

Identifying Students with Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD)

Response to Instruction and Intervention (RtII) has been endorsed as one alternative to the aptitude-achievement discrepancy model for the identification of students with specific learning disabilities (SLD). *Guidelines for Identifying Students with Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD)* have been developed to provide direction and assistance to schools, specifically multidisciplinary evaluation teams, conducting comprehensive evaluations for students who are suspected to have SLD. The *Guidelines* are available at www.pattan.net. The 2008 Chapter 14 special education regulations of the State Board of Education were used as the critical source document of reference in the development of the *Guidelines*. Pennsylvania regulations are based on (and in some references go beyond) the requirements of the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) 2006 regulations. Consequently, the IDEA regulations are also referenced to provide additional context for the *Guidelines*.

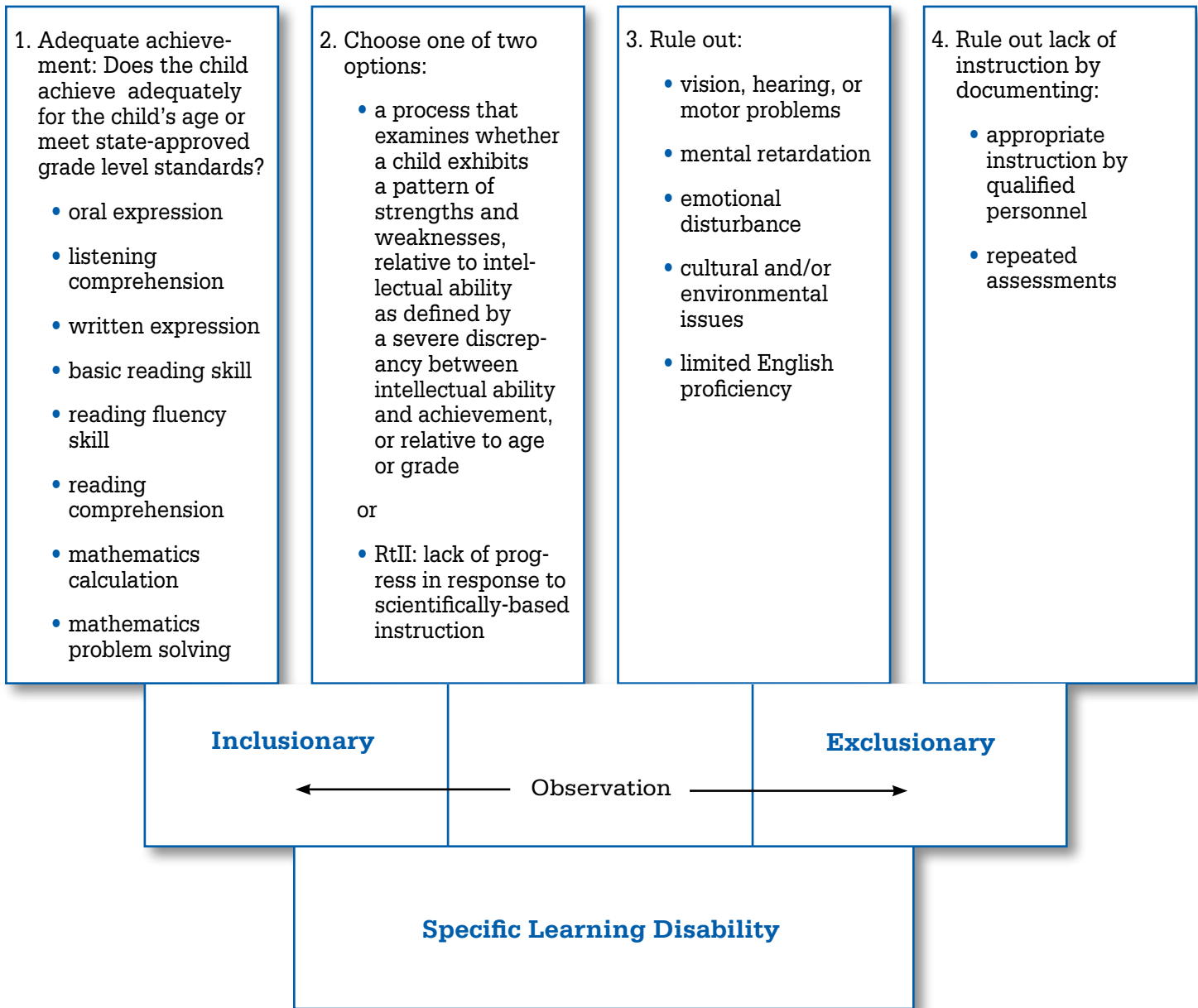
The use of RtII data as part of the SLD identification process is a new and challenging aspect of the IDEA and Pennsylvania regulations. The RtII option was included in the federal regulations because of widespread criticism of the ability-achievement discrepancy approach to identifying students with SLD. However, the federal regulations do not prohibit the use of the ability-achievement discrepancy approach, but only indicate that it may not be mandated by states. Consequently, both the RtII and ability-achievement discrepancy approaches are covered in the *Guidelines*. A third option for identifying students with SLD, though included in the federal regulations, is not included in Pennsylvania state regulations as an available option and therefore is not incorporated in *Pennsylvania's Guidelines for Identifying Students with Specific Learning*

Disabilities (SLD). Multidisciplinary teams, however, maintain the responsibility to implement comprehensive evaluation procedures and the authority to order the appropriate assessments required to conduct the comprehensive evaluation.

The Pennsylvania Special Education Regulations §14.125 outline the criteria, derived from the federal IDEA regulations (§300.309), for the determination of SLD. As indicated in the figure on the reverse side, four factors must be considered when identifying a student as eligible for special education under the category of SLD. An assessment of each of these components is required to ensure that the evaluation is comprehensive as required by federal and state rules. An evaluation team must determine if the student meets the inclusionary criteria of the SLD definition and rule out exclusionary factors of this disability category. The first inclusionary factor requires school districts to determine whether the student "...does not achieve adequately for the child's age or meet state-approved, grade-level standards..." in eight areas of functioning. The second inclusionary factor provides districts with the option of choosing either RtII or the traditional ability-achievement discrepancy approach for SLD determination.

With regard to exclusionary factors, both the federal and state regulations require districts to document that the students presenting academic and/or performance problems are not the result of a lack of instruction or of other disabilities or conditions. These exclusionary requirements pertain to all evaluations regardless of the option (RtII or discrepancy model) chosen by the district. A student must meet the criteria under each factor of the SLD definition in order to qualify as a student with SLD.

Eligibility Criteria for Specific Learning Disability (SLD)



A comprehensive explanation of the criteria is included in the guidelines document, which may be found at www.pattan.net. School districts electing to utilize RtII for the SLD identification process must submit an application to the Bureau of Special Education. Application procedures are outlined in the PennLink: *Special Education Plan Requirements - Identification of Students with Specific Learning Disabilities using the Response to Instruction and Intervention Option*. Districts are encouraged to seek assistance through the Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network (PaTTAN) and/or their intermediate unit.