

Exceptional Education Glossary

Accommodation: This is a change to or in a student's learning environment. Accommodations help students learn and show what they've learned by removing barriers. For instance, students who take longer to answer questions because of learning differences might be allowed extra time to take a test. Even with accommodations, students are expected to learn the same content as their peers.

ADD/ADHD: Attention deficit disorder and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder are medical conditions characterized by a child's inability to focus, while possessing impulsivity, fidgeting and inattention.

Adapted Physical Education (APE): Specially designed physical education program, using accommodations designed to fit the needs of students who require developmental or corrective instruction.

Annual goals: The IEP document lists the academic and functional (everyday) skills the IEP team thinks a student can achieve by the end of a school year. These goals are geared toward helping students take part in the general education curriculum. IEP goals need to be realistic and measurable. Many schools write **SMART goals**. (SMART stands for Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Results-oriented and Time-bound.)

Annual Review: An evaluation, conducted at least one time per year, for each child with a disability for the purposes of recommending the continuation, modification or termination of the special education program.

Assessment: Evaluation procedures used to identify a child's needs and the family's concerns and priorities about their child's development.

Assistive Technology (AT): Any device, equipment, or software that helps students learn, communicate, and function better in school. AT ranges from simple tools (like highlighters) to high-tech software (like apps that read text aloud).

Autism: A developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction, generally evident before age three that adversely affects a child's educational performance. Other characteristics often associated with autism are engaging in repetitive activities and stereotyped movements, resistance to environmental change or change in daily routines and unusual responses to sensory experiences.

Average range is a term therapists use when testing a child for learning differences. If the results fall below the average range for reading or listening comprehension, for instance, it may mean a child has a reading disability or language disorder.

Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP): A plan designed to proactively teach and reinforce positive behavior. Typically, the plan uses strategies to prevent and address behavior that gets in the way of learning. It may also have supports and aids for the student. A BIP is often included as part of an IEP. To get a BIP, a student must have a functional behavioral assessment.

Cognitive: A term that describes the process used for remembering, reasoning, understanding and making decisions.



Exceptional Education Glossary

Community Advisory Committee (CAC): A committee whose membership includes parents of school children, school personnel and representatives of the public. This committee advises school administration and local school boards regarding the plan for special education, assists with parent education and promotes public awareness of individuals with special needs.

Complaint Procedure: A formal complaint filed with California Department of Education (CDE) if a district violates a legal duty or fails to follow a requirement under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Consent: The written approval a parent gives to the Committee on Special Education to have their child evaluated and receive services. Consent is always voluntary and a parent may revoke it at any time.

Cumulative File: The records maintained by the local school district for any child enrolled in school. The file may contain evaluations and information about a child's disability and placement. It also contains grades and the results of standardized assessments. Parents have the right to inspect these files at any time.

Deaf-Blindness: Concomitant (simultaneous) 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 solely for children with deafness or children with blindness.

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

Designated Instructional Services (DIS): Also called Related Services. Instruction and services not normally provided by regular classes, resource specialist programs or special day classes. There are 16 DIS services available for students:

- Speech and Language
- Occupational and Physical Therapy (OT)
- Adapted Physical Education (APE)
- Hearing Services (HH)
- Interpreting Services
- Vision Services (VI)
- Orientation and Mobility (OM)
- Behavior Intervention Services
- Counseling and Guidance
- Parent Counseling and Training
- Psychological Services
- Social Worker Services
- Specially Designed Vocational Education
- Recreation Services
- Health and Nursing Services
- Mental Health Services
- Counseling/Therapy—Individual, Group & Family
- Parent Counseling and Training
- Psychological Services



Exceptional Education Glossary

Developmental History: Steps or stages of a child's growth in such skills as sitting, walking and talking. This information is gathered as part of the social history requirements.

Disability: A condition recognized by the law. To qualify for an IEP, students must have a disability that falls under one of the 13 categories listed in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Many students who learn and think differently are eligible in one of three categories: (1) specific learning disability; (2) other health impairment; and (3) speech or language impairment.

Dominant Language: The language or other mode of communication that the family normally uses. Evaluations of your child are required to be administered in the child's dominant language.

