



# Eligibility for Special Education Under a Specific Learning Disability Classification

**Joint Principles**  
2019

There is general agreement that specific learning disabilities (SLDs), such as dyslexia, dysgraphia, and dyscalculia, are heterogeneous disorders that impact skill acquisition and performance in reading, writing, and mathematics. SLDs may coexist with other conditions, including but not limited to written and spoken language disorders, disorders of attention, or giftedness.

The 2004 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act afforded states greater flexibility in the way their districts set eligibility criteria for special education under an SLD classification. Since then, research and practice have shed light on effective, evidence-based practices to address the needs of students with an SLD.

*The following document outlines joint principles that have been developed and endorsed by the following groups.*




**ASHA**  
American  
Speech-Language-Hearing  
Association



International  
**DYSLEXIA**  
Association®



**NASP**   
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF  
School Psychologists



## Education for all students:

**Principle 1:** All students should have access to general education that includes rigorous, differentiated, universally designed core instruction, as well as supplemental, evidence-based interventions designed to respond to students' individual needs.

**Principle 2:** Education professionals—working as a team—should have the preparation, ongoing training, and resources required to: collect and use universal screening information; select and administer assessments to measure student learning and monitor progress; and provide evidence-based instruction and interventions to support students in accessing the core general education curriculum.

**Principle 3:** Teams of education professionals should establish and maintain clear lines of communication with families to gain valuable input related to a student's strengths as well as academic, social, behavioral, and health needs to ensure that families, students, and service providers can participate in collaborative decision making about future instruction.

## Where a disability is suspected:

**Principle 4:** An evaluation must lead to a clear, unbiased, and timely decision regarding special education eligibility and inform future instruction, whether the student requires special education or not.

## Where special education eligibility is being determined and SLD is suspected:

**Principle 5:** Policies for determining student eligibility for special education services under the SLD classification should require the use of valid and reliable measures and ensure consistency across school districts.

**Principle 6:** Comprehensive evaluations for special education eligibility under the SLD category must include data from targeted, valid, and reliable measures that are tailored to the unique learning and behavioral profile of each student. The selection of measures and an eligibility determination must consider both best practice and professional judgment.

**Principle 7:** Assessments that measure aspects of cognitive functioning may be used to rule out intellectual disabilities or to inform educational decisions by documenting areas in which the student is struggling or excelling.

**Principle 8:** Teams of education professionals should use the data collected on how a student responds to evidence-based interventions as an essential part of the evaluation. School personnel must not use response to intervention (RTI) procedures to delay a comprehensive evaluation and the determination of eligibility for special education services.