

Learning Disabilities Roundtable: Seeking Common
Ground
Priority Issues Responses
Submitted by
The Council for Learning Disabilities

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In response to the white papers presented at the LD Summit in August 2001, salient and priority topics related to learning disabilities (LD) identification and eligibility have emerged and been acknowledged by the NCLD work group. The Council for Learning Disabilities (CLD) considers all the topics of the Summit's white papers to be important for decisions on the conceptualization of learning disabilities and operationalization of services. In this response paper we highlight what CLD considers to be the most critical topics, organized into five categories (the nature of LD, identification, eligibility, intervention, and professional development), with a brief discussion of the implications of each for policy, practice, and research.

Preface

The Council for Learning Disabilities recognizes learning disabilities as a disorder of interest to several branches of the sciences, as well as to educators, and children, adolescents, and their families. Recognizing the importance of language, we support the use of rigorous and appropriate language that facilitates communication among various fields of science, education practitioners, and individuals and their families. Further, recognizing education as the primary field concerned with learning disabilities and uniting the sciences, practitioners, and families, we endorse use of language that is consistent with the traditions of education in these discussions. CLD also endorses a balance of respect for the individual and her or his potential with precision in describing phenomena. Therefore, we call for use of person-first language when referring to persons and learning disabilities, language that characterizes the context in which learning disabilities occur instead of the performance of the individual (e.g., "ineffective intervention" for

"nonresponder"), and translation of language from related sciences to language preferred by the field of education (e.g., "intervention" for "treatment"), whenever appropriate.

Category: Nature of Learning Disabilities

CLD believes that critical to all other matters concerning learning disabilities is a concise and scientifically defensible definition of the nature of learning disabilities. Three core constructs define the nature of learning disabilities: the life-long nature of the disorder, caused by intrinsic information processing disorders, making it difficult for individuals with LD to benefit from traditional intervention approaches. Each is discussed below, along with its implications for policy, practice, and research.

Learning Disabilities as a Life-Long Disability

Although individuals with LD are typically identified in school, LD is a developmental disability that affects the individual throughout the lifespan. Learning disabilities are expressed in different ways and at different levels of intensity during different stages of life. Because LD is intrinsic to the individual and presumed to be a central nervous system dysfunction, it does not disappear over time. However, due to its life-long presence, early manifestations may influence later manifestations; for example, reading deficiencies may negatively impact later general knowledge. For these reasons, CLD believes that conceptualizations of learning disabilities and relevant research and services must acknowledge the life-long nature of the disorder.

Implications for policy. Policy should guide identification of LD at the preschool, elementary, and secondary levels. Specifically, policy should continue to seek improved early identification for prevention of negative manifestations, and identification at the secondary levels that considers cumulative effects (i.e., Matthew effects) and contributes to our knowledge of the needs for transition and the young adult years. School reforms and social policies affecting infants through young adults should be coordinated with IDEA provisions and regulations (e.g., Temporary Assistance to Needy Families [TANF], correctional education, dropout prevention, adult basic education).

Implications for practice. Students with LD at all ages must receive services that effectively address their needs. To help distinguish these students from low-achieving and other school-identified groups, identification should address the organic nature of the disability. Services should anticipate life-long, changing manifestations by emphasizing skills in the processes of thinking and learning, and self-advocacy.

Children from all cultural and linguistic backgrounds may have LD. Therefore, efforts must be undertaken to ensure that English Language Learners (ELL) are not excluded from LD eligibility through the development of ELL eligibility assessment guidelines.

Implications for research. Research must examine the many ways LD is manifested throughout the lifespan and within a variety of contexts and settings. Specifically, longitudinal research should be conducted on the nature and impact of learning disabilities, following the same individuals from at least early childhood through at least the young adult years. Further, research efforts should be expanded beyond targeting a small subset of reading correlates (i.e., phonological awareness, phonological memory) to include all relevant skill areas mentioned in the Federal regulations.

