

Ventura County SELPA’s Response to “Elaborating on the Linkage Between Cognitive and Academic Weaknesses: Using Diagnostic Efficiency Statistics to Inform PSW Assessment” (McGill, Connoyer & Fefer, 2018)

While McGill and colleagues (2018) acknowledge the link between cognitive abilities and achievement as well as the established findings that children suspected of having a learning disability have discrepant cognitive-achievement profiles, they critique the use of PSW methods when assessing a student for SLD. Below is the Ventura County SELPA’s (VC SELPA) response to the claims made in the 2018 article.

Article	Response
<p>Authors purport that a cognitive/processing weakness does not accurately predict an academic weakness.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The VC SELPA PSW procedural manual has never made the claim that the intent of an SLD assessment is to use a processing weakness to predict an academic weakness. ● There is a large possibility that a child could have a processing weakness and not have an academic weakness. Everyone that has a processing deficit does not have an SLD. A student must meet all 4 criteria outlined in the Ventura County SELPA PSW Procedural Manual for the IEP team to consider eligibility for special education under the classification of SLD. ● There are other reasons why a student could be performing below grade level expectations, including other special education classifications as well as exclusionary factors to SLD, as should be discussed and determined by the IEP team.
<p>The authors use the norming sample data of the KABC-II and KTEA-II to discuss their reasoning that cognitive weaknesses do not predict academic weaknesses, as indicated by the Ventura County SELPA.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Ventura County SELPA Procedural Manual</i> does not indicate that cognitive processing weaknesses predict academic weaknesses. ● The use of those two assessment tools alone would not constitute a comprehensive assessment as they do not assess all processing areas outlined in CA Education Code regulations. ● When using the norming data, there was no mention of whether the authors took into account scenarios where composite scores were uninterpretable due to a lack of cohesiveness between subtest scores that comprise individual composites within the KABC-II.

<p>The authors indicated on page 128 of the article that the VC SELPA’s document states there is a level 4 (strong relationship) relationship between long-term storage and retrieval and both math calculations and math problem solving. They further question the reliability of this relationship based on the author’s analysis of the above-mentioned norming sample data.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The <i>Ventura County SELPA COMPARES</i> document does not include the specific term “long-term storage and retrieval.” Therefore, it is unclear as to which processing areas the authors were referring to. • The COMPARES document is a review of literature from reputable sources, including some meta-analyses, that examine the links between specific processing and academic areas. The summary of such data may be useful for practitioners and IEP teams to reference when considering SLD eligibility. However, this information must be used in conjunction with professional judgment and the team’s knowledge of the individual student.
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It is important for practitioners to note that the Ventura County SELPA PSW Manual serves as guidance and information for school teams to help determine if a student is eligible for special education as a student with a specific learning disability. The information in the manual should be used in conjunction with all other special education assessment processes and data gathering to help IEP teams in determining needs and strengths of students. The manual should not be used in isolation or without consideration of individual student profiles. Professional judgement must always be used by all IEP team members when determining student needs and special education eligibility considerations.

The following are a list of Best Practices to keep in mind when utilizing the PSW approaches discussed in the Ventura County SELPA PSW Procedural Manual:

- When SLD is suspected, assess the student for special education (Child Find).
- When considering a student’s eligibility under the classification of SLD, ensure a comprehensive assessment is completed and a legally defensible report is written by the assessment team members.
- Follow best practices and complete additional assessment when a student’s ability level in a specific processing area is unclear.
- The California Education Code definition of SLD includes the terminology “a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in...” Therefore, for psychologists practicing in the state of California, it is important that a psychological processing disorder is identified by the assessment team.