

Understanding School Testing and Data

A Family Guide to Evaluations,
Progress Monitoring, and Advocacy



Presenters



Our Mission

Our mission is to empower families as advocates and partners in improving education and health outcomes for ALL children with disabilities, special healthcare needs and those impacted by behavioral health challenges.



Who is PPMD?

- Maryland's Special Education, Health, & Behavioral Health Information Center
- Established in 1990
- Governed by parents
- Our team is fully made up of parents and family members of children with disabilities, special healthcare, and behavioral health needs



Our Services

- One-on-one assistance to families
- Family peer support for
 - Disabilities
 - Special Healthcare Needs
 - Substance Use
 - Mental Health
 - Problem Gambling
- Resource sharing
- Topical trainings
 - Good Samaritan
 - IEP Basics
 - Early Childhood
 - Transition
 - And more!
- Leadership trainings
- Military outreach



We help families...

- Better understand their children's disabilities, education, healthcare & behavioral health needs
- Communicate more effectively with teams
- Understand their rights and responsibilities under special education law
- Understand their rights and benefits in behavioral and healthcare systems
- Obtain services for their loved ones
- Resolve disagreements with the school or other agencies
- Connect with other community resources



Presentation Goals



Understand why schools do testing and collect data



Learn common testing terms and score types



Read evaluation and progress reports with more confidence



Use data to support collaboration and advocacy



Feel more confident participating in IEP meetings and decision making

Your Experience with Testing and Data

How do you use data every day?

Have you ever been involved in discussions about data?

If so, how did it go?



I. Understanding the Purpose of Testing



Schools use testing to understand how a student learns and what support they need



Testing can help identify strengths, needs, and barriers to learning



Assessment data helps teams make decisions about instruction, interventions, and services



Testing is used in both general education and special education

We use data all the time!

- **Tracking schedules** — Calendars, school apps, and reminders help coordinate who needs to be where and when.
- **Meal planning** — Grocery lists, food prices, and nutrition labels help us decide what to buy and cook
- **Monitoring spending** — Bank apps show spending categories
- **Comparing prices** — Looking at store flyers, online prices, or coupons
- **Planning for big expenses** — We can use data about income, bills, and savings goals to make decisions
- **Weather alerts** — Data helps us decide what to wear or whether it's safe to travel
- **Traffic apps** — We use real-time traffic data to choose the best route
- **Fuel prices** — Apps show where gas is cheapest
- **Travel planning** — Flight times, hotel reviews, and maps are all data-driven
- **Screen-time tracking** — Parents use data to monitor device use
- **Game stats** — Kids (and adults) use data to improve gameplay

Data is just **information**

- Data are factual information – using data allows us to make decisions based on facts (not opinions, guesswork, or feelings)
- Meaningful data is reliable, valid, and accessible
 - Data are accurate and true every time (no matter who collects it)
 - The data measures what it's supposed to measure
 - Concerns, needs, and abilities of those looking at the data need to be considered when sharing and using it

As families, we need to:

Understand why data are important

Understand what data are being collected and how those data are used

Understand how we are/can be involved in using the data

It is essential for you to feel comfortable asking questions about and using data!

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

- ❖ Use a variety of assessment tools and strategies to gather relevant functional, developmental, and academic information
 - ❖ Disability present?
 - ❖ What needs to be in the content of the IEP?
- ❖ Provided and administered in the language and form most likely to yield accurate information on what the child knows and can do
- ❖ Sufficiently comprehensive to identify all of the child's special education and related services needs

Types of Assessments

General Education

- Universal Screening
- Classroom tests & quizzes
- Benchmark Assessments
- Progress Monitoring

Special Education

- Psychoeducational Evaluations
- Speech, OT, PT, or behavioral assessments
- Functional and adaptive assessments
- IEP Progress data

Common Types of Assessments



Screening: Quick checks to identify possible concerns



Diagnostic: In-depth testing to understand specific needs



Progress Monitoring: Frequent checks to see if interventions are working



Outcome Assessments: Measure overall learning and achievement

2. Areas Schools May Assess

Reading, writing, and math
(Used to compare a student's academic skills to grade-level expectations – what have they learned)

Cognitive Assessments (How a child thinks & processes information)

Attention, memory, processing, and problem solving

Disability-specific assessments (Autism, Specific Learning Disabilities)

Speech and language skills
(articulation, expressive, receptive & pragmatic)

Social, emotional, and behavioral functioning – this can include executive functioning and when behaviors interfere with learning

Fine motor, gross motor, visual motor and sensory needs

Daily living, adaptive, and functional skills

Why These Areas Matter

Assessment results help determine eligibility for services

Data helps identify appropriate supports and accommodations

Results guide instruction and intervention planning

Data can help measure progress over time

3. Understanding Key Data Concepts

Bell curves help compare scores to same-age peers

Percentiles show how a student performed compared to others

Standard scores help teams compare performance across areas

Growth measures show whether a student is making progress over time

Informed Parental Consent

- For evaluations
- For the initial provision of special education and related services
- 34 C.F.R. 300.300(a) & (b)



Making the Grade



Think About It Again

- What grade would you give the paper if 100 is a “C”?

