

I recently participated in two IEP placement and programming meetings on behalf of family. It was an interesting experience to be on the "other side of the table" for a change, an invited guest of the parents. These parents are very well educated, but do not work in education. A copy of the Woodcock-Johnson Revised test scores were given to them by the school, but no one had sat down and explained the test results and implications in simple terms. They felt intimidated by their lack of understanding of standard scores, percentile ranks, relative mastery index and W scores in the education of their child. For these parents, the meeting moved at the speed of light, and their lack of understanding of the test results only heightened their concerns and discomfort. The initial meeting went poorly, and the parents left with more confusion and questions than answers. I spent time with the parents after this first meeting, explaining the cause-effect relationship between cognitive potential and the present level of educational achievement. This greatly reduced their stress level, and contributed to a greater understanding of what

information for the assessment team to consider, yet, programming and placement decisions are often weighted using these scores. Standardized assessments yield many different types of scores or comparisons, and it is essential that the differences be understood. Not all scores are appropriate or preferred to use with all audiences. The Woodcock-Johnson III (WJ III) provides the following test score comparisons.

Standard Scores (SS): Use standard scores when discussing performance with psychologists or other professionals, or to establish discrepancy for possible special education qualification. Standard Scores are also useful to transfer and plot on the Student Performance Summary form (attached). The mean standard score on the WJ III is 100, with the standard deviation plus or minus fifteen points, and a ten-point difference from average may be considered significant. Standard scores are useful in determining strengths, average abilities, weaknesses, and functional limitations.

There Are No Facts, Only Interpretations

the school was proposing to do for their child and why. I also generated a report using the Woodcock Johnson Report Writer which gave them a hard copy of the test results for them to read and re-read. I wish that the school would have provided this information to the parents in detail, prior to the first meeting.

It is essential that educational professionals empathize with parents when we meet with them. What may be routine and simple for us to understand may be challenging or beyond parents' understanding, due to their emotional involvement. We cannot expect the average parent to fully comprehend what has taken us years to learn. I strongly believe that our collective responsibility is to first understand the assessment results ourselves, then explain it to parents at a mastery level. We must work diligently to make the assessment information accessible and understandable to parents. We may only work directly with their son or daughter for one year, but they will be involved in their child's education for life. Even the smallest of educational decisions may have a profound impact in ways that we are unable to predict.

The purpose of this article is to demystify common assessment terms, and to suggest strategies and the use of certain types of scores for different uses or audiences. The Student Performance Summary Form is presented as a means of sharing pertinent test data with parents and others while reducing stress and increasing understanding.

A complete assessment should examine both formal (standardized) and informal data. Best practice includes an examination of how a student performs in the educational environment compared to his/her predicted test scores. Standardized assessment scores may provide only one perspective of

The following simplified descriptors are offered as suggested guidelines.

Strengths: Strengths are standard scores ranging from 111-200. Strengths imply natural or intra-personal preferences or patterns that are useful in designing accommodations or suggesting vocational direction. Whenever possible, attempt to use strengths to overcome or accommodate weaknesses or functional limitations. We should never consider accommodations for areas of natural strength.

Average Abilities: Performance in the average range (90-110) suggests that the task or cognitive performance area can be accomplished with little or no accommodation or assistance. Teachers may provide a disservice to a student's progress by accommodating or assisting in areas that are average for that student.

Weaknesses: Weaknesses in performance or skill domains (80-89) suggest that the student can perform in that area, but will require motivation, persistence and strategies to maximize their potential compared to their peers. Tasks or skills in areas of weakness may be frustrating, take longer to accomplish, and their performance may be below that of their peers. Mild accommodations or compensations may be considered if they are required for the student to successfully access the general curriculum.

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Score The WJ III Using Age Or Grade Equivalent Scores?

Functional Limitations (scores 79 and below): This is an important term, used in Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (504) and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). A functional limitation implies a severe weakness, one that cannot be overcome with motivation and hard work alone, or with mild accommodations to the general curriculum. Functional limitations are serious and represent the “disabilities” in Specific Learning Disabilities. The lower the score, the more severe the disability or difference, and the more drastic or complete the accommodation or modification to be considered. While not required for special education services in the schools under IDEA, use of common terminology will help to coordinate programming decisions throughout the life span.

Percentile Rank (PR): Consider using percentile rank comparisons when explaining test scores to parents, students or regular educators. Paraphrase the following when explaining PR scores. *Picture a room with 100 children the same age (within one month) as your child who have been assessed on similar tasks, and who have been lined up in rank order from the highest performing student to the lowest. The students in the middle performed in the average range, while the students at the “head” of the line demonstrated strengths, and scored high average to superior. Students at the “end” of the line or who performed at the “bottom” evidenced weakness or functional limitations, and scored in the low average to low range, compared to the middle group. Students lower than the middle group may require specialized instruction to perform with their peers.* Percentile ranks are powerful descriptors for parents and others, because of the visual description.

