Understanding Psycho-educational Evaluations

Parents often have many questions about the psycho-educational evaluation that is done by the school district as part of the special education referral. The psycho-educational evaluation results are the basis to determine your child's special education eligibility and delivery of services. In order to effectively advocate for your child, you must learn about the various tests given to your child and what the test results mean. You should have received a copy of the written evaluation report before your meeting. If you don't receive one beforehand then you should ask the school psychologist to give you a copy.

General Information on Tests Included in Special Education Evaluations and Examples

Achievement Test: A test over academic subjects such as Reading, Math, and Writing. These tests are often used in the Special Education evaluation process. Examples include the Woodcock-Johnson II Test of Achievement, the Kaufman Test of Educational Achievement, Second Edition (KTEA II), and the Wide Range Achievement Test 4 (WRAT-4).

Adaptive Behavior Rating Scale: An instrument that examines a child's ability to perform certain tasks, such as eating, dressing, completing schoolwork, etc., and is completed by both the parent and the child's teacher. Examples of this are the Adaptive Behavior Assessment System (ABAS) or Vineland-II.

Behavior Rating Scale: An instrument completed by parents and teachers which is used to pinpoint behavioral, academic, and social problems. They are also used by mental health professionals to diagnose specific psychiatric conditions. Examples are the Connors Comprehensive Behavior Rating Scales (CRBS) and the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL).

Intellectual or cognitive tests: A test designed to measure intellectual ability and/or potential. There are questions about whether these tests fairly measure intelligence or are a good prediction of academic performance. Examples of commonly used tests are the Weschler Individual Achievement Test (WISC IV), the Stanford Binet 5, and the Universal Nonverbal Intelligence Test (UNIT).

Other Common Testing Terms Used at Admission and Release Committee (ARC) Meetings

Baseline: Baseline performance describes the student's current performance of a skill or strategy in measurable terms (e.g., words per minute, % correct in 3 out of 5 trials, level of prompts necessary to sustain a behavior) before intervention or treatment. The baseline serves as a starting point for IEP instruction.

Consent: Parent gives permission in writing after being fully informed of everything for which consent is sought. Parental consent is voluntary and may be taken back at any time.

Diagnostic test: A test used to identify or diagnose a child's problem areas.

Intelligence Quotient (IQ): A score from a test designed to measure intelligence. Tables are used to compare children's performance to the performance of same age peers.

Lexile: A reading measure that provides information about an individual's reading ability or the difficulty of a text. It can assist in matching a reader with the appropriate difficulty level or text for decoding and comprehension. The Lexile reader measure can also be used to monitor growth in reading ability over time. For more information: http://www.lexile.com/

Mean: The mean is the average score on a test, generally the mean is 100.

Norm-referenced tests: Tests that are given to a large sample of children so that it is possible to know how children compare with others of the same age or same grade.

Percentile rank: A way to compare test scores by first getting an average, or the mean, and then looking at how the scores vary around the mean.

Valid: A test or intervention is valid if it is used or interpreted in the manner prescribed and measures what it claims to measure. Most widely used tests have research to support their validity.

Quantile: A math measure that identifies a student's ability to think "mathematically" in a variety of ways: math skills, concepts, and applications. It provides an indication of how well a student understands mathematical concepts and skills at his or her grade level. For more information: http://www.quantiles.com/

Reliability: The consistency of results of a test. If a test is supposed to measure something stable, such as IQ, the results should be fairly close to the same if the test is re-administered.

Standard deviation (SD): In most psychological and educational tests, the standard deviation is 15. Average scores should be very close to the mean of 100. If the score is significantly above or below the average, it is referred to as being a distance from the mean. For example, an 85 is one standard deviation below the mean or average, and a 70 is two standard deviations below the mean.

T-scores: Many behavior scales, such as ADD-H or Comprehensive Teacher's Rating Scale (ACTERS) and the Behavior Assessment System for Children (BASC), report results in T-scores. A T-score has a mean or average of 50 and a standard deviation of 10.

Stanine: Some tests report scores in stanines, or in a nine unit format. On a stanine test, a 5 is an average score, a 9 is the highest and a 1 is the lowest. Some subtests of the Woodcock-Johnson Achievement test are often reported in stanines.

Valid: A test or intervention is valid if it is used or interpreted in the manner prescribed by the manufacturer and measures what it claims to measure.

The final section of the evaluation includes a summary of the test results and recommendations for interventions or specially designed instruction to be included in the IEP if eligible. **Remember: Ask questions in the ARC meeting if you do not understand any of the information presented.** For further information on this subject, you may also call P&A at (800) 372-2988.