



POSITION STATEMENT: Evaluation for Specific Learning Disabilities

Background on Specific Learning Disability: The Education for all Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (EHA) required public schools to provide equal access to education to all children with physical and mental disabilities. EHA's successor statute was the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA), the most recent version of which was passed in 2004. This act defined all of the disabilities that public schools are required to identify amongst the student population as well as provide special education services for. By far, the most commonly identified disability in American public schools is Specific Learning Disability. IDEIA defined Specific Learning Disability (SLD) as "a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations, including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia."

Who We Are: Since EHA's inception, school psychologists have been conducting the evaluations used to identify and properly support children with Specific Learning Disabilities as well as the other federally defined disabilities. Founded in 1970, the Georgia Association of School Psychologists has served as the professional body and collective voice of the school psychologists in our state.

Rationale for a Position Statement: Assessment and intervention for SLD have always been challenging topics for researchers and practitioners. School psychologists have been instrumental in developing and implementing a variety of models that have been proposed including but not limited to: (1) IQ-Ach. Discrepancy, (2) Response to Intervention (RTI), and (3) Processing Based Models. While IDEIA 2004 provided a definition and some general guidance on identifying and serving students with Specific Learning Disabilities, it also afforded broad discretion to the states. Each state was charged with determining its own specific methodology resulting in widely varying practices across the nation. At the time the Georgia Department of Education—with statewide input—incorporated evidence-based practices from multiple models, while some other states did not take such a balanced approach.

Position Statement: Since 2004 school psychologists have assessed the strengths and shortcomings of the various models put into practice. GASP itself recently conducted a survey of its members to collect data on the professional viewpoints in our state—these results were remarkably close to total consensus (see Figures 1, 2, and 3). In light of these results and all that we have learned prior to and since 2004, GASP strongly recommends that the Georgia Department of Education once again supports a balanced and reasonable approach to assessment and intervention for Specific Learning Disability that includes both RTI and formal assessment of intellectual, cognitive processing, and academic functioning. We believe that any methodology that fails to include both elements is insufficient and would not adequately address the needs of our children. For additional information on this issue and our viewpoint, please speak with a GASP representative—our organization would be pleased to offer our support.

GEORGIA ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS

Figure 1

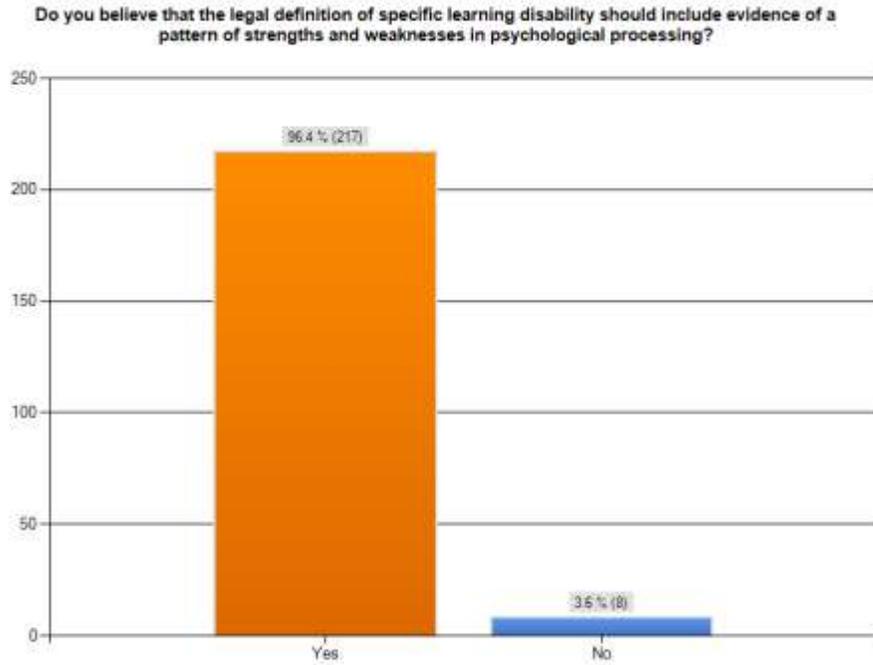
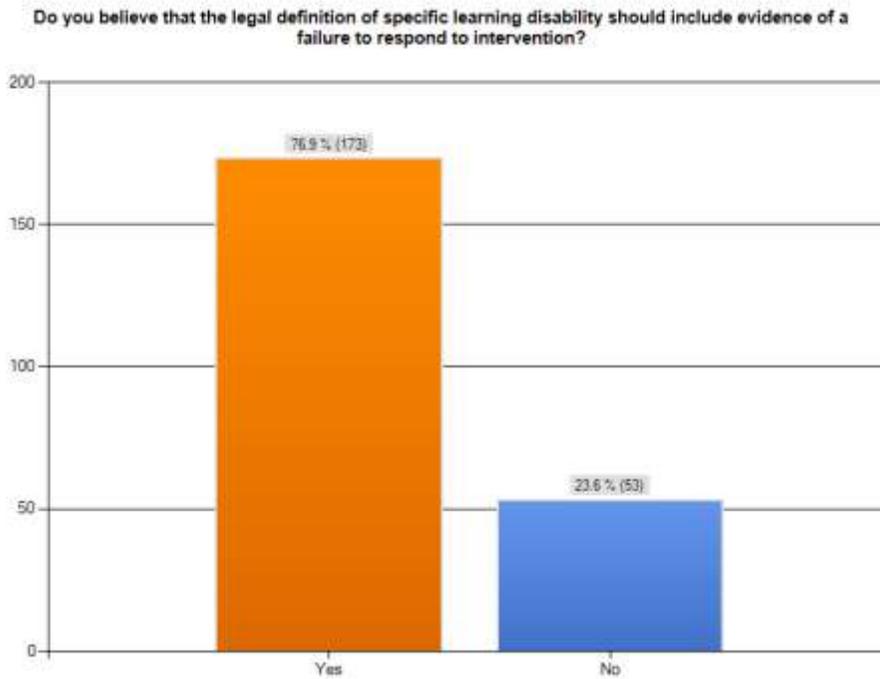


