Preface

The purpose of these criteria is to identify issues, recommend strategies, and outline procedures to aid local school districts in the identification of students with specific learning disabilities. The use of these criteria is intended to promote a consistent approach across the Intermediate School District in determining whether students should receive special education programs and services under this role. It is recognized that differences exist across districts in terms of pre-referral and referral processes, theoretical orientation of staff, re-evaluation criteria, and available resources. These criteria are intended to be specific enough to be useful and understandable, yet general enough to be used by all districts within the Intermediate.

In order to comply with the Federal rules and regulations from the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Michigan has written its definition of "specific learning disabilities" to closely parallel the federal definition. Michigan's definition is:

(1) "Specific learning disability" means a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations. The term includes such conditions as perceptual handicaps, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. The term does not include children who have learning problems which are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor handicaps, of mental retardation, of emotional disturbance, of autism, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage."

Michigan has supplemented the definition of learning disabilities with the following guidelines:

(2) The Individualized Educational Planning Committee may determine that a child has a specific learning disability if the child does not achieve commensurate with his or her age and ability levels in one or more of the areas listed in this subrule, when provided with learning experiences appropriate for the child's age and ability levels, and if the multidisciplinary evaluation team finds that a child has a severe discrepancy between achievement and intellectual ability in one or more of the following areas:

(a) Listening comprehension
(b) Oral expression
(c) Written expression
(d) Basic reading skill
(e) Reading comprehension
(f) Mathematics calculation
(g) Mathematics reasoning

(3) The Individualized Educational Planning Committee shall not identify a child as having a specific learning disability if the severe discrepancy between ability and achievement is primarily the result of the following:

(a) A visual, hearing, or motor handicap
(b) Mental retardation
(c) Emotional disturbance
(d) Autism
(e) Environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage

(4) A determination of impairment shall be based upon a comprehensive evaluation by a Multidisciplinary Evaluation Team, which shall include at least both of the following:

(a) The child's regular teacher or, if the child does not have a regular teacher, a regular classroom teacher qualified to teach a child of his or her age or, for a child of less than school age, an individual qualified by the state educational agency to teach a child of his or her age.

(b) At least one person qualified to conduct individual diagnostic examinations of children, such as a school psychologist, a teacher of speech and language impaired, or a teacher consultant.

DETERMINATION OF ELIGIBILITY

It cannot be emphasized enough that the presence of a severe discrepancy between achievement and intellectual functioning is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for identifying a learning disability. Professional judgment of the MET/IEPC must always be used in making a recommendation as to whether a student is in need of special education programs and/or services. A significant discrepancy may exist and the student still may not be eligible for special education.

By definition, a learning disabled student has a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations. The term includes such conditions as perceptual handicaps, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia and developmental aphasia. Documentation of the process deficit will be included in the psychological report and on the MET.

Determination of Ability Level

A student's general ability level includes cognitive strengths and weaknesses, social/emotional functioning in school, home and community, and general intellectual ability as measured by individually administered intelligence tests. Intelligence measures will be administered by the school psychologist to all students suspected of having a specific learning disability. The school psychologist will provide an estimate of ability in standard scores with a mean of 100 using a valid and technically adequate instrument. Exceptions to this requirement are cases where it is not possible to acquire valid IQ scores, such as students with severe language deficits, perceptual deficits, distractibility, or severe hyperactivity. In these unique situations, when the validity of the intelligence test scores may be in question or when the test scores reflect the learning disabilities, substantial evidence must be documented in support of an estimated level of ability. The regression model will be used for all students referred for determining learning disabilities. (See attached.)

Intra-test analysis is a procedure which allows for the regrouping of an instrument's subtest scores into related clusters. These clusters can then be analyzed to develop a pattern of cognitive strengths and weaknesses which may lead to a clearer understanding of a student's ability level. This is useful when considering cultural, environmental, and economic factors, and when examining specific processing deficits. The Full Scale IQ (or equivalent) should be used whenever possible. However, if a significant (.05) discrepancy is noted between subscales (e.g., VCI/PR), the higher score may be used. The reader is referred to the chart on page 256, Appendix B, Table B1, of the WISC-IV manual.

