Understanding Assessments
Matrix Parent Network

We empower families of children with special needs to successfully understand and access the systems that serve them.

We want you to become successful advocates and role models for your children.
Who are We and Who are You?

(Introductions)
You will leave here knowing:

• Who, what, when, where, why and how of assessments
• Assessment timelines
• Basic understanding of scores
• What can you do?
• What to do if you disagree?
What are Assessments?
What are Assessments?

By definition, an assessment is:

*the evaluation or estimation of the nature, quality, or ability of someone or something.*

An assessment is the process of evaluating your child’s strengths and weakness as they affect his or her ability to benefit from their education.
What are Assessments?

Assessment reports often include various tests done by “experts,” but testing is not the only way that a students’ strengths and weaknesses are evaluated.
What are Assessments?

A variety of sources of information can be used in conducting assessments, and some of these may include:

• Parent Reports
• Behavior & attendance records
• Questionnaires/rating scales
• Review of history/ past reports/ work samples
• Interviews: parent, student or professionals
• Standardized testing – (State Testing)
What’s in Assessments?

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What’s in Assessments?

The primary report is often labeled “Psycho-Educational Evaluation.”

It should include:

• History/background of your student
• Statement about validity of testing
• Discussion of strengths as well as weaknesses
• Recommendations & application to education

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What’s in Assessments?

The “Psycho-Educational Evaluation” should include: (cont.)

- Explanation of any tests done.
- Tests of intellectual functioning and academic skills will almost always be conducted.
- A variety of other tests may be included, based on your child’s suspected area of disability.
- Scores for all tests and subtests should be included.
What’s in Assessments?

At, or preferably before, an initial or triennial IEP, the school will provide you with one or more assessment reports.

Other reports can include OT, PT, Speech and Language, Social/Emotional and many others.

A report does NOT determine eligibility – the IEP Team determines eligibility.
Why get Assessments?

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Why get Assessments?

• Assessments are the FOUNDATION of the IEP.
• Help the IEP Team determine eligibility (not diagnose) in any area of suspected disability:
  C – communication and cognitive
  H – health
  A – academics & adaptive skills
  M – motor
  P – perceptual & psychological
  S – social/emotional

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Why get Assessments?

- Identify areas of need and strengths
- Track progress – parents can request assessments at any time during student’s school career, not just to determine eligibility
- Develop the IEP – refer to IEP pyramid
How to ask for Assessments?

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How to ask for Assessments?

• Parent provides written request – check our sample letter online; school can also request assessment.

• District must respond in writing with answer in **15 calendar** days

• If approved, district gives parent Assessment Plan to sign; this form lists the areas to be assessed – but not the individual tests.
How to ask for Assessments?

• Parent/guardian has at least **15 calendar** days from the receipt of the proposed assessment plan to arrive at a decision.

• You can request in writing what actual tests are going to be given to your child.

• Parent signs, and assessments begin.

• School has **60** days to complete assessments and develop IEP.

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How to ask for Assessments?

- If request for assessments is denied, district must give Prior Written Notice which includes the reason for the denial and all the data used to deny the request.

- **This process is the same** whether it’s the first time you’re asking for an assessment or the 10th.

- Can request reports prior to IEP meeting, in writing.
How to ask for Assessments?

You can ask Matrix for help in understanding your assessments.

* NOTE: Timelines may have extensions for vacations longer than 5 days and/or summer breaks
When to get Assessments?

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When to get Assessments?

- Initially – first IEP
- Triennial – by law, every 3 years, if parent agrees
- To track progress once a year
- If there’s a specific concern – academic, social, behavior, speech,
- Transition: Student 14 years (best practice) or 16 years (by law)
Who does Assessments?

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Who does Assessments?

Your child may be tested by any of the following professionals, depending on the areas of suspected disability:

- School Psychologist – cognitive, social, behavioral, emotional, adaptive skills, processing
- Special Ed teacher – academic skills
Who does Assessments?

