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## Special Education Terminology and Disability Categories

The world of special education can seem like “alphabet soup” with the myriad of acronyms that abound. It is challenging enough for specialists in the field to stay abreast of the terminology, and even more daunting for school counselors and parents to do so. Yet these acronyms stand for key principles in special education, and are commonly utilized within Committee on Special Education (CSE) meetings, IEPs, and assessment reports, to name a few. Numerous Web sites exist, which can be a basic primer and resource, such as:

- Frequently Used Special Education Terms and Definitions  
[http://www.mcpherson.com/418/special\\_ed/terms\\_defintions.html](http://www.mcpherson.com/418/special_ed/terms_defintions.html)
- Special Education Dictionary: Parentpals.com Special Education Guide  
<http://www.parentpals.com/2.0dictionary/dictnewsindex.html>
- Special Education in Plain Language  
<http://www.csea7.k12.wi.us/sped/Parents/plintro.htm>

In addition, numerous parent friendly documents, including those describing special education needs, statements, step-by-step descriptions of special education, access to education for children and youth with medical illness, support and partnership in special education, and assessments, may be found at: <http://www.direct.gov.uk/EducationAndLearning/Schools/Special>.

A sampling of the primary acronyms used in special education is presented in Table 2.1. Equally important is comprehension of the thirteen disability classifications used to identify students with disabilities. These classifications are presented in Table 2.2.

There has long been controversy over the use of diagnostic labels, especially as they apply to children and youth. Concern arises over students being stereotyped and perceived

as different and less than normal. Such fears extend beyond the social realm to the academic area. Parents fear their child receives a less than quality education, and that long-term goals such as college may be negatively impacted.

Litigation has also arisen in this regard due to bias against non-Caucasian students, that is non-White students being disproportionately or inappropriately classified (Gearheart, Mullen, & Gearheart, 1993). In addition, educators are equally concerned that students are being appropriately identified and instructed.

These concerns should not be taken lightly. However, if students are appropriately referred for assessment, the assessment tools are pertinent and comprehensive, classifications are assigned by qualified and credentialed professionals, communication of assessment results and classification categories are sensitively and clearly explained to parents and students, then this categorization system will benefit the students. Previously unknown problems may be identified, assisting all involved to better define needed educational services. Psychologically, understanding that a disability exists and what it is may help alleviate anxiety and ambiguity, decrease feelings of being "crazy," and correct misinterpretations that the students are simply lazy and unmotivated. Implicit in this classification system is the education of teachers, staff, administrators, parents, and students as to disabilities, as well as to sensitivity training.

### Activity

Download special education glossaries, such as those provided by *The Council for Disability Rights* (<http://www.disabilityrights.org/glossary.htm>) and *Wrights Law* (<http://www.fetaweb.com/06/glossary.sped.legal.htm>). Or those found at <http://www.txbsi.org/docs/SPECIAL%20EDUCATION%20TERMS.doc>.

### Activity

Attend a CSE meeting. Make a list of all the acronyms mentioned and review after the meeting.

Table 2.1 provides a detailed list of typical acronyms used in special education. This list can be helpful for educators, parents, and students.

This list is neither exclusive nor final. Individual districts or states may use acronyms to abbreviate different terms. Check your district or state education Web site for the acronyms and terms used most commonly in your area. In addition to the acronyms of special education, a clear knowledge of the definitions of the classifications is also imperative when talking to and writing documents for students with disabilities. Table 2.2 provides the federal classifications, definitions, and acronyms for the thirteen categories of disabilities

Resource A provides a concise description of the federal definitions of the thirteen disability categories as well as useful information for special education teachers, general education teachers, school counselors, parents, advocates, and students. Although the fact sheets do not contain information that is exclusive, they can be used to provide educators and parents with the necessary information to assist in an appropriate understanding of a child's disability and the behaviors and needs that accompany.