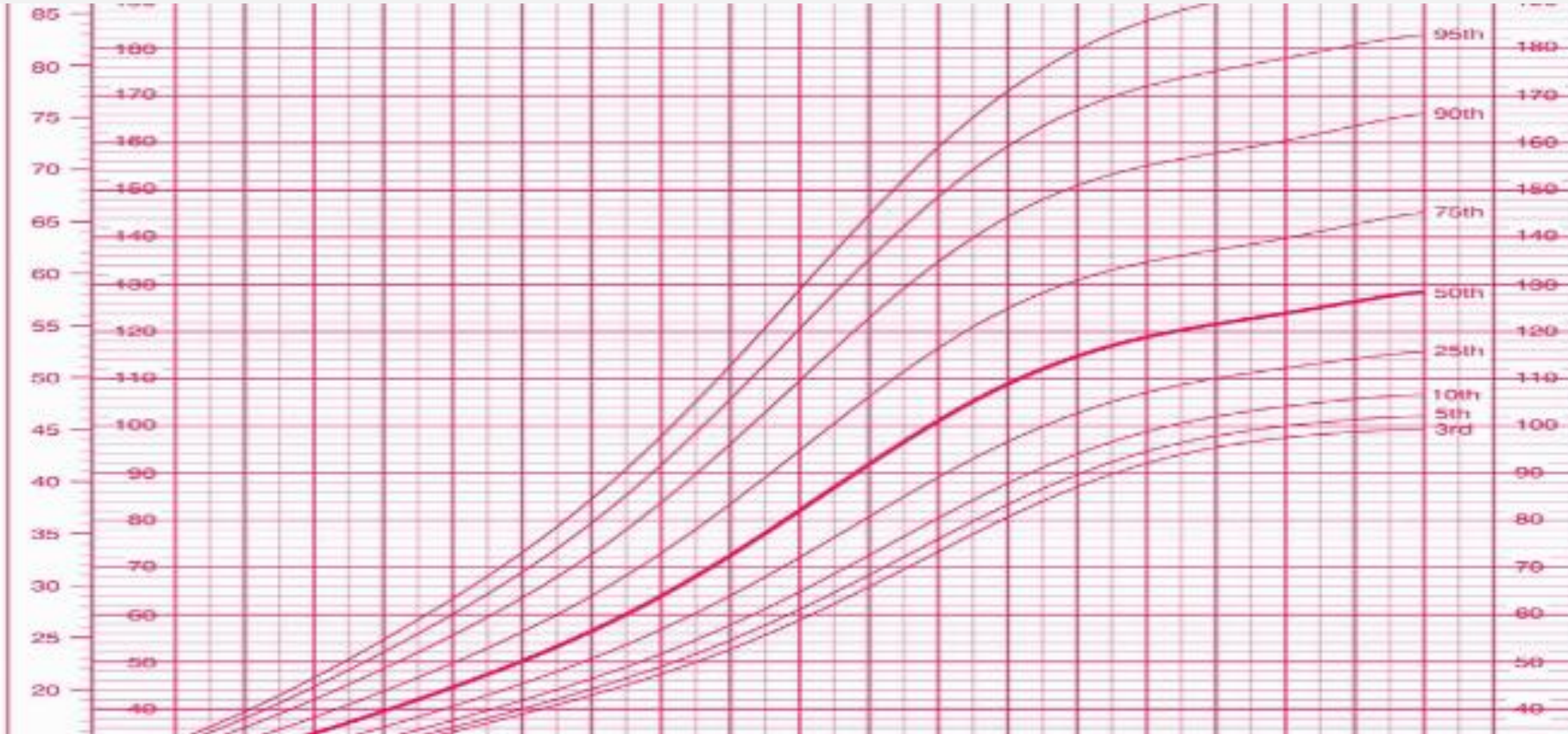




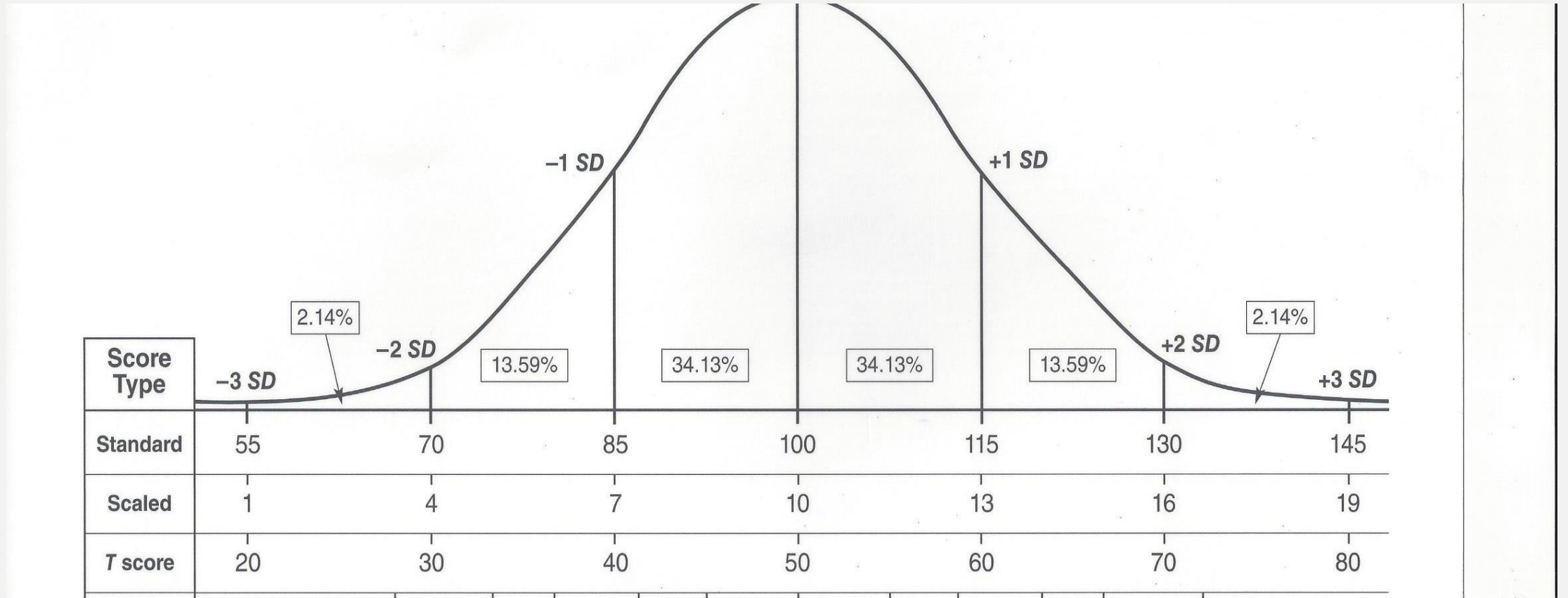
97.8 ° to 99.1 °



Weight Measurements



The Bell Curve



Bell Curve Theory

- Individual scores typically cluster near the center range and will gradually taper off at both ends.
- Standard deviation is the average distance from the average.
(15)
- 2 or more standard deviations from the average is considered significant

Composite Scores vs. Subtest Scores



Composite scores give a broad overview



Subtest scores provide details about specific skills



A student may have average overall scores but significant weaknesses in certain areas



Both overall and individual scores are important when planning supports

Index	Standard Score	Percentile	Description
VCI – Verbal Comprehension	118	88th	High Average
VSI – Visual Spatial	102	55th	Average
FRI – Fluid Reasoning	95	37th	Average
WMI – Working Memory	78	7th	Borderline
PSI – Processing Speed	132	98th	Very High
FSIQ – Full Scale IQ	103	58th	Average (but misleading due to scatter)

- **VCI – Verbal Comprehension:** Understanding and using language
- **VSI – Visual Spatial:** Solving visual puzzles
- **FRI – Fluid Reasoning:** Problem-solving and logic
- **WMI – Working Memory:** Holding and using information in mind
- **PSI – Processing Speed:** How quickly simple tasks are completed