Your child may be tested by any of the following professionals (cont’d)

• Speech/Language – communication

• Occupational Therapist – sensory, fine motor

• Physical Therapist – gross motor
Who does Assessments?

- **You** - through questionnaires or interviews
- Others as needed for specific areas
- Medical professionals – may be “considered” by the team if relevant to your child’s ability to access curriculum, but not a substitute for schools evaluation
- Private pay professionals – school to “consider” results
Where do you get Assessments?

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Where do you get Assessments?

• At school: school specialists

• Outside of school: private pay, medical, neuropsychologist, and others

• Outside assessments only have to be “considered” by the IEP team, and only if they meet the school’s criteria.

• Outside assessments are NOT usually used to determine eligibility or track progress, etc.
Once you have the Assessments

ACTIVITY # 1 - File Review

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is beginning to respond to adult greetings when provided with visual and hand cues. However, he is not yet able to point to body parts upon request, appropriately indicate "yes" or "no" in response to questions, or follow two-step directions in context.

Additional Information in the Area of Communication (P. Frank & C.C.-S.P.):
The Functional Communication Profile: Revised (2003) is an informal instrument that looks at major skill categories of communication and targets practical skills individuals with developmental delays encounter daily. Performance is based on clinical judgment. The measure is not scored, but rather gives a level of impairment.

level of impairment as measured by this instrument is severe, or his skills are 2-3 years delayed compared to typical peers.

- **Sensory/Motor:** demonstrates normal hearing and adequate auditory localization skills. His vision is functional and his visual tracking is adequate.
- **Eye contact** is best with objects, while noted to be "poor" with people. He avoids eye contact most of the time. He can and will make eye contact rarely when engaged in positive social interactions around a preferred item. He has the will to inappropriate behavior challenges; stereotyped motor mannerisms, prefers objects to persons, mouthing inedible objects, social isolation/involuntary, echolalia self-talks, tantrums, stimulus fascination, stimulus oversensitivity, poor sensory integration, restricted interests, poor safety awareness, compulsive or rigid, and easily agitated.

- **Attention:** attention span is "fair"; it varies with his mood. He is ‘frequently’ distracted, however his distractibility depends on the task. His alertness is adequate. He appears to disregard others. His response rate has mild to moderate delays. He is moderately aware of environmental events that are routine and occasionally aware of those that are novel or do not directly involve him. He is cooperative with some prompts and routine.

- **Receptive Language:** understands best when others use phrase to short sentence length statements, when verbal language is supported with visuals and when given direct (rather than indirect) requests. His understanding of basic concepts is "poor". He appears to tune out those who are calling his name and will respond to attention commands most frequently with a physical prompt. He looks at pictures with interest and accepts objects presented spontaneously. He will give objects to the speaker with a gestural prompt, unless the object is a preferred item and then he will often need total assistance. He follows routine and environmental commands with visual and intermittent physical prompts. He will occasionally show understanding of nonverbal language (i.e. gestures, intonation changes). He is able to identify objects, photos, and symbols with limited items.

- **Expressive Language:** is a limited verbal communicator. His current expressive level is single words with emerging phrases. He uses the following methods of communication: speech, facial expressions, actions, manipulation of other bodies, body language, PECS and an activity schedule (see summary of communication/language sample below). His self-expression includes basic needs, preferences, echolalia and interests; however most of his self-expression outside of his use of PECS and some verbal language must be inferred by familiar caregivers. He demonstrates descriptive language in his rote naming, however his descriptive language does contain delayed echolalia. Specifically related to expressing choices, he will

The CELF Preschool - Second Edition: Descriptive Prognostic Profile is a criterion referenced measure that looks at a variety of verbal communication skills and conversational routines and skills, as well as whether a child asks, gives and responds to information appropriately. He had a total score of 38, which did not meet the criterion score for his age group of 68, suggesting inadequate communication abilities in context. Will sometimes respond appropriately in a familiar person's facial expressions, gestures, tone of voice or nonverbally expressed rule. He will also sometimes appropriately use facial express, express nonverbal messages, communicate when playing with other children stay quiet when expected, maintain attention while another person speaks, ask for help from others, and stop a behavior when asked. He is not staying appropriate tone of voice, filling conversation on a regular basis, joining in play with familiar persons, demonstrating turn taking rules, using appropriate strategies for getting the attention of others, interrupting in an appropriate manner, using some screen and age appropriate gestures, asking permission for help, asking questions when confused, or telling the details of an experience or story in the order they occurred.

