



# WHY MTSS MATTERS IN THE WORLD OF CHILDREN WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

**ESD** **112**

Specialized Student  
Services

**The Sunsetting of the SLD  
Discrepancy Model – an Opportunity  
or an Iceberg dead ahead**

# WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

## Who am I?

- Jeffrey Niess
- Executive Director of Specialized Student Services for ESD 112 (Vancouver) and former assistant director and director of special services in Camas, WA.
- School Psychologist
- One of the 9 voting members of the statewide team that recommended sunsetting the Specific Learning Disability (SLD) Discrepancy Model for use in special education qualification.

# WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

## Who are you?

- Teachers
- Intervention Specialists
- School Psychs
- Related Services Staff
- Building Admin
- District Admin
- Parents/Student Advocates
- Other

# AGENDA

- Learning Targets
- Understanding the Discrepancy Model for SLD Qualification
  - What is the Discrepancy Model
  - How the model impacts under and over identification of students with learning disabilities
  - Why the model is being replaced by MTSS
- A brief history of MTSS
- How MTSS changes the face of who qualifies for special education as SLD
- Opportunity or Iceberg?
- Questions

# TARGETS FOR TODAY'S PRESENTATION

- 1. Information of understanding**
- 2. New tools in your toolbox**
- 3. Affirmation**

# THREE CURRENT METHODS FOR DETERMINING SPECIFIC LEARNING DISABLED (SLD) QUALIFICATION IN WASHINGTON STATE

Discrepancy Model

Response To Intervention (aka MTSS)

Pattern of strengths and weaknesses in performance achievement (a basis for Professional Judgment)

# WHAT IS THE DISCREPANCY MODEL FOR SLD ELIGIBILITY DETERMINATION?

Currently, Washington State (and most, but not all states) uses a 'Test Score Discrepancy Model' to identify students with Specific Learning Disabilities.

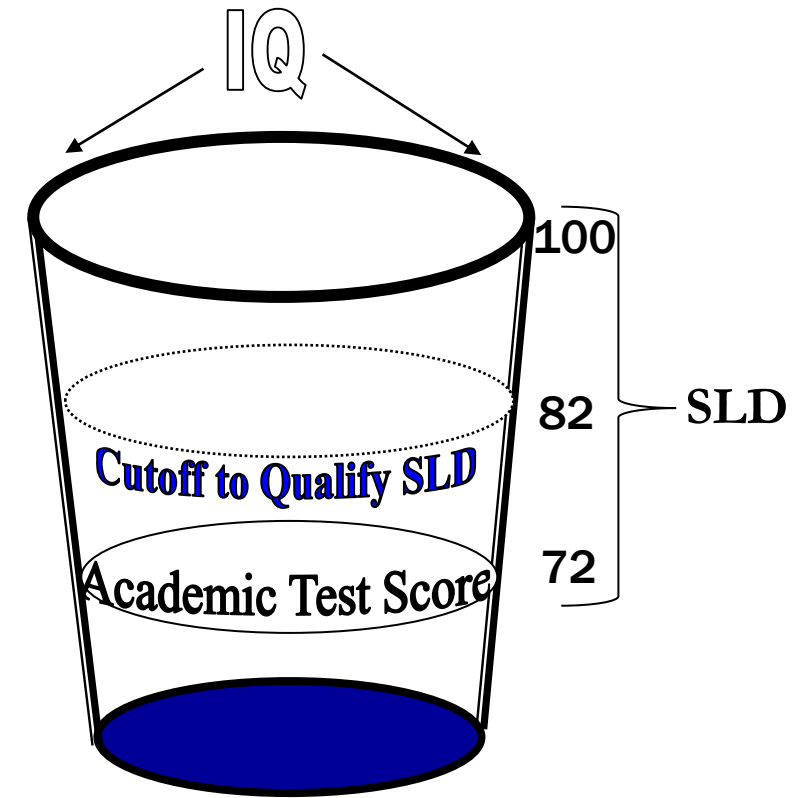
A student with a suspected academic delay would be administered a battery of tests, including an intelligence test and one or more academic achievement tests.

If their IQ standard score...