Intrinsic Deficit in Information Processing as the Heart of LD

There is widespread dissatisfaction with the current reliance on ability-achievement discrepancy as defining learning disabilities. Ability-achievement, or any intracognitive discrepancy, should be regarded as one possible symptom (or consequence) of LD. CLD believes that the defining characteristic of LD is difficulty with cognitive processes used to acquire and use information.

Implications for policy. CLD discourages reliance primarily on ability-achievement discrepancy formulas. Almost every state requires severe ability-achievement discrepancy as an eligibility criterion. Discrepancy formulas must not be used as primary evidence of an LD.

Implications for practice. According to MacMillan and Siperstein (2001), schools currently identify large numbers of low-ability students who do not demonstrate a severe discrepancy. This practice is particularly common in urban schools. Differentiated services should be provided for students with and without cognitive processing difficulties. Students with LD should not be required to be low achieving before being eligible for services. Rather, indicators of potential learning difficulties should be validated further and used

to identify students at an earlier age in attempts to prevent more serious difficulties from emerging due to later intervention, which is common practice.

Implications for research. Valid assessment approaches are needed that can reliably identify students with cognitive processing problems before these difficulties adversely affect academic performance. Identifying cognitive processes that predict future cognitive processing difficulties may include, but should not be limited to, academic failure. Identification of lack of phonological awareness as a predictor for later reading failure may be a first step. However, over reliance on correlates for reading is inappropriate, despite the predominance of reading-related skills deficits in learning disabilities. Other fruitful lines of inquiry include assessment of cognitive skills and how they contribute to reading, writing, and mathematics, and how cognitive processes mediate discrepancies and nondiscrepancies among poorly performing students.

Students with LD Often Do Not Benefit From Intervention

Early intervention to prevent school failure is essential. Some school-aged children who have severe learning disabilities require intensive special education services. These children must be identified early so they can start receiving such services; they should not have to "wait and fail." CLD recognizes that even the most ambitious, carefully articulated general education reforms will not "cure" LD.

Implications for policy. Policy should stipulate support for special education programs in order to provide intensive instruction not offered by general education. CLD believes the full continuum of placements should be available to students with LD. Clarifying language should be inserted in the IDEA regulations to direct LEAs on how to apply the continuum and comply with guidelines for inclusion.

Implications for practice. Schools should continue to offer a continuum of services to students with LD, including "specialized, individualized, intensive, relentless instruction that special education is supposed to be in all cases but actually is today in too few cases" (Kauffman, 1999, p. 251). Consultation and collaboration in and of themselves do not take the place of this type of instruction.

Assessments of "ability to benefit from quality instruction" (Gersten, 2001, p. 10) and academic failure may contribute to more referrals for identification and determinations of eligibility for services, but should not be a sole basis for defining LD.

Implications for research. Researchers should rigorously field-test students' responsiveness to intervention as part of the LD identification process, and in this process recognize potential problems when operationalizing responsiveness to intervention, including the quality of curricula and implementation, and the feasibility of models (Gersten, 2001). The dual discrepancy model (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1997, 1998) is one promising approach for study. Longitudinal studies of states/districts that have adopted response to intervention as part of the eligibility process (e.g., Maryland, Iowa, Pennsylvania, Minneapolis) must be conducted. CLD believes it is imperative that research continue to examine ways to implement, support, and sustain effective instructional practices in both general and special education settings.

Category: Identification of Learning Disabilities

CLD believes that accurate and consistent identification of learning disabilities is necessary for scientific theory and research, as well as for provision of education and related services. Four issues pertaining to the identification process and their implications for policy, practice, and research are discussed below: discrepancy formulas, types of learning disabilities, multiple measures for identification purposes, and identification of LD vs. low achievement.

