

# Special Education Terms

Special education is a service that some children with disabilities receive. Not all children with disabilities qualify for special education services.

Some of the following terms are for students who receive accommodations either through a 504 plan or through the use of differentiated instruction that is part of a quality general education program. The federal and state laws for special education and Section of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (a civil rights law) concerning students with disabilities can sometimes be complex and confusing.

The brief definitions provided here are not intended to be complete, but rather to provide a concise description of the topic as it is being used during a conversation among adults who work with and/or care for children with disabilities. Users are encouraged to seek further, more fully descriptive information about each of these terms from medical professionals and other knowledgeable sources such as school staff, parent groups, or disability-specific support groups.

See also: ***Protecting the Educational Rights of Students with Disabilities in Public Schools*** a free publication from the Office of the Education Ombudsman's available at: [www.waparentslearn.org](http://www.waparentslearn.org)

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## A

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**Accommodations** – Changes in the way instruction, assessment, and instructional materials are designed and used to respond to the special needs of students with disabilities. Most often related to students who have a 504 plan or an IEP.

**Administrative Hearing** – A formal process for parents and school districts to resolve disagreements about discipline and special education services. An administrative hearing concerning Special Education matters is known as a Due Process Hearing. There are other types of hearings that are used in education, including discipline, that are not a part of Special Education.

**Administrative Law Judge (ALJ)** – A judge who handles only administrative hearings (of all types, not just education). ALJs serve as the judges in special education due process hearing.

**Advocate** – An individual who is not an attorney, but who assists or represents parents and advocates for the rights of their children receiving special education services in their dealings with school districts.

**Affective** – A term which refers to emotions and attitudes.

**Alternate Assessment** – A tool used for students with disabilities who cannot take standardized exams. The alternate assessment methods to be used are usually specified in IEPs.

**Annual Goals** – A required component of an IEP. Goals are written for the individual student to address the needs identified in their individual evaluation. The IEP goals must be reviewed and rewritten annually.

**Assistive Technology Device** – Any piece of equipment or product used to increase, improve, or maintain the abilities of a child with a disability.

**Assistive Technology Service** – Any service that directly assists a child with a disability in using or choosing an Assistive Technology Device.

**Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD)** – Children diagnosed with attention deficit disorder tend to have problems staying on task and focusing on conversations or activities.

**Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)** – Children with ADD who are also hyperactive may be diagnosed with ADHD. Hyperactivity, a disorder of the central nervous system, makes it difficult for affected children to control their motor activities, and they may move rapidly from one task to another without completing any of them.

**Autism** – A developmental disability affecting verbal and non-verbal communication and social interactions that is often observed before age three. It is part of a group of disorders known as autism spectrum disorders (ASD). These disorders are often characterized by impaired communication skills and social abilities, and by repetitive behaviors. Symptoms can range from very mild to quite severe.

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## B

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**Behavior Intervention Plan** – The plan of action designed and implemented to address behavior that may negatively impact the success of a student with disabilities. The plan includes positive strategies, program modifications, and aids and supports that address a student's disruptive behaviors and allows the child to be educated in the least restrictive environment (LRE).

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## C

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**Change of Placement** – A change of placement occurs anytime a student is, for disciplinary reasons, removed from the

placement identified on his/her IEP for more than 10 days. A change of placement may also occur if the IEP team meets and decides that services should be provided in a different location. It is not a change of placement if the school moves the student from one general education classroom to another or from one resource room to another.

**Continuum of Services** – The range of services which must be available to the students of a school district so that they may be served in the least restrictive environment. The IEP team must have the opportunity to consider placement in the general education classroom, special education classroom, home or hospital setting with whatever supports or services that are necessary.

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## D

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**Developmental Screening Tests** – A tool used to identify disabilities, sensory impairments (e.g., near-sightedness or reduced hearing), or behavioral and developmental disabilities. A screening is not the same as an assessment or evaluation.

**Disability** – A physical, sensory, cognitive, or affective impairment that causes the student to need special education and related services.

**Due Process of Law** – Ensures a person will be notified and have an opportunity to be heard before any public entity can change her/his rights. Due process procedures for special education situations are clearly outlined in the IDEA. Section 504 plan due process procedures are less clearly defined.

**Due Process Hearing** – An administrative hearing presided over by an administrative law judge, not only in special education. There are special education hearings but there are also DSHS hearings, for example.

**Dyslexia** – A language-based disability that affects both oral and written language.

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## E

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**Extended School Day** – A provision for special education students to receive instruction for a period longer than the standard school day.

**Extended School Year (ESY)** – Special education and related services provided to students qualified for special education outside of the normal school year to ensure the student continues her/his educational progress

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## F

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**Fine Motor** – Functions which require small muscle movement for some activities, for example: writing or typing.

**Free and Appropriate Education (FAPE)** – The right of a student with a disability under IDEA or Section 504 to the education and support services necessary to meet each of his or her identified needs at no cost to the parent.

**Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA)** – A problem-solving process for addressing student problem behavior that uses techniques to identify what triggers the behaviors, select appropriate interventions, and teach the student alternative behaviors.

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## G

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**Gross Motor** – Functions which require large muscle movements. For example, walking or jumping.

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## H

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## I

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**IEP (Individualized Education Program)** – A document that describes the education services that a student qualified for special education will receive. The IEP is specific to each student and tailored to his or her individual educational needs.

**IEP Team** – The group of people, including educators, parents, and others with knowledge of the student's needs, which is responsible for creating and reviewing the student's IEP and determining where, what and how services will be delivered.

**Inclusion** – The practice of educating children in the general education classroom, including children with physical, mental, and developmental disabilities. In order to meet the individual needs of the student, it is often necessary to provide additional supports in the general education classroom.

**Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE)** – An evaluation conducted by a qualified examiner, who is not employed by the school district at the public's expense.

**Individualized Education** – The practice of giving lessons and assignments according to each student's needs and strengths. Also called **Individualized Instruction**.

**Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA)** – A federal law that guarantees a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) for eligible children and youth with disabilities.

**Instructional Aide** – A school employee who is assigned to help teachers with the education of student. Also known as an **Instructional Assistant, Paraeducator, or Paraprofessional**.

**Instructional Placement** – Phrase used to describe the situation in which a child spends at least half of his/her school day receiving special education. See also **Resource Placement**.

**Interim Alternative Educational Setting (IAES)** – A placement of up to 45 days for students with disabilities who a) bring weapons to school, b) bring drugs to school, c) inflict serious bodily injury at school, or d) are determined to be dangerous by an administration law judge. The IAES must be developed so that students can participate in the general education curriculum and progress towards achieving the goals set out in their IEP.

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**Learning Disability** – A child can be, but not always, identified as having a learning disability when she or he does not achieve adequately for the child's age or to meet state-approved grade-level standards when

provided with learning experiences and instruction appropriate for the child's age or state-approved grade-level standards. May also be known as a **Learning Disorder**.

**Learning Disorder** – A condition that interferes with a student's ability to learn. Another term for **Learning Disability**.

**Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)** – LRE is the environment where a student is able to learn and reach the goals on the IEP. The LRE should be in the general education environment to the extent appropriate. The least restrictive environment may be different for each child and based on the subject being taught.

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## M

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**Mainstream** – The practice of placing students with disabilities into regular classrooms with the supports defined in their IEP. The students usually also receive some assistance and instruction in separate classrooms, or resource rooms.

**Manifestation Determination** – A process conducted by a student's IEP team to identify and address the relationship between a student's disability and behaviors that would normally be subject to expulsion or suspension. The IEP team must determine that the behavior is a manifestation of the child's disability if:

- The behavior in question was caused by the child's disability, or had a direct and substantial relationship to the child's disability or
- the behavior was the direct result of the school's failure to implement the child's IEP.

**Mediation** – A free, voluntary process where a trained, neutral mediator helps parents

and/or advocates and school districts reach a mutually acceptable solution to disagreements over special education services and/or supports.

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## O

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**Occupational Therapy** – A special education related service which is usually focused on the development of a student's fine motor skills and strategies for daily life.

**Office of Civil Rights (OCR)** – An office within the U.S. Department of Education responsible for enforcing Section 504 protections and investigating civil rights complaints.

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## P

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**Paraeducator** – A school employee who is assigned to help a teacher with the education of student(s). Also known as an **Instructional Aide, Instructional Assistant, or Paraprofessional**.

**Pervasive Developmental Disorder (PDD)** – A term used to describe a certain type of disability on the autism spectrum.

**Physical Therapy** – A treatment of physical disabilities, under a doctor's prescription, that helps a student improve the use of bones, muscles, joints, and nerves in order to better access education programs and services.

**Placement** – The how and where students who have an IEP or Section 504 Plan

receive the special education services or accommodations outlined in their plans.

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## R

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**Reasonable Accommodation** – Educational program adaptation or modifications that allow students with disabilities to more fully participate in school.

**Referral** – The written request made to a school district to evaluate a student for special education and/or Section 504 eligibility.

**Related Services** – Various support services, for special education students. For example: transportation, social work, counseling.

**Resolution Session** – A meeting between the parents, school district, and IEP team that occurs after a due process hearing request has been made in order to discuss the complaint and try to solve the problem before the hearing occurs.

**Resource Room** – A special education classroom where students can go for additional help mastering academic skills. A student's IEP designates the number of minutes a day and/or week a student will receive resource room support.

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**Section 504 Plan** – Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 extended civil rights to people with disabilities. It allows for reasonable accommodations as necessary for each student. Services,

accommodations, and program modifications for students who qualify under Section 504 are outlined in a document called "504 Plan."

**Special Education** – Specially designed instruction to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability who qualifies for special education. The services are provided at no cost to the parent. The services can be provided in many different settings.

**Special Education Student** – Any student who has a disability that adversely affects his or her academic performance.

**Specially Designed Instruction** – Instruction designed to address the specific needs of a student who qualifies for special education services. It is based on the results of the student's individual evaluation. In order for instruction to be considered specially designed, it must differ from the instruction provided in the general education program, and cannot merely be accommodations or modifications.

**Specific Learning Disabilities** – A disorder of one or more psychological processes that interfere with the ability to process language, written or spoken that may be noticed with difficulty in listening, speaking, writing, reading, spelling, or doing mathematical calculations.

**Speech Language Pathologist (SLP)** – A professional who can help students who have language and speech disorders. This might include expressive and/or reception language as well as speech disorders.

**Stay Put** – The right of a student with a disability to remain in his or her current placement until disputes have been resolved. When a parent or the school district files for a hearing, there may be a

stay put requirement until the dispute is settled.

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**Therapeutic Day Program** – An instructional placement for students with significant emotional disturbances in which treatment for the emotional difficulty is incorporated into the school program.

**Transition Services** – A plan of activities designed to assist and prepare a student in special education to move from secondary education to the workplace or to higher education

**Transition Planning** – Planning for adolescents' post-school lives. It must begin by age 16 and it requires transition goals to be incorporated into the IEP process.

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## V

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## W

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**Washington Alternate Assessment System (WAAS)** – The system designed for and administered to students with disabilities who, even with accommodation, would not be able to take the state assessment of student learning.

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**Y**

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**Z**

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