



## LEARNING DIFFERENCES AND ADHD TESTING FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- What is the difference between cognitive and achievement testing?
- Will my child qualify for services or accommodations?
- Will this result in my child being “labeled?”
- What tests are used? How do you determine which ones?
- What is the timeline for an evaluation?
- What are the merits of evaluation done privately versus one done by the school district?
- How often do I need to have this done?
- What do I say to my child about the upcoming evaluation?
- Should my child attend the conference or summary review?
- Should I tell my child his or her IQ?
- Do I need a psychologist or a learning disability specialist or an educational therapist?
- What makes a good evaluation?
- How much will private learning differences and adhd testing cost?

### **What is the difference between cognitive and achievement testing?**

Cognitive testing assesses a student's ability to remember, reproduce and problem-solve using novel and previously learned knowledge and stimuli. Generally, cognitive tests sample working memory, language skills, nonverbal reasoning and processing speed, visual, language, and psychomotor skills, drawing on a student's prior learning experiences and ability to deal with new tasks. These types of tests look at the underlying processes that facilitate and support learning. In contrast, academic tests are focused on students' school-related learning.

Academic testing measures a student's skills in a variety of academic areas, including reading decoding, reading comprehension, math calculation and reasoning, written language skills, and academic fluency in the areas of written language, math and reading. Clinical observations and diagnostic teaching may also reveal strengths and areas for growth in specific subsets of skills where the student struggles or excels.

All formal testing measures are administered in a standardized manner, which allows the student's performance to be compared with a normative sample of age or grade peers.

### **Will my child qualify for services?**

Whether a student qualifies for services in the school setting depends on the results of testing, whether the criteria laid out in state and federal guidelines are met, and the student's school performance. Under the law, there are currently two sets of criteria for determining eligibility for services and accommodations.

The first way that a student can become eligible is by qualifying for special education services under IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act). While there are many categories of students who are entitled to special education services, the focus here will be limited to the determination of a learning disability. In order to be eligible for special education as the result of a learning disability, a student must demonstrate at least average cognitive ability, a processing problem which interferes with the student's academic learning and a significant discrepancy between his or her cognitive level and academic achievement. In California, most districts

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consider a student to have a significant discrepancy if they either fall two years behind grade level or have a standardized score difference of one and one half standard deviations. Additionally, many school districts also consider RTI (Response To Intervention) and PSW (Pattern of Strengths and Weaknesses) in addition to the discrepancy model.

The second avenue for obtaining accommodations and services is to be considered disabled under the Americans with Disabilities Act, section 504. Again, there are many disabilities that qualify for accommodations under this legislation, but we will focus on students with learning disabilities. This is also the avenue by which students with ADHD (which is technically *NOT* a learning disability) may receive accommodations. The guidelines for determining section 504 eligibility are slightly broader than those for the above-mentioned special education guidelines. A student must, "have a physical or mental impairment which substantially limits one or more major life activities." This has evolved to interpret "a major life activity" as things such as a processing disorder, ADHD, anxiety, etc. but not as severe as requiring more intensive support such as an IEP. Ultimately, a student's learning needs, academic history and current performance in school are also factored in when making decisions about what actual services and accommodations are appropriate.

**What is the timeline for an evaluation?** Our private and more comprehensive assessments can usually be completed in 6/8 weeks.

**How often should learning differences and adhd testing be done?**

Evaluations are generally considered valid for three years. Assessments may be conducted more frequently in academic areas or to determine progress and growth. An updated evaluation may also be requested by colleges and universities if the student was not tested using adult measures.

**What do I say to my child about the upcoming evaluation?**

A student should be told that he or she is going to do a variety of activities that look at the way that his or her brain works and how he or she is doing in different learning areas. Explain that all people, including adults, have strengths and weaknesses, and that the assessment will look at determining what those are. This is why we emphasize the word "**difference**" over "disability" in our discussion of individual learning profiles. Stress that these tests are not like tests at school, where any type of grade is assigned, and that many of the activities are fun and interesting. Also, ensure that the student feels comfortable asking the evaluator any further questions that he or she might have about the process or results.

**What are the merits of evaluation done privately versus one done by the school district?**

- Most of the same instruments (tests) used
- May be more comprehensive because a school district is typically focused on eligibility, and may not have time for clinical or diagnostic inquiry
- A greater level of tailoring is possible and thus a private evaluation may do screenings and determine that no further assessment needed
- Private assessors are able to focus on learning patterns, more subtle learning differences, more in-depth analysis and recommendations
- Parents own the information and can choose whether to share

**Should my child attend the Follow-Up Conference?**

This depends on the age, maturity, and personal characteristics of the student. Some students may not be comfortable sitting there with adults discussing them, while others may not want to feel that they are being discussed without knowing the content. Generally, we discuss results first with

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the student, so they know what we are going to say. It is important to invite the student to the review of the assessment to assist with the student becoming a part of the process and more self aware of their strengths and areas for growth.

### **Should I tell my child his or her IQ?**

The latest research from Carol Dweck at Stanford in her book, "MindSet" suggests not using the term IQ as it can hinder a student. Generally numbers should be de-emphasized in favor of stressing the pattern of strengths and areas for growth. We prefer to address this on an individualized basis with parents.

### **Do I need a Psychologist, Neuropsychologist, a Learning Specialist or an Educational Psychologist?**

There are many types of professionals that can complete psychoeducational assessments. Many professionals have training and experience in a variety of settings, so it's important to understand some of these differences and to choose a professional with whom you feel most comfortable.

For example a Neuropsychologist has expertise in assessments that look specifically at different regions of the brain. However, Psychologists and Educational Psychologists also are typically well trained in administering similar assessments. Some Educational Psychologists have more training in school settings (both public and private), which can also be very beneficial in navigating the various educational plans, Section 504 and IDEA. Also, many Psychologists have more clinical training with mental health disorders, but also have an educational background. Additionally, a learning specialist is someone who is an expert in academic functioning and can provide specific accommodations and recommendations to help your child thrive in those areas.

Finally, it's important to understand the background of the clinician you're working with so s/he can provide the expertise in the areas in which you are looking. This may be with learning, social emotional capacity, or with your child's executive functioning.

### **What makes a good evaluation?**

There are many factors that go into making a good evaluation. The three main components that come to mind are:

- The initial contact with an agency to determine the goodness of fit for your family, and for the evaluator to better understand what your specific concerns are and possible outcome you're looking for in an evaluation.
- The second point to consider is really making the testing process as seamless as possible: coordinating flexible testing dates that work for all parties, making a true connection with your child, understanding what your child's strengths and areas for growth are and meeting and/or exceeding your expectations for an overall evaluation.
- Finally, producing a written report that not only answers the questions you had leading up to the evaluation, but provides insight and recommendations in a readable way.

In summary, a great evaluation would include partnering with your school and outside providers to ensure an outcome with which you are very satisfied.

### **How much will private learning differences and adhd testing at QWERTY cost?**

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We recognize that each student is different. That means that testing at QWERTY not only reflects thoughtful consideration in exploring the areas of your concern, but also reflects our experience with many different kinds of learners and how areas of challenge sometimes “cluster.” This enables us to choose testing instruments that paint a full picture of your child’s learning without administering any tests that aren’t particularly informative.

Rather than charging a flat rate for our learning differences and adhd testing services, QWERTY structures its billing for these services based on the actual amount of time needed to produce the highest quality testing. Our testing and reporting are customized to each student.

Current rates for testing at QWERTY are \$250/hr for testing, scoring, writing and reporting with an educational psychologist. In 2022, our test packages ranged in cost from approximately \$4500 to \$6000.