

Understanding Cut Scores

Severity criterion as unsatisfactory. Jenkins et al. (2007) reported that most screens focus on predicting unsatisfactory outcomes, where "unsatisfactory is defined as performing below a standard such as 'more than one-half year below grade level,' 'below the 25th percentile,' or 'below a high standard' on a state test" (p. 585). Depending on how it is defined, this *unsatisfactory* criterion has the capacity to identify a large number of at-risk students, as much as 50%–75% of students in some school districts.

Severity criterion as very unsatisfactory. When the goal of the universal screening measure is to find the students with the most severe academic deficits, *very unsatisfactory* appears to be the better criterion. **This criterion finds the lowest performers, those suspected of having a learning disability.** For example, if the criterion for *very unsatisfactory* is <10th percentile, a much smaller pool of at-risk students will be identified compared to <25th percentile for *unsatisfactory*.