

Guidance for using the Worksheet Charting the Patterns of Strengths and Weaknesses to help determine SLD eligibility using Patterns of Strengths and Weaknesses

1. Regulations (300.309(a)(2)(ii) state: —The child exhibits a pattern of strengths and weaknesses in performance, achievement, or both, relative to age, State-approved grade-level standards, or intellectual development, that is determined by the group to be relevant to the identification of a specific learning disability, using appropriate assessments, consistent with 300.304 and 300.305. (300.304 describes assessment requirements and 300.305 describes the evaluation planning process.)
2. Definitions:
 - a. Performance – actual performance in the classroom, as assessed by the student’s in-class assessment results, grades, teacher anecdotal and observations.
 - b. Achievement – results on curriculum-based measurement (e.g., DIBELS), criterion-referenced assessment (e.g., Brigance), norm-referenced (e.g., Woodcock-Johnson Achievement Tests), and state assessments.
 - c. Intellectual Development – the student’s cognitive and functional skills, as assessed by IQ tests, functional skill surveys, interviews and observations.
3. When to use patterns of strengths and weaknesses to determine eligibility:
 - a. When a school does not have the capacity to implement Tier 3 interventions.
 - b. In learning disability areas in which the school does not have a three-tier intervention process. For example, a school may use the three-tier intervention process for reading and math, but not for writing, oral expression or listening comprehension.
 - c. In grades in which the school does not use a three-tier intervention process. For example, a school may use the three-tier process in grades K – 6, but not in grades 7 – 12.
4. Suggested requirements for using patterns of strengths and weaknesses to determine SLD eligibility:
 - a. The school uses a scientifically, research-based core programs that was implemented with fidelity with the referred student.
 - b. The school tried differentiated instruction techniques with fidelity with the referred student for a period of at least 8 weeks (Problem Solving Team).
 - c. The school tried a scientifically, research-based Tier 2 intervention that was implemented with fidelity with the referred student for at least 12 weeks (Problem Solving Team).
 - d. During the Tier 2 intervention, the school used weekly progress monitoring to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention and attempted to modify the intervention after each 3-4 weeks of poor progress.
 - e. That when using the Worksheet for Charting the Patterns of Strengths and Weaknesses, a student shall have at least 3 weak boxes checked and at least one other academic area considered a strength (with at least 3 boxes checked as being a strength) and/or the intellectual/functional box checked as a strength to be considered eligible for special education services. The IEP team shall determine if the student’s weakness are a disability that has an adverse affect and the student warrants special education services.
5. Other notes:
 - a. When determining age-based achievement and performance, the evaluator should consider whether or not the student has received appropriate instruction for those age-based skills. For example, can a student retained in second grade be compared with third grade students if that student never received third grade instruction?
 - b. If the student’s weak areas are primarily in performance rather than in achievement (i.e., the student has the academic skill but does not do the work in the classroom), then the school should consider different types of interventions other than academic (e.g., motivation).
 - c. Probably the best way to actually catch up‘ the student’s academic skills with his peers is using a Tier 3 intervention (whether delivered in general education or special education) along with continued Tier 1 instruction.
 - d. If a student is placed into special education and the intent of the school is to catch the student up academically, the student’s instructional time for that area should not be reduced from what it was when the student was only receiving general education services.

(Adapted from the Marquette Alger Regional Education Service Agency, Michigan, Specific Learning Disabilities Evaluation Procedures Manual, August 2010.)