Discrepancy Formulas

The traditional use of IQ discrepancy formulas has been challenged as a viable and valid indicator of learning disabilities in the identification process. Instead, "responsiveness to treatment" has been posed as a possible alternative means of identifying learning disabilities. Gresham (2001) describes the responsiveness to treatment approach as a means of identifying LD when academic performance does not change resultant to the implementation with fidelity of a validated intervention. CLD questions the integrity with which intervention effectiveness (responsiveness to treatment) can be used to discern LD and more appropriately identify those individuals who are in need of services in accordance with IDEA.

Implications for policy. While intervention effectiveness may be one means of identifying LD, it must be coupled with other procedures and measures that distinguish an organic disorder and that contribute to the development of a profile of learning at different age levels. The first task would be to define "responsiveness to treatment" and the ranges within which it may be predicted

(e.g., chronological age, grade equivalent, predicted IQ, skill hierarchy). Policy must be tempered by the recognition that bringing innovation to national scale with fidelity is a daunting task and that hasty implementation may contribute to misidentification of learning disabilities across ages.

Implications for practice. CLD believes effective practitioners are knowledgeable about interventions for learning problems in different domains, and that they must have adequate resources to support and interpret the implementation and evaluation of these interventions. Knowledge of how students benefit from instruction is more useful to the design and delivery of instruction than to identification. Both general and special educators should use effective practices and be accountable for their implementation. In addition, given that teachers continue to request assistance in providing small-group, intensive instruction within a well-managed classroom environment (Foorman, 2001), general educators must have support to provide small-group, intensive instruction necessary to determine if and how students benefit from intervention.

Implications for research. Research is needed to identify and demonstrate the effectiveness of interventions for a variety of domains (e.g., language, mathematics, abstract reasoning) in which learning disabilities may be manifested, and should not be restricted solely to reading. Research is best conducted not just by researchers but also by practitioners to ensure the clinical utility of practices and to demonstrate the feasibility of procedures in applied settings. It must be established that effective intervention can be implemented to scale nationally with fidelity, given the difficulties with bringing any innovation to implementation with fidelity (Deshler, 2001).

Types of Learning Disabilities

CLD endorses the definition of learning disabilities offered by the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (NJCLD) as a heterogeneous group of disorders manifested by significant difficulties in the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, or mathematical skills. Although more than 80 percent of individuals identified as having a learning disability demonstrate reading difficulties, manifestations of LD in other academic, cognitive, and information processing areas cannot be ignored.

Implications for policy. Identification of learning disabilities cannot reside exclusively within the reading domain. Policy must continue to require multiple assessments to identify learning disabilities across domains and to document

the severity of the disability to help inform decision making for appropriate services to meet the individual needs of students. Further, identification efforts should not be limited to early readers or any construct focused excessively on young adults.

Implications for practice. Professionals should document learning difficulties across domains with an emphasis on how difficulties in one domain may have adverse effects across other areas. For example, listening, speaking, and reasoning often do not receive sufficient attention in identifying difficulties exhibited in classroom settings, yet they play a crucial role in students' ability to access the curriculum, particularly as they tackle more difficult subjects and setting demands in later school years.

Implications for research. The field now understands a great deal about the nature of reading disabilities, but less is understood about other types of learning disabilities, such as how low achievement is distinguishable from LD in math. Using advances in the reading domain as a model, OSEP should establish funding sources for research on the nature of learning disabilities that explores not only reading difficulties but other types of LD as well.

Multiple Measures for Identification Purposes

The need for multiple measures for identification of learning disabilities remains a critical issue in the identification process. Despite the explicit requirement of the use of multiple measures (IDEA, 1997) and the position paper by NJCLD on assessment practices, the need for multiple measures continues to surface as an issue. These measures should address the organic nature of the disorder, current (and possibly historical) manifestations, and learning performance.

A multidimensional approach to identification can ensure that students' unexpected learning problems are examined from a multidisciplinary perspective, across time in response to intervention, and through the use of multiple culturally sensitive tools and techniques in a period of time that promotes decision making and early identification, if appropriate. Curriculum-based measurement (CBM) across domains may have particular potential for informing the identification of learning disabilities and may be coupled with other measures to present a multidimensional profile of performance (i.e., norm-referenced as well as curriculum-based).