Is **significantly discrepant** from their norm-referenced achievement standard score(s) – according to the SLD Discrepancy Table as published by DOE (and adopted by OSPI)

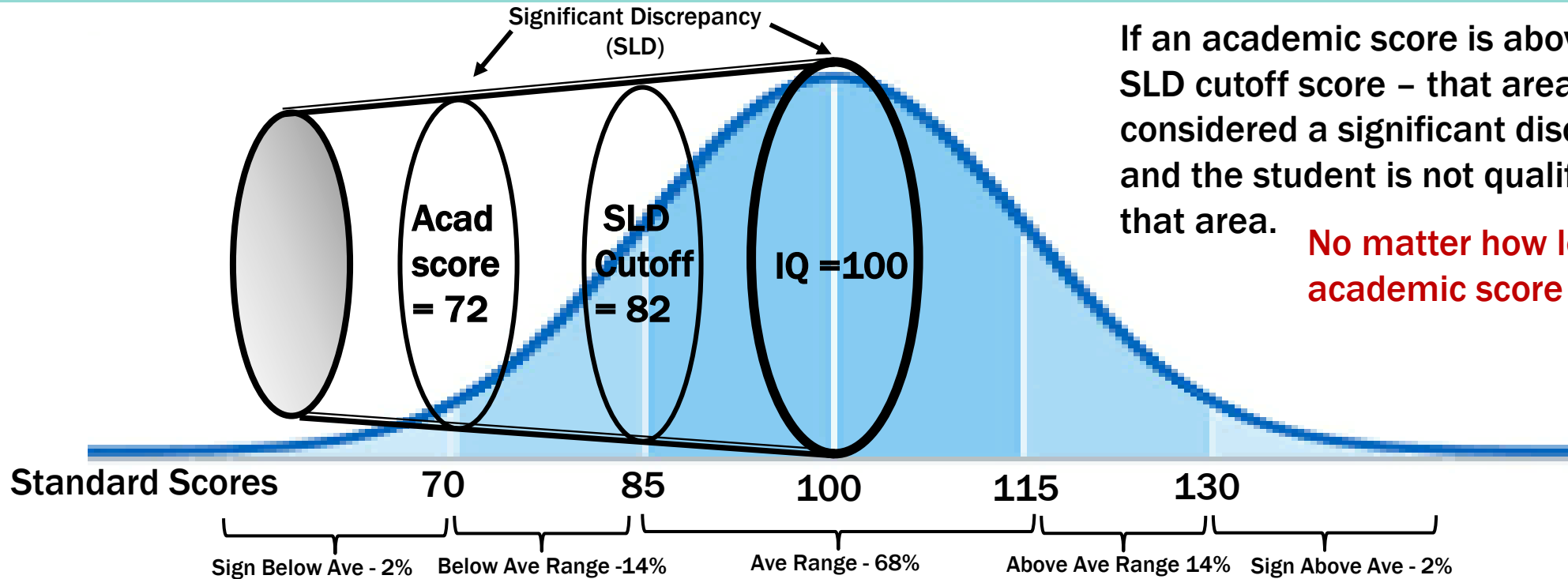
Then that gap between IQ and academic achievement scoring is considered statistically significant and 'severe'. (i.e. size of their cup and how much they fill it)

And after ruling out *other potential causes for the gap*, the student could demonstrate a 'severe discrepancy' [gap] between IQ and achievement and they could be diagnosed with a Specific Learning Disability.





# Bell Curve and the SLD Discrepancy Model



If an academic score is above the SLD cutoff score – that area is not considered a significant discrepancy and the student is not qualified in that area.

**No matter how low that academic score is.**



# **LIMITATIONS TO THE 'TEST SCORE' DISCREPANCY MODEL'**

Requires chronic school failure BEFORE remedial/special education supports can be given.

Fails to consider that outside factors such as ineffective instruction and/or ineffective curriculum may contribute to a child's learning delay.

More identified SLD students each year (some call it an epidemic)

Disproportional Identification (race, social/economic, etc.)

Professional Judgment may be used without empirical data to support qualification.

# HOW DOES THE CURRENT SLD QUALIFICATION NOT REALLY SUPPORT A STUDENT THAT STRUGGLES?

Meet Little Mike



Mike reads at a SS of 80

Mike's IQ is a SS of 100

Because Mike demonstrates a significant discrepancy between his IQ and his reading skills – Mike is qualified for special education services as SLD, in Reading

Meet Little Jeffrey



Jeffrey reads at a SS of 80

Jeffrey's IQ is a SS of 80

Because Jeffrey does NOT demonstrate a significant discrepancy between his IQ and his reading skills – Jeffrey continues to struggle, act out and maybe drop out.

