

What Is the IQ-Achievement Discrepancy Model?

The IQ-achievement discrepancy model is the traditional method used to determine if a student has a learning disability and needs special education services. The discrepancy model is based on the concept of the normal curve. The discrepancy model assesses whether a substantial difference, or discrepancy, exists between a student's scores on an individualized test of general intelligence (IQ test, such as *WISC-IV*) and his or her scores obtained for one or more areas of academic achievement (e.g., *Woodcock-Johnson Achievement Test*). The accepted criteria to identify a student as having a learning disability using the IQ-achievement discrepancy is a difference of at least two standard deviations (30 points).

Concerns About the IQ-Achievement Discrepancy Model

Many teachers express concern and frustration that the IQ-achievement discrepancy model rarely identifies children with learning disabilities in the early grades. Rather, these children often struggle for years before they are finally identified.

Another limitation of the IQ-achievement discrepancy model is that it does not assess or inform the quality of instruction students are receiving. Some students may be identified as having learning disabilities when, in reality, they simply have not experienced classroom instruction that meets their learning needs. Furthermore, the assessments that are used to identify a learning disability do not provide information that can easily be used to guide subsequent instruction.

To summarize, here are some concerns about the IQ-achievement discrepancy model:

- Assessments do not always discriminate between disabilities and the results of inadequate teaching.
- Students can be misidentified due to teacher or testing bias.
- Typically, students must first fail in order to qualify for special education services.
- Results from assessments do not inform the instructional process.
- Many students do not meet the discrepancy criteria but would still benefit from early identification and support to remediate their skills.

Advantages of the IQ-Achievement Discrepancy Model

Although many professionals are frustrated with the IQ-achievement discrepancy model here are a few advantages that might still appeal to some schools:

- The IQ-achievement discrepancy model is an already established practice.
- It is relatively easy to employ.
- A teacher does not have to spend a great amount of time in the identification process because a certified diagnostician or school psychologist conducts the IQ and achievement tests.

- The identification procedure only requires a one-time assessment.