

School Psychologist Services



Introduction

Working in a collaborative, multi-disciplinary manner, School Psychologists play a critical role in supporting school teams in enhancing students' academic, adaptive, social-emotional and behavioural skills, during their Elementary, Middle and Secondary School years. They play a supportive role in the identification, assessment, planning, implementation, reporting, and evaluation process. The School Psychologist:

- Provides collaborative consultation regarding the nature of students' strengths and needs, their educational implications, and ways to enhance learning and interpersonal relations,
- May assist with pre-referral assessments and interventions,
- Provides psycho-educational assessments for students referred by the School-Based Team,
- May contribute to the design and evaluation of the IEP, including recommendations as outlined in assessment reports, and
- May provide in-service training in the area of assessment.

All Greater Victoria School District School Psychologists are registered with the College of Health and Care Professionals of BC (CHCPBC).

Starting the Assessment Process

When the School-Based Team (SBT) decides it is necessary to gather additional information in order to provide appropriate instruction programming for a specific student, a referral for a psycho-educational assessment may be in order. This step is taken only after there has been considerable pre-referral assessment (e.g., with Level A or B assessments) and pre-referral intervention (e.g., learning assistance or in-class supports), and the SBT has consulted with the student's parents/guardian, other professionals who may be supporting the student, and the School Psychologist.

Intention

Given that assessment is primarily a problem-solving and decision-making process, used to determine instructional needs and approaches, before proceeding with a psycho-educational assessment the SBT should also consider the following questions:

- Why are you recommending this student for a psycho-educational assessment?
- What additional information are you hoping to find out?
- How will the information gathered through a psycho-educational assessment further support teachers in teaching, and this student in learning (e.g., enhancements in programming, differentiated interventions)?

Factors taken into Consideration

As part of the assessment process, the School Psychologist needs to consider if the student's persistent learning difficulty may be explained by or related to factors such as inadequate attendance, cultural or linguistic differences, sensory deficits, behavioural or social-emotional factors, health issues, and/or poor or insufficient instruction. Therefore, it is important for the SBT to take factors such as the following into consideration when bringing forward a potential referral at a particular time, because they may impact the validity and reliability of test results and therefore any conclusions that can be drawn from the assessment:

- Home environment (e.g., loss, divorce)
- Attendance record (e.g., absences, chronic tardiness, school moves)
- A history of uncorrected vision or hearing concerns (i.e., it is expected that the student's hearing and vision have recently been assessed [preferably within the last year], and that any corrective measures have been taken)
- Medical conditions (e.g., history of seizures, diabetes) or fine/gross motor concerns
- Language/educational history (e.g., French Immersion, ELL, ESD; cultural factors)
- Social-emotional or behavioural concerns that may impact a student's ability to learn, or participate in an assessment (e.g., trauma)

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Purpose of a Psycho-Educational Assessment

The purpose of a psycho-educational assessment is to investigate a student's strengths and stretches in various domains. This information is then used to build a holistic and integrated profile of the learner to assist with programming, and identify potential interventions and supports. To do this, a comprehensive battery of standardized, norm-referenced measures, including cognitive, achievement, and processing tests, is typically used.

- Depending on the reason for referral and the presenting strengths and concerns, behavioural rating forms (including adaptive behaviour forms) may be used, and qualitative information may be obtained through observations, work samples, or other informal measures.

The goal of assessment is always to gather specific information that can be used to better understand the student's current functioning or learning and how we can best support them. It may also lead to the student being designated as having special educational needs such as a learning disability or an intellectual disability. This designation can make it easier for school personnel, and perhaps the family, to access some additional services that may benefit the student. However, not all assessments lead to a diagnosis or designation, and it may be determined that a student does not meet the current established criteria and, if previously designated, this may result in a "de-designation".

Assessment Responsibilities

Parents/guardians and school district staff all have responsibilities related to psycho-educational assessments.

- The school psychologist typically works with the referred student 1:1 for a period of time (typically several hours) outside of the classroom, but within the school setting, during regular school hours.
- In addition, background information is gathered from parents and teachers through the completion of a file review, as well as interviews, questionnaires, or rating forms regarding relevant student history and functioning (e.g., developmental and medical history, behavioural, social or adaptive functioning, etc.)
- At the end of the assessment a written report is shared with the parents/guardian, and with school personnel during a meeting; the report is generally given to the parents at the meeting and becomes part of the student's record.
- Parent/guardians have the right to be told about any major changes to the assessment process, the ongoing right to refuse or rescind consent and the limits to confidentiality.
 - The consent for assessment (signature) is time limited, lasting for a calendar year from the date the consent form is signed.

- All documents and the written report are the property of the school board; the information contained in the report is considered private and confidential, and may not be disclosed to anyone outside of authorized employees of the school board without the parent/guardian's consent, unless the School Psychologist perceives that there is a clear risk of harm, or a court orders the disclosure of records.

Students Diagnosed Outside of SD61

While assessment documentation may contribute to a range of diagnoses and/or designations, it is within the School Psychologist's scope of practice to diagnose a student with a Learning Disability or Intellectual Disability, or as Gifted. Certified School Psychologists or Registered Psychologists who work outside of SD 61 may also diagnose students, but the Ministry of Education requires that school district staff determine which students are designated in special education categories within a given school district. Therefore, psycho-educational assessments that are not completed by SD 61 personnel need to be reviewed within the district to determine designation eligibility.