

12-2021

## **Pobody's Nerfect: Improving the Identification and Diagnosis of Learning Disabilities**

Jocelyn Kiser

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.csumb.edu/caps\\_thes\\_all](https://digitalcommons.csumb.edu/caps_thes_all)

---

This Capstone Project (Open Access) is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ CSUMB. It has been accepted for inclusion in Capstone Projects and Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ CSUMB. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@csumb.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@csumb.edu).

**Pobody's Nerfect: Improving the Identification and Diagnosis of Learning Disabilities**

Estela Hernandez-Martinez, Jizelle Rios, Jocelyn Kiser, Katie Szeto, Madalyn Nico

California State University Monterey Bay

LS 400: Senior Capstone

December 20, 2021

### **Abstract**

The focus of this Capstone Project is on improving the identification and diagnosis of learning disabilities. This is important because diagnosing a child properly will help teachers understand the students' learning styles and better position the teachers to create more effective learning environments. Also, teachers will be able to better support and accommodate their students both academically and socially. It is argued that many teachers do not have the right resources, understanding, or authority to diagnose learning disabilities. The primary stakeholder perspectives obtained were from teachers, staff, and students because of their relevant experiences and roles in identifying and addressing learning disabilities. After interviewing the participants, three action options emerged from an analysis of the data and were explored as ways to address the issue presented. Implementing monthly check-ups and annual teacher trainings are argued to be the most effective way to achieve the goals of improving the identification and diagnosis of learning disabilities.

## Improving the Identification and Diagnosis of Learning Disabilities

One of my cousins, we will call him Jay, has severe attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Jay went through elementary school without being diagnosed with ADHD. His teachers and instructors did not know how to diagnose a student, and they did not know much of anything about disabilities like ADHD. His parents did not want to admit that something may be wrong, so they never took him to get tested. Jay was constantly acting out and misbehaving at school and at home, but no one knew or wanted to speak up about what may be happening.

While at school, his misbehavior was causing him to get pulled out of class a lot, so he missed a lot of instruction. This was causing his grades to drop. It was also causing him to lose connections with his friends. Jay was becoming depressed because he felt like all he was able to do was cause trouble and get sent out of class. This continued to happen throughout his elementary school years (kindergarten through sixth grade). He was continuously missing classwork, homework, and a lot of instruction in general; and he was lacking the connections he needed at school to feel comfortable.

Once he reached middle school, one of his teachers went to the school psychologist and special education teacher to set up a meeting. They discussed Jay's behavior and what could be going on other than him just acting out. Together, they came to the conclusion that he might have some type of disorder. The school psychologist called his parents and set up a meeting with them to inform them. At first, my aunt and uncle did not want to admit that something may be wrong with their son. They talked to my grandma and my parents about it before making a decision. My parents told them that if it was their child in that situation, they would get him tested just to be

safe rather than sorry. My grandma told them that it was their decision and she did not want to influence it.

After around six months of debate between my aunt and uncle, my uncle decided that Jay should get tested. Jay was still going through missing class and being alone at school during this time period. He still had no idea what was going on with him. It was still more time that he was going undiagnosed. My uncle finally took him to get tested even though my aunt was not on board with the decision. Come to find out, he has ADHD. They were given options to support him, but my aunt and uncle made the decision to put him on medication for his ADHD. I think this was the best thing that they could do.

Ever since Jay started his medication, his behavior, in general, has improved. He loves going to school now, and he has many friends now. He is getting ready to graduate high school soon and his plan is to go to a trade school to learn how to work in construction. Even though the process of diagnosing him took longer than it should have, I am so glad that it eventually happened.

### **Literature Synthesis & Integration**

Identifying and diagnosing students with learning disabilities have been discussed in papers, articles, and journals. The list of people that are interested in this topic is endless. Psychologists, teachers, journalists, and student researchers are the groups of most interested people. This topic is educationally significant because students who have a difficult time in school might have a learning disability but go through many troubles before being correctly diagnosed. I am interested in this topic because knowing how to help students with learning disabilities will make me a better teacher.

### **What is the Problem?**

The identification of learning disabilities has its challenges. Students with learning disabilities struggle with learning in some subjects, mainly reading, writing, and mathematics (Kranzler et al., 2019). They typically underachieve compared to the average student in their grade. Schools are required to use a method of identification to find out how students are underachieving and what can be done to help them. This usually includes a diagnose of a learning disability. The current methods to identify learning disabilities are Intelligence-Achievement Discrepancy (IAD), Response to Intervention (RtI), and pattern of strengths and weaknesses (PSW) (Benson et al., 2020; Maki & Adams, 2018). However, these methods completed by school psychologists do not always work. Sometimes, students are misdiagnosed or not diagnosed at all.