Composite Scores

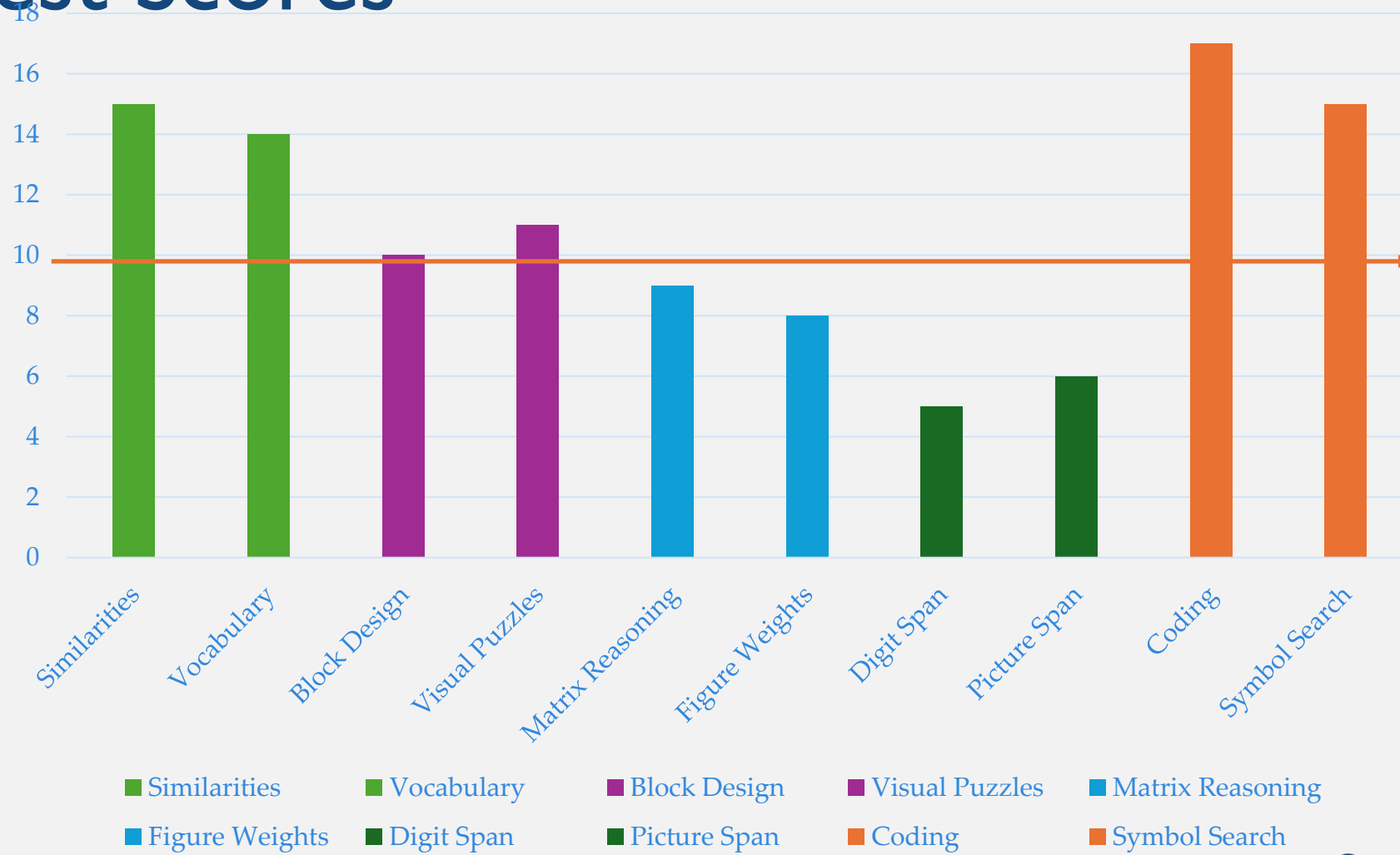


Subtest	Scaled Score (1–19)	Percentile	Notes
Similarities (VCI)	15	95th	Strong verbal reasoning
Vocabulary (VCI)	14	91st	Strong word knowledge
Block Design (VSI)	10	50th	Average visual-motor skills
Visual Puzzles (VSI)	11	63rd	Solid visual reasoning
Matrix Reasoning (FRI)	9	37th	Slightly below average
Figure Weights (FRI)	8	25th	Weakness in quantitative reasoning
Digit Span (WMI)	5	5th	Very low working memory
Picture Span (WMI)	6	9th	Low visual working memory
Coding (PSI)	17	99th	Extremely fast processing
Symbol Search (PSI)	15	95th	Very fast visual scanning

Think of subtests as the “pages” that make up each chapter.

Subtests help identify **specific strengths and challenges** that may not show up in the overall score.

