

GUIDE TO SPECIAL EDUCATION DISABILITIES

If you believe that your child may be in need of a special education program, an evaluation process to assess your child's needs is available to you at no cost through the school district.

A special education program often involves adapting and/or modifying instruction to better meet your child's learning needs.

In order to receive a special education program, your child must qualify by meeting a two-fold criterion. First the student must have one or more of the educational disabilities outlined in the School Code and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Law (IDEA), and secondly, the child must have an educational need that cannot be met without the implementation of an Individual Education Program (IEP) which may consist of instruction, supplementary aids, and/or services by special education staff.

What are the Special Education Disabilities in IDEA

Autism

Autism refers to a developmental disability that significantly affects verbal and/or non-verbal communication skills as well as social interaction. Generally these symptoms manifest and become evident before the age of three (3) that impact upon a student'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 the child's educational performance is adversely affected primarily because the child has an emotional disturbance. A child who manifests the characteristics of autism after the age of three could be diagnosed as having autism if other criteria mentioned above are satisfied. Autism is one of the conditions that children and adults may have under a broader umbrella known as "Autistic Spectrum Disorders" including: Autism, Asperger's Syndrome, Rett's Syndrome, Pervasive Developmental Disorder not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS), and Childhood Disintegrative Disorder.

Deaf-Blindness

Deaf-Blindness refers to the condition in which concomitant hearing and visual impairments the combination of which causes such severe communication and other developmental and educational needs that they cannot be accommodated in special education programs designed solely for children with deafness or children with blindness. For the diagnosis of this disability area both visual and hearing impairments must be present.

Deafness

Deafness refers to a hearing impairment that is so severe that the child is impaired in processing linguistic information through hearing, with or without amplification that adversely affects a child's educational performance.

Intellectually Disabled

Refers to the significantly sub-average intellectual functioning (having an IQ score of 70 and below) existing concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior and manifested during the developmental period that adversely affects a child's educational performance. In regard to adaptive behaviors, two or more areas must be affected to a significant degree. These may include: self-care, communication, social, academic, and/or occupational skills. Depending on the IQ result a child may be diagnosed as being: mildly, moderately, severely, or profoundly retarded.

Multiple Disabilities

Refers to the existence of concomitant impairments for example, mental retardation/blindness, or mental retardation/orthopedic impairment, etc., the combination of which causes such severe educational needs that they cannot be accommodated in special education programs solely for one of the impairments. The term does not include deaf-blindness.

Children with multiple disabilities will have a combination of various disabilities which can vary in severity and characteristics. Physical mobility is often an area of need. There are often medical and physical implications for these students that can be severe.

Traumatic Brain Injury

Refers to 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, motor, and perceptual abilities; psychosocial behavior, physical functions; information processing and speech. The term does not apply to brain injuries that are congenital or degenerative, or to brain injuries induced by birth trauma.

Orthopedic Impairment

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

Emotional Disturbance

This term refers to a condition exhibiting two or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child's educational performance:

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

The term includes schizophrenia, but does not apply to all children who are socially maladjusted unless it is determined that they have emotional disturbance.

Visual Impairment including Blindness

Visual Impairment including Blindness means impairment in vision that, even with correction, adversely affects a child's educational performance. The term includes both partial sight and blindness. A child displays a visual impairment when a visual impairment or a progressive vision loss has been diagnosed by an optometrist or ophthalmologist, and the visual acuity has been determined to be:

- For visual impairment, of 20/70 to 20/200 in the better eye with best correction by glasses
- For blindness, of 20/200 or less in the better eye after best correction by glasses or a visual field measuring 200 or less
- The visual impairment adversely affects the child's educational performance

Hearing Impairment

The term hearing impairment refers to impairment in hearing, whether permanent or fluctuating, that adversely affects a child's educational performance, but is not included under deafness. A child displays a hearing impairment when a hearing impairment has been diagnosed by an audiologist and the hearing impairment adversely affects the child's educational performance.

Specific Learning Disability

Specific Learning Disability refers to 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 listen, think, speak, read, 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 learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, of mental retardation, of emotional disturbance, or environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage. A child is considered to have a specific learning disability when the child does not achieve commensurate with his or her age and ability levels in one or more areas listed below when provided with learning experiences appropriate for the child's age and ability level:

1. Basic Reading Skills
2. Reading Comprehension
3. Mathematics Calculation
4. Mathematics Reasoning
5. Written Expression

6. Listening Comprehension
7. Oral Expression

The child displays observable characteristics that indicate deficits in these areas.

In determining whether a child has a specific learning disability the school district may use one and/or both of the following processes:

Discrepancy Model - the child displays a severe disparity (1.5 Standard Deviation) between measure intellectual ability and measured achievement using appropriate standardized assessment testing, or

Scientific Research Based Intervention - the child does not demonstrate expected growth and progress when provided appropriate instruction in the specific area of concern using scientifically based researched materials and programs designed specifically to remediate the deficit area.

Speech or Language Impairment

The term Speech or Language Impairment means a communication disorder such as stuttering, impaired articulation, language impairment, or a voice impairment, that adversely affects a child's educational performance. Language disorder is present when:

- The child consistently exhibits inappropriate use in any of the structures of language (morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics) as measured by language sampling or other clinical tasks.
- The child's language functioning is significantly below the child's abilities measured by (2) language assessments. Significantly below is considered to one (1) standard deviation below cognitive ability for kindergarten to age 8 children and 1.5 standard deviation below cognitive ability for children age 9 and older.
- The language disorder adversely affects the child's educational performance
- The language disorder is not the result of dialectal differences or second language influences.

What to Do

If you suspect that any of these conditions exist with your child, your first step is to talk with your school principal who will set up a meeting with the teachers, guidance counselor, school psychologist, and other professional working with your child as soon as possible to discuss your concerns.

A course of action designed to address your concerns and to assist your child will be developed at that point which may include actions such as data collection, progress monitoring, response to intervention activities, assessments, and evaluations by these individuals focused to help your child succeed and make appropriate educational progress.