### **Why is it an Issue?**

Students who are misdiagnosed or not diagnosed at all are put at risk of doing poorly in school. They do not get the necessary support they need to succeed. This leads to a lack of confidence, misbehaving, and withdrawal from school. Students with undiagnosed or misdiagnosed learning disabilities continue to do unsatisfactory in school. They question why they fall behind in their class(es) and what is wrong with them. Asking questions like these can cause them to act out and misbehave in class because they can not follow what is being taught and actively participate in lessons and activities. Once these students reach higher education, like high school, they begin to feel like they will never catch on and will never learn anything. This is what leads to them wanting to withdraw from school. If they do not know what is happening to them, and no one else seems to know, they might feel confused about the purpose of attending school.

### **What Has and Should Be Done?**

Teachers, administrators, and parents should provide a nurturing environment for students. Students need to be accommodated for many different learning styles and individual differences. School psychologists should be using the training they receive to help the students and give the students adequate support. If school psychologists and staff can provide what students need to succeed and parents support their children, then students with learning disabilities can academically achieve.

There should be nationwide requirements for how school psychologists should be identifying students with learning disabilities. There can be different methods that they can use, but they should learn about all the techniques and which is used best in which situations. This way, they can adequately diagnose students the first time. Also, psychologists should not let their personal bias and beliefs about learning disabilities affect their ability to identify learning disabilities. If there are nationwide requirements, then there will be no question about the different methods, disabilities, and if the students should be diagnosed. The only national requirement is the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA), which was signed into law in 1975 (About IDEA, 2020). It states that all children with disabilities should receive free and suitable public education.

## **Conclusion**

There are multiple people interested in the topic of the identification and diagnosis of students with learning disabilities. Some people have researched issues about the misidentification and even nonexistent diagnosis of learning disabilities. Students that are misidentified or undiagnosed endure negative feelings that might result in them not being able to learn what they need to and possibly dropping out of school. There has not been much done to

help improve the identification and diagnosis of learning disabilities, and there should be more done to help these students.

### **Method**

For this Capstone Project, the researchers investigated how teachers and students view difficulties in diagnosing children's learning disabilities and what they think could improve them. Based on an analysis of the data and the relevant research literature, the researchers used what they have learned to formulate an action that responds to the difficulties of diagnosing children's learning disabilities in a way that inspires, informs, or involves a particular audience.

### **Context**

Each of the researchers collected data from different schools. Those schools will be described below.

#### ***Estela***

Sky Union Elementary School is located just south of the city of Salinas California. The school is close to the fields and small, but it is one of the top 50% of public schools in California and serves 330 students. The minority enrollment, 99% of the students are Hispanic according to their 2019-2020 SARC.

Mariposa High School is located in Mariposa California. Mariposa High was opened in 2006 and is within the Monterey Peninsula Unified School district. According to their SARC 2019-2020, the school serves 600 students in grades 9-12 and 23.1% of students are Hispanic, 45.1% are White, Asian 23.3%, and African American 1.0%. In addition, the school has a great program to support students with learning disabilities

#### ***Jizelle***

Clydesdale Elementary School<sup>1</sup> is located in Southern California. The school is situated in an equestrian district, having large ranches surrounding the school. The two largest ethnic groups in the students' population are Hispanic at 95.6% and Asian at 4%. According to their 2019-2020 SARC (School Accountability Report Card), the school is in good physical condition. Out of the whole student population, 12.5% of students have disabilities.

Akers Elementary School is located in Central California. The school is situated in the middle of a residential neighborhood, next to an open-field park. The two largest ethnic groups in the students' population are Hispanic at 71.5% and white at 11.6%. Relevant statistics indicate that 13.4% of the students have disabilities. According to their 2019-2020 SARC, the school is in good physical condition.

### *Jocelyn*

Card View Elementary is located in Monterey, California. They offer transitional kindergarten (TK) through sixth grade. According to the 2019-2020 SARC, the two largest racial groups are White (at 50.1%) and Hispanic or Latino (at 30.7%). Out of the entire school population, 6.8% of the students have disabilities. When all students with disabilities took the CAASPP, only 17.65% met or exceeded the standards. The school does not have any full-time support services staff. It seems the only support program they have is their Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS) system.

Sand Carla School District is located in the Bay Area. They offer kindergarten through eighth grade. According to the 2019-2020 SARC, the two largest racial groups are White (at 56.73%) and Hispanic or Latino (at 14.86%). Out of the entire school population, 7.06% of the students have disabilities. The school does not have any full-time support services staff.

