

Key Learnings Garnered from *Student vs. Temecula Valley USD (2018)*

Office of Administrative Hearings (OAH) Decision

This decision involved a school district that utilized the Dehn’s Processing Strengths and Weaknesses Model (DPSWM). Please refer to the entire decision for additional information. The decision can be found by searching at <https://www.dgs.ca.gov/OAH/Case-Types/Special-Education/Services/Page-Content/Special-Education-Services-List-Folder/Decisions-and-Orders>

While the decision did not discredit the use of DPSWM, or the PSW model in general, practitioners can glean key lessons from this case to ensure they are completing comprehensive and legally defensible psychoeducational assessments. The case involved an assessment of a student for consideration under SLD. However, based on interpretation of the judge’s decision made available to the public, there appeared to be some confusion when the PSW criteria versus the Psychological Processing Analyzer (PPA, the DPSWM corresponding software) program were explained by employees of the Temecula Valley Unified School District. These involved:

OAH Decision Area of Discussion	Key Learnings
0.01 vs 0.05 level of significance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that each psychologist in the district who utilizes the PPA program understands which level of significance is being used by the district.</li> <li>• Level of significance on the initial page of the Psychological Processing Analyzer (PPA) program impacts what will be considered an intra-individual strength or weakness.</li> <li>• Simply put, having a level of significance of 0.01 will <i>decrease</i> the number of areas considered as intra-individual strengths or weaknesses. More specifically, any significant intra-individual strength or weakness would be more trustworthy at the .01 level. However, using a .01 level of significance rather than a .05 level means there is the potential to miss or minimize important differences among scores that could potentially illuminate the presence of a PSW profile supporting an SLD. If this potential omission is not of concern due to the student’s specific score profile, then a significance level of .01 might be selected for the analysis, to increase statistical confidence in the results.</li> <li>• Be aware that the PPA Manual indicates, “For significance level, .05 is currently recommended for PSW and SLD determination” (PPA Professional Manual, Version 6, page 78).</li> <li>• However, under Dehn's model using the PPA, a new recommendation is scheduled to be released in the Summer of 2019, when the manual is updated. In the meantime, Dr. Dehn has shared the following clarifying comment with the Ventura County PSW Committee:  “Whenever possible, a composite score from a single instrument, such as a Processing Speed Index or Cluster, should be used to represent the examinee’s ability in specific areas of processing and achievement. When a cognitive or achievement area has been tested in a multi-battery or cross-battery fashion, the PPA software computes the mean of the subtest or composite scores entered for that area. This multi-battery mean, sometimes referred to as a “pseudocomposite”, is used to represent the examinee’s ability in that specific area of processing or achievement. The concern is that this multi-battery mean is not as accurate as a composite score taken directly from a single instrument. To reduce the concerns associated with such multi-battery means, it is recommended that .01 level of significance be used to determine the</li> </ul>

	<p>statistically significant strengths and weaknesses because .01 requires a greater discrepancy for a significant difference to occur than .05 does. However, when the majority of the processing and achievement areas are represented by single instrument composite scores, then .05 level of significance would still be appropriate. Another advantage of using the .01 level of significance over the .05 level is that it reduces the base rates associated with the significant differences. With a lower base rate, a smaller percentage of the population will be identified as having significant strengths and weaknesses. Lower base rates reduce overidentification.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● In short: Practitioners should be aware of how to use the .01 and .05 significant levels within the PPA software and should do so purposefully and with full understanding of how their decision will impact a student’s PSW profile.</li> </ul>
Discussion of outlier scores	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● There are times that a student shows a variety of scores within one processing area.</li> <li>● The assessment team may need to do additional assessment if outlier scores are present to assist the team in understanding the student’s learning profile.</li> <li>● If a score is not being used in the PPA program, remember that all subtests that are administered are still listed in the psychoeducational report and discussed.</li> <li>● If there was a reason for an outlier score, explain the reasoning. A task analysis as to the reason for an outlier score may be useful in determining whether scores were impacted by additional factors (i.e. the presence of a fine motor component on a processing speed subtest). Follow up testing may be warranted in these scenarios.</li> <li>● In terms of prioritizing scores to use, know that the PPA Manual indicates, “If you have more than four scores to enter, it is recommended that you drop the scores that have the lowest reliability (see Table 5, page 81 in the PPA Manual for reliability coefficients), outlier scores, or scores that do not seem to be the best measure of the particular process.”</li> <li>● The <i>Essentials of Processing Assessment</i> by Dr. Milton Dehn states on page 252, “An intra-individual weakness or strength can only be used [as evidence for a SLD] if the two subtest scores involved are unitary. If three or more subtests have been administered, then at least two of the subtests must be unitary.” Dehn’s approach therefore recognizes that there may be non-unitary scores and suggests that having two subtests unitary is sufficient for establishing a unitary construct. (PPA Professional Manual, Version 6, page 81).</li> <li>● The above information must be used in conjunction with a trained practitioner’s clinical judgment.</li> <li>● For additional information regarding the interpretation of non-unitary scores, please click <a href="#">here</a>.</li> </ul>
Cognitive scores as intra-individual weaknesses and/or deficits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Dr. Dehn’s PSW model does not require a cognitive area to be considered a “deficit” to be an area of concern; instead, intra-individual weaknesses can be considered.</li> <li>● This is reiterated in the PPA manual that can be downloaded from the PPA program as well as explained in the Ventura County SELPA PSW Procedural Manual.</li> </ul>
Consistency when running scores	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The PPA program does allow you to “save as” and re-run the program with different scores or different decisions on the initial page. For purposes of eligibility, all scores should be used within the program unless the score is considered invalid or not a representative score for that processing area. As noted above, scores that are not used in the PPA are still included in the psychoeducational report and discussed.</li> </ul>

The following best practices are encouraged when utilizing the PSW approaches discussed in the Ventura County SELPA PSW Procedural Manual:

- Practitioners have the responsibility of ensuring that they have a strong understanding of any software program they are utilizing to assist the IEP team in making eligibility decisions.
- If a practitioner is unclear about the PSW model that is being utilized within their school district, they should ask for help or assistance from a knowledgeable party.
- PSW software programs are designed to assist assessment teams in the decision making process. Results from these programs should never replace a practitioner's common sense or professional judgment. All final decisions about a student's eligibility for special education under SLD are made by the IEP team and not by a software program.