DSM-5: Stands for *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition*. (It is also called DSM-V.) This is the guide doctors and specialists use to diagnose learning, attention, and behavior disorders. [This is not used for special education eligibility.](#)

Due Process: Is the legal method you can use to formally disagree with the school. You have to file a written complaint to begin the process. The complaint could have to do with your child's eligibility for special education services or the types of services she receives. It's important to understand your legal rights under due process.

Emotional Disturbance: A condition exhibiting one 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 school problems.
- The term includes schizophrenia. The term does not apply to children who are socially maladjusted, unless it is determined that they have an emotional disturbance.

Executive function: Refers to a group of mental skills that work together to help the brain organize and act on information. These include the ability to organize, prioritize, and get started on tasks

Extended School Year Services (ESY): Special education services provided outside of the regular school year, such as during the summer or, less commonly, during extended breaks like winter break.

FAPE: Children with disabilities—including eligible learning and thinking differences—have the right to free and appropriate public education (FAPE). FAPE is one of the most important terms to know for your child. It ensures that she receives an education that is "appropriate"—it meets her individual needs. Learn more about FAPE.

Fine motor skills: Refers to the ability to make movements using small muscles, such as those in the hands and wrists. They're used for tasks like writing, drawing, coloring, tying shoelaces, and using scissors.



Exceptional Education Glossary

Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA): Is a process used to try to solve a child's behavioral problems. It can uncover why a student is having behavioral issues by identifying social, emotional and environmental causes. The school then writes a behavior intervention plan (BIP), which outlines how to address the issues.

General Education Curriculum: This is the knowledge and skills that all students throughout a state are expected to master. The curriculum varies from state to state.

Gross motor skills: Refers to the ability to make movements using the larger muscle groups, such as those in the arms and legs. Poor gross motor skills can affect balance, coordination, and the ability to run, kick, jump, and skip.

Hard of Hearing: An impairment in hearing, whether permanent or fluctuating, that adversely affects a child's educational performance but is not included under the definition of "deafness."

Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE): This is different from an evaluation given by the school. Professionals who are not school district employees conduct IEEs. Parents sometimes request an IEE if they disagree with the results of the school's evaluation of their child. Sometimes the school requests an IEE when they don't have the right experts to evaluate a specific issue a student might have. You have the right to request that the school pay for an IEE. Whether or not the school ends up paying for an IEE, it has to consider the results.

Impartial Hearing: A formal process at which a family's complaints can be heard by an impartial hearing officer who will resolve the dispute or complaint regarding the child's evaluation, IEP or certain other issues.

Intelligence quotient (IQ): Is an intelligence test score. Most kids who learn and think differently have an average or above-average IQ.

Individualized Education Program (IEP): An IEP outlines the program of special education instruction, supports, and services kids need to make progress and thrive in school. Some people refer to the written document that outlines this as the IEP (in which case p can stand for plan).

IEP goals: Are what a child may be expected to achieve by the end of the year. They're listed in the IEP.

IEP team: Is a group of people who work together to create a student's IEP. There are several required members. These include a regular education teacher, a special education teacher, a school representative, an expert who can interpret evaluation results, and parents.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA): The nation's special education law. IDEA is a federal law that guarantees all students with disabilities access to a free, appropriate public education.

Intellectual Disability: Significantly sub-average general intellectual functioning, existing concurrently



Exceptional Education Glossary

(at the same time) with deficits in adaptive behavior and manifested during the developmental period, that adversely affects a child's educational performance. Until October 2010, the law used the term "mental retardation." In October 2010, Rosa's Law was signed into law by President Obama, which changed the name of the term to "intellectual disability."

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE): Students with disabilities have to be educated in the same setting as students without disabilities as much as possible. "Setting" refers to a general education classroom. For example, if your child has dyslexia or ADHD and needs specific supports and services to succeed in the general education classroom, the school has to offer those supports and services.

Mediation: A method for solving a problem that uses persons trained in helping people resolve their own problems. In mediation, the school district and parent will try to reach an agreement with which both parties are satisfied.