However, they do have at least one part-time counselor for social, behavioral, or career

---

<sup>1</sup> Pseudonyms have been used for the names of people, places, and organizations.

development, at least one part-time psychologist, and at least one part-time speech, language, and hearing specialist.

Charles Water is located in Monterey County. They offer second grade through twelfth grade. According to the 2019-2020 SARC, the two largest racial groups are White (at 78%) and Hispanic or Latino (at 12%). Out of the entire school population, 100% of the students have disabilities. When all students with disabilities took the CAASPP, only 44.5% met or exceeded the standards. The school has academic counselors, a behavior specialist, learning specialists, a speech and language pathologist, an occupational therapist. and classroom aides and assistants.

### ***Katie***

Las Positas Elementary school is located in Northern California and opened in September 1973. According to their 2019-2020 SARC, the two largest groups are Asian at 71% and White at 18.5%. Out of the entire school population, about 6.8% have learning disabilities. The school's physical condition is fair.

Birdie Falcon High School is in Bay Area, California and was opened in 1973. According to the 2019-2020 SARC, the two largest groups are Asian at 42% and White at 37.8%. Additionally, 7.5% of the students have learning disabilities. The school's condition is exemplary.

### ***Maddie***

Watson school is located in Seashore, California. The elementary school was opened in 1983. The 2019-2020 SARC states that the student population is 78% white, 12% Hispanic or Latino, 5% Asian and African descent. The school facility is in moderate condition.

Christian Church School is a school located in Mountain, California. The School was founded in 1898. According to the Christian Church website, since it is a private school, it does

not produce a SARC report. The school has served students from all over Mountain California for 123 years. The school is a faith-based school that teaches religious views along with academics. Many historical buildings at Christian Church School are in good condition.

### **Participants and Participant Selection**

Each researcher interviewed at least two participants.

#### ***Estella***

**K. Farson.** A special education teacher at Mariposa High School who teaches ninth grade. Before becoming a Special ED teacher, she started as a Behavior Technician in the LEAP program at Mariposa High School, where she was the support staff in the Special Education classrooms.

**B. Jonn.** General ED Teacher at Sky elementary school. Took twelve units of special ED classes and have being colabollative with special ED teachers

#### ***Jizelle***

**Y. Rather.** A Hispanic teacher at Clydesdale Elementary School who teaches a first and kindergarten combination class. She has taught at charter and public schools. She has over ten years of teaching experience.

**D. Cross.** A behavior intervention assistant at Akers Elementary School. She helps students with disabilities and behavioral issues by coming up with solutions and teaching appropriate behavior for the classroom.

#### ***Jocelyn***

**J. Hayes.** This teacher in training at Card View Elementary was invited to participate due to her relevant experience and role as a kindergarten teacher.

**M. Nike.** This student attended schools in Sand Carla School District from kindergarten

to eighth grade and Charles Water for high school. She was invited to participate due to her relevant experience and role as a student with a learning disability.

### ***Katie***

**K. Paterson.** A white female kindergarten teacher at Las Positas Elementary School. She has been teaching for 30 years at multiple schools. She has taught students with and without learning disabilities.

**P. Mason.** A white male special education teacher. He has taught at Birdie Falcon High School for three years. He is part of the Special Education program. He teaches Algebra, English, and Learning Lab. He taught Special Education Mild to Moderate last year.

### ***Maddy***

**C. Royal.** A white female principal at Christian Church School. She has taught many students of all different backgrounds of learning for 30 years. She has served as a teacher at other schools conducting special education in grades kindergarten through eighth grade.

**M. Road.** A white female teacher at Watson school for 20 years. In her time teaching at Watson school, she obtained a degree in teaching and special education. Her goal as a teacher is to help students with learning disabilities be successful in their academics.

**A. Numa.** A white female principal was also at Watson school for five years. As a principal at Watson school, she has tremendously changed Watson school to be a more accepting and focused school on learning disabilities.

### **Researcher**

Below, each researcher will reflect on their relationship to the issue of the identification and diagnosis of learning disabilities.

### ***Estella***

I am interested in this topic because I have relatives who have special needs. I also want to become an elementary school teacher, so having knowledge about this topic will help me to understand my students and to be able to address their problems when necessary. I want to have a better understanding of this topic as some of the participants have educational backgrounds working with learning disabilities. I will gain insights as my understanding of this topic is very limited. I believe that getting this knowledge from people who already work with students will help me in the long run, and I will be more aware of their needs.