Relative Proficiency Index (RPI): RPI scores are unique to the WJ III, and are especially helpful in predicting performance in regular education settings. Consider RPI scores to be your “crystal ball” when predicting how a student may perform a task in the general curriculum if no accommodations or specialized supports are given. Use RPI scores to predict a student’s degree of mastery, or how well they would perform a task in comparison to age or grade level peers. Use RPI scores to help determine what level of supports may be necessary for students to succeed in regular education classrooms. Paraphrase the following when describing a student’s performance using RPI scores. *“Imagine a room full of grade level students who have been given one hundred similar tasks or problems to complete. A student who performs at mastery level would be expected to correctly complete or solve ninety of the one-hundred tasks (90/100 as no one is perfect), and this performance could be written as the equation 90/90. An RPI score of 35/90 indicates that the student would be expected to demonstrate 35% mastery or solve 35 problems correctly compared to peers who have truly mastered the task. The lower the RPI score, the more difficult to impossible the task for the student, and the greater the need for accommodation.”*

Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP): Receptive and/or expressive language proficiency difficulties underlie academic failure for many students with specific learning disabilities. For other students who are English Language Learners (ELL), all tests in English only may be biased, and may severely underestimate the students aptitude and potential. CALP represents higher order English language usage, necessary for school success in typical English language only classrooms. The WJ III provides CALP scores for all cognitive and achievement subtests that are highly correlated with language and culture. CALP scores are reported in a range of 1-5. A score of 1 would indicate that the student would find the English language demands of instruction impossible, and a CALP of 5 suggests that the student would find the same tasks very easy. CALP scores are useful in interpreting test results for ELL students as well as for students with language related disabilities. Teachers and diagnosticians should always consider possible language differences (ELL) or disabilities (SLD, CD?) first when interpreting test results.

Both are useful, and the diagnostician may choose to score the tests both ways. The results may not be similar, as would be expected of younger or older students in a grade or students who have been retained. In WJ III publications, it is suggested that *“At the preschool and early elementary levels, age equivalent scores (AE) may be of more value than grade equivalent (GE) scores for low functioning students.”* And, *“For individuals in school, ..grade placement is usually a better reference than chronological age because it is more valuable to use the reference group with whom a subject must perform in school.”*

Age Equivalent Scores (AE): Use AEs to compare aptitude/achievement discrepancies for specific learning disabilities determination. AE scores are useful in discussing academic performance with parents or others, and are helpful in comparing young adults or adults to their peers. AEs have more utility over time, such as for students who are transitioning to post-secondary educational or training programs.

Grade Equivalent Scores (GE): Grade scores compare the student’s level of development in a skill or performance area compared to grade level peers. GE scores are useful in discussing academic performance with parents and teachers, and are helpful in selecting materials and level of instruction (instructional range) for individual students. The WJ III Compuscore provides mean GE equivalent scores, and suggests at what grade level the student would find tasks difficult (D) or easy (E).

Student Performance Summary Form

It is suggested that only the scores pertinent to the referral question be examined. This may be accomplished by transferring selected scores to the appropriate cognitive or achievement Student Performance Summary (SPS) form. Parents and other partners should be provided with a copy so that they can follow along and refer to it to aid in their understanding and participation in the IEP process. Parents and teachers who have used the form have reported that it helps to keep the discussion focused, and leads to greater understanding of the student’s profile and educational needs. The following suggestions describe the completion of the SPS form.

1. Transfer Percentile Rank (PR), Relative Proficiency Index (RPI), and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) scores to the form.
2. Transfer Standard Scores (SS) for each domain to the form, but place the numerical score in the appropriate column as a **STRENGTH** (SS 111 or above), **AVERAGE** (SS 90-110), **WEAKNESS** (SS 80-89), or **FUNCTIONAL LIMITATION** (SS 79 or below).
3. Color-code STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, FUNCTIONAL LIMITATIONS for easier identification. Highlight STRENGTHS pink, WEAKNESSES blue, and FUNCTIONAL LIMITATIONS green. Scores in the AVERAGE RANGE are highlighted in yellow. Other colors may be used, but standardization between practitioners and schools in a district will facilitate a focused discussion and universal understanding. When discussing scores on the SPS form, paraphrase the following to facilitate understanding. *“Notice that some of the scores on the page are different colors. Scores highlighted pink represent strengths compared to other students in the same grade (or age). Scores highlighted in yellow represent average performance compared to peers. Scores highlighted in blue represent mild weaknesses that we may consider in designing mild supports or accommodations for the general curriculum. Scores highlighted green represent very low scores that require attention and specialized instruction or in designing accommodations for the general curriculum.”* ■

WJ III STANDARD SCORE (SS), AND PERCENTILE RANK (PR) RANGES

<i>STANDARD SCORE RANGE</i>	<i>PERCENTILE RANK RANGE</i>	<i>WJ III CLASSIFICATION</i>
131 and above	98 TO 99.9	Very Superior (Strength)
121 to 130	92 to 97	Superior (Strength)
111 to 120	76 to 91	High Average (Strength)
90 to 110	25 to 75	Average
80 to 89	9 to 24	Low Average (Weakness)
70 to 79	3 to 8	Low, (Functional Limitation)
69 and below	0.1 to 2	Very Low (Functional Limitation)
55 to 69	0.1	----- (Functional Limitation)
40 to 54		
39 and below		