Subtest Scores



4. Common Data Terms



Norm-Referenced: Compared to other students the same age



Criterion-Referenced: Compared to a specific skill or standard



Baseline: Starting point before instruction or intervention



Progress Monitoring: Ongoing checks to measure growth



Accommodations: Changes that help a student access learning



Modifications: Changes to what a student is expected to learn

Norm vs Criterion

Norm: based on age or grade



Criterion: what they learned



Baseline & Targets



Baseline – Starting point

- What your child does/knows now

Target – Ending point

- What your child will be able to do/know by a given date

Academic Reading Levels

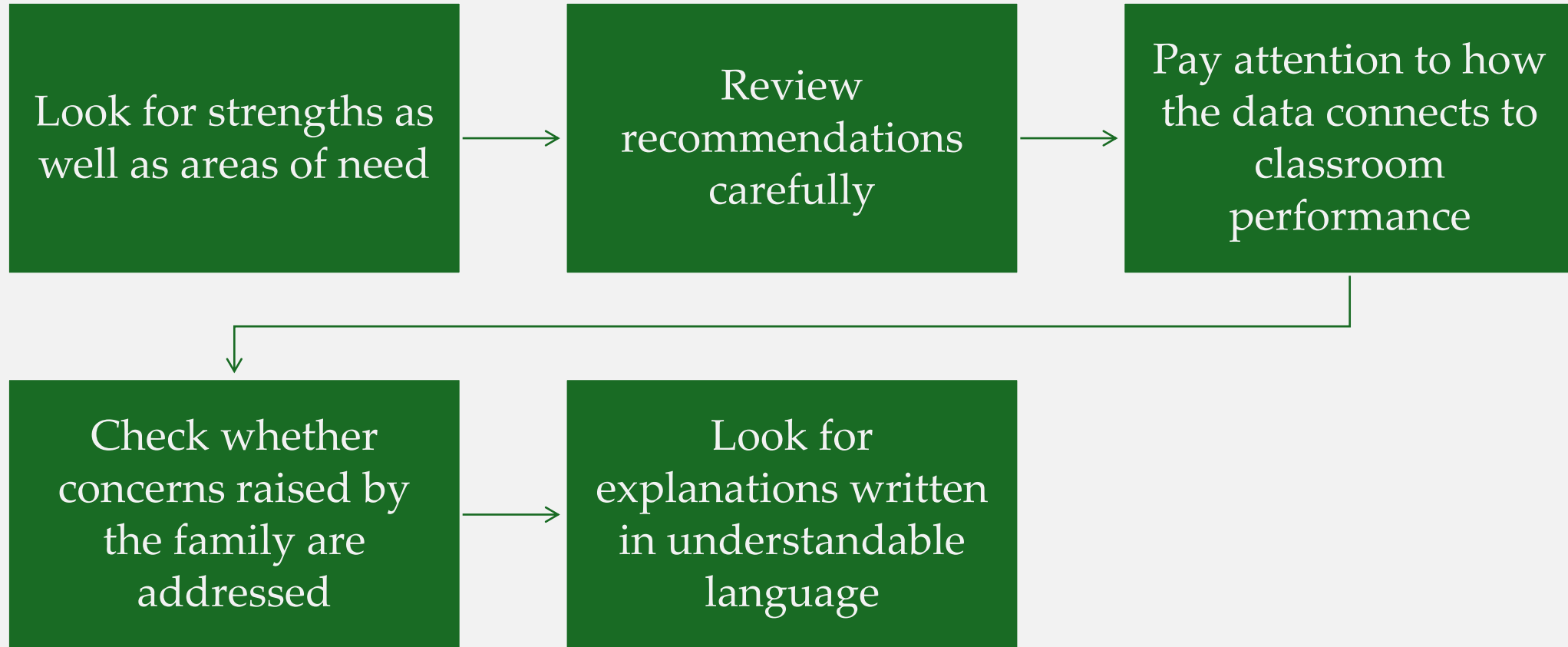
Independent Level: The student can complete the work successfully with little or no help

Instructional Level: The student can complete the work with teaching, support, prompting, or guidance

Frustration Level: The work is too difficult for the student to complete successfully, even with support

These levels help schools determine appropriate instruction, intervention, and support

5. Understanding Evaluation Reports



Questions Families Can Ask



“Can you explain this score in everyday language?”

“Which areas are my child’s strengths?”

“Which areas show they need support?”

“Are there big differences between the index scores?”

“How do these scores affect my child’s learning in class?”

“What accommodations or interventions match these needs?”

“What progress should we expect to see?”

“How will progress be monitored?”

“What does this look like for my child at home or in school?”

Take Away Tips



Different assessments have different measures

Figure out a way to chart your child's test scores that's comfortable for you

Compare Broad Scores and Subtest Scores

- Intellectual evaluation
 - Are the skills measured evenly developed?
 - If not, ask what impact that has on the classroom performance

Take Away Tips (cont'd)

Academic achievement

- Are the skills measured evenly developed?
- If not, ask how those discrepancies affect the child in the classroom
- If they are evenly developed, ask if your child is demonstrating these abilities in the classroom.
- If he's not demonstrating them, why not?



Key Advocacy Tips

- I don't understand.
- What does this look like in the classroom?
- What are we going to do differently?
- How are we going to measure progress?
- What is the expectation?



6. Understanding Progress Reports



Progress reports should explain whether the child is making meaningful progress toward IEP goals



Data should be specific, measurable, and easy to understand



Progress should connect directly to the student's goals and services



Families can ask for clarification if reports are unclear

Signs of Meaningful Progress



Skills are improving over time



The student needs less prompting or support



The student can use skills in different settings



Progress data shows steady growth



Instruction and supports are helping close skill gaps

Kristen Learns to Type



Within 12 months, given **explicit instruction in proper keyboarding techniques** (including posture, home-row finger placement, and touch typing methods), **daily structured practice** (10–15 minutes) using research-based typing programs, scaffolded drills progressing from accuracy to fluency, immediate corrective feedback, and weekly timed assessments, **Kristen will increase her typing speed from 18 correct words per minute (WPM) to 45 correct words per minute while maintaining at least 95% accuracy**, as measured by teacher-collected data and **weekly typing probes**.

