

**Connecticut State Department of Education**  
**Office of Dyslexia and Reading Disabilities (ODRD) and Bureau of Special Education (BSE)**  
**ConnCASE March Legal Conference| March 10, 2023**

**Case Presentation: Sample PSW Approach to SLD Eligibility Determination**

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**Purpose and Description**

The purpose of this case study activity is to provide participants with the opportunity to work through the process of applying a Pattern of Strengths and Weaknesses (PSW) approach to SLD eligibility determination.

Participant dyads will evaluate a provided case study using the sample PSW approach. Afterwards, participants will be asked to consider, discuss, and be prepared to share their responses to the following questions:

- Which Reading Disability subtype, if any, is suggested?
- After completing the MER, prepare a *brief* statement justifying the team’s eligibility determination decision.
- What additional information would the team like to have access to before making an eligibility determination for this student?
- How might your team suggest strengthening this sample PSW approach?
- What guidance, supports, and/or resources could be helpful to teams opting to utilize a PSW approach – not necessarily this one- with confidence?

**Required Materials**

- Pencil/Pen; Highlighter
- Case Presentation
- PSW Worksheet
- Multidisciplinary Evaluation Form (MER)

**Directions**

Prepare

1. Select a partner to work with.
2. Review the sample PSW Worksheet to familiarize yourself with its organization and content. (5 Minutes)
3. Take a few minutes to independently read through the Case Profile presented below to gain a sense of the student. (10 Minutes)

Do

4. With your partner, revisit the Case Profile to work through and complete Steps 1-3 of the PSW Worksheet, taking care to jot down notes to help justify your ratings. You may find the need to make professional judgments when conflicting data is presented, based on your knowledge of assessment task demands, etc.
  - Part I (5 Minutes)
  - Part 2 (10 Minutes)
  - Part 3 (10 Minutes)
5. Review the MER and complete Section II. Eligibility Criteria, including Criterion F to identify the students reading disability profile, if eligible. (10 Minutes)

Respond

With your partner, consider, discuss, and be prepared to share their responses to the following questions:

- Which Reading Disability subtype, if any, is suggested?
- After completing the MER, prepare a *brief* statement justifying the team’s eligibility determination decision.
- What additional information would the team like to have access to before making an eligibility determination for this student?
- How might your team suggest strengthening this sample PSW approach?
- What guidance, supports, and/or resources could be helpful to teams opting to utilize a PSW approach – not necessarily this one- with confidence?

## Additional Resources for Reference

CSDE IEP Preview Series: [Mini-Series on Specific Learning Disability \(SLD\)](#):

- Overview ([Overview Slides](#); [Overview Webinar](#))
- Part 1: Subject-Specific Worksheets ([Part 1 Slides](#); [Part 1 Webinar](#))
- Part 2: Multidisciplinary Evaluation Report (MER) ([Part 2 Slides](#); [Part 2 Webinar](#))
- Part 3: Understanding Profiles of Common Reading Disabilities ([Part 3 Slides](#); [Part 3 Webinar](#))
  - Handout: [Common Profiles of Reading Disabilities](#)
- Part 4: Understanding a Pattern of Strengths and Weaknesses (PSW) ([Part 4 Slides](#); [Part 4 Webinar](#))

CSDE [CT-SEDS Documents/Templates](#):

The following documents are intended to assist school districts with the CT-SEDS transition. Documents may be accessed and used to support staff training and/or Section 504 and Special Education processes. Please note that any information that is entered in these stand-alone documents must also be entered into CT-SEDS.

### Referral and Evaluation

- [Referral to Determine Eligibility for Special Education and Related Services](#) - July 2022
- [Mathematics Worksheet](#) - July 2022
- [Reading Worksheet](#) - July 2022
- [Written Expression Worksheet](#) - July 2022
- [Multidisciplinary Evaluation Report \(MER\) for Students Suspected of Having a Specific Learning Disability: Initial Evaluation](#) - July 2022
- [Multidisciplinary Evaluation Report \(MER\) for Students Suspected of Having a Specific Learning Disability: Three-Year Reevaluation](#) - July 2022
- [Mutual Agreement to Extend Evaluation Timeline for Determining Special Education Eligibility for a Student Suspected of Having a Specific Learning Disability](#) - July 2022

## CASE PROFILE

Student: James

Grade: 4<sup>th</sup> (Spring)

Grades Repeated: NA

Age: 9-4

### **Referral Concerns**

James' parents referred him for evaluation due to concerns that long-standing reading difficulties warrant an identification of dyslexia and the provision of specialized education. Specifically, they are concerned that he is not able to read words accurately, with the exception of high frequency sight words that he's memorized. They state that word reading difficulties cause him to be slow to complete schoolwork, results in his earning poor grades despite great effort and solid conceptual understanding. Parents are of the opinion that James' variable reading comprehension performance is directly related to underlying phonics and fluency difficulties and are not due primarily to other factors such as language, attention, or executive functioning.

### **Review of Records**

Parents report that all developmental milestones were met on target, including language milestones. They report that James entered Kindergarten without knowing all of his letter names/sounds and that he has struggled mightily with learning how to read since entering school.