*Jordan is a seven-year-old female in second grade. She has been diagnosed with a learning disability. Currently, her educational program includes the use of a consultant teacher for forty-five minutes per day. She also receives resource room service for thirty minutes a day. Once a week, Jordan goes to occupational therapy with a group of students from her classroom. She holds her pencil with a thumb wrap and frequently adapts her grip to a functional dynamic grasp. She is unable to correctly spell her name, and struggles with formation of most capital letters. The classroom teacher asks you to come in and conduct a brief observation.*

(Text continued on page 17)

**Table 2.1** Special Education Acronyms

AAD	adaptive assistive devices
ABA	applied behavior analysis
ABD	antisocial behavior disorders
ABE	adult basic education
AD	attachment disorder
ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act; average daily attendance
ADD	attention deficit disorder
ADHD	attention deficit with hyperactivity disorder
ADL	activities of daily living
AEP	alternative education placement
APD	antisocial personality disorder; auditory processing disorder
APE	adaptive physical education
ASD	autism spectrum disorder
ASL	American Sign Language
AT	assistive technology
BASIS	Basic Adult Skills Inventory System
BD	behaviorally disordered; behavior disorders; brain damaged
BIA	Brain Injury Association; Bureau of Indian Affairs
BIP	behavior intervention plan
BOCES	Board of Comprehensive Education Services (New York State)
CA	chronological age
CAPD	central auditory processing disorders; see also APD (auditory processing disorder)
CBA	curriculum based assessment
CBM	curriculum based measurement
CD	conduct disorder
CNS	central nervous system
COTA	certified occupational therapist assistant
CP	cerebral palsy
CPSE	committee on preschool special education
CSE	committee on special education
DB; DBL	deaf-blind
DD	developmental disabilities; developmentally delayed

*(Continued)*

Table 2.1 (Continued)

DDC	developmental disabilities council
DNR	do not resuscitate
DOE	Department of Education
DSM	Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (for Mental Disorders)
EBD	emotional and behavioral disorders
EC	early childhood; exceptional child[ren]
ECE	early childhood education
ECI	early childhood intervention
ECSE	early childhood special education
ECT	early childhood team
ED	emotionally disturbed; emotional disorders
EHA	Education for All Handicapped Children Act (since 1990, known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [IDEA])
EI	early intervention
EMDR	eye movement desensitization and reprocessing
EMR	educable mentally retarded
ESE	exceptional student education
ESEA	Elementary and Secondary Education Act
ESL	English as a second language
ESOL	English for speakers of other languages
ESY	extended school year
EYS	extended year services (ECSE)
FAPE	free appropriate public education
FBA	functional behavior assessment
FERPA	Family Educational Rights to Privacy Act (aka the Buckley Amendment)
GT	gifted and talented
HI	hearing impaired
HOH	hard of hearing
HS	head start; high school
IASA	Improving America's Schools Act
ICDP	individual career development plans
ICF	intermediate care facility
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

IED	intermittent explosive disorder
IEE	independent education evaluation
IEP	individualized education program
IEPC	individualized educational planning committee
IFSP	individualized family service plan
IHO	impartial hearing officer
IQ	intelligence quotient
ISP	individualized service plan
ISS	in school suspension
ITP	individualized transition plan (similar to IEP)
LD	learning disabilities; learning disabled
LDA	Learning Disabilities Association
LEA	local education agency
LEP	limited English proficient
LRE	least restrictive environment
LSSP	licensed specialist in school psychology
MA	mental age
MBD	minimal brain dysfunction
MDT	multidisciplinary team; manifest determination team
MESC	migrant education service center
MD	multiple disabilities
MI	multiple intelligences
MR	mentally retarded or mental retardation
MR/DD	mentally retarded/developmentally disabled
NCLB	No Child Left Behind Act
NEA	National Education Association
OCD	obsessive compulsive disorder
ODD	oppositional defiant disorder
OHI	other health impairments
OT	occupational therapy/therapist

*(Continued)*

Table 2.1 (Continued)

OT/PT	occupational therapy/physical therapy
PDD	pervasive development disorder
PLEP	present level of educational performance
PPD	Preschooler with a disability
PPS	pupil personnel services
PT	physical therapy/therapist
PTSD	post-traumatic stress disorder
RAD	reactive attachment disorder
REBT	rational emotive behavior therapy
RTI	response to intervention
SEA	state education agency
SECTION 504	a part of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 making it illegal for any organization receiving federal funds to discriminate against a person solely on the basis of disability
SED	seriously emotionally disturbed; state education department
SI	speech impaired
SIB	self-injurious behavior
SLD	specific learning disability
SLP	speech-language pathologist
SLPA	speech-language pathologist assistant
SPED	special education
SSI	statewide systemic initiative; supplemental security income
SS	Standard Score
SST	student study team; student support team
TBI	traumatic brain injury
VI	visually impaired
VESID	Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities
WISC-R	Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children-Revised
WISC-III	Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children-Third Edition
WRAP	wraparound program