# CHARACTERISTICS OF NON-SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

*A history of academic failure.*

*Emotional and behavioral problems.*

*Frequent interaction with low-achieving peers.*

*Lack of psychological attachment to school.*

*Drop out and/or Chronically Truant.*

Christenson & Thurlow, 2004; Battin-Pearson et al., 2000, Garnier, Stein, & Jacobs, 1997

# THE ROOTS OF MTSS

The use of a systems approach to provide interventions predates special education. Ability grouping has been around for more than 70 years.

In 1977 S. Deno and P. Mirkin developed and then investigated a 3-tiered intervention model for students with reading difficulties that incorporated interventions and progress monitoring through CBM. That same year, J. Bergan studied behavioral interventions using individual student data and a problem-solving approach. These studies are thought to have provided the foundation for RTI frameworks in both academic and behavioral interventions.

In the late 1980's there was a push for intervention curriculum, subsequent to school-wide norming. Higher Learning institutions began its biggest push to provide quality data and interventions. The University of Oregon school education faculty began developing data collections systems that would later be known as Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) and AIMSweb. And interventions such as Direct Instruction and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS).

# THE ROOTS OF MTSS

**P.L. 108-446 (IDEA 04)** eliminates the requirement that a severe discrepancy between achievement and ability must exist to identify a child as having a specific learning disability.

**WAC 392-172A-03045 District procedures for specific learning disabilities.** In addition to the evaluation procedures for determining whether students are eligible for special education, school districts must follow additional procedures for identifying whether a student has a specific learning disability. Each school district shall develop procedures for the identification of students with specific learning disabilities which may include the use of:

- (1) A severe discrepancy between intellectual ability and achievement; or
- (2) A process based on the student's **Response To** scientific, research-based **Intervention** (RTI); or
- (3) A combination of both.

