



RTI and SLD Eligibility: A Framework for Evaluation

University of Oregon DIBELS/IDEL Early Literacy Research Team

Rebecca N. Briggs, Jessica Horwitz, Yu Ling Lo, Shaheen Munir, Nancy J. Nelson, MA, Courtney E. Wheeler, MS, NCSP, Roland H. Good III, PhD.

University of Oregon



1. Introduction

This poster presents a framework for evaluating Specific Learning Disability (SLD) eligibility decision-making within a Response to Intervention (RTI) model. The framework incorporates three educational decisions that must be made when determining eligibility and four criteria for judging the defensibility of those decisions.

2. Educational Decisions

In order to determine whether a student meets special education eligibility criteria for Specific Learning Disability under an RTI framework, educators must make three critical determinations:

- 1) does the student demonstrate severe low skills,
- 2) is the student receiving instruction that is generally effective, and
- 3) is the student making adequate academic progress ("responding")?

Table A defines each determination and provides examples of some essential elements of each.

Table A. Educational Decisions for Determining Eligibility within an RTI Model

Individual Educational Decision	Definition	Elements
Does the student demonstrate severe low skills?	Lack of foundational skills required to meet standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > criterion or norm referenced > significantly below expectations > student not on track to meet pre-determined goals
Is the student receiving instruction that is generally effective?	Instruction where each student learns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > supports all students in meeting (OR most students make adequate progress towards) meaningful and ambitious goals > research-based, evidence-supported (current) > implemented with high fidelity > driven by student data > differentiated instruction > systematically and purposefully designed > delivered for an adequate period of time (duration and length) > grouping for instruction is planned to meet learner needs > sufficient opportunities to respond > corrective feedback > professional development > resource provision > administrative support
Is the student responding?	Unresponsiveness is a severe, stubborn, sustained lack of adequate progress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > criterion or norm referenced > lack of response to good instruction/intervention over time (sustained) > continual progress monitoring > change/slope – response sufficient to catch students up with peers > performance is below the aimline > may include team-based decision making

3. Generally Effective Instruction

The most recent results from the NAEP indicate that current typical instruction is not generally effective for *all* students. Taking this into consideration, we emphasize that generally effective instruction should be *more effective* than typical instruction within a national normative context.

Fourth Grade Reading Outcomes on the 2007 National Assessment of Educational Progress