James' classroom teacher describes him as having a strong math aptitude as well as strong math calculation skills. He is described as enjoying learning about new concepts in all subjects and as relying on text readers at home to support his access to information. He is described as reluctant to use similar resources in the classroom. Reading is described as problematic, and she noted that James is presently receiving SRBI interventions designed to target phonics skills. Instruction is delivered by a special education teacher three times/week in a pull-out setting for 40 minutes in a small group of 1:2. James is missing Language Arts during this time, which is when the class is reading, discussing, and responding in writing to a variety of thematically-anchored texts. In reporting on James' overall functioning in the classroom, his teacher shared that if tasks are to be completed independently and they require reading or writing, James has a difficult time identifying steps associated with task completion and monitoring his performance. Reading strategies introduced incidentally in the context of the general education setting do not appear to be benefitting James, as he does not generalize their application.

A review of academic records indicates that James has been receiving reading intervention services via SRBI since the fall of K. The initial emphasis was on letter identification, letter-sound correspondence, sight word reading and basic phonics skills. In K and Grade 1, James was described as transposing letters when reading and writing, frequently forgetting letter names and sounds, confusing visually similar letters, having difficulty remembering basic sight words, and experiencing difficulty with near and far point copying. To rule out the possibility that visual-perceptual skills were underlying some of the difficulties James was experiencing, an OT evaluation was completed in Grade 1 that included the administration of the Test of Visual Perceptual Skills-Nonmotor 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. All scores on this assessment fell in the superior range (SS 18-19). James underwent a language evaluation in Grade 3 in order to rule out the possibility that language issues were a factor in the difficulties he was experiencing in school. Results indicated that language skills were intact (average-superior range) for both receptive and expressive language.

Medically, James is described as a healthy student. James' pediatrician diagnosed him with ADHD in Grade 3, predominantly inattentive with features of anxiety and depression. James completed a medication trial without success and is presently not medicated. A review of school records indicates that James has a tendency to visit the school nurse frequently during times when independent reading and writing demands in the general education setting are tapped. During these times, he complains of headaches and stomachaches.

Current report cards and informal curriculum-based assessments completed by his classroom teacher indicate that James knows grade-appropriate letter-sound associations and while he can often state phonics rules, he does not reliably apply them when reading words in isolation or context. Reading fluency is as such impaired, with James demonstrating a slow reading rate and impaired reading accuracy. Although James can read grade level high frequency sight words presented in isolation accurately, identification of these words varies when they are placed in the context of a passage. Spelling is impaired for regular and irregular high frequency sight words.

James reports that he feels like teachers don't understand him and get mad at him for no reason. He expressed feeling anxious and worried in school because he can't seem to do anything right. He shared that schoolwork is difficult because he can't read well and that since he has so much difficulty with reading, he is often confused about what he is supposed to be doing. As a result, he often asks others for assistance and reports then getting in trouble for distracting others and being off task.

### **Observation(s)**

Reading Intervention Observation. James was observed during a Tier 3 intervention lesson in a group size of 1:2. Intervention was provided by a certified special education teacher, who reported having completed introductory-level training in a range of Structured Literacy programs and approaches, including Orton-Gillingham. James was attentive during the lesson; however, his partner required consistent redirection due to off-track and shutting down behaviors. Both students required so much individualized scaffolding during application aspects of the lesson that when the teacher was working with one, the other was relatively unproductive.

When students were asked to sound out closed pattern one syllable words with initial blends (e.g., flat, brag, etc.), James had a great deal of difficulty doing so. He often misrepresented the vowel sound altogether or identified the sound as long vs. short, and while he could identify the individual sounds of consonants in isolation, he could not blend them together sufficient to arrive at target words. Most often, James read words based solely on initial letter sounds.

During the dictation portion of the lesson, when James' teacher dictated a sentence for the students to transcribe, James required repetition and scaffolding to recall all of the words and the sequence of words.

Assessment Observations. James established rapport easily and engaged in playful banter with evaluators. He was sensitive to evaluators writing information down as he worked and asked early on what was being written about him. Evaluators opted to feign continuous writing in order to normalize the behavior. James approached tasks with a competitive spirit: he was not one to guess at items, but would spend ample time considering how best to solve a given item. Verbal mediation was noted throughout assessments.

### **Current Academic Assessments (Reading)**

#### Curriculum Based Assessments

- Fry Sight Words: Not Administered because James has not yet mastered Dolch Grade 3 word list.
- Dolch Grade 3 Word List: 78% Accuracy  
Missed: carry; clean; cut; eight; far; got; own; shall; together
- Gallistel-Ellis Test of Coding:
  - One Syllable Words
    - Closed Syllable Type with Single Consonants: Instructional Level (76% Accuracy)
    - Closed Syllable Type with Consonant Combinations: Instructional Level (65% Accuracy)
    - Open Syllable and Magic-e Syllable Type: Instructional Level (67% Accuracy)
    - Vowel Team Syllable Type: Frustration Level (32% Accuracy)
    - Vowel-r Syllable Type: Frustration Level (13% Accuracy)
  - Two+ Syllable Words: Not Administered
- MASI Oral Reading Fluency Test: Grade 4
  - Students in the Spring of Grade 4 are reading approximately 133 wcpm
  - James is reading 14 wcpm
  - Accuracy is 48% (Frustration Level)