Recognizing that intelligence tests may be culturally and/or economically biased, other factors should be used to corroborate the standardized testing such as achievement levels, observations, adaptive behavior levels and/or developmental history information.

Determination of Achievement Levels

Achievement is defined as the developmental acquisition and application of specific abilities in academic content areas. There are seven achievement categories included as areas of possible learning disability in the federal and state guidelines. These include:

(1) Listening comprehension
(2) Oral expression
(3) Basic reading skills
(4) Reading comprehension
(5) Written expression
(6) Mathematics calculation
(7) Mathematics reasoning

Only one area of achievement must be discrepant with the student's ability in order for a diagnosis of learning disability to be further considered. However, the seven areas seldom appear in isolation. Lack of basic reading skill may be associated with a similar weakness in reading comprehension. The relationship between calculation and reasoning in mathematics is often an equally serious problem for the learning disabled student.

Achievement tests vary with respect to the adequacy of their standardization, validity, and reliability. The evaluator(s) will need to determine which instruments are appropriate, depending upon the needs of the student and preferences of the diagnostician. Informal as well as formal instruments may be useful when evaluating achievement. However, individually administered norm referenced/standardized instruments must be included in the initial determination of a specific learning disability. Formal tests, which provide standard scores, must be utilized to allow a comparison between ability and achievement levels. Grade- based/age-based standard scores are to be used to determine severe discrepancy, except if the student has been retained and then grade-based standard scores are to be used.

A review of each of the seven achievement areas in which a student could qualify for special education services as learning disabled follows.

Listening Comprehension

Listening comprehension is the ability to process and understand auditory information. It includes the following elements:

(1) Phonology - auditory discrimination of the phonemes (speech sounds) of a language.
(2) Morphology - morphemes (smallest meaningful spoken units) of a language and the rules which dictate their correct use.
(3) Syntax - the sequence, combination and function of spoken language.
(4) Semantics - the meaning of spoken language in a given context.
(5) Pragmatics - the intent of functional language.

The primary characteristic of students exhibiting a listening comprehension deficit is their inability to comprehend the spoken word. The inability to understand words, however, must be differentiated from disorders related to distractibility or hearing impairment.

Two other factors need to be considered when evaluating listening comprehension. They are (a) primary language, and (b) relationship between language and thinking. In primary language, consideration must be given to students whose language includes other than standard American English. The relationship between language and thinking must take into account the student's level of intellectual competence. Students with listening comprehension delays should be evaluated jointly by the speech and language therapist and the school psychologist.

Oral Expression

Oral expression is the ability to express oneself utilizing speech and language. This includes:

(1) Phonology - inventory of speech sounds and the permissible way in which those sounds can be combined with one another.
(2) Morphology - the morphemes (smallest meaningful spoken units) of a language according to the roles that dictate their correct use.
(3) Syntax - the correct sequence, combination and function of spoken language.
(4) Semantics - meaningful language within a given context.
(5) Pragmatics - functional language which is understandable and appropriate.

When evaluating oral expression, as in listening comprehension, other factors need to be considered such as:

(a) primary language spoken in the home.
(b) relationship between language and thinking.

Students with oral expression delays should also be evaluated jointly by the speech and language therapist and the school psychologist.

Reading

Reading is defined as the process of constructing meaning through the dynamic interaction among: the reader's existing knowledge, the information suggested by the written language (text), and the context of the reading situation. This definition is translated into "Essential Goals and Objectives for Reading Education" in the following three major categories of the Core Curriculum adopted by the Michigan Department of Education:

(1) Constructing meaning: Good readers must be able to integrate prior knowledge and skills as they build understanding for new text.
(2) Knowledge about reading: Good readers must be aware of various purposes for reading, skills/strategies for reading, and how different texts and contextual factors influence their reading.
(3) Attitude - Self-Perceptions: How people feel about the process of reading and materials that are read in school.

Basic reading skill is defined as those fundamental reading skills, processes, and strategies required for identifying clues significant for obtaining meaning in written text. This includes items such as:

(1) Sight word vocabulary - identifying words by sight from their configuration and form, and when in context, from their semantic and syntactic relationships.
(2) Phonic analysis - identifying words by utilizing sound-symbol relationships and structural analysis.
(3) Reading rate - reading speed and fluency.

