

Special Education Terminology

The following is a list of terms used in specialized areas, such as education, psychology, and medicine. The short definition of these words included here will hopefully be helpful to parents when reading reports, attending meetings or conferences, and/or talking with specialists who have contact with their child.

Academic: Refers to subjects such as reading, writing, math, social studies, and science.

Access: A personal inspection and review of a record, an accurate copy of a record, an oral description or communication of a record, or a request to release a copy of an educational record.

Advocate: A person who represents and provides support to parents of children with disabilities.

Affective: Pertains to feelings or emotions.

Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR): Alternative Dispute Resolution is an informal method of settling concerns or disagreements. It is a process that encourages all parties to problem solve and reach a mutually beneficial agreement.

Annual Review: Scheduled meetings of the IEP team at least on an annual basis to review, revise, and update the IEP.

Aphasia: A weakening or loss of the ability to send and/or receive verbal and/or written messages; not connected with diseases of the vocal cords, eyes, or ears.

Appeal: An integral part of the due process and complaint procedures. If the party filing a complaint disagrees with the findings, the party may give input at the local board presentation of findings or request review of the findings by the State Superintendent of Instruction. A parent or district that disagrees with a due process decision may appeal that decision through the court of appropriate jurisdiction.

Appropriate Education: "Appropriate Education," as in "free, appropriate, public education," is an educational program and/or related service(s) as determined on an individual basis which meets the unique needs of each individual with exceptional needs. Such an educational program and related service(s) are based on goals and objectives as specified in an IEP and determined through the process of assessment and IEP planning in compliance with state and federal laws and regulations. This educational program provides the equal opportunity for each individual with exceptional needs to achieve commensurate with the opportunity provided to other pupils.

Aptitude Test: A test which measures someone's capacity, capability, or talent for learning something.

Assessment/Evaluation: Assessment encompasses all those functions in the testing and diagnostic process leading up to the development of an appropriate, individualized educational program and placement for a child with exceptional needs. Assessment may include screening to identify potentially (i.e., high probability) handicapped children; the observation, testing, and diagnosis of those children to specifically identify each child's handicapping condition(s) and the severity of that condition(s); interviews; and the definition of educational needs based on handicapping condition(s) and learning profile.

Attention Span: The extent to which a person can concentrate on a single task (sometimes measured in length of time).

Cognitive Operations: Processes involved in thinking.

1. Cognition - comprehension
2. Memory - retention and recall of information
3. Convergent thinking - bringing together of known facts
4. Divergent thinking - use of knowledge in new ways (creative thinking)
5. Evaluation - critical thinking

Cognitive skills: The act of process of knowing. Analytical or logical thinking.

Community Advisory Committee (CAC): A committee of parents and guardians, including parents or guardians of individuals with exceptional needs, and representatives from schools and community agencies, which has been established to advise the SELPA regarding the development and review of programs under the comprehensive local plan.

Communicatively Handicapped [CH or SI (speech impaired)]: The students with disabilities in one or more of the communication skills, such as language, speech and hearing.

Complaint: An alleged violation by a public agency of any federal or state law or regulation.

Confidentiality: Assurance that no information contained in school records be released without parental permission, except as provided by law.

Consent: Permission from the parent/student (eighteen years or older) required by law for assessment, development of a special education program, and placement.

Contractual Support Services: Specially allocated funds designed for special education students whose programs must be supplemented through outside sources.

Coordination, Fine-motor: Pertains to usage of small muscle groups (writing, cutting).

Coordination, Gross-motor: Pertains to usage of large muscle groups (jumping, running).

1. Bilateral – Ability to move both sides of the body at the same time (jumping).
2. Unilateral – Ability to move one side of the body without moving the other (hopping).
3. Cross lateral (cross pattern) – Ability to move different parts of the opposite sides of the body together or in different sequences (e.g., skipping, which is a highly integrated movement).

Coordination, Visual-motor: The ability to relate vision with movements of the body or parts of the body.

