



Washington State Association of School Psychologists

Dear Assessment Committee,

Referrals are increasing. What factors should be considered for suspected SLD evaluations during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Dear School Psychologist,

Here are some guiding questions to consider for students who are being referred for suspected SLD.

1. Compared to peers, what was the student's performance like *before* COVID?
 - a. Did the student receive interventions for the referral concern?
2. Compared to peers, what was this student's performance like *during* COVID?
 - a. Data may need to be retrospective from the previous teacher, the student, and their parents. Consider interviews addressing attendance, participation, work completion, grades/scores, especially compared to others in the class during virtual instruction.
 - b. Consider engagement during remote instruction. Also consider that remote instruction in itself may not be a "lack of appropriate instruction."
3. How did this student's functioning *change* during COVID (compared to their earlier functioning)? What does their progress or trajectory look like?
 - a. This may speak to information that is less normative and more ipsative/relative. For example, if a student appeared fairly typical prior to the pandemic, but is now withdrawn and low-performing, an SLD evaluation may not be warranted.
4. Where is the student on Fall 2021 benchmarking? How much have they "kept up" or been able to meet grade-level standards?
 - a. To help determine if the problem is more universal, consider arranging a whole grade's benchmark scores from highest to lowest and find the median score. Is the median score at benchmark?
5. Did the student experience notable stressors or personal trauma that was beyond what other students experienced?
 - a. Consider resources like the [COVID-19 Impact Checklist](#)

If historical data is limited for the student, consider:

1. Are there local or district norms that can be used for comparison? Are you able to compare student's data to like-group peers?
2. Is the student missing skills from the previous grade level's scope and sequence?
 - a. For example, if a student performed low in one area of an academic screening, was this area focused on during remote/hybrid instruction?



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3. Is there anything in early development that could influence an atypical academic trajectory?
 - a. Consider health/developmental history as part of the pre-referral process
4. What did the student's progress look like compared to other school-age siblings? Do parents have more or fewer concerns about this student compared to others in the family?

As always, it is encouraged to rely on data-based team decisions.

Here are some more resources that may be helpful:

[NASP Guidance on Pandemic's Impact on Special Education Evaluations and SLD Identification](#)

[NASP Guidance on the Use of Grade Retention and Special Education Eligibility to Address Instructional Loss](#)

[WSASP Guidance for Special Education Evaluations During the COVID-19 Closure](#)