***Jizelle***

This topic is important to me because, as a child, I was diagnosed with dyslexia. Still, upon further testing, the school psychologist at my elementary school found that I did not have dyslexia but a visual processing disorder. Having a correct diagnosis would have given my teachers a clearer lesson plan that would have benefitted my learning outcome.

I am pursuing a degree in teaching, so I have chosen my participants to be people with educational backgrounds. They also have knowledge of special education and learning disabilities. I am not as well-rounded in disabilities as the participants, but I have a limited understanding of the subject. Being someone with a disability and being misdiagnosed gives me an understanding of how this may impact a student's behavior and academic performance. I learned more about the process that teachers, staff, and school administrators have to help teachers and parents create a learning environment that will help their students academically and emotionally.

***Jocelyn***

I am interested in teaching special education in elementary school. By researching this topic, I will better understand my students, even in other types of classrooms besides special

education. I will also be able to assist students with learning disabilities better. I am similar to our participants because I want to teach in an elementary school. A few of our participants are special education teachers, while others are general education teachers. I am different from the participants because I do not know how to aid students with learning disabilities. I need to be open-minded when listening to my group members and the participants, and I should also keep in mind that I should ask my group members for help.

***Katie***

When I was five years old, my parents and I went to a psychiatrist at Dawn Elementary School to find out what my learning disability results were before getting ready for Henry Elementary School. The school psychologist thought I had Autism and had me tested, but I did not have Autism. The school psychologist wanted to send me to Children's Hospital to get more testing. The psychiatrist at Children's Hospital wanted to know if I could interact with the doctors to measure my social interactions, which I was able to do. I found out later that I had speech and language impairment.

The participants are people who have an educational background. I see most teachers who teach special education and they do not appear to have a learning disability. It can be hard to tell if the teacher has a learning disability, so we do not know if the participants have a learning disability. There are other people who have a learning disability like me. We all go through different experiences. I have a background in special education but do not have a background in teaching like the participants.

I feel like we need to get in communication with my group for this project. I think my group should do roles on what we need to do. We should all work as a team. This can help everyone go forward with the project. When I work with students with learning disabilities you

have to show care and patience with people. We should make sure we watch out for the timing schedule when we set up a meeting on Zoom.

### ***Maddy***

This topic is meaningful to me because, in first grade, I was diagnosed with a learning disability called auditory processing disorder, which causes the brain to process slower than the average person. This has had not only a significant impact on my learning but also my daily life. My goal as a teacher is to show students what they can do despite their disabilities. As for this subject, I feel over the years, I have gained more knowledge not only about my disability but other disabilities as well. This is an excellent tool for our project to understand the difference between misdiagnosing and diagnosing disabilities. Because this topic connects well with my life, the participants I chose understand and have experience in knowing about learning disabilities. These people include connections from schools I have been to and teachers I have developed relationships with. As for differences, I can not say I know all the knowledge about every disability and what other participants have gone through in their own experiences with a learning disability. Still, I will try my best to understand. As for my thoughts, feelings, or assumptions, I need to be mindful of others as I continue with this project by being flexible and coordinating with others' lives outside of class. I will also understand and listen to other thoughts and opinions about the project.

### **Semi-Structured Interview and Survey Questions**

For this project, three different groups served as participants and unique interview questions were developed for each group. The questions are shared below.

**Teacher Interview.** The following questions were asked to the teacher and teacher in training participants.

1. What is your background in teaching and working with students with special needs?
2. What are your or your school's protocols to diagnose students with learning disabilities?
3. What are you most concerned about when it comes to identifying and diagnosing children with learning disabilities?
4. What is currently being done to improve the identification and diagnosis of students with learning disabilities - by whom - and what are the strengths and weaknesses of these efforts?
5. What do you think should be done to improve the identification and diagnosis of students with learning disabilities?
6. Is there anything else that you would like to say about the identification and diagnosis of students with learning disabilities?

**Student Survey.** The following questions were asked to student participants.

1. What was your schooling experience like regarding having a learning disability?
2. How were you diagnosed? Did the school have any part in diagnosing you?
3. Based on your experience, what are you most concerned about when it comes to identifying and diagnosing children with learning disabilities?
4. When you were in K-12, was there anything being done to improve the identification and diagnosis of students with learning disabilities - by whom - and what are the strengths and weaknesses of these efforts?
5. What do you think should be done to improve the identification and diagnosis of students with learning disabilities?

6. Is there anything else that you would like to say about the identification and diagnosis of students with learning disabilities?

### **Procedure**

Participants have been interviewed. All interviews were conducted individually. When it was not possible to interview participants in person, they were invited to complete a phone interview or a paper and pencil survey of the same questions. Face-to-Face interviews took less than one hour, audio-recorded (with participant consent), and taken at the participant's school. A semi-structured interview format was used for face-to-face interviews to allow follow-up questions to unclear, interesting, or unexpected responses. All interviews and surveys were scheduled at the convenience of the interviewee and took approximately 20 minutes to complete.