How Do We Get To The Target?



Objective 1 (First Quarter):

Within 3 months, given daily structured typing practice, explicit instruction, and feedback, Kristen will increase her typing speed from 18 WPM to **25 correct WPM with at least 90% accuracy**, as measured by weekly timed typing assessments.

Objective 2 (Second Quarter):

Within 6 months, given continued guided practice, scaffolded drills, and corrective feedback, Kristen will increase her typing speed to **30 correct WPM with at least 92% accuracy**, as measured by weekly timed typing assessments.

Objective 3 (Third Quarter):

Within 9 months, using touch typing strategies and structured practice, Kristen will increase her typing speed to **38 correct WPM with at least 94% accuracy**, as measured by weekly timed typing assessments.

Objective 4 (Fourth Quarter):

Within 12 months, given ongoing instruction and progress monitoring, Kristen will reach **45 correct WPM with at least 95% accuracy**, as measured by weekly timed typing assessments.

Are We 'Making Sufficient Progress To Meet The Goal?



Progress Report #1: during this quarter, Kristen is averaging 23 correct WPM with at least 90% accuracy



Progress Report #2: during this quarter, Kristen is averaging 25 correct WPM with at least 78% accuracy



Progress Report #3: during this quarter, Kristen is averaging 24 correct WPM with at least 75% accuracy



Progress Report #4: Kristen is a delight in the class, and she works very hard. She starts her tasks independently, and her grade in English is a C.

7. Using Data to Support Advocacy



Focus on collaboration and problem solving



Use data to explain concerns and needs



Ask questions instead of making assumptions



Separate positions from interests



Keep conversations centered on the student's needs

Helpful Advocacy Questions



What data supports this decision?



How is progress being measured?



What happens if progress stalls?

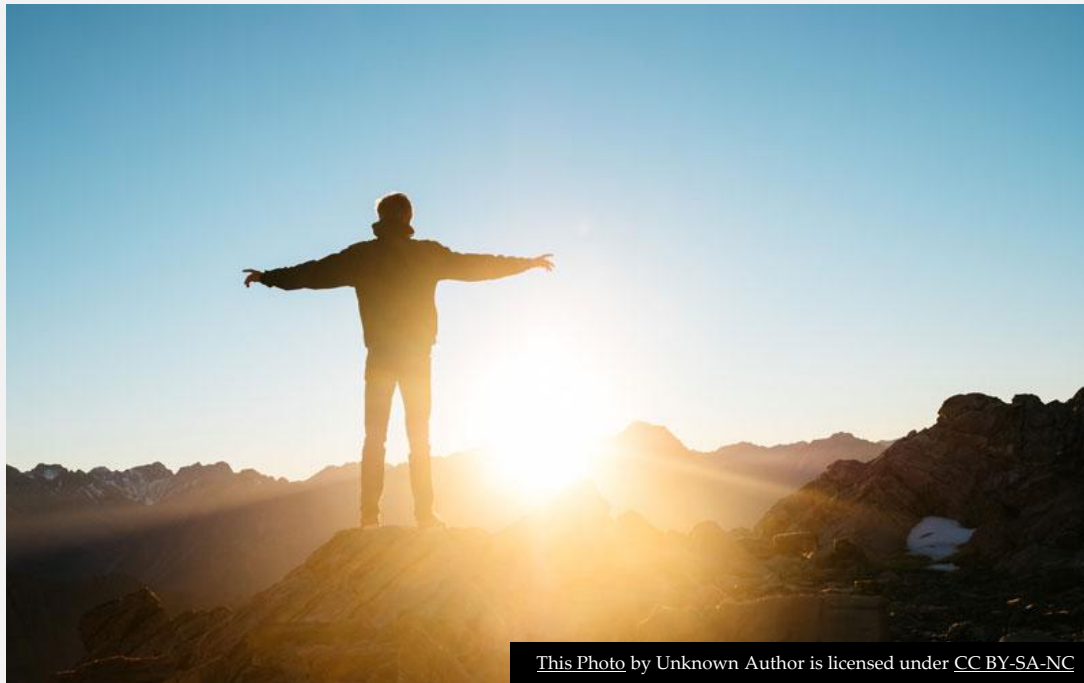


What additional supports could be considered?



How often will the team review the data?

8. Building Confidence



- You do not need to be an expert to ask questions
- It is okay to ask for explanations in plain language
- Families are important members of the IEP team
- Your observations and concerns matter
- Understanding data helps families participate more confidently in decision making

Final Thoughts

Data should help teams understand and support students

Testing and progress monitoring should guide instruction and services

Families and schools work best when they collaborate together

Asking questions is part of effective advocacy

Additional Resources

[Everything About Evaluations
Fact Sheet](#)

[Understood.org: Understanding
Evaluation Results and Next Steps](#)

How Did We Do?



