

Lincoln Public Schools



A Question and Answer Guide to Understanding Assessments and Assessment Reports

2009-2010

Why do we complete testing?

The Lincoln Public Schools acts in accordance with state (Chapter 766 of the Acts of 1972) and federal laws (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 known as IDEA), regulations and policies. Under these laws, initial evaluation is required in all areas of suspected disability for eligibility determination, and re-evaluation in all areas of suspected disability must occur at least every three years, to determine continued eligibility for special education services. Sometimes, students with disabilities make such substantial gains that they are exited from special education. When this happens, the student no longer shows evidence of the disability, is making effective progress, and/or no longer requires specially designed instruction provided by a special educator. This determination is made by the IEP team in collaboration with the parents following a review of the student's current performance data (classroom) and formal evaluation results.

What is standardized testing?

A standardized assessment is a test administered and scored in a consistent and established manner across all administrations. Standardized testing can either be "norm-referenced" or "criterion-referenced." Norm-referenced tests inform you of how your student is doing relative to other students/peers at a national level. Criterion-referenced tests compare your student's scores to a defined testing result expectation.

What do the test results mean?

The majority of standardized assessments that would be administered in the Lincoln Public Schools are "norm referenced" assessments. Most often, norm referenced tests compare your student's result to age similar peers however, your student's result could also be compared to grade similar peers. Additionally, evaluators are not only looking for individual score differences between your student's result and normative data, but are also looking for statistically-significant differences between your student's actual test scores.

Testing can tell you if your student is making progress, when comparing current results to your student's own past testing results. If well analyzed, testing can also tell you areas in which your student needs help or remediation and where he/she presents with relative strengths.

What are the limitations of formal testing?

There are no assessments that directly measure *why* a child is having learning difficulties. Additionally, many of the tests we administer to students do not directly correspond to the tasks we ask students to do in the classroom setting. Finally, even the best evaluator and/or evaluation

instrument can not be successful if a student is difficult to test, due to activity level, distractibility, shorter attention span, guardedness with strangers, or inconsistent performance in unfamiliar environments.

What is a raw score?

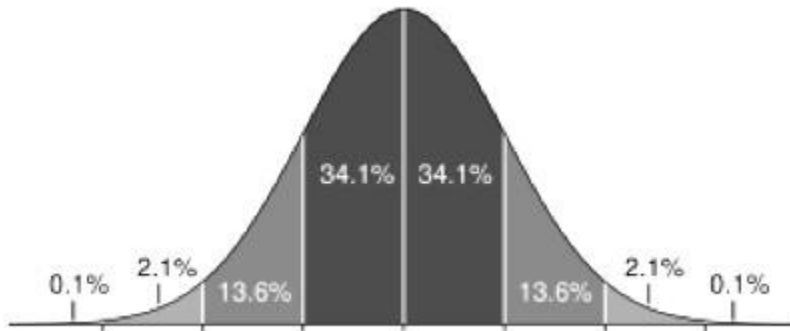
A raw score represents the number of points a student received for correctly answering questions on a test. Since tests may assign different point values to questions and have a different total number of questions, the raw score is only useful in relation to that test's content area. Test administrators use the raw score data to determine scaled scores, and scaled scores are used to determine where your student's score falls within the test's standard deviation bell curve and percentile rankings.

What is a scaled score?

A scaled score is a conversion of a student's raw score on a test to a scale that allows for a numerical comparison between students. Additionally, scaled scores are particularly useful for comparing test scores over time, such as measuring year-to-year growth of your student in a particular area.

What are standard deviations?

Standard deviation is a statistic that tells you how various data points, most often scaled scores, are clustered around a mean, or middle value. One standard deviation away from the mean in either direction accounts for approximately 68 percent of students tested. Two standard deviations away from the mean accounts for approximately 95 percent of students tested, and three standard deviations away from the mean accounts for approximately 99 percent of students tested. For a majority of standardized tests, it is typical that if a student's score falls within the one standard deviation range on either side of the mean, such is considered an age appropriate score. If the student's score falls within the range of two to three standard deviations above the mean, this testing result is considered an above average score whereas a testing result that falls within the range of two to three standard deviations below the mean is considered a below average score and is of concern.



What is a percentile rank?

Percentile rank is the percentage of your student's normative peer group that your student's score surpassed. For example, if your student received a percentile rank of 85, this means that your student's score was higher than 85% of the normative group, with only 15% of the normative group scoring higher than your student. If your student received a percentile rank of 25, this means that your student's score was higher than 25% of the normative group, but that 75% of the group scored higher than your student.

