

Glossary of Special Education and Legal Terms

A

ABA (Applied Behavioral Analysis) – Teaching children on the autistic spectrum through discreet trials, breaking down skills into small parts. Can be used alone or in combination with another treatment.

Accessible – Modified or designed so that persons with limited mobility (i.e., in wheelchairs or with crutches) can move into and around the structure or building.

Accommodations – Changes in how test is administered that do not substantially alter what the test measures; includes changes in presentation format, response format, test setting or test timing. Appropriate accommodations are made to level the playing field, i.e., to provide equal opportunity to demonstrate knowledge.

Achievement Test – Test that measures competency in a particular area of knowledge or skill; measures mastery of skills.

Adaptive Behavior – How well a child functions independently and meets responsibilities or rules set by parents, school, and social groups.

Advocate – An individual or group who acts on behalf of the child; can be a parent, friend, relative, concerned private or professional individual or group.

Age Equivalent Score – Standard based on the average performance of individuals in specific age groups.

Affective – Pertaining to feelings or emotions.

Alternative Placement – Placement of children with disabilities outside of the general classroom with program modifications: options range from regular classroom instruction by the teacher to alternative placement in a residential facility.

American with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) – Legislation enacted to prohibit discrimination based on disability.

Annual Goals – Statement of anticipated learning or skills mastery that student will achieve in each area of special education and/or related services.

Annual Review – Federal and state law requires that a student's special education program be monitored each year. This review includes updating students' progress and designing a new IEP for the upcoming year.

Aptitude Test – A test to measure an individual's ability to learn in a particular area such as music, mechanics, etc.

Articulation – The movement of the mouth and tongue that shapes sound in speech.

Assessment – Process of testing and observing the child in order to understand the nature, personality, learning style, and abilities of the student to help make educational decisions.

Assistive Technology – An item, piece of equipment, product, or service that helps a child with a disability benefit from his/her educational program.

Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder – (AD/HD) is a developmental disorder characterized by developmentally inappropriate degrees of inattention, over activity, and impulsivity. Child with AD/HD may be eligible for special education under other health impairment, specific learning disability and or emotional disturbances categories if AD/HD condition adversely affects educational performance. AD/HD is the name given this disorder with or without symptoms of hyperactivity.

At-Risk – Term used to describe children who exhibit characteristics that make them susceptible to school (or other) difficulties.

Audiologist – Specialist who has studied the science of hearing and can administer hearing test to determine possible hearing loss, and provide information to people regarding hearing aids, training programs, or medical treatment.

Auditory Association – The ability to relate concepts presented orally.

Auditory Discrimination – The identification of likeness and difference between sounds heard.

Auditory Memory – The ability to remember what one hears.

Auditory Perception – The ability to receive sounds accurately and to understand what they mean when combined into words.

Auditory Sequential Memory – The ability to remember what one hears and the specific order or sequence it was presented.

Autism – The term means a developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and non-verbal 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 behavior disorder/emotional disorder.

B

Basic Skills – Skills in subjects like reading, spelling, writing, and mathematics.

Behavior Disorder/Emotional Disability – The term means a condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over an extended period of time and to a marked degree, which adversely affects educational performance. The student must demonstrate an inability to learn which cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory or health factors; an inability to develop or

maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and adults; 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. This category does not include autistic and autistic-like children.

Behavior Management/Modification – A method for changing specific human behaviors that emphasizes regular encouragement or discouragement of behavior that can be seen, and observing what happens both before and after the behavior.

Bilingual Instructional Category – Refers to the degree to which a child needs language assistance through the home language in an educational setting: categories range from a (least amount of language assistance) to C (greatest amount of language assistance).

Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP) – A plan of positive behavioral interventions in the IEP of a child whose behaviors interfere with his/her learning, or that of others.

Business Day – Monday through Friday, except for federal and state holidays.

C

Calendar Day – Any calendar day unless otherwise indicated as school day or business day.

Case Manager – Professional (or paraprofessional) at the local level assigned to oversee the educational assessments, placement, performance and progress of children with disabilities.

Case Study Evaluation – Study of child's record and performance to determine skills, identifies disabilities, and decides if child is eligible for special education and/or related services; also determines if child continues to be eligible for special education and related services.

Child Find – Requirement that states ensure that all children with disabilities are identified, located and evaluated, and determine which children are receiving special education and related services.

Cognitive Disabilities – The child's intellectual development, mental capacity, adaptive behavior, and academic achievement are markedly delayed. Such mental impairment may be mild/moderate, severe or profound.

Confidentiality – Ensuring that information is accessible only to those authorized to have access. Refers to being careful and using good judgment in reporting only the information that is relevant about the child when disclosing personal information to school personnel social workers, etc. . . .

