On Assessment for Children in Special Education Experiencing Reading Difficulties

Students are frequently identified to receive special education services because of difficulties in learning how to read. These students deserve special education services by professionals who use reading assessments that both inform instruction and monitor instructional effectiveness. Assessments used for this purpose should include a variety of measures that reliably reveal a student’s reading strengths and weaknesses.

Educators must protect the privacy rights of special education students. They must also ensure that any assessments are free from cultural bias. Students identified with difficulties in reading should have access to a variety of accommodations to ensure that the assessments used to identify students with reading problems to receive special education services and instructional accommodations should evidence excellent psychometric qualities of validity and reliability in order to provide accurate information about each student’s needs and abilities accommodations recommended might include such changes as adjustments in testing time and manner of administration to provide students with disabilities a fair opportunity to demonstrate their strengths and weaknesses in reading. It should be noted that testing accommodations are only appropriate so long as they do not interfere with the fundamental nature of the skill, process, or content being tested.

Consequently, care needs to be taken that testing accommodations do not mask children’s needs for further instruction in essential competencies. For example, it may be appropriate to read test items aloud to struggling readers when assessing their content knowledge in areas such as science and social studies to ensure that their reading problems do not lead to underestimating their content knowledge. On the other hand, reading performance tests should not be read aloud because this accommodation would fundamentally alter what is being assessed—reading.

Students with reading difficulties should be included in administrations of national and local reading assessments although they might require accommodations as suggest above. Just as students in special education should not be denied access to the regular education curriculum, they should also have equal opportunity to participate in and attain the benefits from participation in large-scale assessment programs. Scores from a single national and local assessment should never be used as the sole criterion for making high-stakes decisions about students’ promotion and high school graduation.

Reading programs provided to students in special education must meet the same high standards of excellence as is expected in other areas of the curriculum. Information drawn from administrations of local reading assessments can be used as only one indicator of the reading instructional program’s or intervention’s effectiveness. Data obtained from a single administration of a local assessment should be used in combination with other similar assessments, both formal and informal, for making determinations about whether a reading instructional program or intervention is meeting a student’s instructional needs.

(continued)
Resolution

Be it resolved that students qualified for and served by special education for reading difficulties deserve to be:

- assessed using assessments that reliably and fully describe their reading abilities in ways that can be used by their teachers to design instruction that helps them develop proficient reading
- included in national and local assessment administrations
- provided appropriate assessment and instructional accommodations
- provided follow-up alternative assessment to assure student needs are comprehensively assessed and data triangulated using assessment that preserve the fundamental nature of the skill, process, and/or content being tested.

Be it further resolved that national and local assessment scores should not be used as the sole or main criterion, for making high-stakes decisions about special education students' placement, promotion, and high school graduation.

Note: This is a revision of the 2000 resolution on “Assessment in the U.S. for Children in Special Education Experiencing Reading Difficulties.” This resolution is more globally applicable.

(Adopted April 2000; Revised May 2011)