

## PA's Multi-Tiered System of Supports (PA-MTSS)



Pennsylvania has long established Response to Instruction and Intervention (RtII) as an optional guiding framework for comprehensive school improvement efforts, as well as an alternate method for identifying specific learning disabilities. While *RtII* (Response to Instruction and Intervention) is a familiar acronym in most schools, *MTSS* (Multi-Tiered Systems of Support) may be relatively new language. Pennsylvania will be supporting the transition from Response to Instruction and Intervention (RtII) to PA's Multi-Tiered System of Supports (PA-MTSS).

Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) is defined as a comprehensive system of supports that in the Commonwealth includes standards-aligned, culturally responsive and high quality core instruction, universal screening, data-based decision-making, tiered services and supports, parental engagement, central/building level leadership, RtII/SLD determination and professional development. Simply put, PA-MTSS represents a broad set of evidence-based practices that may be implemented across a system to include Academics AND Behavior within a recursive and systematic problem-solving process. PA-MTSS is relatively synonymous with RtII and is intended to help ALL students meet with continual academic and behavioral success.

PA Core Standards, MTSS and PA's Educator Effectiveness System serve to connect what students should know and be able to do within the context of effective instruction/intervention using data-based decision-making. PA's Educator Effectiveness System may be used as a mechanism to evaluate how well educators are bridging the what-how gap and target professional learning to help the field at large continue to evolve. Evidence associated with planning and preparation, the classroom environment, instruction and professional development and learning is naturally collected as a function of MTSS adoption and implementation.

Schools across PA continue to be strongly encouraged to adopt and implement RtII/MTSS and to use PA's RtII/SLD Application as an implementation guidance and fidelity tool.

([http://www.pattan.net/category/Educational%20Initiatives/Response%20to%20Instruction%20and%20Intervention%20\(RtII\)/page/Using RtII for SLD Determination .html](http://www.pattan.net/category/Educational%20Initiatives/Response%20to%20Instruction%20and%20Intervention%20(RtII)/page/Using_RtII_for_SLD_Determination_.html)).



## What Is the IQ-Achievement Discrepancy Model?

The IQ-achievement discrepancy model is the traditional method used to determine if a student has a learning disability and needs special education services. The discrepancy model is based on the concept of the normal curve. The discrepancy model assesses whether a substantial difference, or discrepancy, exists between a student's scores on an individualized test of general intelligence (IQ test, such as *WISC-IV*) and his or her scores obtained for one or more areas of academic achievement (e.g., *Woodcock-Johnson Achievement Test*). The accepted criteria to identify a student as having a learning disability using the IQ-achievement discrepancy is a difference of at least two standard deviations (30 points).

## Concerns About the IQ-Achievement Discrepancy Model

Many teachers express concern and frustration that the IQ-achievement discrepancy model rarely identifies children with learning disabilities in the early grades. Rather, these children often struggle for years before they are finally identified.

Another limitation of the IQ-achievement discrepancy model is that it does not assess or inform the quality of instruction students are receiving. Some students may be identified as having learning disabilities when, in reality, they simply have not experienced classroom instruction that meets their learning needs. Furthermore, the assessments that are used to identify a learning disability do not provide information that can easily be used to guide subsequent instruction.

To summarize, here are some concerns about the IQ-achievement discrepancy model:

- Assessments do not always discriminate between disabilities and the results of inadequate teaching.
- Students can be misidentified due to teacher or testing bias.
- Typically, students must first fail in order to qualify for special education services.
- Results from assessments do not inform the instructional process.
- Many students do not meet the discrepancy criteria but would still benefit from early identification and support to remediate their skills.

## Advantages of the IQ-Achievement Discrepancy Model

Although many professionals are frustrated with the IQ-achievement discrepancy model here are a few advantages that might still appeal to some schools:

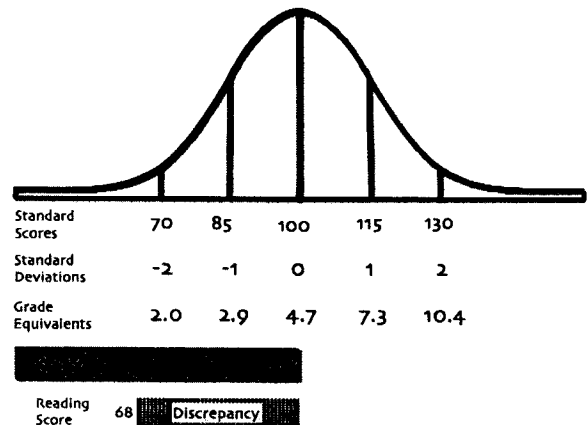
- The IQ-achievement discrepancy model is an already established practice.
- It is relatively easy to employ.
- A teacher does not have to spend a great amount of time in the identification process because a certified diagnostician or school psychologist conducts the IQ and achievement tests.

- The identification procedure only requires a one-time assessment.



## TOPIC: WHAT IS THE IQ-ACHIEVEMENT DISCREPANCY MODEL?

### WHAT IS IT?

The IQ-achievement discrepancy model assesses whether there is a significant difference between a student's scores on a test of general intelligence (e.g., an IQ test such as the *WISC-IV*) and scores obtained on an achievement test (e.g., the *Woodcock Johnson Achievement Test*). The IQ-achievement discrepancy model is the approach traditionally used to identify children with learning disabilities. If a student's score on the IQ test is at least two standard deviations (30 points) higher than his or her scores on an achievement test, the student is described as having a significant discrepancy between IQ and achievement and, therefore, as having a learning disability.



### KEY IDEAS

-  Many causes for concern exist regarding schools' use of the IQ-achievement discrepancy model as the method for identifying students with learning disabilities. Three major concerns are detailed here:
  - This method does not allow schools to identify children as having learning disabilities while they are still in the primary grades.
    - Students often struggle for years prior to being identified as having learning disabilities.
    - Students often do not receive the support they need in the early grades.
  - The information gathered from the IQ and achievement assessments does not indicate each student's specific learning needs:
    - The assessment process does little to inform classroom instruction.
    - It also is unable to provide information about whether classroom instruction meets each student's learning needs.
  - The IQ-achievement discrepancy model can create inequitable treatment for students:
    - A variety of factors can cause students to be misidentified as having learning disabilities.
    - Many states and districts have experienced a disproportionate representation of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, based on traditional identification methods.
  
-  The Response-to-Intervention (RTI) approach is an alternative to the IQ-achievement discrepancy model for identifying students with learning disabilities.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

**Articles**

Reschly, D.J. (2005). LD identification: Primary intervention, secondary intervention, and then what? *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 38*(6), 510-515.

Speece, D.L., Molloy, D.E., & Case, L.P. (2003). Starting at the beginning for learning disabilities identification: Response to instruction in general education. *Advances in Learning and Behavioral Disabilities, 16*, 37-50.

**Books**

Bradley, R., Danielson, L., & Hallahan, D.P. (Eds.). (2002). *Identification of learning disabilities: Research to practice*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.  
*This book provides in-depth and detailed information on the identification of learning disabilities, including historical perspectives and the use of IQ-achievement discrepancy models, and has several chapters devoted to response to intervention.*

**Online Resources**

National Research Center on Learning Disabilities

<http://www.nrcld.org>

*The National Research Center on Learning Disabilities is funded by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). Among its many activities, the center participates in RTI evaluation, technical assistance, and dissemination.*

*Please visit the IRIS Center's module RTI (Part 1): An Overview ([http://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/rti01\\_overview/chalcycle.htm](http://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/rti01_overview/chalcycle.htm)) for further information.*