### **Data Analysis**

Transcribed interviews were coded and analyzed for emergent themes.

### **Results**

For this Capstone Project, teachers and school staff were interviewed to see what they think could improve the methods for identifying and diagnosing children with learning disabilities. This is important because diagnosing a child properly will help teachers understand the students' learning styles and create the proper learning environment for the children's needs. The hope is that teachers will be better able to support and accommodate their students academically. Based on an analysis of the data and the relevant research literature, three themes emerged (see Table 1). Evidence-based decision-making required evaluating each potential option by the following criteria: time, cost, and effectiveness. Time is an essential aspect because the following actions must fit with the schedules of those that are affected and doing the action. Cost can be a determining factor for a school because the cost of implementation must be within

the school's annual budget. Effectiveness plays a crucial role, as it considers how successful the outcome could be. Based on the evaluation of each option, an action will be recommended and justified.

Table 1

*Evaluation of Action Options*

Options↓	Criteria→ Time	Cost	Effectiveness
Monthly Check Ups	Medium	Low	Medium
Annual Teacher Training	Medium	Medium	High
Student Improvement Plan	High	Low	Medium

### **Monthly Check Ups**

Monthly check ups are vital because they give school staff a detailed monthly report on all students' who are displaying an academic achievement gap. Based on the data provided from the participant interviews, monthly meetings on the student's progress will give a consistent record of the student's academic and behavioral growth.

This option would not require extra allotted time to be given to school staff or teachers. Many schools already have teachers conducting meetings to check their classrooms' overall academic progress, so adding a monthly check up on students will not need a different time frame. One of the participants had mentioned, "most schools have monthly cycles of inquiry in which students are discussed on a monthly basis based on summative and formative assessments" (Y. Rather, personal communication, November 5, 2021). Based on students'

results on these assessments, teachers will decide how to help students that may show a learning gap.

A monthly check up would not have a cost, nor would it need a specific budget. Checking on academic and behavioral report cards from previous years and semesters that previous teachers conducted can be one form of doing the check up. The monthly report will be conducted by the student's current teacher, and the content within the report will be observational and statistical data from tests, work, and behavior. Analyzing the students' behavior in the classroom and going over their in-class assignments and homework will give substantial evidence of their academic progress.

The effectiveness of monthly checkups is moderate. When a teacher analyzes the data and finds a learning gap within the student, the teacher will then make accommodations for the student. Although they do provide a consistent paper trail of a student's progress, it may be difficult for teachers and administrators to identify traits of specific learning disabilities if they do not know how to spot these traits. One of the teachers that have been interviewed mentioned, "We normally need to meet three times in a year before we can even get the student to be considered for testing instead" (B. Jonn, personal communication, October, 28, 2021). Having the monthly meetings can help expedite the process, since there is evidence of an academic achievement gap.

### **Annual Teacher Training**

Teachers will have an annual mandatory teacher training that focuses on learning disabilities. As the behavior intervention assistant interviewee Cross stated, "As there is a rise in more students having learning disabilities throughout the years, teachers as well should be given training that helps them understand different learning disabilities" (D. Cross, personal

communication, October 18, 2021). The training will go over ways to create a better learning environment and identify traits commonly found in specific disabilities. Based on the data provided through the interviews, providing learning disability training helps teachers recognize the signs when students may need help (K. Fason, personal communication, October 27, 2021).

This option would not affect a school's amount of available time because the training would be given during a teacher in-service day, in which students do not attend school, but teachers go to work. The only cost for the training would be bringing in a specialist that knows about learning disabilities, if schools decide to pay for the specialist. Some schools might get volunteer specialists instead of having to pay them. This option would be effective in schools because teachers would know what signs to look for instead of not knowing how to help their students. One of the interviewees stated that, "I feel that if a teacher does not have the training that they need, they can't provide quality instruction" (K. Fason, personal communication, October 27, 2021). Which means that training is a must for teachers to be prepared in order to provide good services for their students. Even though the teachers would not diagnose the students themselves, interviewee Nike asserted that, "Teachers should gain more knowledge about the topic of learning disabilities"(M. Nike, personal communication, November 12, 2021). By gaining more knowledge about the topic, they would go to the school's psychologist or an appropriate administrator with their concerns. Furthermore, Fason agreed that we need quality trained teachers to better support students with learning disabilities, "We need to have more quality trained or trained teachers" (K. Fason, personal communication, October 27, 2021).