Modification: A modification is a change in what a student is expected to learn and demonstrate. For example, instead of being asked to write an essay analyzing the outcomes of three major battles during the American Revolution, your child might be asked to describe in writing the basic facts of three American Revolution battles. Modifications are often confused with accommodations, but they're not the same thing.

Multiple Disabilities: Concomitant (simultaneous) impairments (such as intellectual disability-blindness, intellectual disability-orthopedic impairment, etc.), the combination of which causes such severe educational needs that they cannot be accommodated in a special education program solely for one of the impairments. The term does not include deaf-blindness.

Multisensory instruction: Is teaching that engages more than one sense at a time. For example, a teacher may have a child use his finger to trace spelling words in sand or shaving cream. Multisensory instruction can be more effective than instruction that only uses one sense. Check out examples of multisensory techniques for reading and math.

Nonverbal learning disability (NVLD): Affects a child's ability to understand the nonverbal aspects of communication. A child with NVLD may have trouble interpreting tone of voice, body language, and facial expressions. [This is not considered a special education disability.](#)

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

Occupational Therapy (OT): Services delivered by an Occupational Therapist that relate to self-help skills, adaptive behavior and play and sensory and motor and postural development.

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:



Exceptional Education Glossary

- 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, sickle cell anemia and Tourette syndrome.
- Adversely affects a child's educational performance.

Parent Report: This is a letter families write to document their child's strengths, struggles, and success at school, at home, and in the community. Sharing the report with the IEP team gives a more complete view of the student.

Parent Support Group: Discussion and information-sharing meetings for parents of children with disabilities.

Pendency: A due process right that the parent and child have that allows the child and family to continue to receive services as described on the current IEP while the parent works to resolve a dispute.

Percentile rank (percentiles): Refers to the percentage of students of the same age or grade that perform lower than the student. For example, if a student scores at the 5th percentile, that means that 5 percent of students score lower than him and 95 percent score higher.

Physical Therapy (PT): Services provided by a Physical Therapist that relate to large movement difficulties and related functional problems.

Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS): PBIS is a proactive, schoolwide approach used to promote positive behavior and improve school safety. PBIS creates a school culture in which all students learn about behavior and use a common language to talk about it.

Present Level of Performance (PLOP, PLP, PLAFF, PLAAFP): A description of a student's current abilities, skills, challenges, and strengths at the time the IEP is written. PLOP describes academic skills (like reading level) and functional skills (like making conversation or writing with a pencil). This is the starting point for setting annual IEP goals.

Prior Written Notice (PWN): Is a formal letter the school sends to parents. It's also a legal right under IDEA. Any time the school district denies, refuses or accepts a parent request for an evaluation or change to special education services, it must give prior written notice. It explains what the school plans to do or refuses to do.

Progress Reporting: How a school reports on student progress on annual goals. This is specified in the IEP. Progress reporting needs to be provided as often as a school reports on progress in general education for all students.

Reevaluation Review: A reassessment of the child's ability and achievement within a three-year period.

Related Services: Any support services a student needs to benefit from special education. One possible example is transportation. Another is occupational therapy.



Exceptional Education Glossary

Remedial education or instruction: Is an approach that addresses a student's weaknesses in basic, foundational skills. Remedial programs try to help kids catch up in reading, writing, math and other subjects.

Response to Intervention (Rti): Integrates assessment and intervention within a multi-level prevention system to maximize student achievement and to reduce behavioral problems. Schools use data to identify students at risk for poor learning outcomes, monitor student progress, provide evidence-based interventions and adjust the intensity and nature of those interventions depending on a student's responsiveness, and identify students with learning disabilities or other disabilities. This is similar to Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS).

Screening: Is often the first step in determining whether a child has a learning difference. It may include observation, interviews, a brief written test, and a review of school and health records.

Section 504 Accommodation Plan: An educational plan or modifications for a student suspected of a disability that may not require special education services.

Self-monitoring: The ability to observe your own behavior and adjust it to fit the situation. This includes keeping track of how you're doing on a particular task.

Sensory processing or integration: Refers to how the brain organizes and responds to information it gets through the senses. Trouble with sensory processing or integration can cause kids to over- or under-react to things like noise, touch, or sudden movement.