Understand why schools do testing and collect data



Learn common testing terms and score types



Read evaluation and progress reports with more confidence



Use data to support collaboration and advocacy



Feel more confident participating in IEP meetings and decision making

Please tell us how we did today!



Scan the QR code with your phone or [click here](#).

Coffee and Conversations

Join our virtual groups to share ideas, share frustrations, get resources, and make new friends!

- [Families of children ages Birth-Kindergarten](#)
- [Families of children in Elementary School](#)
- [Families of children in Middle & High School](#)
- [Spanish Speaking Families](#)



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Behavioral Health Support Groups

Join our virtual support groups if you are a family member connected to mental health, substance use, and/or problem gambling.

- [Lunch and Listen: A support group for families dealing with behavioral health \(Western Maryland\)](#)
- [Embracing Strength \(Southern Maryland\)](#)
- [Simply Breathe \(North Central Maryland\)](#)
- [A Place to Breathe \(South Central Maryland\)](#)
- [Courageous Conversations \(Eastern Shore\)](#)



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Are you receiving our newsletters?

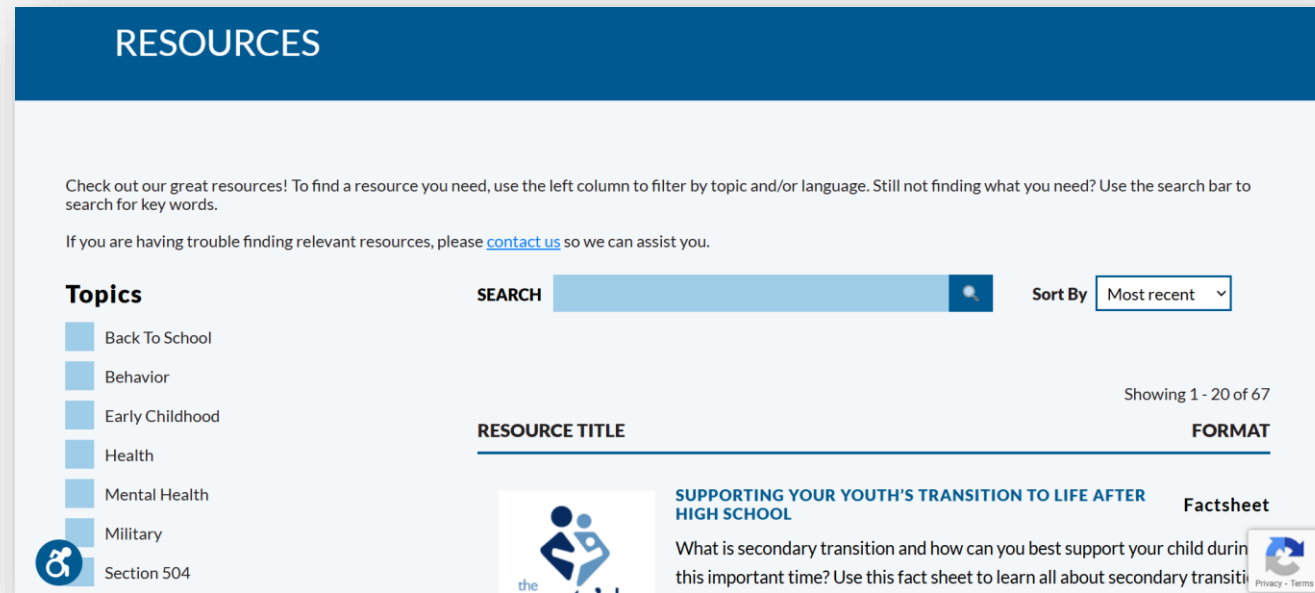
Subscribe to our monthly newsletter to always get the latest news affecting Maryland families of children with disabilities, special healthcare needs, and behavioral health needs.



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What's on our website?

We have HUNDREDS of resources around special education, healthcare, transition, early intervention, and more on our website.



The screenshot shows the 'RESOURCES' page with a blue header. Below the header, there is a search bar and a 'Sort By' dropdown menu set to 'Most recent'. A list of topics is on the left, including Back To School, Behavior, Early Childhood, Health, Mental Health, Military, and Section 504. The main content area displays a resource titled 'SUPPORTING YOUR YOUTH'S TRANSITION TO LIFE AFTER HIGH SCHOOL' with a 'Factsheet' format. The resource description reads: 'What is secondary transition and how can you best support your child during this important time? Use this fact sheet to learn all about secondary transition.' There is also a small icon for 'the parents' place' and a 'Privacy - Terms' link.

