



CASP Position Paper

Online Psychoeducational Assessments

There are a handful of companies that are currently marketing online psychoeducational assessments to school districts within California. Some of these companies are training “aides” who sit next to the students during these online assessment processes. The California Association of School Psychologists (CASP) has concerns about this practice.

A shortage of school psychologists currently exists in California and throughout most of the nation. This shortage of available school psychologists is one of the reasons why companies are beginning to offer alternative solutions, such as online assessment for students. While this approach could help to meet compliance issues regarding assessment and special education law during this shortage of qualified school psychologists, this method is also fraught with many pitfalls. As California has unique regulations, the school psychologist who is providing the online assessment for a student residing in the state would need to be credentialed in California. Ethically, the school psychologist will also need to be up-to-date regarding California special education laws and regulations. It is unclear as to who is responsible to ensure that the school psychologist completing the online assessment is knowledgeable in the application of these laws and regulation.

CASP supports these online activities if they are being pursued for the following reasons and in the conditions:

- For expanding available service delivery, including direct service, supervision, consultations, especially to rural, poorly resourced urban communities and not-always-easy-to-reach-or-access places such as Native American reservations.
- Specialized training is provided to paraeducators who will proctor these assessments. As standardized tests must be administered exactly as prescribed in the manual, the training is critical and may be complex, depending on the nature of the test’s stimulus. To what level of the paraeducator’s training qualifies to assist in administration and what level training in knowledge of the responsibilities, such as test security, confidentiality, etc., are salient points. In addition, ensuring student cooperation, motivation, and proctor neutrality are a few keys to valid assessment results.
- Technology standards (such as size of screen, digital resolution, internet speed, number of cameras, etc.) are established for a valid online administration.
- Standardized tests being utilized in the online assessment practice have been properly vetted for this use to ensure validity of the results for important student decisions. It is not yet clear if the publishing companies have a plan for a wide range of tools for this purpose.¹ Publishing companies may want to halt these online assessment companies’ use of their standardized instruments until proper validation studies can be completed.

¹ Houghton Mifflin Harcourt has contracted with PresenceLearning, Inc., for online assessments using the *Woodcock-Johnson IV* Cognitive and Achievement Tests. See the notes section of this paper regarding a 2016 study done on the practice.

CASP does not support these activities under the following conditions:

- These assessments displace the hiring of qualified school psychologists who can provide much more cohesive service delivery.
- These assessments replace, instead of supplement, on-site assessments. There is a limited number of assessment tools that are available for use for online psychoeducational assessment. Therefore, online results would not likely be able to assess the wide range of areas that are necessary, dependent upon the referral question(s). School psychologists need access to a wide range of tools to ensure appropriate assessments for students due to various areas of disability ranging from autism to traumatic brain injury.

Overall, CASP strongly believes that quality psychoeducational assessments are essential to understanding the needs of students in order to plan appropriate educational opportunities designed for student success. Therefore, CASP supports online assessment only under specific conditions. Due to all the limitations associated with online assessments, each school district that utilizes online psychoeducational assessments must ensure that parents are fully informed of the limitations of results obtained from this alternative approach. There is little doubt that gathering confidential and accurate data solely through a camera cannot be as comprehensive as gathering data through personal interactions.

A particular area of concern is with cases when social-emotional assessment is deemed needed as part of the assessment process. It is unclear as to the potential problematic impact of having an aide present in the room during this part of the assessment. Also unclear is the impact to the potential limited rapport between student and school psychologist in the online environment, which may impact the validity of the social-emotional assessment results.

As CASP has many reservations about this practice; we offer some possible solutions:

- CASP will continue to promote and market the field of school psychology to potential job candidates to assist with the shortage of school psychologists within the state.
- CASP will assist school districts to reach out to Licensed Educational Psychologists (LEP) within their community. LEPs are mandated to have worked as a school psychologist for a minimum of three years and therefore, are prime candidates for unfilled positions. CASP maintains a list of LEPs who are interested in providing assessments as part of their current practice.
- CASP will advertise for school psychologists to administer standardized tests via online when publishers take on the task of standardization in the context of online delivery.
- CASP will continue to offer legal and ethical updates and mentoring for qualified school psychologists new to the state.

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Notes

Equivalence of Remote, Online Administration and Traditional, Face-to-Face Administration of Woodcock-Johnson IV Cognitive and Achievement Tests, by A. Jordan Wright, PhD, ABAP (September, 2016), evaluated the equivalence of the scatter of scores captured by remote, online administration of the WJ IV (Schrank et al., 2014) and traditional, in-person administration. The goal was to evaluate both cluster and individual test standard scores, to determine if the scores are interchangeable in the two formats, and if so that the current normative and psychometric information can be applied to both administration formats.

The author concluded that the present study suggests that the scores elicited by the two different administration methods are equivalent and interchangeable, and as such all the WJ IV normative and psychometric (reliability, validity, utility) research can be applied confidently to the new online, remote administration of the tests. However, the 240-student sample size was a general school sample, rather than a sample from a specific clinical population, so generalizability is limited. Plus, the aides and school psychologists involved in the study received strict training protocols which may, or may not, be duplicated in school districts. CASP believes much more study is needed before it can be concluded that the two different administration methods are equivalent and interchangeable. Meanwhile, CASP endorses a wide range of assessment tools be used rather than one online assessment to determine eligibility for services.