Special Education: Specially designed instruction to meet the unique needs of a student. It should be designed to give access to the general education curriculum. The instruction is provided at no cost to families.

Special Education Itinerant Teacher (SEIT): A preschool special education teacher who provides direct and indirect service in regular programs or a child's home for students ages three and four.

Specific Learning Disability (SLD): 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 the 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 intellectual disability, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural or economic disadvantage.

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

Speech Therapy (SP or ST): Services provided by a Speech and Language Pathologist that relate to delays in speech development and communication.



Exceptional Education Glossary

Standardized norm-referenced tests: Are a type of standardized test used in evaluations. These tests compare a student's performance with that of students of the same age or grade who have also taken the tests.

Standards-Based IEP: A standards-based IEP measures a student's academic performance against what the state expects of other students in the same grade.

State Education Department (SED): Refers to the state agency that establishes education regulations and provides support to counties and school districts.

Supplementary Aids and Services: These are supports to help students learn in the general education classroom. They can include equipment or assistive technology, like audiobooks or highlighted classroom notes. They may also include training for staff members to help them learn how to work with students based on their specific needs.

Transition Plan: This part of the IEP lays out what a teen will learn and do in high school in order to thrive as a young adult. The IEP team and the student develop the plan together before it kicks in at age 16. The transition plan includes goals and activities that are academic and functional. But they extend beyond school to practical life skills and job training.

Traumatic Brain Injury: Means 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, 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.

Visual Impairment Including Blindness: An impairment in vision that, even with correction, adversely affects a child's educational performance. The term includes both partial sight and blindness.

Working memory: Is the brain's ability to hold on to information long enough to use it. When you hear a phone number, remember it, and then dial it, you're using working memory.



Exceptional Education Acronyms

504	Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act
ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act
ADD	Attention Deficit Disorder
ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder
APE	Adaptive Physical Education
AE	Age Equivalent
AIS	Academic Intervention Services
ASL	American Sign Language
AT	Assistive Technology
BIP	Behavior Intervention Plan
BOCES	Board of Cooperative Educational Services
BOE	Board of Education
CAC	Community Advisory Committee on Special Education
CAHSEE	California High School Exit Exam
CEIA	Center for Early Intervention of Autism
CEP	Counseling Enriched Program
CPSE	Committee on Preschool Special Education
CSE	Committee on Special Education
DD	Developmental Disability
DIS	Designated Instruction and Services
DOE	Department of Education
DOR	Department of Rehabilitation
ED	Emotionally Disabled
ESEA	Elementary and Secondary Education Act
ESY	Extended School Year Services
FAPE	Free and Appropriate Public Education
FBA	Functional Behavioral Assessment
FERPA	Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act
GATE	Gifted and Talented Education
IAES	Interim Alternative Educational Setting
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
IEP	Individualized Education Program
IEE	Independent Educational Evaluation
IFSP	Individualized Family Service Plan
IHO	Impartial Hearing Officer
IQ	Intelligence Quotient
LCAP	
LD	Learning Disabled



Exceptional Education Acronyms

LEA	Local Education Agency
LRE	Least Restrictive Environment
NCLB	No Child Left Behind
OHI	Other Health Impaired
OT	Occupational Therapy
PDD	Pervasive Developmental Disorder
PT	Physical Therapy
PWN	Prior Written Notice
RR	Resource Room
RSP	Resource Specialist Program
RtI	Response to Intervention
SAI	Specialized Academic Instruction
SDC	Special Day Class
SED	State Education Department
SEIT	Special Education Itinerant Teacher Services
SELPA	Special Education Local Plan Area
SETRC	Special Education Training Resource Centers
SGI	Small Group Instruction
SI	Speech Impaired
SLP	Speech Language Pathologist
SPED	Special Education
TBI	Traumatic Brain Injury
TDD	Telecommunication Devices for the Deaf
UDL	Universal Design for Learning
VESID	Office of Vocational & Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities
VI	Visually Impaired
VR	Vocational Rehabilitation

Definitions and acronyms gathered from PTA.org, DREDF.org, and Understood.org