Speech Production/Voice/Fluency:
The preschool Motor Speech Evaluation is criterion-based assessment of oral-motor and motor speech skills in young children who are exhibiting significant speech delays. Information is gathered through direct elicitation and observation. Interpretation of developmental levels is based on a checklist of skills and clinical judgment. Skills are recorded in terms of "developmental observations" (motor patterns that are typical and expected at some point in a child's early development) or "diagnostic observations" (behaviors or conditions that are atypical in development).
Mother’s Observations

is a sweet natured, kind and respectful 11-year, 3-month old, 6th grade student at Middle School. lives in with his biological parents. Per parent report, English is the primary language spoken in the home; Spanish is also spoken in the home. is reported to maintain a "loving, and friendly" relationships with his parents with whom he maintains a "strong bond". Per parent report, the family history not is significant for any neurodevelopmental issues. is reported to have many wonderful qualities and positive characteristics including, but not limited to, his compassion, empathy, generosity and creativity. Further, it was noted that has a good sense of humor, he is hard working/persistent and he is always willing to help others. enjoys skateboarding, riding his scooter, playing various video games, working on a Rubik’s cube and playing basketball. is also skilled and interested in working on/repairing electronics.

Academically, his mother noted that for the first time in his academic career, “loves school because he feels no one is checking on him or after him”. By parent report, is responsible about bringing his schoolwork home; he spends 1-hour each night completing his work and his need for assistance (from his parents or tutor) is variable. His mother further commented that consistently completes his schoolwork but does not all ways remember to turn it in. In terms of his communication skills, his mother suggested that experiences difficulty with following verbal directions, understanding questions, following longer sentences and understanding what someone is saying to him. He is better able to take in and understand stories.

His mother indicated that does not experience difficulties with visual tasks such as completing puzzles or drawing. He does however tend to avoid engaging in challenging tasks involving concentrated attention such as reading. ’s gross motor skills were described as “average”. He enjoys participating in games and sports and participates in team/group activities. His mother indicated that ’s fine motor skills are poor and he often forgets punctuation and capitalization. His mother indicated that is a kind and generous friend. Emotionally, his mother indicated that does not become easily upset. Behaviorally, his mother suggested that is responsive to earning rewards and privileges.
Psychologist's Observations:
The school psychologist evaluated at Middle School on four separate occasions in 2017. On each occasion presented as a friendly, engaging and kind student. During the informal interview, discussed school, his family, hobbies and friends. reported that he finds Learning Center support helpful and would like to continue to receive services. During testing 's ability to sustain his attention was somewhat inconsistent; with the majority of tasks he was quite focused, other times he seemed to become overwhelmed and distracted by the amount of auditory information presented. consistently put forth his best effort and seemed highly motivated to perform to the best of his ability. On verbal tasks, appeared to have some word finding difficulty. This difficulty might be related to second language issues and/or lingering challenges with expressive language. Positively, when allowed additional processing time, often came up with the correct word. was highly responsive to corrective feedback. During some of the memory tasks, utilized strategies such as sub-vocalization, which seemed to improve his performance. Despite some of 's challenges, the current assessment results in the areas of cognitive/intellectual processing; social/emotional development and behavioral functioning appear to be valid at this time.

The Education Specialists also made observations of 's behavior during the WIAT-III, KeyMath3 and Tests of Written Language-4 assessments. was familiar with the assessors. His conversational proficiency seemed typical for his age level. He was cooperative throughout the examination. However, although appeared at ease and comfortable during the examination, he did seem slightly distracted / restless at times. Yet, he generally responded promptly to test questions, appearing to be trying his best during all subtests. As such, the current assessment results appear to provide an accurate estimate of 's overall academic ability.
Understanding Scores

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Understanding Scores

Scores, depending on the specific test, can be reported in:

• Percentiles
• Standard Scores
• Scaled Scores
• Grade Equivalent
• Age Equivalent
• T scores
What do the numbers mean?