### **Student Improvement Plans**

The third strategy to help students is with a Student Improvement Plan. The Student Improvement Plan is made specific to students' individual needs. Students Improvement Plans

are created by a student support team. A student support team is a team of school staff that is assigned to a specific student in order to help support the student's educational needs. The team of staff can include the student's teacher, the school psychologist, a counselor, the student's parent/guardian, and any person that has resources to benefit the student. Often, teachers meet with parents and work together on the student's plan. If the student plan does not seem to give positive results, then the teacher collaborates and cooperates with the student support teams and special education teachers to make required changes. When their needs are adequately met, students with learning disabilities can reach their full potential (Sansom, 2015).

The amount of time for this option is considered high. There are multiple people involved, meaning time will be taken from multiple staff members. Also, the team will meet multiple times to discuss the student plans. So this will take more time from the staff. The cost for this option is considered low. There is no specific budget for student plans and the student support team. Staff members are voluntarily participating in the team, so there will not be a need to pay them more than their salary.

The effectiveness of student improvement plans is medium. Student support teams meet to discuss ways that they can help the student. As mentioned in an interview, "we do a Student Improvement Plan and meet with parents and set goals for six weeks. If needed, we make a second six week improvement plan and goals" (K. Paterson, personal communication, October 15, 2021). The plan is made for a fixed period of time to assess its effectiveness in helping the student academically so the achievement gap reduces. In kindergarten teacher Paterson's words, "if they do not meet their goals on both of those, we bring it up to the student support team with administrators and our special education teachers" (K. Paterson, personal communication, October 15, 2021). The student support team tries its best to help the student do better in school,

but there is no guarantee that the student will be diagnosed with a learning disability. As interviewee Mason stated, “When students have been identified, it is the school psychologist that knows the diagnosis” (P. Mason, personal communication, October 18, 2021). This would mean only one person has the knowledge and authority to diagnose the student. As interviewee Rather mentions, “Most SSTs do not lead to an evaluation, but the team of educators, instructional staff, parents, and psychologists work together to support students’ needs” (Y. Rather, personal communication, November 5, 2021). So, even if a student is not evaluated, the team still finds ways to aid the student. Being able to meet their needs and provide any other support to help them will increase their learning (Samson, 2015).

### **Conclusion**

Based on the evaluation of the action options, the recommendation would be to implement monthly check ups and annual teacher training. Schools would either ask a specialist to volunteer to give the training on learning disabilities or hire a specialist if it is within their budget. The training would be given during a teacher in-service day. Using the information teachers learn from the training, they would do monthly check ups on their students’ academic progress and behavior to see if any students show signs of a learning disability. This would allow teachers to bring any concerns they may have to an administrator or the school psychologist. The administrator or psychologist would take the information given to them and take appropriate steps to get support for the student.

**Concessions.** The first and second options being recommended as the best options to use does not mean that the third option would not be effective. It is best to see how well the child is doing in school. Based on research, the Student Improvement Plan is not being primarily recommended because there is no direct help from specialists, teachers, or school psychologists.

Similarly, through the Student Improvement Plan, students usually do not get any further assistance for evaluations. However, it is important that the purpose of the Student Improvement Plan is to increase the chance of learning. A way of offering support to students would be to encourage teamwork and collaboration.

**Limitations.** While this recommendation is the best option from the action options provided, it does have limitations. Schools may not be able to get a specialist to volunteer if they can not afford to hire one. This would cause the training to be less effective since teachers would be getting incomplete or possibly incorrect information. If there is no designated administrator for teachers to bring their concerns to, then there will not be a way for students to get support. Not all teachers would feel comfortable bringing up their concerns to a parent or the student directly.

**Potential negative outcomes.** If this action is implemented, there could be negative outcomes. Students that are diagnosed with a learning disability might not accept their status. This could lead to negative emotions such as frustration, agitation, and sadness. It could also lead to students developing generalized anxiety and clinical depression. Also, even if a student is diagnosed with a learning disability, that does not mean the school has the necessary resources to support the student and give them accommodations. Teachers may not be able to meet students' needs, and their teaching styles may not match the students' learning styles.