It is important to consider that there is not always a direct correspondence between basic reading skills and reading comprehension. Frequently, learning disabled students will perform basic reading skill tasks poorly, while reading comprehension remains relatively well developed. In other cases, however, the reverse situation is also observed. As a result, it is important not to predict one type of reading ability from performance on the other, since they are semi-independent. Regardless of the relationship, both areas need to be evaluated.

Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension is an interactive process using cues provided by the author and the reader's prior knowledge to understand the author's meaning.

The two major categories of reading comprehension are:

(1) Literal - understanding information which appears directly in the written material (e.g., summarizing concrete ideas, answering questions based directly on the content of a written passage, sequencing details and main ideas).

(2) Inferential - interpreting and generalizing from what has been read; the reader demonstrates the ability to expand upon and generalize from the written material, (e.g., noting cause-effect relationships, drawing conclusions, judging accuracy, distinguishing between fact and opinion, making predictions).

Written Expression

Written expression is the process of selecting, developing, and arranging ideas effectively. The process requires students to write in a variety of forms for a variety of purposes and for a variety of audiences. Areas to be considered in an evaluation of writing are:

(1) Mechanical - ability to form letters, words, numerals, and sentences in a legible manner.
(2) Productive - ability to generate enough meaningful sentences to express one's thoughts, feelings, and opinions adequately.
(3) Conventional - ability to write in compliance with accepted standards of style, especially those governing punctuation, capitalization, format, and spelling.
(4) Linguistic - ability to use acceptable syntactic, morphological, and semantic elements.
(5) Cognitive - ability to express ideas, opinions, and thoughts in a creative and organized way at a mature level of abstraction.

To write effectively requires ability in each of these five components. However, poor performance in one component such as spelling would not suggest a written expression disability.

Written work samples are an important part of the evaluation process. The student's exposure to information and his/her motivation to communicate in writing must also be considered.

Mathematics Calculation

Mathematics calculation includes those processes and strategies by which one shows an understanding of the mechanics to reach an arithmetic solution. Broadly stated, such strategies include the concrete or rote manipulation of objects, sets, numbers, and patterns in order to reach an appropriate solution.

Calculation abilities in mathematics include not only the computational processes of addition, subtraction, multiplication and division, but also the wider conceptual base of "averaging," "differences," "greater/lesser," and related operations.

Mathematics Reasoning

Math reasoning is the ability to apply mathematical facts, concepts, laws, and operations to the solution of math problems. Math reasoning often includes problems which require the use of such processes as mental problem solving, measurement concepts, reading graphs and tables, money and budgeting, and related problems.

When performing mathematical reasoning tasks, the student must isolate the important information needed to solve the tasks, usually through making inferences or applications to the real world. Often mathematical reasoning can be evidenced best by the student's ability to apply strategies and concepts to a variety of tasks and problems.

Mathematics reasoning is both numerical and non-numerical. It includes a sense of order and pattern, and understanding of the nature of the problem, the ability to predict or fashion good

solution strategies, reinvestigation of a possible solution, and the ability to employ the most efficient strategy.

Both calculation and its related area, reasoning, need to be considered in evaluating math achievement. It is not always possible to predict performance in mathematics calculation from one's performance in mathematics reasoning, and vice versa.

Determination of Severe Discrepancy

The issue of severe discrepancy continues to be one of the most controversial aspects of the LD definition. The determination of severe discrepancy is at least in part arbitrary. However, it is important that a severe discrepancy be determined in a manner that is fair, equitable, and defensible.

The standard score comparison model involves the direct comparison of obtained IQ scores with academic achievement scores. In this procedure, a severe discrepancy is based on a set of criteria of standard score units.

For initial evaluations, a discrepancy of 19 points must be utilized for full scale IQ. If the examiner chooses to use the higher IQ (VCI/PR), 19 points should be used for VCI scores and 21 points should be used for PR scores in accordance with the chart on page 256 of the manual.