#### Universal Screening Assessment

- Acadience Reading Benchmark Assessment
  - Oral Reading Fluency (ORF): Words Correct=14 (Well Below Benchmark)
  - Oral Reading Fluency (ORF): Accuracy= 42% (Well Below Benchmark)
  - MAZE Comprehension: 13 correct (Well Below Benchmark) *Teacher notes that James earned credit for every item attempted and commented that time appears to be a factor.*

#### Progress Monitoring Assessment

Progress monitoring data consisting of off-level Acadience Oral Reading Fluency probes (Grade 1) for the past 10 weeks was reviewed. Calculation of James' Performance Level and Rate of Growth/Learning Slope indicate that he is responding adequately to instruction.

### **Current Formal Assessments**

#### Word Identification and Spelling Test – Elementary (WIST)

- Word Identification SS 75
  - Informal Item Set Analysis indicated that his ability to Read Regular Words was Below Average for his grade; Irregular Word Reading ability was Above Average for his grade.
- Spelling SS 64
  - Informal Item Set Analysis indicated that his ability to Spell Regular Words and to Spell Irregular Words was Below Average for his grade.
- Sound-Symbol Knowledge SS 98
  - Informal Item Set Analysis indicated that knowledge of Letter-Sound Associations was Average/Above Average for his grade; Pseudo-Word reading ability was Below Average for his grade.
- Fundamental Literacy Ability Index SS 66

#### Test of Word Reading Efficiency-2 (TOWRE-2)

- Sight Word Efficiency SS 67
- Phonemic Decoding Efficiency SS 66
- Total Word Reading Efficiency SS 65

### Gray Oral Reading Test-5 (GORT-5)

- Rate SS 4
- Accuracy SS 2
- Fluency SS 4
- Comprehension SS 6 (See Note Below)

*Untimed. Student reads a brief passage (paragraph) out loud and responds orally to open-ended questions presented by the evaluator. Student may not reference the text.*

- Oral Reading Index SS 73

*James' reading rate and accuracy profiles were so impaired that he was not able to secure basal for fluency (score of 9 or 10 on two consecutive passages). Comprehension is likely an underestimate, as James reached ceiling on fluency thereby resulting in testing being discontinued before difficulty with comprehension questions arose.*

*While reading passages, James demonstrated difficulty reading words accurately even when attempting to methodically sound them out, he omitted and inserted words as he read, repeated phrases, and altered/omitted/added grammatical morphemes.*

*An example of James' reading of a passage compared to the target passage appears below:*

*The boy was baking a white cake for Mother.*

*The boy ...the ...the boy wants banking a white cake for Mothers ...Mother.*

*It was going to be a good birthday*

*It was going to be a good birthday. . . It was going to be a good birthday.*

*Father went out to buy some pretty flowers.*

*Fathers ...Father went out to...to (evaluator provided "buy") some party flowers.*

*The cake cooked a little too long so it was brown.*

*The cake...the cake cooked a little too...a little too long soon...so it was brown.*

*All the pans were dirty.*

*All the plants were dry.*

*But Mother said, "This cake is the best present of all."*

*But Mother said, "Thanks this cake is the best present of all."*

### Woodcock-Johnson-3 Achievement (WJ-3)

- Passage Comprehension SS 95

*Untimed. Student reads 2-3 sentence passages silently to self and provides a missing word to complete the passage/maintain syntax.*

### Test of Reading Comprehension-4 (TORC-4)

- Text Comprehension SS 98

*Untimed. Student previews mc questions, reads a brief passage silently, answers mc questions while able to reference passage.*

### Comprehensive Test of Phonological Processing-2 (CTOPP-2)

- Phonological Awareness Composite SS 118
  - Elision SS 12
  - Blending Words SS 12
  - Phoneme Isolation SS 14
- Phonological Memory Composite SS 76
  - Memory for Digits SS 6
  - Nonword Repetition SS 6
- Rapid Symbolic Naming Composite SS 70
  - Rapid Digit Naming SS 5
  - Rapid Letter Naming SS 5

### Test of Integrated Language and Literacy Skills (TILLS)

- Listening Comprehension SS 125
- Vocabulary Awareness SS 130

### WISC-V

- Verbal Comprehension Index SS 127
  - Similarities SS 14
  - Vocabulary SS 16

- Visual Spatial Index SS 114
  - Block Design SS 11
  - Visual Puzzles SS 14
- Fluid Reasoning Index SS 100
  - Matrix Reasoning SS 10
  - Figure Weights SS 10
- Working Memory Index SS 98
  - Digit Span SS 8
  - Picture Span SS 11
- Processing Speed Index SS 86
  - Coding SS 8
  - Symbol Search SS 7
  - Cancellation SS 11
- FSIQ SS 102

Test of Memory and Learning-2 (TOMAL-2)

- Verbal Memory SS 104
- Verbal Delayed Recall SS 105
- Attention/Concentration SS 85