Activity #2 – Bell Curve
Fold the page in half, then fold it in half again, and then fold it in half again.
Overall Intellectual Ability

The Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children—Fifth Edition (WISC-V) was utilized to measure general thinking and reasoning abilities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Composite Scores</th>
<th>Percentile Rank</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval</th>
<th>Classification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Verbal Comprehension Index (VCI)</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>89-102</td>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual Spatial Index (VSI)</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>94-106</td>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fluid Reasoning Index (FRI)</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>100-112</td>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working Memory Index (WMI)</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>80-93</td>
<td>Low Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Processing Speed Index (PSI)</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>80-95</td>
<td>Low Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Ability Index (GAI)</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>92-102</td>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subtest</th>
<th>Scaled Score</th>
<th>Percentile</th>
<th>Classification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Similarities</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Block Design</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Low Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual Puzzles</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>High Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matrix Reasoning</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>High Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure Weights</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digit Span</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Low Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Picture Span</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>High Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter-Number Sequencing</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coding</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbol Search</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Low Average</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Academic Testing

Wechsler Individual Achievement Test Third Edition (WIAT-3) on 11/14/16, 11/16/16, 11/18/16, & 11/21/16

ORAL LANGUAGE ASSESSMENTS using the WIAT-III

There are two subtests on the WIAT-III that assess Oral Language skills. They are Listening Comprehension and Oral Expression subtests.

### Oral Language Tests

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SS</th>
<th>PR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>96</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>86</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Description of Test and Observations**

- **Listening Comprehension** — contains receptive vocabulary and oral discourse comprehension components and measures listening comprehension at the level of the word, sentence and discourse.

- **Oral Expression** — contains expressive vocabulary, oral word fluency, and sentence repetition components and is designed to measure skills and competencies that are important for effective speaking vocabulary, word retrieval, flexibility of thought process, and oral syntactic knowledge and short-term memory.

### Oral Language Composite

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SS</th>
<th>PR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>89</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Description of Test and Observations**

- **Oral Language** — includes Listening Comprehension and Oral Expression.
**READING ASSESSMENTS using the WIAT-III:**

There are four subtests on the WIAT-III that assess reading. They include Word Reading, Pseudo-word Decoding, Reading Comprehension and Oral Reading Fluency.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading Tests</th>
<th>Description of Test and Observations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SS</td>
<td>PR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>95</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>79</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading Composite</th>
<th>Description of Test and Observations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SS</td>
<td>PR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>78</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>83</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### MATH using the WIAT-III

There are five subtests on the WIAT-III that assess math. They include Math Problem Solving, Numerical Operations, Math Fluency-Addition, Subtraction, and Multiplication.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SS</th>
<th>PR</th>
<th>Description of Test and Observations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>89</td>
<td>23</td>
<td><strong>Numerical Operations</strong> – measures written mathematics calculation skills under untimed conditions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>83</td>
<td>13</td>
<td><strong>Math Problem Solving</strong> – measures the ability to problem solve mathematically using both verbal and visual prompts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77</td>
<td>6</td>
<td><strong>Math Fluency Addition</strong> – this subtest is designed to measure written mathematics calculation fluency, accuracy and speed in addition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>72</td>
<td>3</td>
<td><strong>Math Fluency Subtraction</strong> – this subtest is designed to measure written mathematics calculation fluency, accuracy and speed in subtraction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>86</td>
<td>18</td>
<td><strong>Math Fluency Multiplication</strong> this subtest is designed to measure written mathematics calculation fluency, accuracy and speed in multiplication</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Math Composite**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SS</th>
<th>PR</th>
<th>Description of Test and Observations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>85</td>
<td>16</td>
<td><strong>Mathematics</strong> – includes Numerical Operations and Mathematical Problem Solving.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77</td>
<td>6</td>
<td><strong>Math Fluency</strong> – includes Math Fluency Addition, Subtraction and Multiplication.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Scatter Matters**

Having very high and low scores is sending a message.
How Assessments relate to the IEP
How Assessments relate to the IEP

The next important step for YOU, once you have gone through the assessment reports, is to prioritize the needs you’ve identified.

