

# FSL FAQs

POPARD Family - School Liaison Newsletter



## FAQ: WHEN DOES A STUDENT NEED A PSYCH-ED?

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Psych-eds (psychoeducational assessments) are performed by school psychologists to identify students who are eligible for adapted or modified instruction and determine resources that might be helpful to them. Some writers have said every child should have at least one psych-ed during their school years – whether or not they really “need” one. But results from psych-eds might be of little use to students doing “OK” in school; nor are there enough psychologists to do that.

### What does it mean to be doing "OK?"

For children in school, the BC Ministry of Education and Childcare provides performance standards that teachers use to report to parents how well their child is meeting expectations for:

- reading
- writing
- numeracy
- social responsibility
- healthy living

Performance Standards are used to show how well a student meets expectations for their grade placement.

There are 4 levels, as shown in the figure to the right.

Most schools *screen* requests for psych-eds to sort students who might benefit from assessment from those who might not. Resource Room Teachers or Learning Assistance Teachers often do this. Most screening involves:

1. comparing a student's accomplishment to Performance Standards expectations for their peers and
2. comparing a student to themselves;
3. evaluating the success of an intervention in achievement, development, or socialization

### Comparing a student to expectations for peers

Students who *fully meet* or *exceed* Performance Standards for their grade placement are likely "OK;"

**Together, curriculum and performance standards describe what students are expected to know and the levels they should achieve.**

#### Levels of Student Performance

The BC performance standards describe levels of achievement in key areas of learning. The performance standards answer the questions: "*How good is good enough?*" What does it look like when a student's work has met the expectations at this grade level?"

The BC performance standards describe student achievement in terms of prescribed learning outcomes in March-April of the school year and illustrate the following four levels of student performance:

##### NOT YET WITHIN EXPECTATIONS

- ◆ the work does not meet grade-level expectations
- ◆ there is little evidence of progress toward the relevant prescribed learning outcomes
- ◆ the situation needs intervention

##### MEETS EXPECTATIONS (MINIMAL LEVEL)

- ◆ the work may be inconsistent, but meets grade-level expectations at a minimal level
- ◆ there is evidence of progress toward relevant prescribed learning outcomes
- ◆ the student needs support in some areas

##### FULLY MEETS EXPECTATIONS

- ◆ the work meets grade-level expectations
- ◆ there is evidence that relevant prescribed learning outcomes have been accomplished

##### EXCEEDS EXPECTATIONS

- ◆ the work exceeds grade-level expectations in significant ways
- ◆ the student may benefit from extra challenges

From: [BC Performance Standards - Reading - Introduction \(gov.bc.ca\)](#), p. 2.

students who meet expectations at a *minimal level* might be OK but need monitoring and may require intervention(s). Students who are *not yet within* expectations likely require intervention and possibly assessment.

When a teacher rates a student's performance as "not yet within expectations" for their grade, that is a moment to ask:

- Would more information help to determine why a student is not meeting expectations?

The need for more information is clear, even at young ages, in the instances of global difficulties or specific severe difficulties or delays in development or learning. It is reasonable, however, to provide an intervention while waiting for an assessment – and evaluating the success of the intervention while waiting.

### Comparing a student to themselves

Parents or teachers might wonder whether a student is learning as well as they could. For example, a student might have well-developed abilities in oral language (“fully-meets” or “exceeds” expectations) but meets expectations at a minimal level for reading decoding. School personnel might find such a discrepancy sufficient to approve a psych-ed.

### Evaluating the success of an intervention

In some schools, intervention is a type of screening that involves a “Response to Intervention” (**RTI**). Staff providing school-based interventions monitor the success of intervention and report to parents and classroom teachers.

If intervention is not successful, school staff might recommend a referral for a psych-ed to obtain more information.

This is an appropriate use of **RTI** as a screening procedure *and* is an important addition to a student’s history. For example, a diagnosis of specific learning disorder requires a history that includes a targeted attempt to remediate a learning difficulty.

### Other reasons to consider a Psych-ed referral

There are other reasons to consider a referral for a psych-ed. The importance of these might vary across schools and districts:

- To evaluate reluctance by a child to attend school
- To evaluate substantial declines in social or academic performance
- To evaluate support needs for post-secondary education
- To review the need to continue intervention
- To evaluate eligibility for support by an agency such as Community Living BC
- As part of a referral for further assessment by specialists (e.g., for diagnosis of ASD)

- To evaluate qualifications for a programme or school that requires such information
- To assist in determining if retention is appropriate<sup>1</sup>

### Who should not have a Psych-ed?

Resistant students or parents are not likely to benefit from the results of a psych-ed. The process of *informed consent* required to begin a psych-ed can help to sort students and their families into those who are willing to participate in a psych-ed and those who are not.

### And if you are not sure about asking for a Psych-ed?

Some K-12 authorities might provide assessments related to post-secondary education, while others might not.

<sup>1</sup> While there is not straightforward evidence as to the usefulness of an assessment with respect to retention in a grade placement, this is such a major intervention in the life of a student that it seems reasonable and prudent to assemble all information possible before making such a decision.



Some districts may rarely provide psych-eds for students in primary grades because children in primary grades may “catch up” on their own or with school-based interventions.

If you are a parent of a child for whom you believe a psych-ed might be helpful, or if you are a mature minor who desires this service, and if it is important to you to have this performed by your education authority, you may request that service. If school staff do not agree with your request, see POPARD FAQ: [What do I do if I do not agree with the goals on the IEP?](#)

**IF YOU HAVE  
QUESTIONS OR  
WOULD LIKE  
FURTHER  
INFORMATION  
CONTACT POPARD'S  
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A parent may decide to obtain an assessment privately. In that case, screening for referral is not an issue, though reviewing how well Performance Standards are being met is helpful in the decision to seek a private assessment. See: POPARD FAQ: [How do I find professionals \[professional services\] outside of school in my community?](#)