Implications for policy. The effectiveness of using assessment of performance,

such as CBM, to establish dual discrepancy identification should be examined, in addition to other measures currently in place for identification purposes (e.g., achievement tests) (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1998; MacMillan & Siperstein, 2001).

Implications for practice. School personnel must be prepared to implement CBM procedures with fidelity and to document repeated measurement of interventions that are sensitive to change or growth. Such procedures can be implemented throughout the school years to take into consideration learning problems that may occur in the early grades as well as at the secondary level. Moreover, personnel preparation programs must do a better job of teaching preservice teachers how to administer CBM procedures, not only for identification purposes but also to inform instruction.

Implications for research. Research should be conducted from a school district standpoint to determine the feasibility and fidelity of implementing CBM-like procedures to support other assessment measures used to capture student performance. This includes both obstacles that impede implementation and technology tools that can support the implementation of CBM to promote manageability, fidelity, and usefulness coupled with other measures for providing learning profiles. Models that demonstrate educators' ability to implement CBM for decision making and identification purposes should be developed.

Identification of LD vs. Low Achievement

It is still being debated whether learning disabilities is a valid category with marker variables that distinguish it from merely a subset of low achievement. CLD believes the two groups of individuals can and should be distinguished and that resources and services outside of special education could be better utilized for the larger number of students who fall in the low-achievement range.

Implications for policy. Policymakers must rely on research across domains when proposing changes that could dilute resources across too many students and reduce safeguards that guarantee a free, appropriate public education for individuals with learning disabilities.

Implications for practice. CLD supports provision of a continuum of special education services of varying intensities to students with LD. Other resources and programs should serve the needs of low achieving students without LD.

Stricter guidelines for referral practices should be included in the new IDEA amendments that stipulate a tiered model of intervention prior to referral. Districts must be held accountable for overidentification figures that contradict national averages of disability. The notion that in any class there will naturally be a small percentage of low achievers has been lost in practice; rather, low achievers tend to go the referral route rather than educators identifying other school resources and practices to accommodate the learning needs of students who are slow learners, low achievers but do not have a learning disability.

Implications for research. Research is necessary across domains to examine and discern the characteristics and marker variables of individuals who manifest learning difficulties that contribute to low achievement as distinct from learning disabilities. Researchers must be held accountable for descriptions of subjects that go beyond "school identified." For example, researchers should examine students' response to a variety of cognitive, academic, and information-processing tasks to determine what, if any, differences distinguish low-achieving students from students with learning disabilities.

Category: Eligibility Criteria

Within the field of learning disabilities opinions vary regarding eligibility for service criteria and practices. Four eligibility-related issues that CLD recognizes as fundamental to provision of appropriate services are reviewed below along with their implications for policy, practice, and research: discrepancy as an eligibility criterion, need for service as an eligibility criterion, variability across states, and clinical judgment.

Discrepancy as an Eligibility Criterion

Currently, the central LD eligibility concept, as well as practice, involves a discrepancy between ability and achievement. This concept is rooted in the federal definition of learning disabilities as the inferred result of inadequate academic achievement in the presence of average intellectual ability and the absence of known identifiable causes (e.g., poor teaching, sensory deficit, or mental retardation). The concept has been operationalized by state departments of education largely through two practices ? using IEP team clinical judgment to ascertain discrepancy and applying a variety of statistical formulas to calculate discrepancy.