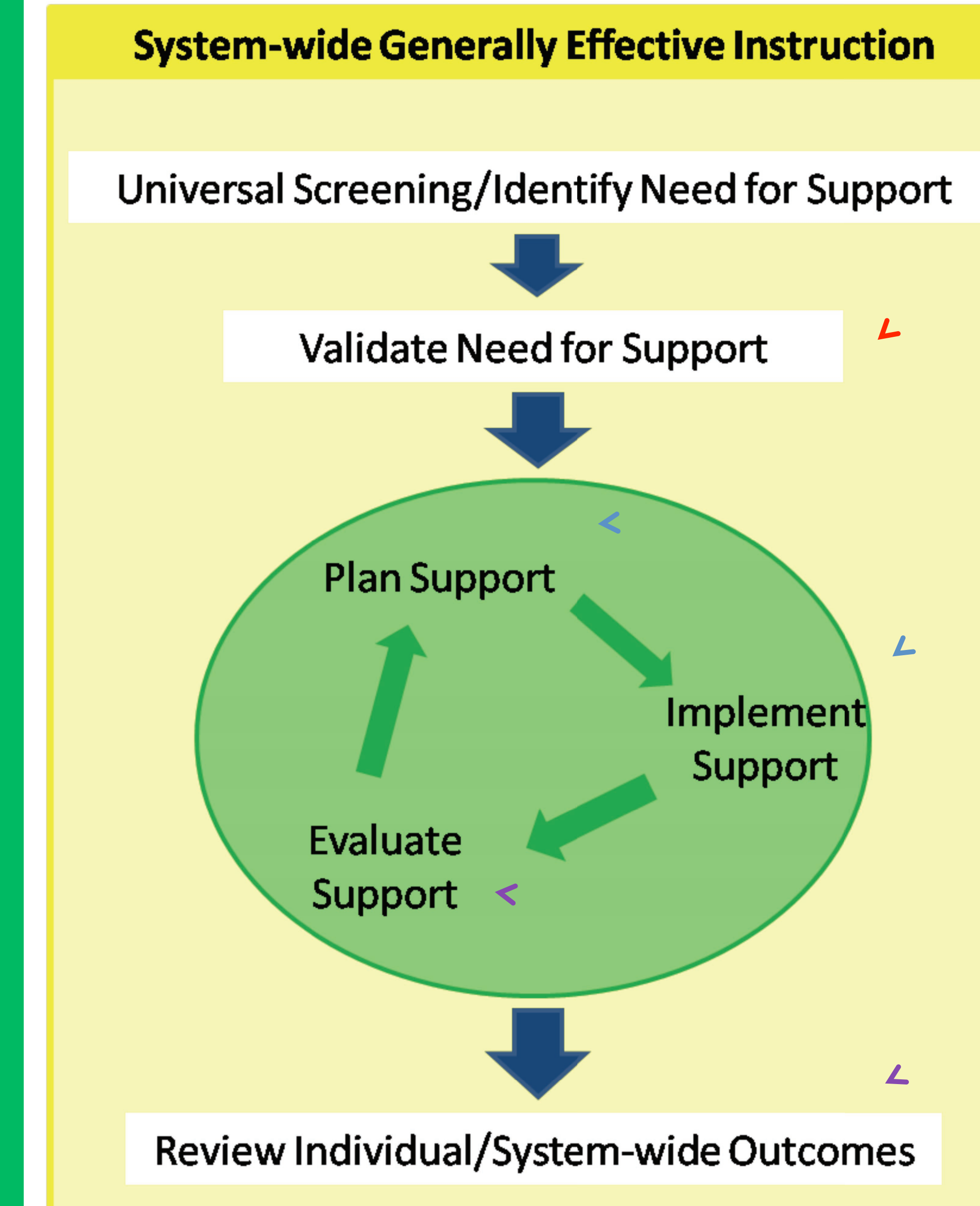
Skill Level	Skill level definition	Nation (public) percent of fourth grade students scoring below (pp. 16, 52-53)	Nation (public) percent of fourth grade students from diverse backgrounds scoring below (pp. 54 & 57)
Basic	Basic denotes partial mastery of prerequisite knowledge and skills that are fundamental for proficient work at a given grade.	34%	54%, 51%, 49%, 50%
Proficient	Proficient represents solid academic performance. Students reaching this level have demonstrated competency over challenging subject matter.	68%	86%, 83%, 80%, 83%

Note: Students from diverse backgrounds includes students identified as Black, Hispanic, American Indian/Alaska Native, and eligible for free/reduced-price school lunch. From data reported in Lee, Grigg, & Donahue (2007).

5. Eligibility Decisions

Eligibility decisions are distinguished from other educational decisions because of the permanent consequences – both positive and negative – of special education identification. Consequently, our criteria must be held to a particularly rigorous standard of evidence in order to be defensible for eligibility decisions. Table C provides necessary questions educators must consider to ensure that each decision is reliable, meaningful, has a normative context, and is feasible.

The figure to the right is an adaptation of the Outcomes Driven Model depicting at which stage each educational decision is made.