What are some of the different kinds of tests available at the Lincoln Public Schools?

- Intelligence/Cognitive testing: Intelligence tests are composed of a number of sub-tests which typically test verbal abilities (such as vocabulary, comprehension, and similarities), perceptual reasoning (such as block design and picture concepts), working memory (the ability to hold information in mind while working), and processing speed (the ability to scan data). In general, verbal tests measure left brain function, perceptual reasoning tests measure right brain function, and working memory and processing speed tests measure executive function.
- Neuropsychological testing: Neuropsychological testing looks at why student performs the way he/she does on a test, provides a picture of a child's strengths and weaknesses, and can give information on what impact the child's weaknesses can have on classroom functioning. Components of Neuropsychological testing include cognitive/Intelligence Quotient (IQ) testing, and tests that assesses the rate of learning, strategies, and the ability to deal with arbitrary information. Neuropsychological tests can help diagnose the neurological organization of the brain, but these tests don't provide a direct diagnosis.
- Academic testing: Academic tests include testing in the areas of English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics, and may consist of

reading short passages, spelling, math computations, and written language assessments.

- **Speech and Language testing:** Language tests examine receptive (understanding) and expressive (use) of language. Subtests assess vocabulary base/word knowledge (semantics) and grammatical (syntax) knowledge. The speed at which a student is able to process verbally presented information can also be assessed. Articulation tests assess sound production and sound sequencing abilities. Additionally assessments in the areas of assistive technology, oral motor, fluency and voice are available.
- **Pragmatics (social use of language):** Pragmatics, or the social use of language, is an area of great concern for many children however, this is an area that is difficult to formally assess as such requires observation of a student's social functioning with peers. Often, concerns of this nature are assessed based on observation of the student and formalized questionnaires, which you and/or your student's teacher may be asked to complete.
- **Occupational Therapy testing:** Occupational therapy assessments primarily focus on skills that students require to function appropriately during his/her school day, such as fine motor skills (handwriting/keyboarding), visual motor skills, visual perceptual skills, ocular motor skills, and self-help skills. Additionally assessments in the areas of sensory processing and motor planning are available.
- **Physical Therapy testing:** Physical therapists assess students within their educational setting, using an ecological model to determine their needs. Physical therapy assessments primarily focus on skills that students require to function appropriately during his/her school day, such as gross motor skills, mobility, postural control, strength, balance, bilateral coordination, motor planning, and seating and positioning.
- **Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA):** Functional behavioral assessments assess a student's behavior and attempt to determine the casual factors to such behaviors, in order to develop interventions to appropriately address the behavior. FBAs are typically carried out by behaviorists, classroom teachers or trained specialists.

Who should do the testing?

Typically, the staff members who are most familiar with your student complete their academic testing. Specialists, such as certified Speech and Language Pathologists, Physical Therapists or Occupational Therapists, must conduct testing in those specific developmental areas, and these may be

specialists your student is or is not familiar with. Similarly, the Lincoln Public Schools Psychologist would conduct any school psychological testing, if necessary.

How is eligibility for special education services determined?

A school-based team of professionals who examine formal, informal and curriculum-based assessment data determines eligibility for special education. Eligibility for special education is based on the presence of a disability that results in the student not making effective progress as well as need for specially designed instruction. Specially designed instruction may include content, methodology or performance assessment that is different from what is available through general education. Not all students who are referred to special education reach the rigorous eligibility criteria. When this occurs, the general education faculty monitors the students and supports are put in place through general education to meet their social, emotional and academic needs.

At other times, students who are not eligible for special education but otherwise have a disability that requires classroom accommodations may fulfill the eligibility criteria for having a Section 504 Accommodation Plan. These students have an impairment that substantially limits one or more life activity (including learning). This plan is written to assure that the students will be provided with the appropriate adaptations within their general education classrooms to prevent discrimination on the basis of their disability.

How can I go about requesting that my student be tested?

To learn more about the process of referring your student for special education eligibility determination, please first discuss your concerns with your student's teacher. Additionally, you can refer to the Special Education Services Guide or contact Denise Oldham, Special Education Coordinator at the Hanscom Schools, at oldhamd@lincnet.org by phone at 781.274.6178 extension 6403, Allison Sears, Special Education Coordinator at the Lincoln School, at asears@lincnet.org or by phone at 781.259.9404 extension 2204 or Lynn Fagan, Lincoln Preschool Coordinator, at lfagan@lincnet.org or by phone at 781.259.9889.

References

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