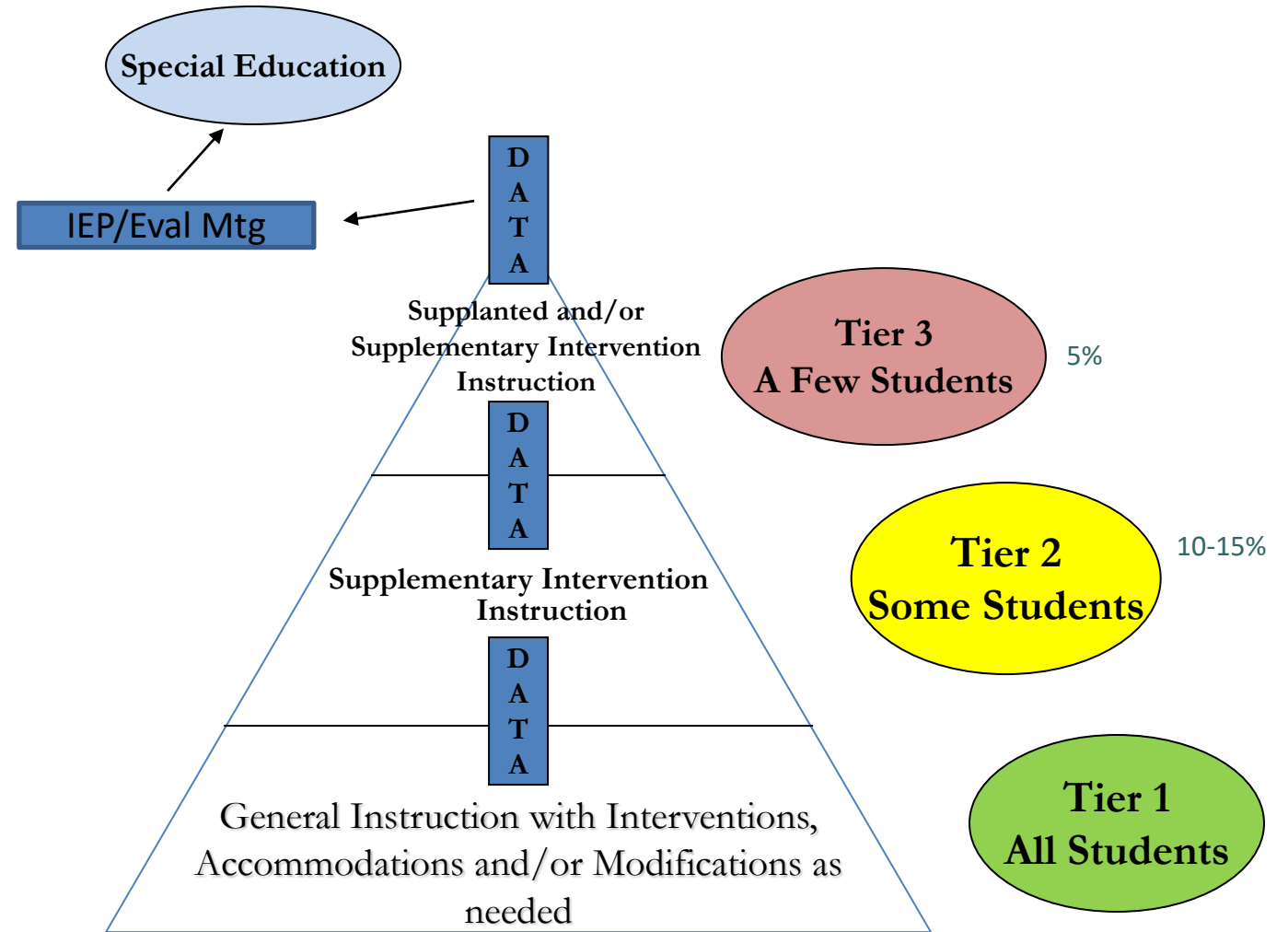
# ESSENTIAL REQUIREMENTS OF MTSS

**WAC 392-172A-03060 Process based on a student's response to scientific research-based intervention.** (1) School districts using a process based on a student's response to scientific, research-based interventions to determine if a student has a specific learning disability shall adopt policies and procedures to ensure that such process includes the following elements:

- (a) **Universal screening and/or benchmarking** at fixed intervals at least two or three times throughout the school year;
- (b) A **high-quality core curriculum** that sufficiently meets the instructional needs of **the majority of the students**;
- (c) **Scientific research-based interventions** are identified for use with students **needing additional instruction**;
- (d) **Scientific research-based interventions** used with a student are appropriate for the student's identified need and are implemented **with fidelity**;
- (e) A multitiered model is developed for delivering both the core curriculum and strategic and intensive scientific research-based **interventions in the general education setting**;
- (f) **Frequent monitoring of individual student progress** occurs in accordance with the constructs of the multitiered delivery system implemented in the school consistent with the intervention and tier at which it is being applied...

# MTSS MODEL AS IT SUPPORTS SLD QUALIFICATION

(Wouldn't be an MTSS approved slide-deck without the obligatory triangle)





# HOW THE PROFILE CHANGES FOR THOSE STUDENTS QUALIFIED AS SLD

Meet Little Mike



Mike reads at a SS of 80

Mike's IQ is a SS of 100

Because Mike demonstrates growth in the MTSS system at his school – Mike is ~~qualified for special education services as SLD~~ does not require special education instruction and services in Reading.

Meet Little Jeffrey



Jeffrey reads at a SS of 80

Jeffrey's IQ is a SS of 80

Because Jeffrey does NOT demonstrate ~~a significant discrepancy between his IQ and his reading skills~~ learning gains within an MTSS model, he qualifies as SLD.

# IMPACT OF MTSS ON EDUCATION SYSTEMS

Numerous studies support the positive effects of an MTSS system on Special Education, including:

- Sustained Academic Performance

- Reduced Behavioral Issues

- Reduced non-qualifying referrals for special education

- Improved Graduation Rates

- Eliminates some of the *rule out factors* before SLD qualification

- Less minority-biased qualifications for special education

- Decreased overall % for students with disabilities

Matthew K Burns, James J. Appleton, Jonathan D. Stehouwer; PBIS.org; AIR.org

# OPPORTUNITY OR ICEBERG?

By the fall of 2028 the state will remove the Discrepancy Model as an option for Specific Learning Disability qualification and replace it with the MTSS model of intervention and instruction.

Patterns of Strengths and Weaknesses can supplement the MTSS data, but it will not be a stand-alone qualifier for SLD

Without a viable and valid MTSS system in place – a school district will not meet the requirements of Child Find (WAC 392-172A-02040)

Currently 1 in 3 students on an IEP qualify as SLD so the impact on Child Find is significant.

# FORTUNATELY, WE ARE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER...

- Statewide IPP/MTSS initiative (All means All)
- OSPI and ESD's have resources and supports to move your district through the development of a valid MTSS system (for both academic and behavioral intervention systems).
- Numerous conferences, trainings and lab sites.
- Efforts begin as early as Part C (Birth to 2 services include SEL specialists) and Pre-K (pyramid model)
- While not a Special Education initiative, it would be a mistake for special education leadership and service providers to not participate in the development and support of academic and behavioral supports.

## QUESTIONS

*Give me Six hours to chop down a tree  
and I will spend the first Four  
sharpening the axe.*

Abraham Lincoln