**Table 2.2** Classification and Definitions of IDEA, Part 300

Autism	<p>Part 300 (i) Autism means a developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction, generally evident before age 3 that adversely affects 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 a child’s educational performance is adversely affected primarily because the student has an emotional disturbance defined in paragraph (b)(4) of Part 300.7.</p> <p>(i) A child who manifests the characteristics of “autism” after age 3 could be diagnosed as having “autism” if the criteria in paragraph (c)(1)(i) of Part 300.7 are satisfied.</p>
Mental Retardation <b>MR</b>	<p>Part 300: Mental retardation means significantly subaverage general intellectual functioning, existing concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior and manifested during the developmental period, that adversely affects a student’s educational performance</p>
Learning Disability <b>LD</b>	<p>Part 300: Specific Learning Disability is defined as follows:</p> <p>(i) <i>General.</i> The term means a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which manifests itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations, including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia and developmental aphasia.</p> <p>(ii) <i>Disorders not included.</i> 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 of environmental, cultural or economic disadvantage.</p>
Emotional Disturbance <b>ED</b>	<p>Part 300 Emotional disturbance is defined as follows:</p> <p>(i) The term means 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:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors.</li> <li>B. An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers;</li> <li>C. Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances;</li> <li>D. A generally pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression; or</li> <li>E. A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems.</li> </ul> <p>(ii) 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.</p>
Traumatic Brain Injury <b>TBI</b>	<p>Part 300: Traumatic brain injury means an acquired injury to the brain caused by an external force, resulting in total or partial functional disability or psychosocial impairment, or both that adversely affect educational performance. The term includes open or closed head injuries or brain injuries from certain medical conditions resulting in mild, moderate or severe impairments in one or more areas,</p>

(Continued)

Table 2.2 (Continued)

	including 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 include injuries that are congenital or caused by birth trauma.
Visual Impairment  <b>VI</b>	Part 300: Visual impairment including blindness means an impairment in vision that, even with correction, adversely affects a child's educational performance. The term includes both partial sight and blindness.  Legally blind: An individual with a visual acuity of 20/200 or less even with correction or has a field loss of 20 degrees or more.  Low Vision: A person who is still severely impaired after correction, but whom may increase functioning through the use of optical aide, nonoptical aids, environmental modifications and/or techniques.
Hearing Impairment <b>HI</b>	Part 300: Hearing impairment means an impairment in hearing, whether permanent or fluctuating, that adversely affects the child's educational performance but that is not included under the definition of deafness in Section 300.7.
Deafness	Part 300: Deafness means 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.
Deaf-blindness <b>DB</b>	Part 300: Deaf-blindness means 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 solely for children with deafness or children with blindness.
Speech or Language Impairment <b>SI</b>	Part 300: Speech or language impairment means a communication disorder, such as stuttering, impaired articulation, a language impairment or a voice impairment, that adversely affects a child's educational performance
Other Health Impairment  <b>OHI</b>	Part 300: Other health impairment means 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  (i) Is due to chronic or acute health problems such as, asthma, attention deficit disorder or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, a heart condition, hemophilia, lead poisoning, leukemia, nephritis, rheumatic fever and sickle cell anemia; and  (ii) Adversely affects a child's educational performance
Orthopedic Impairment  <b>OI</b>	Part 300: Orthopedic impairment means 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, etc.), impairments caused by disease (e.g., poliomyelitis, bone tuberculosis, etc.), and impairments from other causes (e.g., cerebral palsy, amputation, and fractures or burns which cause contractures).
Multiple Disabilities  <b>MD</b>	Part 300: Multiple disabilities means concomitant impairments (such as mental retardation-blindness, mental retardation-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.

*She feels that Jordan is struggling to make gains, and would like you to assess on task/off task frequency.*

- What will you look for in the classroom to determine whether Jordan's struggles are environmentally related?
- Is consultation necessary with any other school personnel to best meet her needs?
- Discuss the role of the school counselor as part of the educational planning team. How can valuable, useful suggestions be incorporated into her current program?
- What are some struggles that school counselors often face in situations like this?

### Questions for Reflection

1. What acronyms are used most commonly in your school? In your school district?
2. Are the acronyms understood by all of the multidisciplinary team?
3. How are parents educated as to the acronyms?
4. What percentage of students in your school is classified in each of the classification categories? What percentage in your school district?
5. What classification of students with special needs is most frequently included in your school? In your school district? On school counselor caseloads?
6. What classifications of disability categories are most familiar to professionals at your school? At your school district? What classifications are least familiar?