

# A Parent Primer on Special Education Acronyms, Abbreviations, and Definitions



Mountain Plains Regional Resource Center  
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LD	Learning Disability
LEA	Local Education Agency
LEP	Limited English Proficiency
LRE	Least Restrictive Environment
MPRRRC	Mountain Plains Regional Resource Center
NASDSE	National Association of State Directors of Special Education
NCLB	No Child Left Behind
NECTAC	National Early Childhood and Technical Assistance Center
OCR	Office for Civil Rights
ODD	Oppositional Defiant Disorder
OHI	Other Health Impaired
OI	Orthopedic Impairment
O&M	Orientation and Mobility
OSEP	Office of Special Education Programs
OSERS	Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services
OT	Occupational Therapy
P&A	Protection and Advocacy
Part B	Special Education—School-Aged Children
Part C	Special Education—Birth–Two Years Old
PDD	Pervasive Development Disorders

**United States Department of Education (USDE):**  
Provides guidance, fiscal support, and technical assistance to the States.

**Visual Impairment (VI):** An impairment in visual that, even with correction, adversely affects a child’s educational performance.

**Vocational Rehabilitation (VR):** A program of rehabilitation through job training focusing on the participant moving toward gainful employment.

**Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD/TTY):**

An assistive technology device attached to a telephone to enable individuals who are deaf to communicate with others.

**Therapy:** A treatment for certain physical or psychological conditions. The most common forms of therapy provided through early intervention and special education include occupational therapy, physical therapy, and speech/ language therapy.

**Transition:** The movement from one service, location, or program to another. Young children with disabilities transition at age three from early intervention to preschool special education services or to other community settings and services (early intervention and special education). Adolescents transition from school to adult services.

**Transportation:** A related service. If it is determined that the child needs this service to benefit from their education, the school district must provide the transportation, contract with another agency, or contract with the parents to bring their child to school. Transportation could mean round trip, home to school and school to home, services.



**Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI):** Physical damage to the brain that could result in physical, behavioral, or mental changes depending on which area of the brain is injured. TBI could impact a student’s education; special education services might be needed.

PLP	Present Levels of Educational Performance
PT	Physical Therapist
PTIC	Parent Training and Information Center
RRC	Regional Resource Center
SA	Self-Assessment
SAT	Student Assistance Team
SEA	State Education Agency
SEAP	State Special Education Advisory Panel
Section 619	Special Education—3–5 Years Old
SI	Sensory Integration
SIG	State Improvement Grant
SIP	State Improvement Plan
SL	Speech Language
SLP	Speech Language Pathologist
STO	Short Term Objective
TAT	Teacher Assistance Team
TBI	Traumatic Brain Injury
TDD/TTY	Telecommunications Device for the Deaf
USDE	United States Department of Education
VI	Visual Impairment
VR	Vocational Rehabilitation

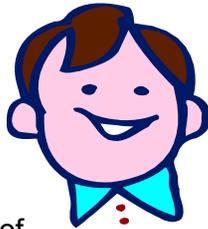
## Common Terms and Definitions

Many terms have different meanings across States. The following, to the maximum degree possible, follow federal definitions.

**Adapted Physical Education (APE):** A component of the educational curriculum in which physical, recreational, and other therapists work with children who exhibit delays in motor development and perceptual motor skills. It is a related service some children might need in addition to or in place of physical education.

**Adequate Yearly Progress:** The degree of progress for children in academic areas established by the State Education Agency.

**Advocate:** An individual who represents or speaks on behalf of another person's interests (as in a parent with his/her child).

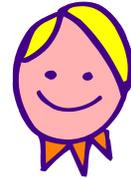


**American Sign Language (ASL):** A method of communicating by using hand signs. Each sign represents either one word or a concept that is typically expressed with several spoken words. For words that do not have a sign, finger spelling is used.

**American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA):** The national professional association for speech and language therapists and audiologists.

**Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA):** A law that took effect in 1992 that defines "disability" and prohibits discrimination by employers, by any facility open to the general public, and by State and local public agencies that provide such services as transportation (Public Law 101-336).

**State Improvement Grant (SIG):** A competitive grant offered by the U.S. Department of Education to States. The purpose is to improve special education services in the State.



**State Improvement Plan (SIP):** The State plan that includes improvement strategies to correct areas needing improvement and/or noncompliance issues discovered in the State self-assessment.

**State Special Education Advisory Panel (SEAP):** An advisory panel required by federal law in each State for the purpose of providing policy guidance with respect to special education and related services for children with disabilities in the State.

**Student Assistance Team (SAT):** Made up of a variety of educators who provide the teacher with ideas for interventions in the classroom.

**Tactile Defensiveness:** An abnormal sensitivity to touch indicated by avoidance or rejection of touching and handling. The child who has tactile defensiveness may resist touching or being touched by something that is wet, that is an unusual texture, or that is an unfamiliar temperature or pressure.

**Teacher Assistance Team (TAT):** A team of general education staff trained to assist school personnel and parents in solving difficult instructional and behavioral challenges. It is also known as a prereferral team of a school based support team.

**Specific Learning Disability (SLD):** A disorder that affects the ability to listen, think, speak, read, spell, or do mathematical calculations.

**Speech and Language (SL) Disorders:** Problems in communication and related areas such as oral motor function. These delays and disorders range from simple sound substitutions to the inability to understand or use language or use the oral-motor mechanism for functional speech and feeding. Some causes of speech and language disorders include hearing loss, neurological disorders, brain injury, mental retardation, drug abuse, physical impairments such as cleft lip or palate, and vocal abuse or misuse. Frequently, however, the cause is unknown.

**Speech Language Pathologist (SLP):** A trained therapist who provides treatment to help a person develop or improve articulation, communication skills, and oral-motor skills. Also helps children with speech errors and/or those with difficulties in language patterns.

**State Board of Education:** Determines public school and vocational education policy and manages and directs all public schools under provisions of applicable laws.

**State Department of Education:** Oversees all aspects of education in the State.



**State Education Agency (SEA):** The State Board of Education or other agency responsible for the State supervision of public elementary and secondary schools.



**Annual Performance Report:** The report that is submitted by each State to the U.S. Department of Education that provides data and information on compliance and results of special education for children with disabilities.

**Aphasia:** A communication disorder characterized by difficulty with producing language and/or with understanding language.

**Assessment:** The gathering of information by qualified personnel on a child's development and on the needs and priorities of the family. This information about the child and family is used in planning the Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP).

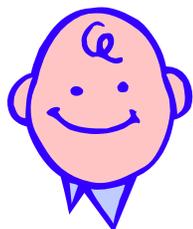
**Assistive Technology Device (AT):** Any item, piece of equipment, or product system, whether acquired commercially off the shelf, modified, or customized, that is used to increase, maintain, or improve functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities. Public schools are required to consider the assistive technology needs of students with disabilities.

**Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD):** A neurobiological disorder. Typically, children with ADD have developmentally inappropriate behavior, including poor attention skills and impulsivity. These characteristics arise in early childhood, typically before age seven, are chronic, and last at least six months. Children with ADD may also experience difficulty in the areas of social skills and self-esteem.

**Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD):**

A neurobiological disorder, typically children with ADHD have developmentally inappropriate behavior, including poor attention skills, impulsivity, and hyperactivity. These characteristics arise early in childhood, typically before age seven, are chronic, and last at least six months. Children with ADHD may also experience difficulty in the areas of social skills and self-esteem.

**Autism (AU):** A developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and non-verbal communication and social interaction.



**Autism and Pervasive Developmental Disorder:**

Developmental disabilities that share many of the same characteristics. Usually evident at age three, autism and PDD are neurological disorders that affect a child’s ability to communicate, understand language, play, and relate to others.