Confidential File – File maintained by the school that contains evaluations conducted to determine whether a child has a disability, and other information related to special education placement. Parents have a right to inspect the file and have copies of any information contained in it.

Consent – Requirement that the parent be fully informed of all information that relates to any action the school wants to take about the child and that the parent understands that consent is voluntary and may be revoked at any times. (See also Procedural Safeguards Notice and Prior Written Notice.)

Counseling Services – Related service; includes services provided by social workers, psychologists, guidance counselors, or other qualified personnel.

Cultural Background – Information regarding the customs and values of the child’s family.

Cultural Competency – A systemic approach which implies that consideration must be given to an individual’s gender, race, ethnic/cultural backgrounds, communities, and societal factors that impact an individual’s quality of life. Cultural competency is distinguished from cultural sensitivity in that cultural sensitivity deals with awareness/understanding while cultural competence implies issues of awareness/understanding, but also includes an ability to demonstrate skills and ability to implement programs within a culturally sensitive framework.

Curriculum Based Assessment – Test designed from the district curriculum and yielding information specific to instructional goals of the school.

D

Development Delay – The term means one or more disabilities for children aged 3-9 experiencing delay in at least one of the following domains: physical development, cognitive development, communication development, social and emotional development or adaptive development.

Diagnostic Test – Assessment tools used to find specific strengths and weaknesses in a developmental skill or academic subject.

Disability – In Section 504 and ADA, defined as impairment that substantially affects one or more major life activities; an individual who has a record of having such impairment, or is regarded as having such an impairment.

Domain – An aspect of a child’s functioning or performance that must be considered in the course of designing an evaluation.

Domain Review – Reviewing the results of evaluations in the areas of a child’s life such as health, vision, hearing, social & emotional status, general intelligence, academic performance, communication status, and motor abilities.

Due Process Hearing (impartial due process hearing) – Procedure to resolve disputes between parents and schools; administrative hearing before an impartial hearing officer or administrative law judge.

E

Early Intervention (EI) – Special education and related services provided to children under the age of 3. The discovery of academic and/or behavior difficulties at an early stage so that strategies may be developed to help the child achieve success in a regular classroom setting.

Education Records – All records about a student that are maintained by an educational agency or institution; includes instructional materials, teacher’s manuals, films, tapes, test materials and protocols.

Educational Consultant/Diagnostician – An individual who may be familiar with school curriculum and requirements at various grade levels; may or may not have a background in learning disabilities; may conduct educational evaluations.

Educational Performance – A student’s academic performance, as well as their ability to establish and maintain social & emotional relationships, and to experience a sound emotional development in the school environment.

Educational Surrogate Parent – A person who has received training and acquired the knowledge and skills to substitute for the biological parent(s) or guardian(s). The primary functions of the ESP are to advocate for the student and represent the student’s educational needs and interest.

Eligibility Criteria – Criteria used to determine who does, and who does not, qualify for special education program.

Emotional Disability (ED) – Disability category under IDEA; includes depression, fears, schizophrenia; adversely affect educational performance.

Evaluation – The process of collecting and interpreting information about a child. An evaluation consists of a variety of tests, observations, and background information and is conducted by a multi-disciplinary committee (MDC) or team of educational professionals.

Extended School Year (ESY) – Special education and related services provided to children with disabilities that go beyond the average school day or year in accordance with the child’s IEP and at no cost to the parents of the child.

Expressive Language – Skills required to produce language for communication with others.

F

FERPA – Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act; statute about confidentiality and access to education records.

FAPE – **Free appropriate public education**; special education and related services provided in conformity with an IEP; are without charge; and meets standards of the State Education Agency.

The underlying philosophy of special education regulations with the idea that: an instructional program must be designed to meet the individual needs of the student with a disability and provided at no cost to the parents.

Fine Motor Coordination – Small, distended, coordinated movements of the hand, such as those used in writing or picking up small objects.

Functional Behavior Assessment – An assessment process for gathering information regarding the target behavior, the antecedents and consequences, controlling variables, the student's strengths, and communicative and functional intent of the behavior for use in developing behavioral interventions.

G

General Education Curriculum – Curriculum adopted by LEA or SEA for all children from preschool through high school.

Guardian ad Litem – Person appointed by the court to represent the rights of minors.

H

Hearing Impairment – Disability category under IDEA; a permanent or fluctuating impairment in hearing that adversely affects educational performance.

Hyperactivity – Overactive body activity. Strong emotional reactions, impulsive behavior, and sometimes a short span of attention are also typical for a hyperactive person. Some individuals may show these characteristics naturally, as personality differs from person to person. Nonetheless, when hyperactivity starts to become a problem for the person or others, it may be classified as a medical disorder. The slang term "hyper" is used to describe someone who is in a hyperactive state.

Hypo activity – Under active behavior, often seen as lethargy.