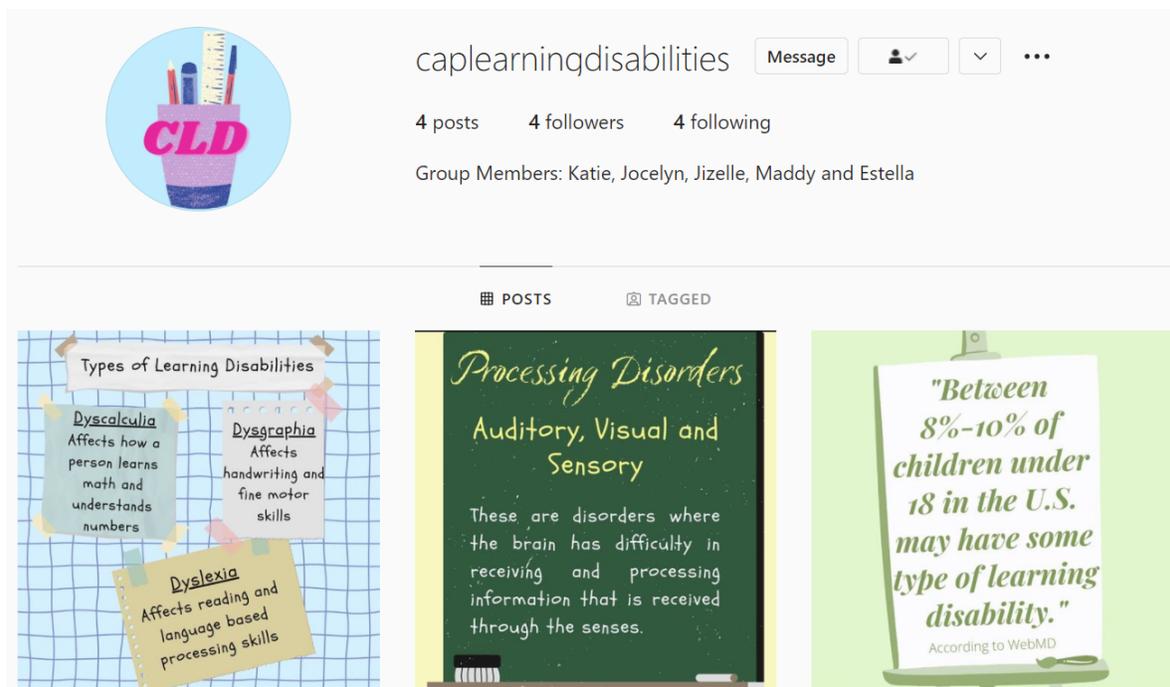
**Conclusion.**

Despite the concessions, limitations, and potential adverse outcomes, the best action option to recommend is implementing monthly check ups and annual teacher training to help reduce the difficulties of diagnosing students with learning disabilities. The combination of these two action options has the most potential reach. Both monthly check ups and teacher training do

not need outside scheduled time, making it easy for staff and teachers to implement it in their busy schedules. They also do not have a high cost making it easy to fit with a school's annual budget. Monthly checkups and annual teacher training work hand in hand. Monthly check ups become more effective when teachers get the proper training to understand and spot learning disabilities characteristics. For these reasons, having annual training and monthly check ups are highly beneficial to easing the stress in diagnosing students with learning disabilities.

### **Action Documentation and Critical Reflection**

The focus issue for this project is improving the methods for identifying and diagnosing children with learning disabilities. For our data, we interviewed a mix of teachers, school staff, and students. Three action options that emerged were monthly check ups, annual teacher training, and student improvement plans. We were unable to implement our action options, so we chose to create an Instagram account that promotes information about students with learning disabilities. This option was picked because it reaches a larger audience, including our intended audience, parents, teachers, and administrators. The platform is easy to use, and is installed on most people's smart devices. It is also accessible through a search engine or browser, making it accessible to all.



<https://www.instagram.com/caplearningdisabilities/>

### **Action Research Project Documentation and Reflection**

For this project, we researched our audience on Instagram to take action in promoting how teachers can be aware of their students' learning styles when they are dealing with a child with a learning disability in the classroom environment. On the Instagram account, we created posts with flyers and different photos to promote to the audience how to advocate for the students and give them the right tools to be successful. From doing this method of action, we found that our project did encourage teachers to take action in the classroom when handling students with learning disabilities. It was also surprising to see how engaged people were with the Instagram account. We made some changes and improvements when conducting this by directing our social media posts more towards educators than a regular Instagram audience. Because our topic is aimed to change the classroom setting, our audience would take action towards educators who need to be aware of this.

We wish we knew from the start how important it is to research a topic before diving into it. It is essential to get feedback from a professional who has handled students with learning disabilities along with resources we can use. We learned that working towards change can have an enormous impact on someone's academic career. Even though this is a small step, it is a significant step in empowering students to be advocated for and supported.

