



Building Partnerships Between Families, Schools, and Communities

IDEA PROTECTIONS

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In a nutshell, IDEA ensures unbiased, multidisciplinary and professionally sound evaluation.

The terminology related to the nondiscriminatory evaluation process can be confusing.

ASSESSMENT refers to the specific features used to gather information and can include formal and informal tests; student records; work products; and observations of students in the classroom, other school environments, and even outside the school.

EVALUATION refers to the interpretation of information secured through assessment.

Tests are the major types of assessment. All tests have to meet two criteria: reliability and validity.

RELIABILITY refers to how consistently a test yields similar results across time, raters and items. If a particular test is given at several different times to different students and is administered and scored by different people, and if the test questions do not change, the test is *reliable* if the raters basically agree on the scores of the test takers.

VALIDITY refers to how well the test measures what it says it measure. A test is valid when it accurately measures one or more of a student's capabilities (skills) or deficits (needs), such as the capacity (or lack of capacity) to see, hear, talk, reason, remember, or conform to certain standards of behavior. Reliability and validity are critical aspects of tests because they both help ensure that the test will be used in an accurate and meaningful way. IDEA requires that procedures used with students must be validated for the specific purposed for which they are used.

There are many different kinds of tests, but two types that are important for you to know about are norm-referenced tests, and criterion-referenced tests. These tests have different purposes and characteristics.

NORM-REFERENCED TESTS

Norm-referenced tests compare a student with his or her age- or grade-level peers and have two purposes: to help to determine whether a student has a disability and to assess various skills. These tests are standardized, which means they are administered, scored and interpreted the same way each time they are given. The tester compares the student's score on a specific test to scores made by a sample of peers--called the normative sample or norm group. The normative sample is a group of students chosen randomly to represent the entire population that will be taking the test in the future. The evaluator then uses this information to decide if the student's score is at, above, or below the performance of students who are the same age or grade. Often--indeed, almost always--a nondiscriminatory evaluation uses a norm-referenced test to measure intelligence.

CRITERION - REFERENCED TESTS

Criterion-referenced tests determine whether a student has mastered a particular skill. They compare a student to a standard of mastery. Unlike norm-referenced tests, criterion-referenced tests do not assess how well a student performs in comparison to his or her peers. Instead, they assess how well a student performs on a test of a particular skill. Thus, they help determine a student's educational needs and special education programming and placement.

	Norm-referenced tests	Criterion-referenced tests
Purposes	To measure a student's performance in comparison to peers	To measure a student's performance in comparison to a standard of mastery
Uses	Screening, classification	Student attainment of specific skills and objectives
Relevance to student's curriculum	Weak	Strong
Standardized	Yes	No
Frequency of instruction administration	Rarely	As needed to plan