I

IDEA – The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Also referred to as the Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Act (IDEIA) or IDEA 2004.

Individualized Education Program (IEP) – An educational program for a child with a disability that identifies the child's current abilities and writes measurable goals and objectives so that the child will increase skills in deficit areas, and is the vehicle to help the child achieve success in school and in later life.

Impartial Hearing Officer – An unbiased person, knowledgeable about special education, appointed by the state to preside over a due process hearing.

Inclusion – Practice of educating children with special needs in general education classrooms in neighborhood schools. (Also see Mainstreaming and Least Restrictive Environment.)

Independent Evaluation – An evaluation conducted by an agency or individual who is not employed by the school district.

Independent Living – Completing day-to-day living functions with or without direct supervision.

Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) – A written plan for each infant or toddler receiving early intervention services that includes goals for the family and a transition plan for the child as he/she moves into special education services for children age 3 and above.

Intelligence Quotient (IQ) – A measurement of thinking ability used to compare an individual to others in the same age group.

Itinerant Teacher – A teacher, typically found in special education, who works at more than one school and usually works with a specific disability category (i.e., hearing itinerant).

L

LASSO – Language and Social Skills Opportunities program.

Language Use Pattern – Record of the language spoken in the home and the language used most frequently by the child.

LEA – Local education agency or school district.

LOP – Learning Opportunities Program

Learning Styles – Different methods in which children learn visual, auditory, or kinesthetic (hands on).

Liaison – A means of communication between different groups; a close relationship, connection or link. Communication for establishing and maintaining mutual understanding and cooperation; one that establishes and maintains liaison.

LRE – Least Restrictive Environment; IDEA requirement to educate children with special needs children who are not disabled to the maximum extent possible.

Level of Language Proficiency – Record of the degree of proficiency a child has in the English language.

M

Mainstreaming – Practice of placing children with special needs in general education classrooms for at least a part of the child’s education program. (See also Least Restrictive Environment and Inclusion.)

Manifestation Determination Review – If a child with a disability engages in behavior or breaks a rule or code of conduct that applies to non-disabled children and the school proposes to remove the child, the school must hold a hearing to determine if the child’s behavior was caused by the disability.

Mediation – Procedural safeguard to resolve disputes between parents and schools; must be voluntary, cannot be used to deny or delay right to a due process hearing; must be conducted by a qualified and impartial mediator who is trained in effective mediation techniques.

Mediator – Trained negotiator who helps parents and school personnel settle their differences regarding the education of children with disabilities. The mediator establishes an understanding of the nature of the disagreement, determines points of agreement, and helps initiate a Level 1 process hearing if the dispute cannot be resolved informally.

Medical Services – Related service; includes services provided by a licensed physician to determine a child’s medically related disability that results in the child’s need for special education and related services.

Mentoring – The process by which a responsible individual provides a positive role model for a child, forms a supportive relationship with the child, and provides academic help and exposure to new experiences and opportunities.

Modifications – Substantial changes in what the student is expected to demonstrate; includes changes in instructional level, content, and performance criteria, may include changes in test form or format; includes alternate assessments.

Modality – The pathways through which an individual receives and processes information and learns. Four modalities are typically discussed with regard to modality instruction: auditory (sound), visual (sight), tactile (touch), and kinesthetic (movement).

Multi-Sensory Approach – A method for remediating disabilities that uses the child’s hearing, vision, and motor skills in an integrated instructional approach.

N

Native Language – Language normally used by the child and family as their primary communication tool.

Neurologist – A physician who specializes in the disorders of the brain, spinal cord, and nerves.

Neuropsychology - is the basic scientific discipline that studies the structure and function of the brain related to specific psychological processes and overt behaviors.

Neuropsychological Evaluation – An evaluation completed by a neuropsychologist to determine cognitive abilities in a child with a brain injury or neurological deficiencies.

O

Objectives – Statements (in measurable terms) of steps a child will have to take in order to move from the present level of performance to the annual goals; describes what a child is expected to achieve in a particular area within a given period of time; determines extent of child's progress in meeting expectations.

Occupational Therapy (OT) – Related service; services provided to train an individual to use gross and fine motor skills, self-care skills, and use sensory and perceptual motor integration with the intent of strengthening the individual's ability to function independently.

Orientation and Mobility Services – Related services; includes services to visually impaired students that enable students to move safely at home, school, and community.

Orthopedically Impaired – A disabling condition caused by physical impairments, especially those related to the bones, joints, and muscles.

Other Health Impaired – Eligibility category; medical conditions that place a child at risk in everyday functioning and school survival, thereby requiring special education services.

P

Parent – Biological parent, guardian, or surrogate parent; may include grandparent or stepparent with whom a child lives, or foster parent.