Core Curriculum: The district/COE-defined curriculum. The core curriculum is the range of knowledge and skills which are included in the district-adopted course of study and which must be learned for successful grade promotion and graduation. The curriculum may include academic as well as cultural, social and moral knowledge and skills. IEP goals and objectives should reflect knowledge and implementation of the district's core curriculum as adapted for the student with disabilities.

Criterion-referenced Testing (or measurements): Measures which answer the question, "What can this student do?" not "How does this student perform compared to other students?" Individual performance is compared to an acceptable standard (criterion) – such as "can correctly name letters of the alphabet" – not to the performance of others as in norm-referenced testing.

Deaf: A student with a hearing loss so severe that it inhibits language processing and affects educational performance.

Expressive Language Skills: Skills required to produce language for communicating with other people. Speaking and writing are expressive language skills.

Extended School Year: The term "extended school year" means, the period of time between the close of one academic year and the beginning of the succeeding academic year. The term "academic year" as used in this section means that portion of the school year during which the regular day school is maintained. An extended school year program shall be provided for a minimum of 20 instructional days, including holidays. Schools must provide extended year services to individuals with disabilities if the gains for the child during the regular school year would be significantly jeopardized by a summer break without continuous structured programming. Whether or not an individual is entitled to extended school year services is determined by the IEP team.

Eye-motor Coordination: The ability to relate vision with movements of the body or parts of the body.

Formal Assessment: Using published, standardized tests usually for measuring characteristics, such as “intelligence” or “achievement,” rather than skills, such as “tying shoes” or “following directions;” tests which have a standard set of directions for their use and interpretation.

Foster Family: Education Code 56155 (b): A family residence that is licensed by the state or other public agency having delegated authority by contract with the state to license, to provide 24-hour non-medical care and supervision for not more than six foster children, including, but not limited to, individuals with exceptional needs.

Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE): Every school-age handicapped child is entitled to an education which meets his or her individual needs, whether it be in a public school setting or in a private school at public expense, if a public program is not available or appropriate.

Grade Equivalent: The score a student obtains on an achievement test, translated into a standard score which allows the individual student’s score to be compared to the typical score for students in his or her grade level. A “grade equivalent” score of 6.0 means the score that the average beginning sixth grader makes; a “grade equivalent” score of 6.3 means the score that the average student who has been in sixth grade for three months makes.

Group Home: A facility of any capacity which provides 24-hour non-medical care and supervision to children in a structured environment, with such services provided at least in part by staff employed by the license.

Health Impaired: Students who have persistent medical or health problems, such as heart conditions, epilepsy, diabetes, etc., which adversely affect their educational performance.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA): The Federal legislation that created amendments to PL 94-142, including the title of the act from the “Education for the Handicapped Act” (EHA) to the “Individual with Disabilities Education Act.”

Individualized Educational Program Team (IEPT): Comprised of multidisciplinary staff which includes the surrogate parent and open to any other persons charged with care and education of courts wards and dependents in each local educational agency. The team is responsible for determining special education eligibility for individuals referred to special education services and appropriate educational program goals.

Individuals With Exceptional Needs (IWEN): A pupil whose educational needs cannot be met by a regular classroom teacher with modifications of the regular school program and who requires and will benefit from special instruction and/or services. Excluded are children whose needs are solely or primarily due to the unfamiliarity with the English language or to cultural differences.

Individualized Educational Program (IEP): The IEP is a written educational plan for each special education student that includes instructional goals and objectives based upon the educational needs specified and developed by the IEP team.

Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP): An IFSP is a written plan for providing early intervention services to a child eligible for early intervention service. The plan must be developed jointly by the family and appropriately qualified personnel involved in the early intervention. The plan must be based on the multidisciplinary evaluation and assessment of the child and include the services necessary to enhance the development of the child and family’s capacity to meet the child’s special needs.

Informal Assessment: Using procedures such as classroom observations, interviewing, or teacher-made tests which have not usually been tried out with large groups of people, and which do not necessarily have a standard set of instructions for their use and interpretation.