Priority needs will leads to goals, which will lead to services which will lead to placement.
How Assessments relate to the IEP

This is the relationship between assessments and rest of IEP –

*assessments are the foundation!*
Assessment leads to Eligibility

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Assessment leads to Eligibility

- No single score determines eligibility,
- The IEP team makes an eligibility decision taking all information into consideration.
- Just having a disability doesn’t mean eligibility.
- Any area of suspected disability should be evaluated.
Assessment leads to Eligibility

• There are 13 eligibility categories, each with its own eligibility requirements.

• If a district believes a student is no longer eligible for Special Education, a parent can request an assessment to confirm that determination.

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What you can do

what
can
we do?
What you can do

Gather and organize your papers

• Work samples, report cards, state testing
• Documents from outside professionals
• Plot your child’s scores in a spread sheet to show progress/lack of progress over time
• Observations and surveys
• Behavior, discipline or attendance records
• Communications from school
• Medical/ Medication history
What you can do

Other Steps:

• Request your child’s school file
• Read up about your child’s disability
• Understand basics of testing
• List your questions, concerns, comments
• Be specific
• Use examples & data
• Avoid generalizations
• Use others for help

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Questions you might ask
Questions you might ask

Suggested questions:

• Does this assessment sound like my child?

• Are there any scores that fit a pattern or do not fit a pattern?

• Are some scores way higher than others? Scatter?
Questions you might ask

Suggested questions: (cont.)

• Is there some need that does not show up in the assessment?

• Does the report reflect the needs you see in your child?
More to do

Find out more

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More to do

• Parents can submit private assessments for the team to “consider”. It is good to make sure prior to paying for the assessment that it will fit the school’s criteria.

• If you are in agreement with assessments and findings, proceed to develop or revise IEP.

• If you are not in agreement with the assessment or eligibility decision from assessment …
What if you disagree?
What if you disagree?

• Sign in disagreement.

• Request the district do additional assessment or subtests.

• Request an IEE (Independent Education Evaluation) at district expense – the parent is entitled to one IEE for each assessment the parent disagrees with (unless the school district files for due process to defend its evaluation and prevails).
What if you disagree?

- An IEE at public expense automatically meets the school’s criteria.

- The District must proceed with the IEE unless they file for due process to prove the original assessment is valid.

- Consider Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR).

- Use formal Dispute Resolution Processes.
Keeping perspective

SEE THE BIG PICTURE
Keeping perspective

• A child is more than an assessment, life is more than school.

• Make strengths more important than weaknesses.

• Living with ambiguity – Needs can be complex or unclear even after assessment.

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Keeping perspective

- Never worry alone – find support.
- Information is empowerment.
- Take one day at a time – breathe and remember self-care is not selfish!
Skills Checklist

• What have you learned?
• Do you need more resources?
• Do you need more support?

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The ability to ask the right Question is the most important skill
Matrix Parent Network & Resource Center

We are parent advisors not attorneys or advocates

We do not give legal advice or advise a course of action. We provide support and information to help parents learn about their rights and options, find referrals and resources and help parents become the best advocate they can be for their child.

Matrix Helpline: 1-800-578-2592

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Matrix Parent Network & Resource Center

Federal Parent Training & Information Center
designated by the Office of Special Education, US Department of Education,
serving families of children birth through 26 in Marin, Napa, Sonoma & Solano counties

California Family Resource Center
designated by CA Department of Developmental Services,
serving families of infants and toddlers

California Family Empowerment Center
designated by CA Department of Education
serving the underserved in Solano and Sonoma Counties

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Please consider supporting Matrix in any way you can!

Help Us Help You: Donate

Thank you!!