### **Critical Reflection**

Throughout participating in the Liberal Studies 400 course and completing the capstone project, I learned some things about myself, teaching and learning, and working towards change. In the past, I have struggled with my time management and spacing things out, so I have enough time to work on them. Doing the paper sections at different times in the semester helped me learn how to break complex tasks into parts and steps, which has helped me ease my stress levels. Also, it helped me learn how to manage my time better so that I do not overwhelm myself. In my past Liberal Studies courses, I realized that teachers should depend on their coworkers and that they should work in groups. I think working on this project in a group gave me a glimpse into what working with my future coworkers will be like. I learned to listen to other suggestions and how to work with them, which increased my knowledge about the topic. When my group members voiced their opinions, I listened to them and did not judge. When I start working in a school, I will use the knowledge I gained from my group work to participate in group discussions with my fellow teachers. Through doing the research for our topic, I learned different ways to collect information and how to interpret the information. I can use what I learned to look into other challenges that I, my students, or anyone I know face so I can determine ways to help them.

During my time at California State University, Monterey Bay (CSUMB) as a Liberal Studies (LS) major, I have taken courses that impacted my professional development. Every LS course I took in the past years taught me something new about being a teacher (MLO 1). I used to despise public speaking, but now I understand how to control my stress and anxiety while talking to people I do not know and groups of people. Through different presentations I gave and different groups that I worked with, I found my own ways of being confident in myself. My organizational skills have increased since I started my LS courses. Any time conflict occurred, I learned different ways to handle it and resolve issues, whether it was between myself and someone else or other people. Motivation, encouragement, and support are the foundations of building up my future students, and I acquired knowledge about how to do these things. Students require helpful feedback, and through truly useful and unfortunately insignificant feedback that I received from professors, I learned what type of feedback students will appreciate. Before I started college, many people told me that I can be very empathetic, but I never understood how. Through my courses at CSUMB, I gained knowledge about what it means to be empathetic and how to be empathetic, so I understand better now.

There have been LS classes that were specifically about social identities and multiculturalism (MLO 2). I learned a lot about what contributed to what myself and others went through in school based on how we identify ourselves. Due to my white privilege (even when I was unaware of what this term means), I received opportunities and resources that my peers and students at other schools may not have received. Also, I learned about ways I can help my students that are experiencing inequity in their schooling. Everyone goes through things outside of school, and we should all respect that even when we are unaware of what might be happening.

There was a LS course that was specifically about technology and how to use it in school. While I do not remember the number for it, I do remember what I learned in that class (MLO 3). On a daily basis, I use my personal laptop to complete assignments, and I did so in high school as well. Access to technology starting in elementary school can broaden students' learning and teachers' instruction. Using technology incorporates different learning styles, can improve collaboration, allows students to be more creative, and prepares students for the real world.

The courses that I have taken in which I was required to complete a research project taught me about social change and how to achieve it, even through little acts (MLO 4). I learned about different methods to collect data from stakeholders and how to execute those methods. By collecting data, I can define ways that I can support others, not just my students, in schooling. Overall, I believe that by passing my California Basic Educational Skills Test (CBEST) after my first year of college, receiving a California Subject Matter Exams (CSET) waiver, being accepted into a dual credential program, and graduating from CSUMB as an LS major shows that I am proficient in the subject areas that were covered in the LS courses and will be successful in my future career steps (MLO 5).

The next step that I will take on my route to becoming a teacher is attending California State University, Fresno as a dual credential program student. I will be taking classes for two years that will allow me to apply for my multiple subject teaching and my education specialist mild/moderate credentials. Then, I will take classes for another year to achieve my Master of Arts in Special Education. While I take my classes at Fresno State, I will also gain experience as a multiple subject teacher and a special education teacher. Through working in a school, I will make relationships with the staff and administrators that can help me when it comes time to apply for a job after I graduate.

## References

- About idea*. Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. (2020, November 24). Retrieved December 16, 2021, from <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/about-idea/>
- Benson, N. F., Maki, K. E., Floyd, R. G., Eckert, T. L., Kranzler, J. H., & Fefer, S. A. (2020). A national survey of school psychologists' practices in identifying specific learning disabilities. *School Psychology, 35*(2), 146–157. <https://doi.org/10.1037/spq0000344>
- Kranzler, J. H., Gilbert, K., Robert, C. R., Floyd, R. G., & Benson, N. F. (2019). Further examination of a critical assumption underlying the dual-discrepancy/consistency approach to specific learning disability identification. *School Psychology Review, 48*(3), 207–221. <https://doi.org/10.17105/spr-2018-0008.v48-3>
- Maki, K. E., & Adams, S. R. (2018). A current landscape of specific learning disability identification: Training, practices, and implications. *Psychology in the Schools, 56*(1), 18–31. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.22179>