Integrated Program: Refers to participation by students in a regular classroom for specified amounts of time during the school day.

Intelligence Test: A standardized series of questions and/or tasks designed to measure mental abilities – how a person thinks, reasons, solves problems, remembers, and learns new information. Many intelligence tests rely heavily on the understanding of spoken language. Some intelligence tests are designed to be given to one person at a time; these are called individual intelligence tests; others may be

given to several persons at once and are called group intelligence tests. Both types of intelligence tests are given under controlled conditions involving standard instructions and time limits.

Intelligence Quotient (IQ): The score obtained on a test of mental ability; it is usually found by relating a person's test score to his or her age.

Learning Disabilities: Significant delays in learning or social behaviors including disabilities resulting from visual perceptual disorder, visual motor disorders, behavior disorders, educational retardation, or a combination of these.

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE): The concept that each handicapped child is to be placed in a learning environment that most closely approximates the learning environment of his or her non-handicapped peers (regular classroom) and provides for the most appropriate educational opportunities for the handicapped child.

Local Education Agency (LEA): A school district or county office of education that provides education services.

Local Plan: The state required plan (EC 56170) that designates how the local education agencies of the special education local plan area will meet both state and federal requirements for educating individuals with exceptional needs who reside in the geographical area served by the plan. The local plan must include the governance structure, administrative support, and agency responsibilities. The local plan is revised every three years as required by the Education Code.

Long-range Goals: Global and general "aims statements" which describe what needs to be learned by the student.

Low Incidence Disability: A low incidence disability is a severe disability with an expected incidence rate of less than 1 percent of the total K-12 statewide enrollment. Low incidence disabilities include hearing impairments, visual impairments, and severe orthopedic impairments (EC 56026.5).

Mediation: A conflict resolution process that can be used to resolve special education issues. Mediation is entered into prior to holding the due process hearing. It is the intent of the legislature that the mediation conference be an intervening, informal process conducted in a non-adversarial atmosphere that allows the parties to create their own solutions rather than having one imposed upon them through the judicial process. The mediation conference must be held within fifteen days of state receipt of a hearing request.

Modality: A way of acquiring sensation; visual, auditory, tactile, kinesthetic, olfactory, and gustatory are the common sense modalities.

Motor Perceptual Tests: Tests of eye and hand coordination.

Multi-handicapped: Students with a combination of disabilities (such as mental retardation and deafness) which cause severe educational problems. Deaf-blind is not included in this category.

Neurological Examination: Tests to determine dysfunction to the nervous system.

Non-discriminatory Assessment: Assessment tools and methods which are "fair" to the student in the sense that they are given in his or her native language; given and interpreted with reference to the child's age and socioeconomic and cultural background; given by trained persons; appropriate, even if the child has a physical, mental, speech, or sensory disability. Because some tests used in schools often do discriminate against certain students (e.g., by asking questions that relate to the experiences of white, middle-class, English-speaking persons), the term culturally appropriate assessment has come into use to emphasize that assessment must be fair to students of other language and cultural backgrounds.

Norms: Information, provided by the test-maker, about "normal" or typical performance on the test. Individual test scores can be compared to the typical score made by other persons in the same age group or grade level.

Occupational Therapist: Trained in helping pupils develop daily living skills, e.g., self-care, prevocational skills, etc.

Occupational Therapy (OT): Treatment provided by a therapist trained in helping the patient develops daily living skills in all areas of daily life, e.g., self-care, prevocational skills, etc.

Other Health Impaired: Students with physical impairments resulting from disease (such as polio), conditions such as cerebral palsy or from amputations or birth defects which are so severe as to interfere with their educational performance.

Parent: The natural or adoptive parent, guardian, or person appointed to act as parent for a student (surrogate parent), or the student if eighteen years or older and determined to be competent by the individualized education program team coordinator.

Public Law 94 -142 (Education for the Handicapped Act (EHA) of 1975, now entitled IDEA): The federal legislation governing the education of all handicapped students. PL 94 -142 mandates that all public schools in the U.S. are to provide “a free, appropriate public education and related services” to “all handicapped children.” PL stands for Public Law, 94 means it was passed by the 94th Congress, and 142 is the number of the law.