Numerous differences and disagreements surround both the concept and the

application of discrepancy models in current practice. Conceptually, we are dissatisfied with defining a disability by what it is *not* as opposed to what it *is* through a clear description of observable characteristics or its organic basis. Practically, we are troubled by the use of statistically indefensible discrepancy formulas, the confusing variations across states, the inability to identify very young children, the identification of adolescents and young adults that does not adequately account for their developmental stage, the prevailing belief that use of a formula makes eligibility decisions automatic and scientific, the use of formulas specifically designed to restrict the number of students identified, the lack of any link between discrepancy and specific interventions, and the inconsistent application of clinical judgment to the identification of discrepancy. In addition, some research investigations have failed to find differences in intervention effectiveness between low-achieving students with discrepancy-identified LD and students with similar low achievement but without achievement-ability discrepancies.

Given the level of dissatisfaction with discrepancy-based eligibility, it is not surprising that researchers, practitioners, administrators, and policymakers have offered a wide range of alternative approaches. Those most dramatically different from current practice involve replacing the discrepancy criterion with (a) simple, severe low achievement, (b) continuing severe low achievement after intensive well-designed but ineffective remediation, or (c) the presence of deficits in intervening skills such as phonological processing. Others advocate lesser modifications to current practice; for example, using the presence of severe low achievement in students of average intelligence without the need for discrepancy. CLD endorses a scientifically based replacement of discrepancy formulas; we further recommend that such formulas not be excised from the eligibility process (or from identification) until appropriate alternative measures of the organic basis for LD have been validated.

Implications for policy. Because replacing a flawed eligibility criterion with one of undemonstrated merit would inject unnecessary uncertainty and confusion into the field, CLD currently cannot support any of the eligibility criteria that are being proposed to supplant discrepancy.

Implications for practice. CLD supports efforts to determine recommendations to replace indefensible discrepancy formulas. This process should include determining the impact of the variability of discrepancy formulas across states as well as formulating recommendations for practice that would reduce variability in discrepancy formulas across states and allow for local determination of eligibility, until suitable alternative measures of eligibility can

be validated.

Implications for research. CLD supports continued investigation of the eligibility criteria that have been proposed to supplant discrepancy. Many of these concepts and practices offer significant promise and should not be abandoned simply because research supporting and validating their use is not yet available.

Need for Service as an Eligibility Criterion

Access to remedial and support services is ensured by labeling students as having a learning disability even though they fail to meet local, state, or federal disability eligibility criteria. This practice results in inappropriate increases in the number of children identified with LD and escalating costs. CLD believes that "need for service" cannot be the sole criterion that leads to disability identification. A significant educational performance deficit must exist. However, an academic deficit is a necessary but not sufficient condition to determine the presence of a learning disability. Relying only on a "need for service" model ignores major definitional components of LD and, because its application has not been validated, its use is problematic.

CLD believes that the solution to this problem lies not in redefining LD, but in correcting the conditions that created it. In this case, students are identified with LD because the special education system is perceived as able to address a need for service that is not otherwise available. The solution is to provide the appropriate services outside of special education and to refer children without LD to such services when needed. The field should not be taken to task because LD professionals are delivering an effective service to children who need remediation simply because it is not available elsewhere. Instead, we must develop, fund, and deliver effective remedial services when and where they are needed.

Implications for policy. Effective instructional programs for all students in general education programs should be the norm. This would alleviate additional demands on the continuum of services for students with disabilities and enhance delivery of services when the general education classroom in the least restrictive environment.

Implications for practice. CLD supports provision of adequate funding to serve students with severe low achievement and the use of empirically validated instructional practices with these students. CLD recognizes that low achieving students without LD require remedial services often not available outside of

special education. However, special education services should be restricted to those students with documented learning disabilities.

Implications for research. CLD supports the determination of the prevalence across the states of students identified with LD who do not meet current eligibility requirements, including those who have been identified simply because of their need for service.

Variability Across States

Current eligibility criteria have led to a system whereby variation across states may result in students who are eligible for LD services in one state being ineligible in another. Researchers and practitioners have hypothesized several probable causes, including variations in discrepancy formulas, size of the state educational budget, and considerable variability in the application of clinical judgment decisions of eligibility. An argument should be made for some flexibility in the LD eligibility process.