**Behavioral Assessment (BA):** Gathering (through direct observation and by parent report) and analyzing information about a child’s behavior. The information may be used to plan ways to help the child change unwanted behaviors. Observations include when a behavior occurs as well as the frequency and duration of the behavior.

**Behavior Disorders (BD):** A term used by some States for children who exhibit difficulties with social interactions and inappropriate behavior that interferes with learning.

**Self-Assessment (SA):** The State Steering Committee uses current and reliable data to analyze how successful the State has been achieving compliance and positive results for children with disabilities.

**Self-Stimulation:** Often referred to as stemming, these are abnormal behaviors, such as head banging, watching the fingers wiggle, or rocking side to side, that interfere with the child’s ability to “sit still” and pay attention or to participate in meaningful activity.

**Sensory Integration Disorder (SID or SI):** Also known as Sensory Integration Dysfunction—The inability to process information received through the senses, causing problems with learning, development, and behavior.

**Sensory Integration Treatment (SI):** A technique of occupational therapy that provides playful, meaningful activities that enhance an individual’s sensory intake and lead to more adaptive functioning in daily life.

**Short Term Objectives (STO):** Part of a child’s IEP that breaks down an annual goal into small measurable steps.

**Special Education:** Specialized instruction tailor-made to fit the unique learning strengths and needs of students with disabilities. A major goal of special education is to teach the skills and knowledge the child needs to be as independent as possible. Special education programs focus on academics and also include therapy and other related services to help the child overcome difficulties in all areas of development. These services may be provided in a variety of educational settings but are required by IDEA to be delivered in the least restrictive environment.

**Prior Written Notice (PWN):** Must inform parents of their rights. It is a form that the school must use to tell parents why they're doing what they're doing or why they're not doing what they're not doing—they must tell parents in writing.

**Protection and Advocacy (P&A):** The Protection and Advocacy System is a private, nonprofit organization that protects and promotes the rights of people with disabilities.

**PTIC:** Each State has a Parent Training and Information Center to assist parents of children with disabilities to become more knowledgeable about special education and their child's disability.

**Regional Resource Center (RRC):** Funded by the U.S. Department of Education, there are six RRCs that provide technical assistance in special education for State Education Agencies.

**Screening:** The process of looking at a child's development to find out if there are any areas of concern. It is used to recommend children for more in-depth evaluation.

**Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act:** A federal law that protects the civil rights of individuals with disabilities. This law is closely intertwined with IDEA. Children with disabilities who are not eligible for special education may qualify for accommodations under Section 504.



**Section 619:** Authorizing section of Part B of IDEA that requires States to provide preschool services to children with disabilities, ages three to five.

**Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP):** A plan that is put in place to teach a child proper behavior and social skills. It should be positive in nature, not punitive.

**Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA):** The government agency that oversees and assists the affairs of the Native Americans. The BIA operates schools in 22 States.

**Cerebral Palsy (CP):** A disorder of movement and posture control resulting from non-progressive damage to the brain during fetal life, the newborn period, or early childhood. Both genetic and acquired factors may be involved. It may be caused by a lack of normal fetal brain development or by injury to the brain. The extent and location of the brain damage determine the type of cerebral palsy and the associated symptoms.

**Certified Occupational Therapist Assistant (COTA):** An individual who has received special training and instruction in the area of occupational therapy.

**Child Find (CF):** A required federal program that requires States to actively locate children, birth to age 21, with developmental disabilities or who are at risk for developmental disabilities. It particularly focuses on children not enrolled in school programs.

**Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (CHADD):** A national organization that provides information, training and support for individuals interested and/or impacted by ADD/ADHD.

**Cognitive Delay (CD):** A disability where a child's intellectual and adaptive behavior is below average and impacts the child's education.



### **Continuous Improvement and Focused Monitoring**

**Process (CIFMP):** The monitoring process used by the U.S. Department of Education to check compliance and results of special education in States.