Public Law 101- 476 (Education for the Handicapped Act Amendments): The Federal legislation that created amendments to PL 94 -142, including changing the title of the Act from the “Education for the Handicapped Act” (EHA) to the “Individuals with Disabilities Education Act” (IDEA).

Reading Comprehension: The ability to understand what one has read.

Receptive Language: Receiving and understanding spoken or written communication. The receptive language skills are listening and reading.

Referral: The process of requesting an evaluation for a student who is suspected of having a learning disability. A referral is official and must be in written form; once it is made, time lines and procedural safeguards ensue.

Related Services: Related services means transportation and such developmental, corrective, and other supportive services as are required to assist a handicapped child to benefit from special education, and includes speech pathology and audiology, psychological services, physical and occupational therapy, recreation, early identification, and medical services for diagnostic or evaluation purposes. The term also includes school health services, social work services in schools, and parent counseling and training.

Reliability: The extent to which a test provides precise or accurate measures.

Resource Specialist Program (RSP): The RSP setting provides instruction and services for those individuals with exceptional needs who are assigned to a regular classroom for the majority of the school day.

Scaled Scores: The translation of “raw scores” (total points earned on a test) into a score which has similar meaning across age levels. If a scale from 0 to 20 is used, then a scaled score of 10 is an average score, regardless of whether it was obtained by a five-year-old or a fifteen-year-old.

School Psychologist: A person trained to give psychological tests, interpret results, and suggest appropriate educational approaches to learning or behavioral problems.

Self-concept: A person’s idea of himself or herself.

Self-help: Refers to feeding, dressing, and other activities necessary for functioning in a family, in school, and in the community.

Service Provider: Refers to any person or agency providing some type of service to children and/or their families.

Severely Handicapped (SH): Those students who require intensive instruction and training; such as developmentally handicapped, trainable mentally retarded, autistic, seriously emotionally disturbed.

Student Study Team (SST): A team of educational personnel including classroom teachers who are responsible for developing modifications to the regular program and providing appropriate learning environments for students who may be exhibiting school related problems. Through combining

knowledge and brainstorming efforts, the SST may generate solutions that enable students to remain in regular classrooms rather than be referred for special education programs.

Surrogate Parent: A surrogate parent is a person appointed by the SELPA who acts as a child's parent for the purpose of the IEP process to ensure the rights of an individual with exceptional needs when no parent can be identified or located, or the child is a ward of the state and the parents do not retain educational rights for the child.

Symbolization: The process in which spoken or written symbols take on meaning; that is, are understood by the individual and in turn are used for a verbal or written expression.

Tactile: Sense of touch.

Test of Auditory Perception: A test that tells how well a youngster perceives or hears specific sounds.

Transition: Transition services are a coordinated set of activities for a student, designed within an outcome-oriented process, which promotes movement from school to post-school activities, including post-secondary education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation. The coordinated set of activities is based upon the individual student's needs, taking into account the student's preference and interests, and as appropriate include instruction, community experience, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and, when appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation. The process begins at fourteen years and includes the student, family, education personnel and vocational and adult service providers (Vocational Rehabilitation, Regional Center, Social Security, etc.).

Triennial Assessment: Every child shall have a complete reassessment every three years. This reassessment may occur sooner if requested by parents or teacher. Preparation for the assessment follows the same process as for an initial evaluation, including the assessment plan with written parental consent, and the 50-day time line.

Validity: The extent to which a test really measures what it is intended to measure.

Visual Discrimination: Using the eyes to discriminate letters and words.

Visual Perception: The identification, organization, and interpretation of data received through the eye.

Visual-Perception Test: A test that requires the person to identify, organize, and interpret information received through the eyes - e.g., find a simple shape "hidden" in a complex picture.

Visually Handicapped (CVH): Students who are blind or who have partial sight and who, as a result, experience lowered educational performance.