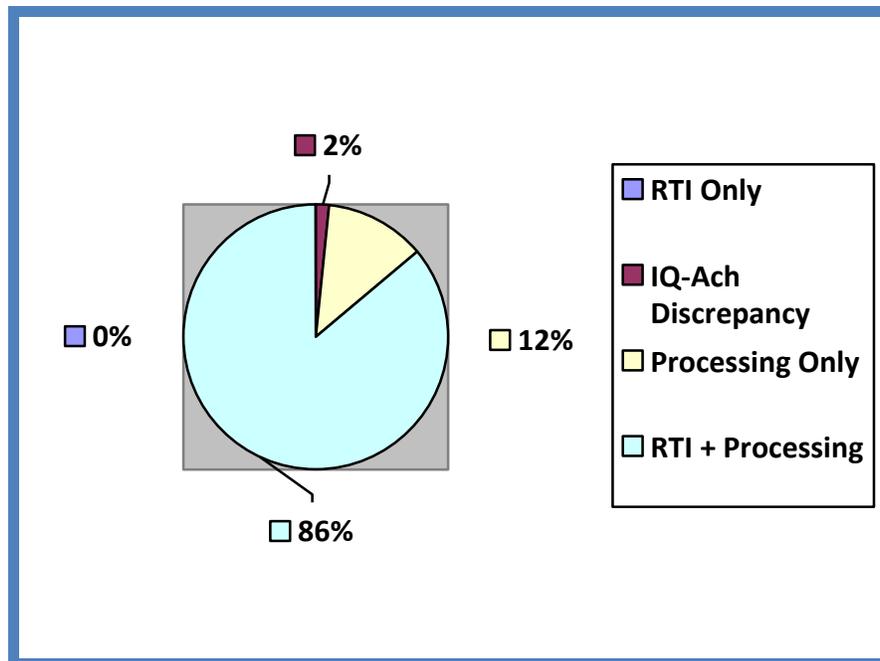
Figure 2



GEORGIA ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS

Figure 3

Georgia School Psychologists: which of the following best reflects your professional viewpoint?



1. Children with specific learning disabilities should be identified through a Response to Intervention framework. There is no need to conduct formal psychoeducational assessment of intellectual ability, academic achievement, or cognitive processing. **GEORGIA SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS WHO ENDORSED THIS VIEWPOINT: 0 %**
2. Children with Specific Learning Disabilities should be identified by assessing for a discrepancy between intellectual ability (typically best represented by Full Scale IQ) and achievement. Response to Intervention and cognitive processing frameworks are unreliable. **GEORGIA SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS WHO ENDORSED THIS VIEWPOINT: 2 %**
3. Children with Specific Learning Disabilities should be identified utilizing a PSW (Pattern of Strengths and Weaknesses) Model. Full Scale IQ is irrelevant and the focus of assessment should be on identifying cognitive processing deficits that are related to a specific academic weakness; these deficits should be found in a “sea of strengths” as Dr. Sally Shaywitz puts it. RTI may be helpful, but it is not necessary for identifying students with SLD. **GEORGIA SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS WHO ENDORSED THIS VIEWPOINT: 12 %**
4. Children with Specific Learning Disabilities should be assisted and identified utilizing the Response to Intervention framework (RTI). However, failure to respond to intervention alone is not sufficient. Rather, there should also be evidence of a pattern of psychological processing strengths and weaknesses as well as achievement and/or performance deficits consistent with this pattern. A model that incorporates both RTI and assessment of cognitive and academic functioning makes the most empirical and clinical sense. **GEORGIA SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS WHO ENDORSED THIS VIEWPOINT: 86 %**