RESOURCES

Check out our great resources! To find a resource you need, use the left column to filter by topic and/or language. Still not finding what you need? Use the search bar to search for key words.



If you are having trouble finding relevant resources, please [contact us](#) so we can assist you.

Topics

- Back To School
- Behavior
- Early Childhood
- Health
- Mental Health
- Military
- Section 504

SEARCH **Sort By** Most recent

Showing 1 - 20 of 67

RESOURCE TITLE	FORMAT
 SUPPORTING YOUR YOUTH'S TRANSITION TO LIFE AFTER HIGH SCHOOL	Factsheet
What is secondary transition and how can you best support your child during this important time? Use this fact sheet to learn all about secondary transition.	

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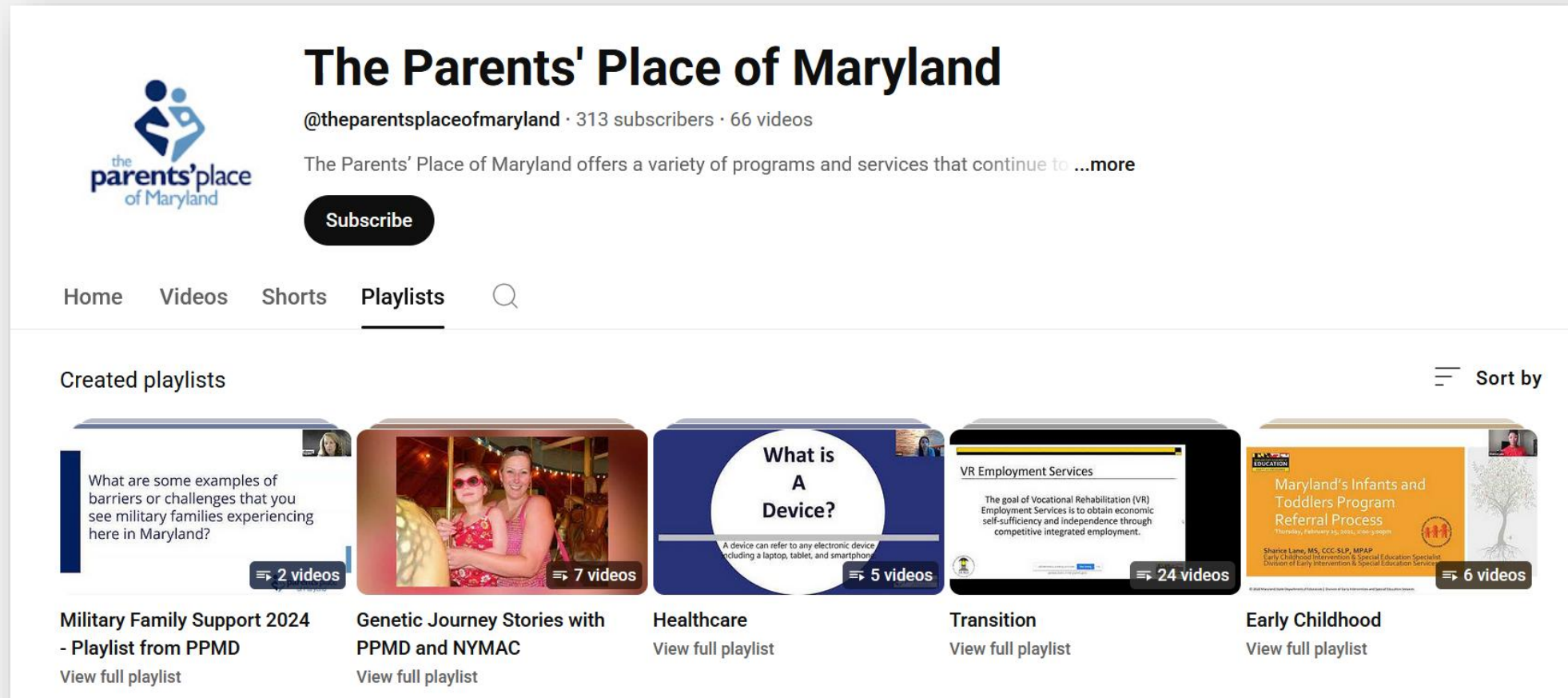


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Home Videos Shorts **Playlists**

Created playlists Sort by

- Military Family Support 2024 - Playlist from PPMD**
What are some examples of barriers or challenges that you see military families experiencing here in Maryland?
2 videos
[View full playlist](#)
- Genetic Journey Stories with PPMD and NYMAC**
7 videos
[View full playlist](#)
- Healthcare**
What is A Device?
5 videos
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- Transition**
VR Employment Services
24 videos
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- Early Childhood**
Maryland's Infants and Toddlers Program Referral Process
6 videos
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THANK YOU!

For more information, or if you have questions, contact us!

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