EXCLUSIONARY CONSIDERATIONS

Primary Disability

In order to be eligible for special education services, the student's difficulties must be primarily the result of a learning disability. They must not be the result of visual, hearing, or motor handicaps; mental disabilities; emotional disabilities; or environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantages. This does not mean that a learning disabled student cannot exhibit secondary- disabilities such as a minor vision problem, a temporary hearing loss, concomitant emotional or adjustment problems, or a physical disability.

If a student's learning problems are primarily due to any of the exclusionary factors, then it is NOT a learning disability. When a student's learning problems are due to environmental disadvantage, cultural differences, or a history of inconsistent educational programming, the MET and the IEPC should assist in locating or developing appropriate educational alternatives for the student. The primary responsibility for such a student remains with the general education program. In the event the primary disability is another handicapping condition, then the IEPC has the responsibility to recommend appropriate special education services. The MET and the IEPC must consider the most dominant impairment and the problem that is most evident and requiring the greatest attention in educational programming at that specific time.

Exclusionary Criteria

The following subsections describe the various categories of exclusionary criteria.

Visual Impairment

Students whose primary learning problems are due to a visual impairment may not be determined to be learning disabled. Such students may require special materials and modified or adapted instructional methods and may qualify for services under the category of visually impaired. Documentation is usually done through the school vision screening program and ophthalmologic and/or optometric examinations.

Hearing Impaired

If a student's hearing loss is permanent, adversely affects his/her educational performance, and requires classroom and instructional modifications in order to fully benefit from school experiences, then he/she may qualify for special education programs and services on the basis of hearing impairment. A student who is experiencing a temporary loss, such as a hearing loss associated with an upper respiratory infection, or whose loss is not considered educationally relevant, such as a high frequency loss above the speech range, should not automatically be excluded from special education programs and services as learning disabled if all other criteria of eligibility are satisfied. A student who has a history of fluctuating, recurring, and educationally significant loss, such as a hearing loss associated with chronic and frequent middle ear infections, should not automatically be considered learning disabled. In such cases, the student's primary handicap may be a hearing impairment.

Motor and Health Impairments

Students who have neurological dysfunctions such as paralysis, cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, or skeletal problems, which interfere with motor performance, may or may not have

related educational problems. If the primary disability is a motor handicap, the student may qualify for special education services as physically and otherwise health impaired and should not be classified as learning disabled. Motor problems are often identified through motor screening programs by the physical education teacher or other staff. Physical therapists, occupational therapists, physicians, and neurologists may do more intensive examinations as needed.

Students whose learning problems are due to poor health such as malnutrition, allergies, low physical strength, epilepsy, etc., as determined by a physician, should not be identified as learning disabled if the health problem is the student's primary deficit.

Mental Impairment

Any student who can be identified as having a mental impairment according to current Michigan regulations is not eligible as learning disabled. If there is any question whether a student's primary disability is a learning disability or mental impairment, the assessment of the student's intellectual functioning should include the assessment of adaptive behavior and any other assessment necessary for the team to rule out mental impairment.

Emotional Impairment

Two of the most difficult disability areas to differentially diagnose are emotional impairments and learning disabilities. A student who chooses not to perform academically is not necessarily learning disabled or emotionally impaired. If there is a question of whether the student's primary handicap is a learning disability or an emotional impairment, a comprehensive and systematic evaluation of the student's behavioral history and status should be conducted. Neither learning disabilities nor emotional impairments have sudden beginnings, nor are they the result of short-term external stress. Often the behavioral difficulties of LD students may be a direct reaction to their learning disability, social imperception, and/or reduced awareness of appropriate behavior in social situations. They may misinterpret social cues and lack behavioral alternatives. The MET should consider a student's personal adjustment, interpersonal relationships, and overall behavioral status when differentiating between LD and emotional impairment.

Autism

When a student can be identified as autistic, then the child should not be determined eligible as learning disabled.

Environmental, Cultural, or Economic Disadvantage

The determination as to whether a student's learning problems can be attributed to environmental or economic disadvantage or cultural difference must be made. If there is a reason to suspect that any of these factors could account for the student's learning problems, a family assessment and history should be conducted as part of the comprehensive educational evaluation. This may include structured interviews with the student and the parents, as well as home visitations.