Implications for policy. Regulations that accompany the IDEA should be modified to specify how acceptable options for eligibility criteria can be "translated" in cases where different criteria and processes are employed upon moving to a new school district. A history of having or being treated as having a learning disability should be sufficient to guarantee continuation of the sending SEA or LEA's IEP until redetermination of eligibility is completed.

Implications for practice. CLD supports reliance on the collective clinical judgment of the IEP team when making eligibility decisions.

Implications for research. CLD supports the determination of the prevalence across the states of students identified with LD who do not consistently meet eligibility requirements within and across states.

Clinical Judgment

In conjunction with discrepancy, clinical judgment has long been central to LD eligibility determination. The application of clinical judgment to determine eligibility for LD services is extremely variable across LEAs and states, and is subject to abuse and misuse. Following accepted practice, the IEP team must use its best clinical judgment to determine if the evidence presented from multidisciplinary evaluations justifies eligibility. Proper clinical judgment implies that a team of well-trained experts and parents: competently gathers all relevant information; critically evaluates all data; considers the federal, state,

and local regulations; and makes an informed decision. However, considerable evidence suggests that many IEP teams are not meeting these conditions. Thus, the number of false positive and false negative eligibility determinations exacerbates the "need for service" dilemma.

Implications for policy. To end abuse and misuse of clinical judgment, CLD believes that appropriate and enforceable standards must be applied to all IEP teams.

Implications for practice. CLD supports the development of exemplary standards of practice and training for IEP teams as they exercise clinical judgment. In addition, general educators should be adequately prepared to participate on IEP teams.

Implications for research. CLD supports research that examines ways in which IEP teams can effectively use their collective expertise and judgment to make appropriate eligibility decisions. Team members must be appropriately trained across the disciplines. We have arrived at the current state of practice because the application of clinical judgment has evolved with too few guidelines and standards, resulting in IEP teams that are ill equipped to apply consistent standards and achieve high levels of accuracy in eligibility determination.

Category: Intervention

CLD believes three issues are central to effective and appropriate intervention: research-based interventions in all settings, specialized services, and success in school and beyond. Effectiveness, based on defensible standards, is predicated on scientifically validated practices, and supports all provisions of the IDEA to contribute to success in academic and life contexts. The three issues are discussed below along with their implications for policy, practice, and research.

Research-Based Interventions in All Settings

Research-based high-quality interventions should be provided and monitored in all settings where students with learning disabilities receive services, so that they are implemented systematically (i.e., fidelity of treatment) (Gresham, 2001). CLD believes that educators should use clinical judgment and data to chart progress and implement program changes when students are not progressing (McGrady, 2001; Rooney, 2001).

Implications for policy. Interventions should have a research base that includes clearly identified samples of students with LD (see CLD Research Committee, 1992) to avoid dissemination and application of inappropriate techniques in general education settings. Educational reform efforts should explicitly address issues related to students with learning disabilities and the ways in which they can be successful in general education settings when high-quality differentiated instruction occurs (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2001). Further, the IDEA should include a provision to ensure the use of research-validated practices across settings.

Implications for practice. Educators who teach students with LD should be skilled at and knowledgeable about how to analyze curriculum and use validated techniques that are responsive to students' diverse learning needs, including students with LD (NJCLD, 1999; Simmons & Kameenui, 1996). OSERS should disseminate information about validated practices to practitioners across states. Again, validated techniques should be monitored when implemented in school settings to ensure systematic implementation and decisions on when to make adjustments in light of individual student data (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2001; Wise & Snyder, 2001).

Implications for research. Researchers should include students with learning disabilities in their studies, and disaggregate the data to determine how students with LD fare with certain interventions compared to students with other types of learning strengths and needs, and to ensure intervention integrity (Gresham, MacMillan, Beebe-Frankenberger, & Bocian, 2000). Well-controlled studies across content in general education settings are necessary to inform interventions related to access to general education curriculum (Swanson, 2000). Continued research on the technology and practice of assessment techniques such as curriculum-based measurement and performance assessments should be expanded to increase the efficiency and validity of individual progress monitoring for students (Stecker & Fuchs, 2000; Woodward, Monroe, & Baxter, 2001).

