

## Comprehensive Special Education Assessments: Beyond Rtl

Schools using a discrepancy model rather than Rtl to identify learning disabilities can use further comprehensive assessments to define a student's learning profile.

A comprehensive special education assessment, administered by a school psychologist, will provide specific information about the extent of the reading difficulties. This information may be used to determine appropriate instructional approaches, to provide recommendations for educational planning, and to assist with the determination of eligibility for either special education services or a Section 504 Accommodation Plan at school. A student with dyslexia may qualify for special education services as a student with a Specific Learning Disability in the area of reading, but a formal diagnosis of dyslexia will not be provided at the school level.

The diagnosis of dyslexia reflects a reading difficulty that is unexpected for a student's intelligence and exposure to teaching strategies. It is a clinical diagnosis generally given by a Learning Disabilities Specialist, Clinical Psychologist, Neuropsychologist, or Educational Psychologist based on a thorough examination of a number of factors including family history, observations of a student's reading and speaking, and tests of reading and language. A diagnostic assessment process should be comprehensive and tailored so that it reflects the nature of the problems of the student. In general, a formal assessment should include the following:

- a case history including medical, academic, developmental, behavioral, family and instructional/classroom information;
- determination of overall cognitive abilities including verbal and nonverbal skills;
- educational tests for basic skills in reading, writing, spelling, written language, and often math, including:
  - vocabulary and syntax, phonological sound and symbol matching,
  - single real and nonsense word decoding,
  - oral and silent reading comprehension,
  - fluency in oral and silent reading,
  - spelling and handwriting, and
  - written language;
- examination of specific cognitive processes including phonological awareness, phonological memory, orthographic coding, and rapid naming; and
- clinical observations.