Psychological Assessment
Information for Parents/Guardians

What is Psychological Assessment?
Psychological assessment includes a clinical interview, checklists, formal psychological testing and interpretation of that testing by a qualified examiner that may be a school psychologist, social worker, counselor or other mental health clinician.
- Psychological testing uses standardized techniques to measure a child's or adolescent's functioning in a variety of domains
- Methods used in psychological assessment
  - Caregiver/parent and student interview
  - Checklists, surveys, and/or rating scales filled out by parent(s)/guardian(s), staff, and the child or adolescent.
  - Behavioral observations during testing
  - Standardized tests
  - Subjective measures (e.g., projective techniques)

Projective techniques allow respondents to project their subjective or true opinions and beliefs onto other people or objects. The respondent's real feelings are then inferred from what s/he says about others. Projective techniques are normally used during individual or small group interviews. They incorporate a number of different research methods such as the Word Association Test, Sentence Completion Test and Thematic Apperception Test (TAT). Projective techniques often require the expertise of a trained psychologist to help devise the tests and interpret them correctly.

Who conducts psychological assessments?
- Licensed psychologists and neuropsychologists
- School psychologists
- Licensed mental health clinicians such as licensed clinical professional counselors or licensed social workers
- Other qualified examiners that may include school social workers and counselors.

Who can make a referral?
- Your child's teacher, therapist, or doctor
- Your school's IEP team (see IEP resource guide for more information)

Why would my child be referred for an assessment?
There are many reasons your child could be referred for an assessment. You should get a full explanation from the person who is referring your child about what they are concerned about, and what decisions will be made with the testing. Some examples of possible reasons for referring for an assessment include:
- To determine areas of special need
- To determine level of developmental or cognitive functioning
- To determine patterns of strengths and weaknesses that can help in educating the child

- Do determine academic placement or program eligibility
- To track progress or deterioration over time
- To identify baseline data that could be used in developing an educational, behavioral, and/or treatment plan in order to ameliorate a problem area.

Common domains assessed:
- Cognitive/intellectual (IQ or intelligence tests)
- Adaptive living skills (how much your child can do for him/herself)
- Academic achievement (how much your child has learned in academic subjects such as reading, writing, and math)
- Attention, memory and learning
- Social/emotional and personality functioning
- Learning style modalities - This type of assessment is used to determine how a child best learns. For example it might indicate that a child learns best by reading listening, and/or writing information.
- Specialized assessments (ex., autism, neuropsychological evaluations)

Autism is a developmental disorder that usually appears during the first years of childhood (18 to 60 months). Although there is no known cause for autism, researchers believe that it is a neurological disorder brought on by genetic and biological factors.

The diagnostic criteria for autism fall into three categories: (1) impairment in social interaction, (2) qualitative difficulties with communication, and (3) repetitive, restricted, or stereotyped behaviors. In order to receive a diagnosis for autism, a child must meet requirements in each of the three categories.

Children with autism have difficulty communicating and interacting with others (no eye contact, limited or no language, low motivation for typical play). They often display repetitive behaviors that reflect their desire for extreme order. For instance, a child with autism may not want to go the bathroom until they first have their favorite book. Without the book, they refuse to use the bathroom. Children with autism have different sensitivities to the physical world. For example, one child with autism may not hear high pitches; another may cry and moan when a siren goes by because it physically hurts them.

Unlike children with mental retardation, children with autism do not necessarily have low levels of intelligence. Some children with autism have a *splinter skill*, an ability to do something very well (e.g., remembering names and dates).

Unlike children with Asperger Syndrome, children with autism display significant delays in language, cognitive development or in the development of age-appropriate self-help skills.

Neuropsychological evaluations are comprehensive assessments of cognitive and behavioral functions using a set of standardized tests and procedures. Various mental functions are systematically tested, including, but not limited to intelligence, problem solving and conceptualization, planning and organization, attention, memory, learning,

language, academic skills, perceptual and motor abilities, emotions, behavior, and personality.

A neuropsychological evaluation can only be done by a psychologist who has had specialized training and experience in the field.

What are my rights if my child has a psychological assessment?
- You have the right to have the purpose of the testing explained to you
- You have the right to have the procedures that will be used explained to you
- You have the right to refuse to have your child evaluated
- You have the right to see the reports of results that come out of the assessment
- You have the right to have the results and recommendations thoroughly explained to you
- You have the right to refuse to share the results
- YOUR INPUT IS CRUCIAL
  - In order for the assessment to be complete, you should be a partner in providing information about your child or adolescent.