Specialized Services

CLD believes that there should be a focus on maintaining and/or expanding the use of specialized services that retain the individualized nature of interventions specific and responsive to a student's particular type of learning disability.

Implications for policy. The continuum of services that enables special educators to deliver intensive and extensive interventions to students with learning disabilities must be preserved. Some students with learning disabilities

cannot make satisfactory progress without specialized services that may be frequent and lengthy in duration (Bryant et al., 2000).

Implications for practice. Educators should increase the delivery of effective specialized services for students with LD when those students are not sufficiently successful in well-designed and well-implemented differentiated general education settings. Validated techniques, such as learning strategies (Deshler, 2001; Graham, Harris, & Larsen, 2001), that require intensive and extensive intervention and can result in students independently and proficiently responding to school demands should be regularly and appropriately used.

Implications for research. Research should continue in and/or expand to all academic areas where students with LD are potentially able to participate. Regardless of where service delivery occurs, the research should include a focus on specialized techniques that enable students with LD to reach their potential (Maccini & Hughes, 2000; Moody, Vaughn, Hughes, & Fischer, 2000). Moreover, research should be conducted that continues to both expand the current knowledge base for assessment (i.e., eligibility for special education as well as instructional interventions) and inform instruction and decision making (i.e., clinical judgment) for students with all types of learning disabilities that manifest themselves in difficulties across school and out-of-school settings (Elksnin, 2001; McGrady, 2001; Rooney, 2001).

Success in School and Beyond

Learning disabilities is a life-long issue, and CLD believes that school-based services must prepare students for success not only across the school years but also after public school services have ended. Preparation should include skills that increase the likelihood that students with LD will successfully contribute to and benefit from a democratic society.

Implications for policy. Policies that focus primarily or solely on intensive early intervention and reading omit the realities of life-long implications for individuals with learning disabilities that are heterogeneous. Policy must focus on types of learning disabilities in addition to those in reading, and on all ages of students who have learning disabilities (Deshler, 2001). Moreover, the current focus on high-stakes assessments for all students should be examined and refocused so that depthful, challenging, meaningful, and realistic educational goals are at the core of school practices and curriculum that lead toward graduation and transition (Manset & Washburn, 2000; Morocco, 2001). Policy guidelines should be developed that enable persons with LD to move

seamlessly from receiving school-based services to receiving adult services.

Implications for practice. Goals and teaching should focus on preparing students with LD for success within and across school settings, including post-school success. Valued life outcomes that include academic and independent life skills should be a primary goal of education (Rojewski, 1999).

Implications for research. Research should continue to critically examine the post-school success of students with LD and which elements of public schooling need to be addressed to ensure greater post-school success (Murray, Goldstein, Nourse, & Edgar, 2000). Dissemination of research-based practices that promote an individual's school successes should occur on a widespread basis with a focus on institutionalization of effective practices within the context of complex school and student factors.

Category: Professional Development

CLD considers three interrelated issues in the professional development of teachers of students with learning disabilities to be critical: preservice preparation, support during induction years, and continuous professional development. Each is described with their implications for policy, practice, and research.

Preservice Preparation

CLD believes that comprehensive interdisciplinary education programs are necessary for all teacher candidates. Further, CLD believes that additional competencies are necessary for the specialized preparation of teacher candidates who want to teach in the LD field (NJCLD, 2001a). Teachers of students with LD (hereafter: "special education teachers") must have an overview of the scope and sequence of the curricular areas in the grades in which they support students. They should also possess a rich understanding of pedagogical and content-specific knowledge for the subjects they teach. Additionally, they must be able to effectively identify and use appropriate modifications and accommodations to ensure student achievement.

