



Special Education Areas of Disability

Disability Terms Definitions

Students who qualify for special education do so based upon one or more of the following areas:

Autism

A developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction, generally evident before age 3 that adversely affects a child's educational performance. Other characteristics often associated with autism are engagement in repetitive activities and stereotyped movements, resistance to environmental change or change in daily routines and unusual responses to sensory experiences. The term does not apply if a child's educational performance is adversely affected primarily because the child has a serious emotional disturbance. A child who manifests the characteristics of autism after age three could be identified as having autism if the requirements of the first two sentences of this definition are satisfied.

Intellectual Disability

Significantly below-average general intellectual capability that exists along with deficits in adaptive behavior. It is demonstrated during the child's developmental period and negatively affects a child's educational performance.

Deaf-blindness

Hearing and visual impairments occurring together. The combination causes such severe communication and other developmental and educational problems that the child with deaf-blindness cannot be accommodated in special education programs designed only for children with deafness or only for children with blindness.

Deafness

A hearing impairment that is so severe that the child is unable to process language through hearing, with or without amplification, and the child's educational performance is affected.

Emotional Disturbance

A condition showing one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a degree that it affects a child's educational performance, resulting in:

- An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory or health factors
- An inability to build or maintain satisfactory relationships with peers and teachers;
- Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances;
- A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression; or
- A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems.

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Hearing Impairment

Impairment in hearing, whether permanent or fluctuating, that adversely affects a child's educational performance, but that is not included under the definition of deafness.

Multiple Disabilities

Impairments that occur simultaneously (such as cognitive disability-blindness and cognitive disability-orthopedic impairment), the combination of which causes such severe educational problems that they cannot be accommodated in special education programs solely for one of the impairments. The term does not include deaf-blindness.

Orthopedic Impairment

A severe orthopedic impairment that adversely affects a child's educational performance. The term includes impairments caused by congenital anomaly (e.g., clubfoot, absence of some member), impairments caused by disease (e.g., poliomyelitis, bone tuberculosis) and impairments from other causes (e.g., cerebral palsy, amputation and fractures or burns that cause contractures).

Other Health Impairment

Having limited strength, vitality, or alertness, including a heightened alertness to environmental stimuli, that results in limited alertness with respect to the educational environment, that is due to chronic or acute health problems such as asthma, attention deficit disorder or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, diabetes, epilepsy, a heart condition, hemophilia, lead poisoning, leukemia, nephritis, rheumatic fever or sickle cell anemia and Tourette syndrome; and adversely affects a child's education performance.

Specific Learning Disability

A disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, write, spell or to do mathematical calculations. The term includes such conditions as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia and developmental aphasia. The term does not include children who have learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing or motor abilities, of cognitive disability, of emotional disturbance or of environmental, cultural or economic disadvantage.

Speech and Language Impairment

A communication disorder, such as stuttering, impaired articulation, language impairment or a voice impairment that adversely affects a child's educational performance.

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Traumatic Brain Injury

An injury to the brain caused by external physical force or by other medical conditions, including but not limited to stroke, anoxia, infectious disease, aneurysm, brain tumors and neurological insults resulting from medical or surgical treatments. The injury results in total or partial functional disability or psychosocial impairment, or both, that adversely affects a child's educational performance. The term applies to open or closed head injuries, as well as to other medical conditions that result in acquired brain injuries. The injuries result in impairments in one or more areas, such as cognition; language; memory; attention; reasoning; abstract thinking; judgment; problem-solving; sensory, perceptual, and motor abilities; psychosocial behavior; physical functions; information processing; and speech. The term does not apply to brain injuries that are congenital or degenerative, or brain injuries induced by birth trauma.

Visual Impairment Including Blindness

Impairment in vision that, even with correction, adversely affects a child's educational performance. The term included both partial sight and blindness. Visual impairment for any child means:

- A visual impairment, not primarily perceptual in nature, resulting in a measured visual acuity of 20/7- or poorer in the better eye with correction; or
- A physical eye condition that affects visual functioning to the extent that special education placement, materials and/or services are required in an educational setting.

To qualify for one of these areas of disability, a Multi-factored Evaluation must be conducted. In an evaluation, the team gathers information about your child's abilities and challenges. The team may present RTI (Response to Intervention) data, as well. You and your child's educational team then use this information to determine whether your child qualifies as a student with a disability. If your child does qualify, the team then determines to what extent your child needs special education services in order to make progress.