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ASSESSING EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING IN SCHOOLS:
THE UTILITY OF THE BRIEF AND D-KEFS IN IDENTIFYING ADHD

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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ADHD is a prevalent childhood psychiatric disorder encountered by many school psychologists in the school setting. Extensive research has been conducted related to the identification of ADHD using a multitude of assessments methods, including behavior rating scales and direct measures of executive function. This study examined the utility of the BRIEF and the D-KEFS, which are two executive function batteries developed for use with children. The sample consisted of 33 participants aged 11 to 13 years: 18 students with a diagnosis of ADHD and 15 students without a diagnosis of ADHD. A Parent and Teacher BRIEF Rating Form was completed for each participant, and each participant was administered the Sorting Test, Verbal Fluency Test, and Color-Word Interference Test from the D-KEFS. Overall results indicated a significant group difference in performance on the executive function assessments as well as a significant association between groups and predictors indicating that the executive function assessments significantly predicted the diagnosis of ADHD. When analyzing the executive function scores individually, the Parent BRIEF Rating Form, the D-KEFS Sorting Test, and the Teacher BRIEF Rating Form were discovered to produce significant group differences as well as be the most important variables in predicting the diagnosis of ADHD, respectively. The other executive function scores were not found to demonstrate significant group differences nor contribute significantly to the prediction of the diagnosis of ADHD. The inclusion of the D-KEFS error scores was not found to significantly improve the prediction of

the diagnosis of ADHD. This study suggests to school psychologists that both indirect and direct executive function assessments are important in identifying ADHD in students. Furthermore, this study highlights the utility of the D-KEFS Sorting Test, which may be an underutilized test of executive function in the school setting, as well as highlight the potential ineffectiveness of the D-KEFS Color-Word Interference Test, which may be a frequently utilized test of executive function in the school setting, when identifying ADHD in students. This study also provides caution with regard to average scores on the D-KEFS as average scores do not always indicate the absence of the diagnosis of ADHD.