WJ III: RELATIVE PROFICIENCY INDEX (RPI) SCORES

<i>RPI</i>	<i>PROFICIENCY DESCRIPTOR</i>	<i>STUDENT WILL FIND RELATED TASKS AT AGE OR GRADE LEVEL:</i>
100/90	Very Advanced	Extremely Easy
99/90 to 100/90	Advanced to Very Advanced	Extremely to Very Easy
98/90 to 99/90	Advanced	Very Easy
96/90 to 97/90	Average to Advanced	Very Easy to Manageable
82/90 to 95/90	AVERAGE	MANAGEABLE
68/90 to 81/90	Limited to Average	Manageable to Difficult
34/90 to 67/90	Limited	Difficult
19/90 to 33/90	Very Limited to Limited	Difficult to Extremely Difficult
5/90 to 18/90	Very Limited	Extremely Difficult
3/90 to 4/90	Negligible	
0/90 to 3/90	Negligible	

WJ III: COGNITIVE ACADEMIC LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY (CALP) SCORES

CALPS; Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency Skills. This is the higher order language usage necessary for success in academic situations. CALPS represents deeper levels of processing including analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.

<i>CALP LEVEL</i>	<i>STUDENT WILL FIND ENGLISH LANGUAGE DEMANDS OF INSTRUCTION AT AGE OR GRADE:</i>
5 ADVANCED	VERY EASY
4.5 FLUENT TO ADVANCED	EASY
4 FLUENT	MANAGEABLE
3.5 LIMITED TO FLUENT	DIFFICULT
3 LIMITED	VERY DIFFICULT
2.5 VERY LIMITED TO LIMITED	VERY DIFFICULT TO EXTREMELY DIFFICULT
2 VERY LIMITED	EXTREMELY DIFFICULT
1.5 NEGLIGIBLE TO VERY LIMITED	EXTREMELY DIFFICULT TO IMPOSSIBLE
1 NEGLIGIBLE	IMPOSSIBLE

STUDENT PERFORMANCE SUMMARY: WJ-III COGNITIVE

NAME:
DATE OF BIRTH:
AGE:

DATE OF EVALUATION:
GRADE:

GENERAL INTELLECTUAL ABILITY (GIA) =	Performance based on: ___ Standard Battery 1-10 ___ Extended Battery 1-20						
COGNITIVE CLUSTER	RPI	PR	STRENGTH (111+)	AVERAGE (90-110)	WEAKNESS (80-89)	FUNCTIONAL LIMITATION (<79)	CALP
ORAL LANGUAGE * (3,4,(14,15))							
VERBAL ABILITY (1,(11))							
THINKING ABILITY (2-5(12-15))							
COG. EFFICIENCY (6,7,(16,17))							
COMP.-KNOWLEDGE (1,(11))							
LONG-TERM RETRIEVAL (2,(12))							
VISUAL-SPATIAL THINK (3,(13))							
AUDITORY PROCESSING (4,(14))							
FLUID REASONING (5,(15))							
PROCESSING SPEED (6,(16))							
SHORT-TERM MEMORY (7,(17))							
PHONEMIC AWARENESS (4,8)							
WORKING MEMORY (7,9)							
BROAD ATTENTION (7,9,(14,20))							
COGNITIVE FLUENCY (12,16,18)							
EXECUTIVE PROCESSES (5,(19,20))							

* Oral Language RPI scores between 34/90 and 67/90 suggest lower English Language Proficiency: use/interpret scores with caution
 * Oral Language RPI scores under 33/90 indicate Limited English Proficiency: some scores may not be valid!

STUDENT PERFORMANCE SUMMARY: WJ-III ACHIEVEMENT

NAME:
DATE OF BIRTH:
AGE:

DATE OF EVALUATION:
GRADE:

6/01

ACHIEVEMENT CLUSTER	RPI	PR	STRENGTH (111+)	AVERAGE (90-110)	WEAKNESS (80-89)	FUNCTIONAL LIMITATION (<79)	CALP	+/- 1.5 SD
ORAL LANGUAGE * (3,4,(14,15))								
ORAL EXPRESSION (3,(14)[5-22])								
LISTENING COMP. (4,(15) XXXXX)								
READING COMP. (9,(17)[5-22])								
BASIC READING (1,(13) [4-22])								
Reading Fluency (2)								
Phoneme/Grapheme Know. (13,20)								
MATH CALCULATION (5,6)[5-22]								
MATH REASON (10(18)[3-22])								
Math Fluency (6)								
WRITTEN EXPRESSION (8,(11)[7-22])								
WRITTEN EXPRESSION (USE BWL CLUSTER) (7,8(11)[6-22])								
Basic Writing Skills (7,(16))								
Writing Fluency (8)								
Academic Knowledge (19)								
Academic Skills (1,5,7)								
Academic Fluency (2,6,8)								
Academic Applications (9,10,11)								
TOTAL ACHIEVEMENT (1-2, 5-11)								