If there is any question regarding the student's dominant language, a determination of language dominance should be made through interviews with family members. For pupils whose dominant language is not English, the evaluation procedures must accommodate this difference by assessing in both or all languages. If neither of these approaches can be used, the pupil should be assessed with non-verbal tests or with tests developed in English but administered to the pupil in his or her dominant language through the use of an interpreter.

When one suspects environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage, an educational history should be taken which would include a review of school records and interviews with the student's present teacher and, if possible, previous teachers. The intent of the records review and interviews is to determine: (1) if the concern that led to a referral is of recent development or persistent over several years; (2) if any previous evaluations have been conducted, and, if so, what the findings were; and (3) if any remedial efforts have been attempted.

If the discrepancy can be attributed to extended absences from school, frequent moves, family disruptions, lack of motivation (not the result of secondary characteristics due to a learning disability), or negative attitudes toward school, a learning disability should not be attributed to the student. While these factors may have educational relevance, they do not constitute a learning disability.

A student may come from a disadvantaged environment and qualify for LD if his or her difficulties are not the direct result of these factors. The MET should also review the school records of siblings. If the subject's brothers and/or sisters are doing well in school, the probability is high that the potential LD subject's learning problems are not directly the result of cultural, environmental, or economic factors.

REGRESSION TABLE
(Updated 2/04)

Obtained Ability Score	(19) .7	(21) .6	(21) .5
	Expected Achievement		
130	121	118	115
129	120	117	115
128	120	117	114
127	119	116	114
126	118	116	113
125	118	115	113
124	117	114	112
123	116	114	112
122	115	113	111
121	115	113	111
120	114	112	110
119	113	111	110
118	113	111	109
117	112	110	109
116	111	110	108
115	111	109	108
114	110	108	107
113	109	108	107
112	108	107	106
111	108	107	106
110	107	106	105
109	106	105	105
108	106	105	104
107	105	104	104
106	104	104	103
105	104	103	103
104	103	102	102
103	102	102	102
102	101	101	101
101	101	101	101
100	100	100	100
99	99	99	100
98	99	99	99
97	98	98	99
96	97	98	98
95	97	97	98
94	96	96	97
93	95	96	97
92	94	95	96
91	94	95	96
90	93	94	95
89	92	93	95
88	92	93	94
87	91	92	94
86	90	92	93
85	90	91	93
84	89	90	92
83	88	90	92
82	87	89	91
81	87	89	91
80	86	88	90
79	85	87	90
78	85	87	89
77	84	86	89
76	83	86	88
75	83	85	88

TABLE INSTRUCTIONS

Use the .7 column for the regression score and a 19 discrepancy when these tests of intelligence are used:

- WJ-III General Intellectual Ability
- WJ-III Thinking Ability
- CAS Full Scale
- WISC-IV Full Scale IQ
- WISC-IV Verbal Comprehension
- SB-V Full Scale IQ
- SB-V Verbal IQ
- WAIS-III Verbal IQ
- WAIS-III FSIQ
- WAIS-III Verbal Comprehension
- UNIT Reasoning Quotient

Use the .6 column for the regression score and a 21 discrepancy when tests of intelligence are used:

- WPPSI-III VIQ and FSIQ
- WISC-IV Perceptual Reasoning
- WISC-III VIQ, VC, and FSIQ
- WAIS-III PIQ
- SB-V Nonverbal IQ
- K-ABC Verbal Intelligence and Mental Processing Composite Scales
- DTLA-4 Verbal Composite
- DTLA-4 General Mental Ability
- DAS Verbal Ability and General Conceptual Ability Scales
- KAIT Crystallized Scale and Fluid Scales
- UNIT FSIQ: UNIT Symbolic Quotient

Use the .5 column for the regression score and a 21 discrepancy when these tests of intelligence are used:

- WIPPSI-III PIQ
- WICS-IIIPIQ and PO
- WAIS-III PO
- K-ABC Simultaneous and Nonverbal Scales
- DTLA-4 Nonverbal Composite

74 73 72 71 70	82 81 80 80 79	84 84 83 83 82	87 87 86 86 85	• DAS Nonverbal Reasoning Ability and Spatial Ability Scales • TONI-3 • C-TONI