Educational Decision	Reliable	Normative Context	Meaningful	Feasible
Does the student demonstrate severe low skills?	Do assessments used to measure skills have a reliability of at least .90? Is the measure of low skills consistent -at different times? -with different raters? -with different conditions? -with different samples of behavior?	Are the skills severely low when compared to typical skills in a normative context (i.e., local or national norms)? Is the student meeting grade level, benchmark goals?	Are the assessment results valid indicators of the student's skills? Do low skills impact the student's academic progress? Does the lack of skills prevent the student from making normal academic progress? Are the skills necessary for the student to demonstrate academic success? Can the skills be increased by good instruction?	Do you have the assessment materials available to assess student skills? Is benchmarking in place? Is a progress monitoring system in place? Are data reviewed regularly? Are personnel trained to use the assessment system?
Is the student receiving instruction that is generally effective?	Are the procedures used to rate the effectiveness of instruction reliable? Is the measure of instructional effectiveness consistent -at different times? -with different raters? -with different conditions?	Is the instruction provided at all tiers more effective than typical instruction when compared to a normative context (i.e., local or national school norms)? a) Is the school-wide system of curriculum and instruction more effective than typical in a national normative sample of schools? OR b) Is the instruction provided to the student more effective than is typically provided within the school?	Does the instruction address important goals? Is the instruction effective for 80-90% of students with similar instructional needs?	Do you have sufficient resources to implement instruction? Is the instruction implemented with high fidelity? Do you have adequate training to implement instruction?
Is the student responding?	Do we have an estimate of the rate of student progress (i.e., slope) with adequate reliability? Does the student perform consistently lower than what is expected when using formative measures with established reliability?	Is the student's rate of progress severely low when compared to typical rates of progress in a normative context (i.e., local or national norms)?	Is the rate or slope of progress sufficient for the student to catch up with peers? Is the rate of progress sufficient to make an important difference in educational outcomes?	Can the student's performance be regularly assessed? How much elapsed time is needed to estimate progress? How many data points are needed to ensure a stable estimate of student progress?

4. Criteria for Making Defensible Educational Decisions

These educational decisions should not be made haphazardly; we propose four criteria that should be applied to all educational decisions: the decision must be (a) reliable, (b) meaningful, (c) have a normative context, and (d) have instructional implications that are feasible for educators.

Table B provides definitions of each criterion and practical questions to ask when determining if practices meet the criterion.

Table B. Criteria for Determining the Defensibility of Educational Decisions

Criteria	Definition	Questions
Reliable	Using reliable procedures to make a decision requires you to be reasonably confident that you're making an accurate decision without being misinformed by measurement error. <i>Salvia & Good (1982); Test Standards (1999); Blashfield, Cromwell, & Strauss (1975); Salvia & Ysseldyke (2007)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the decision generalize to other samples of behavior? • Does the decision generalize to other times? • Does the decision generalize to other raters or clinicians?
Normative Context	The normative context of instruction is essential to consider in deciding whether instruction is generally effective. A normative context must be considered when evaluating the level of skills, instruction, and rates of progress. With respect to a normative context, if good, generally effective instruction is typical, low skills may be the result of a disability. In contrast, if low skills are typical, instruction is not generally effective. <i>Salvia & Good (1982); Test Standards (1999); Salvia & Ysseldyke (2007)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are students performing relative to local norms (e.g., the classroom, school, and district)? • How are students performing relative to national norms? • Are low skills unusual when compared to peer performance (e.g., local or national norms)? • Is good instruction typical?
Meaningful	To support instructional relevance of decisions and increase student skills, assessments used for eligibility must be meaningful in the context of the school environment. "Validity is an integrated evaluative judgment of the degree to which empirical evidence and theoretical rationales support the adequacy and appropriateness of inferences and actions based on test scores or other modes of assessment." (Messick, 1989, p.13) <i>Ysseldyke & Christensen (1988); Hayes, Nelson, & Jarrett (1986); Reschly (2008)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do assessment results inform instructional practices? • Are assessment results valid indicators of student skills? • Do the decision-making model and placement reflect the assessment results? • Is data regularly reviewed to determine whether placement benefits the student? • Is instruction adapted based on the data to ensure meaningful results?
Feasible	For an eligibility decision-making model to be implemented, it must be feasible; that is, it must be capable of being done or carried out successfully. <i>Glover & DiPerna (2007); Sugai, Horner, & McIntosh (2008); Skollar, Schaeffer, Skelton, Stine, Lateer-Huhn, & Poth (2008)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are adequate resources in place for the model to succeed? • Is the model sustainable given available resources, goals, and skills?