



## JANUARY 2009

### It All Starts with a Good Assessment

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*"The effect of assessment for learning, as it plays out in the classroom, is that students keep learning and remain confident that they can continue to learn at productive levels if they keep trying to learn. In other words, students don't give up in frustration or hopelessness."*  
~ Stiggins, R. J. 2002.

Do you worry that your child is not doing well in school or learning as they should? Could they be feeling frustrated, hopeless, or overwhelmed? A good assessment (or evaluation – the 2 words are often used interchangeably) can answer these questions, while also informing instruction, intervention, classification and placement decisions for your child. The importance of assessment cannot be underestimated – in Special Education it is often said that the assessment is the engine that drives the IEP train, the foundation upon which to build the IEP. A thorough assessment identifies areas of strength and areas of challenge. Developing areas of strength is key to [success in life](#) and identifying specific challenges is needed to target remediation and accommodations.

If your child is not in Special Education, but you think they may need these services, the assessment starts the process to see if your child meets eligibility requirements. This type of evaluation typically only assesses relative to eligibility standards, which is different from an assessment that provides an overall picture of strengths and weaknesses. Each of the 13 eligibility categories have their own requirements – if you're interested in learning more about these, the [Matrix Assessment packet](#) discusses these in detail. If your child is already in Special Education and you don't think they are making enough progress, an assessment can be requested so that more information can be gathered to guide the process of changing your child's IEP. Read on to learn more about this important process and key steps to ensure you get the information you need...

##### Know the Basics

These are some key facts about assessments that every parent should know.

1. Any request for an assessment MUST BE PUT IN WRITING. For sample letters consult [our website](#) or [Assessment Packet](#). There are TIME LINES the school district must follow once they receive your written request.
2. Your local school district is responsible for assessments on any child who is over 3 years of age and may be in need of Special Education services. For instance, if your preschooler is having difficulties, you would contact your local school district to inquire about an assessment. Local school districts are responsible for assessing students in both public and private schools.
3. Assessments can be in any area that impacts learning – language, [behavior](#), academics, functional skills, motor skills, [thinking/processing skills](#), [attention](#), and [emotions](#).

For more basic information on assessments, the following article and websites are helpful:

[Great Schools: Article on Special Education Assessment](#)

<http://www.taalliance.org/publications/pdfs/all10.pdf>

<http://www.fape.org/pubs/fape-8.pdf>

##### A good assessment is a thorough assessment

If an assessment of your child is not thorough and complete, then eligibility may be denied or the IEP document may be written in a way that does not result in appropriate progress. Look for these things:

1. It include multiple measures. Not just test scores – work samples, observation of him/her in the school setting, parent questionnaires, and other things are possibly needed. For tests, more than one measurement in areas of concern (this can confirm the findings when several measures say the same thing.)
2. It measures all areas of suspected concern and the assessment methods used actually can measure these areas.
3. The testing is culturally sensitive and in the primary language of the student.
4. If an area has a low score, it is further explored.

##### What can parents do to ensure a thorough assessment for their child?

1. [Be specific in your concerns](#) when communicating with the professionals who are doing the testing.
2. Ask about each assessment procedure so you understand what it is meant to test and how. See "[Learning Processes: A Diagnostic Framework](#)" at the end of

Chapter 2 [in this publication](#). National Disability Organizations also frequently have articles about how best to assess each disability. See our website for a [listing of links to these organizations](#).

3. Have someone else who knows assessments review the proposed assessment plan AND go over the results with you – second opinions can be a good thing! While Matrix staff are not assessment professionals, using the "parent-to-parent" model, they can go over the assessment with you to help you formulate questions to ask the professionals.

#### Finally...Follow Up

What do you do after the assessment is done and you do not feel it was thorough or accurate? Follow up with your child's educational team immediately and discuss your concerns with them. There may be agreement that additional assessments are needed and the school can initiate those. If the IEP team is not willing to consider your concerns or objections, it is important to put in writing that you disagree with the assessment. This opens the door to an I.E.E. (Independent Educational Evaluation/Assessment at public expense.) For more information on these visit the following links:

<http://www.wrightslaw.com/info/test.iew.steedman.htm>

<http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/se/qa/psssummary.asp>

#### LIBRARY NEWS

Matrix has many books and materials that will help you better understand the assessment process including ones that explain specific tests your child may receive and how to assess specific disabilities and needs. Some of these include:

- *Finding Help When Your Child is Struggling in School: From Kindergarten Through Jr. High School*, by L. Greene
- *Assessing Learners with Special Needs: An Applied Approach (5th edition)* by T. Overton
- *The Special Educator's Comprehensive Guide to 301 Diagnostic Tests* by R. Peirangelo, G. Guilian
- *Children's Psychological Testing: A Guide for Nonpsychologists (3rd edition)* by D. Wodrich
- *Making Sense of Test Scores: How to Understand a Comprehensive Test Battery*, Presented by the No. Ca. International Dyslexia Assn.
- *Straight Talk About Psychological Testing for Kids* (reference, not to be circulated), by E. Braaten, G. Felopulos

Additionally, we have many comprehensive IEP/special education books that include chapters on assessment. Visit [our website](#) to learn about new books and periodicals added to our library each month.

#### UPCOMING MATRIX TRAINING & EVENTS

*Wednesday, February 4, 2009, 9 to 11:30 AM*

##### **Transitions: Middle or High School, For Students in Special Education.**

Learn how to get your child's IEP ready for Middle school and IEP transition plans. Location: Sonoma County Office of Education.

*Thursday, February 5th, 9 AM to 11:30 AM*

**When Behavior Impacts Learning: IEPs and Behavior Plans.** This training covers the components of a behavior intervention plan and how such a plan can support your child. Location: Matrix Office in Novato.

*Saturday, February 7, 2009, 9:30 AM to 12 Noon*

**Students with Emotional Challenges and the IEP.** Learn your rights and different approaches for crafting effective IEP plans for children with emotional challenges. Location: Matrix Solano Office - 1615 West Texas St., Ste. 4, Fairfield, CA 94533.

#### COMMUNITY PRESENTATION:

*Saturday, March 7, 2009, 9 AM to 12 Noon*

Matrix and ParentsCAN invite you to a presentation by the **Office of Administrative Hearings Special Education Division**. This presentation will help parents better understand mediation and due process procedures. Location: American Canyon Recreation Center. See [Flyer](#) for more details.

#### MATRIX SUPPORT GROUPS

Matrix is pleased to announce that an **Asperger's Syndrome and Similar Profiles Parent Support Group** is now meeting monthly in Sonoma County. Call Chris at 415.475.2119 for meeting dates, location, and time. See [our website for a full listing of Matrix Support Groups](#).

#### MORE USEFUL INFORMATION

##### **Time-Sensitive College Scholarship Information**

Apply for assistance by **March 2, 2009** in order to be considered for the greatest number of various types of aid. For information about federal and state grants visit: <http://www.csac.ca.gov> The main CSAC website is not explicitly for students with disabilities, however if you meet the requirements for these resources you are eligible for all of them. Many parents do not know that these resources exist and parents of students with disabilities often assume they won't even qualify, but this is NOT the case. Most are controlled by income and assets and many can be used not only for academic colleges, but also for career/technical schools and job

training. Other important websites to check:  
[FinAid – Other Types of Aid/ Financial Aid for Students with Disabilities Funding Strategies – Traditional and Nontraditional College.gov](#) – In addition to the other information provided it also has information on Financial Aid.

**Reminder: New Matrix Service.** Matrix now has office hours in Santa Rosa. See [Flyer](#) for more details.

**Confessions of a Refrigerator Mother** – April 2nd through the 25th at *The Marsh in San Francisco, 1062 Valenica St.*

This full length, autobiographical solo show is a presentational, multi-media exploration of a day-in-the-life of a 9-year old boy and his family as they navigate the mysterious world of autism. For more information and to purchase advance tickets [click here](#).

For a more complete listing of community events, trainings, workshops, and conferences, please see the [Community Calendar on our website](#).

Matrix serves families in 4 counties: Marin, Napa, Solano and Sonoma, with offices in Novato and Fairfield.

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707-423-2545 tel • 800-578-2592 toll free  
707-425-4585 fax

[info@matrixparents.org](mailto:info@matrixparents.org) • [www.matrixparents.org](http://www.matrixparents.org)

This email was sent to [julia.stenson@networkforgood.org](mailto:julia.stenson@networkforgood.org). To ensure that you continue receiving our emails, please add us to your address book or safe list.

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