Parent Involvement – Actively participating in the education of your child. Activities might include providing support with homework, volunteering at your child's school, attending school board meetings, and participating on decision-making teams.

Parent Mentor – A parent who has personal experience parenting a child with a disability and has learned to navigate the systems who provides support to other parents.

Paraprofessional – A non-certified educator who assists the certified educator in providing instruction to students; a non-certified person who has the training and/or experience to perform non-clinical work for/with children and families.

Pediatric Neurologist – A neurologist who specializes in children.

Percentile Rank – A test statistic used to compare an individual's performance to another's by ranking them on a scale of 1 to 100%. For example, a percentile of 78 is interpreted as a person completing the test as well, or better than, 78% of the people who took the test.

Physical Therapy – Related service; services provided to evaluate muscular development, functional abilities, reflexes, and range of motion; to provide therapy in deficit areas.

Placement – The location where special education services will be provided according to the least restrictive environment guidelines referenced in state and federal laws. A placement is decided by the IEP team, including the parents, and is determined based on the child’s individual needs, not an administrative convenience.

Present Levels of Performance – Statements on an IEP that specifically describe what a student can or cannot do academically and functionally.

R

Rehabilitation – The process of helping a person who has a disability learn, or relearn the skills needed for daily living and work activities.

Rehabilitation Counseling Services – Related service; includes career development, preparation for employment, vocational rehabilitation services funded under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

Related Services – Services necessary for a child to benefit from special education; includes speech-language pathology and audiology services, psychological services, occupational therapy, recreation, early identification and assessment, counseling, rehabilitation counseling, orientation and mobility services, school health services, social work services, parent counseling and training.

Remediation – Process by which an individual receives instruction and practice in skills that are weak or nonexistent, in an effort to develop/strengthen these skills.

Resource Room – An instructional setting to which a child with a disability comes for specific periods.

Response to Intervention (RtI) – A system designed to increase the capacity of school districts to provide early intervening services, aligned with the general education curriculum, to at-risk students and students with disabilities.

S

School Day – A day when children attend school for instructional purposes.

School Health Services – Related service; services provided by a qualified school nurse or other qualified person.

Section 504 – Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act protects individuals with disabilities from discrimination due to disability by recipients of federal financial assistance.

Self-concept – How a person feels about him/herself and general level of self-worth.

Self-contained Classroom – A separate special education classroom where a student may be placed for full or part time intensive special education services.

Sensorimotor – Relating to both motor and movement and sensations and output of motor activity.

Sequencing – The ability to put things in the correct order according to some predetermined characteristic.

Sheltered Workshop – A not-for-profit facility providing segregated vocational services to adults with disabilities.

Social Worker – A person from a service agency such as a nursing home, group home or the school district involved with helping an individual or family deal with specific problems and needs caused by the presence of a disability.

Spatial Orientation – The ability to organize space in terms of the individual relating his/her physical self to the environment, with particular reference to distance size, position, and direction.

Special Education – Specially designed instruction, at no cost to the parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability.

Specific Learning Disability - The student exhibits a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language—spoken or written—which may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to list, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculation. The term includes such conditions as perceptual disabilities, 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 disabilities, of mental retardation, emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural or economic disadvantage.

Speech and Language Impairment – The child exhibits deviation of speech and/or language processes which are outside the range of acceptable deviation within a given environment and which prevent social or educational development.

Speech/Language Therapy – Services provided by a trained professional to correct speech or language problems. Related service; includes identification and diagnosis of speech or language impairments, speech or language therapy, counseling and guidance

Standardized Test – Norm-referenced test that compares child's performance with the performance of a large group of similar children (usually children who are the same age).

State Education Agency (SEA) – State Departments of Education

Supplementary Aids and Services – Aids, services, and supports that are provided in regular education classes that enable children with disabilities to be educated with non-disabled children to the maximum extent appropriate.

Supported Employment – Paid employment in community setting for persons with disabilities who need ongoing support.

T

Transition Services – IEP requirement; designed to facilitate movement from school to the workplace or to higher education.

Transportation – Related service about travel; includes specialized equipment (i.e., special or adapted buses, lifts, and ramps) if required to provide special transportation for a child with a disability.

Traumatic Brain Injury – An acquired injury to the brain caused by an external physical force, resulting 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 resulting 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, psychosocial functions; information processing; and speech.

V

Visual Discrimination – The ability to recognize differences in the shape and form of letters, numbers, and other objects.

Visual Impairment – A visual problem that prohibits the child from achieving at his/her educational potential without social services and materials.

Visual Perception – The identification, organization, and interpretation of stimuli received by the individual through vision/eyesight.

Visual Motor Coordination – The ability to coordinate vision with the movement of the body.

Visual Reception – The ability to gain meaning from visual stimuli.

Vocational Education – Educational programs that provide training in those skills needed to acquire and maintain employment.

