



What is "Educational Achievement" Testing?



Just as the specific challenges faced by students receiving special education services are varied, so are the assessments available to identify disabilities.

Comprehensive Achievement Testing

While Intelligence testing (See Intelligence Testing Tip Sheet) focuses on students' learning potential, Comprehensive Achievement testing focuses on current achievement level at the time of testing. They measure achievement across core skill sets including reading, mathematics, oral language, and more. They are often used as screeners to identify a broad range of learning disabilities. Comprehensive achievement testing can be administered by a school psychologist or other mental health professional, special education teacher, or classroom teacher.



Some common types of achievement tests include:

- Kaufman Test of Educational Achievement (KTEA)
- Norris Educational Achievement Test (NEAT)
- Peabody Individual Achievement Test - Revised (PIAT-R)
- Test of Academic Achievement Skills - Reading, Arithmetic, Spelling, and Listening (TAAS-RASLC)
- Wechsler Individual Achievement Test (WIAT)
- Wide Range Achievement Test - 3 (WRAT-4)

How to read achievement test results:

Intelligence (IQ) test results generally remain constant over time, whereas achievement test scores rise as a child continues to progress. IQ, achievement, and various other tests are composed of subtests. The subtest scores are combined to develop composite or full-scale scores. An individual's strengths and challenges generally are not reflected in their composite scores; however, they are reflected in their subtest scores. It's important that caregivers have access to the sub-test results. They help to determine what the IEP goals should be based on.



What do the numbers mean? Like IQ and other tests, the achievement tests results assume that the “mean” or average child scores a 100 and the “standard deviation” or typical acceptable range of 15. So if your child receives an 85 on a test, they are one standard deviation below the “norm” (or low average) or if they score a 115 they are one standard deviation above the “norm” (or high average). Typically, it’s when a student scores more than one standard deviation below 100 (i.e 70) that there is cause for concern in a particular skill area. Additionally, if your student scores more than one standard deviation above 100 (i.e 130) then there might be exceptional abilities in that area and require more support.

IQ / Achievement Discrepancy Depending on your child’s district, you may hear something called the “discrepancy model” while being evaluated for special education services. The discrepancy model is a way to capture and compare a student’s scores on different types of tests. It compares assessments of a child’s intellectual ability with how much progress they are making in school (his academic achievement). In some cases, there may be a significant “discrepancy” (difference) between various sets of scores. The idea is that when there’s a difference like this, it’s evidence that an underlying condition is making it unusually hard for a child to learn.

Tips for families during the evaluation process:



- Families should understand that assessments do not always discriminate between disabilities and the results of inadequate teaching or low-quality curricular materials.
- Students can be misidentified due to teacher or testing bias. (See Racial Bias in assessments)
- Many students do not meet the discrepancy criteria but would nevertheless benefit from early identification and support to intervene with skills.

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