Implications for policy. CLD urges policymakers to recognize and reconcile the competing demands of the national teacher shortage, high standards for teachers, generic certification, alternative routes to certification, and pressures to eliminate education as an undergraduate major or limit the number of

methods courses in favor of a more liberal arts background. CLD believes there is no acceptable substitute for intensive, specific, and extensive teacher preparation in special education for learning disabilities. While other practitioners should be involved in providing services, educators with primary responsibility for IEP-compliant instruction should be certified special educators.

Implications for practice. CLD believes that special education teacher candidates should graduate from preparation programs that mandate intensive, extensive field experiences and use of performance assessment measures to ensure teacher competency.

Implications for research. CLD urges researchers to empirically compare special education teachers' effectiveness and retention across the multiple routes to certification.

Support During Induction Years

Especially during the first three years of teaching, otherwise known as the induction years, CLD believes special education teachers need systemic support. Across the nation, there is a critical shortage of well-qualified special education teachers, with dire predictions of greater shortages for the future. Forty percent of special educators leave the field before their fifth year of teaching (Council for Exceptional Children, 2000). Factors contributing to this staggering statistic include special education teachers who are faced with heavy caseloads, unsupportive administrators, inordinate amounts of paperwork, and, with nowhere to turn for help, a sense of isolation.

Implications for policy. CLD believes districtwide support programs, providing monetary and administrative support for participation, should bring beginning special education teachers together monthly throughout the school year for opportunities to network with other beginning special education teachers as part of professional development opportunities. Additionally, school and caseload assignments to induction-years special education teachers should be made based on the recognition that more challenging assignments must be accompanied by adequate supports for success.

Implications for practice. CLD believes that each special education teacher should be paired with a capable in-house mentor to provide guidance and support especially during induction years. And, based on need, targeted training should be provided to beginning special education teachers, building upon

knowledge and skills learned in teacher preparation areas such as writing IEPs, providing effective accommodations and effective classroom organization and management, building and maintaining relationships with students' families, and collaborating with general education colleagues.

Implications for research. Researchers should continue to identify strategies to alleviate the pressures felt by induction-year special education teachers across a variety of learning disabilities programs, while maintaining high levels of student achievement. In particular, more research in special education teacher retention to identify realistic incentives should be conducted.

Continuous Professional Development

In the current period of education reform and its demand for high academic standards for students with LD, teachers must engage in effective, continuous professional development in order to support the diverse needs of students with LD. CLD believes that professional development is an ongoing process of providing high-quality training programs with intensive follow-up and support that encourages and rewards growth-promoting processes, such as teacher research, peer coaching, and teacher learning circles. As detailed in the NJCLD report (2001b), CLD reaffirms its support of professional development principles and practices that ultimately result in high achievement for students with LD.

Implications for policy. CLD believes that unless continuous professional development is an integral part of a school district's strategic plan, the needs of students with LD will go unmet. Effective professional development is a systemic process that empowers teachers of students with LD by providing programs based on their needs, and is adequately funded, providing sufficient time during the school day for staff members to learn together.

Implications for practice. CLD believes professional development programs must be reflective of the many roles in which a special education teacher might serve over a career (e.g., direct service provider, co-teacher with a general education colleague, consultant teacher). Effective programs support the ongoing acquisition of new skills to ensure student success, provide teachers incentives to engage in professional development, and facilitate collaborative skills among staff needed to make decisions, solve problems, and work together to improve student performance. CLD supports dissemination by federal and state education agencies of empirically validated best practices in this area.

Implications for research. CLD believes that teachers must be competent in the use of a wide variety of research-based instructional practices to ensure their students' academic success. Researchers must continue to identify best practices for academic and social skills, learning and organizational strategies, self-advocacy, life skills, and transitioning that maximize achievement of students with LD. Through research-based continuous professional development programs, special education teachers will improve their knowledge and skills, adding to their instructional repertoire.

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