

Special Education Evaluation Summary

To conduct quality special education assessments in a timely manner during the COVID-19 related school closure, the NYC DOE launched a comprehensive data driven assessment model that does not require virtual or face-to-face assessments. We are proposing to continue using this model during the 2020-2021 school year, even as more in-person learning and services are being provided.

Through comprehensive data driven assessment, when deemed appropriate, the school psychologist has been using a variety of psychological and educational techniques and examinations in the student's native language, to study and describe a student's developmental, learning, behavioral and other personality characteristics.

This model is in line with guidance from the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP). NASP supports a comprehensive data driven assessment model for special education assessments and suggests caution in interpreting traditional standardized assessments used. They have stated, "intelligence tests are not required for specific learning disability (SLD) justification" and "specific learning disabilities (SLD) identification could be questioned [as] the norms for standardized tests may not apply" and "[standardized assessments] were not normed after a 5-6 month disruption in school, which again questions comparisons to norms and suggests extreme caution in interpreting subtest scores". NASP has identified a conflict between the Child Find law and lack of instruction requirements related to both overidentification and under identification of SLD, as "students who have not been in school for extended periods, especially those with academic deficiencies, will likely have fallen behind during the pandemic-related school closures and summer break". To that end, enhancements have been made to the comprehensive data driven model to align to current limitations of traditional standardized assessments that have been highlighted.

During the 2020-2021 school year, we expect that students will engage in either a blended learning environment or a remote learning environment. We also expect that a significant number of school psychologists may work remotely. The enhanced comprehensive data driven model will allow a greater number of students to receive quality, timely evaluations that reflect multiple sources of data and consider all of the issues identified by NASP.

School psychologists will, at times, deem face-to-face assessments a *necessary* component of a special education evaluation. In addition, since the beginning of remote learning, some evaluations that require face-to-face assessments have been delayed. These assessments will be conducted face-to-face, as set out below. Social distancing limitations and alignment to health and safety guidance may require modification of face-to-face assessment practices, and IEP teams must consider the effect that modifications to standardized administration have on the assessment results when making eligibility determinations.

Special Education Evaluations

School psychologists will first use a comprehensive data driven model for all open and new referrals (except where they previously determined that the assessment needed to be conducted face-to-face). All aspects of this form of assessment can be conducted remotely (e.g., developmental history, review of existing data, web-based rating scales, student pre-assessment forms, response to intervention data and information gleaned from consultation with teachers and parents) and through socially distanced classroom observations and clinical interviews if needed.

Face-to-face (in person) or other virtual assessments, such as remote, will be conducted only when the school psychologist deems this to be a necessary component in the identification process. In instances where face-to-face assessments are necessary, the school psychologist will conduct only those assessment subtests that are needed to identify a disability, to avoid unnecessarily prolonging assessment interactions. Administration of face-to-face testing will follow Health and Safety Guidance. Principals will ensure that school psychologists are assigned a quiet, private space and appropriate PPE supplies to ensure that social distancing measures and alignment to health and safety guidelines can be followed while protecting fidelity and test security.

When school psychologists determine that face-to-face assessments are necessary after the completion of a comprehensive data driven assessment, the additional assessments will be conducted by the assigned school based or CSE school psychologist working on site. If the assigned school psychologist managing the referral is working remotely

due to an approved accommodation request, and further assessment beyond a comprehensive data driven assessment is needed, a Request for Assistance (RFA) for an assessment will be made. In instances where an RFA does not result in a completed assessment, and further face to face assessment is necessary, the DOE will redeploy the case to an available clinician for testing. If the redeployment involves completing assessments that can be done remotely the clinician will not be required to physically be in a different school building. The DOE will redeploy clinicians who are eligible for redeployment for work assignments that can be completed remotely (comprehensive data driven assessments, IEP meetings, etc.).

A summary of this process can be found below:

1. School psychologists will first use of a comprehensive data driven model for all open and new referrals (except where they previously determined that the assessment needed to be conducted face-to-face).
2. If after consultation with the supervisors, the school psychologist determines that face-to-face assessments are necessary, they will be conducted by the assigned school based or CSE school psychologist working on site.
3. A Request for Assistance (RFA) for assessment will be made if the assigned school psychologist managing the referral is working remotely due to an approved accommodation request and further testing beyond the comprehensive data driven assessment is necessary. The assigned school psychologist who is working remotely must still complete a comprehensive data driven assessment and indicate a rationale for further testing.
4. Redeployment will take place as follows:
 - To the greatest extent possible, clinicians who are eligible for redeployment will be redeployed for work assignments that can be completed remotely (comprehensive flexible assessments, IEP meetings, etc.).
 - In instances where an RFA does not result in a completed assessment, and further face to face assessment is necessary, the DOE will redeploy the case to an available clinician for testing.

School psychologists and social workers will receive training in early September (9/8 - 9/14) in order to integrate new tools and guidelines into their practice. Our goal in this training is to support clinicians in the assessment process and their reporting of student functioning as reliably as possible, with consideration given to issues related to transitioning back to school.

Focus areas for professional learning will be:

- Enhanced Teacher Pre-Referral form
- Comprehensive data driven assessment
- Pre-Referral Considerations form
- Guidance document- guiding principles and considerations for eligibility determinations upon return to physical school location
- Specific Learning Disability Justification form