**Council on Exceptional Children (CEC):** The largest international professional organization dedicated to improving educational outcomes for individuals with exceptionalities, students with disabilities, and/or the gifted.

**Comprehensive Educational Evaluation:** The tests and observations done by the school staff to find out if the child has a disability and requires special education and related services. The school's multi-disciplinary team is required to do this evaluation and hold a meeting with the parent to discuss the results. A parent may choose to share any evaluation and assessment information done by the child and family agency or by other qualified persons.

**Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD):** A State or school plan to train and provide technical assistance for school staff and parents.

**Deaf-Blindness (DB):** Concomitant hearing and visual impairments that cause severe communication, developmental, and educational needs.

**Department of Health (DOH):** The government agency whose mission is to promote health and sound health policy, prevent disease and disability, improve health services systems, and ensure that essential public health functions and safety net services are available.



**Other Health Impaired (OHI):** An educational classification that describes students who have chronic or acute health problems that cause limited strength, vitality, or alertness that adversely affects a child's educational performance.

**Pervasive Developmental Disorders (PDD):** Refers to the overall category of Pervasive Developmental Disorders that includes autism, Rett Syndrome, Asperger's syndrome, PDD-NOS, and Childhood Disintegrative Disorder.

**Part B:** The section of the federal special education regulations that address school-aged children.

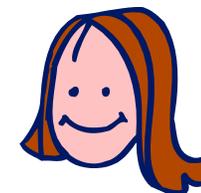
**Part C:** The section of the federal special education regulations that address children birth through two years.



**Physical Therapist (PT):** A professional who is devoted to improving a person's physical abilities through activities that strengthen muscular control and motor coordination.

**Preschool Special Education:** An educational program that is designed to meet the unique developmental needs of an individual child with a disability who is three, four, or five years of age. It is a child-focused educational effort. Sometimes referred to Section 619 of the law.

**Present Levels of Educational Performance (PLEP):** Statements written in the IEP that accurately describe the student's strengths, weaknesses, and learning styles.



**Occupational Therapy (OT):** Enforces several federal civil rights laws that prohibit discrimination in programs or activities that receive federal financial assistance. These laws prohibit discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, disability, and age.

**Office for Civil Rights (OCR):** The Office for Civil Rights enforces several federal civil rights laws that prohibit discrimination in programs or activities that receive federal financial assistance from the Department of Education.

**Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP):** Dedicated to improving results for infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities ages birth through 21 by providing oversight, leadership, and financial support to assist States and local districts. OSEP administers the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).



**Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD):** Children who exhibit defiant and anti-social behaviors over a long period of time and environment.

**Orientation and Mobility (O&M):** Services provided to the blind or visually impaired by qualified personnel to enable a child to safely move in school and other environments.

**Orthopedic Impairment (OI):** Any orthopedic impairment that adversely affects a child's educational performance.

**Developmental Disability (DD):** Any physical or mental condition that begins before the age of 18 years, causes the child to acquire skills at a slower rate than his/her peers, is expected to continue indefinitely, and impairs the child's ability to function in society.

**Diagnostic and Statistical Manual IV (DSM-IV):** The American Psychiatric Association's classification and description of behavioral and emotional disorders.

**Disability:** A substantially limiting physical or mental impairment that affects basic life activities such as hearing, seeing, speaking, walking, caring for oneself, learning, or working.

**Due Process:** A process for resolving a dispute between the family and the child and family service agency related to the delivery of early intervention services. In special education, due process refers to a process for resolving a dispute between the family and the public school related to the identification, evaluation, or placement of a child with disabilities.

**Due Process Hearing:** A legal proceeding, similar to a court proceeding, where a hearing officer is presented evidence by disagreeing parties. A verbatim record is taken of the proceedings, and a hearing officer writes a decision that may be appealed to the State education agency, and if desired, to a civil court.

**Due Process Hearing Officer:** The trained and neutral individual who conducts the due process hearing.

**Dyslexia:** A learning disability in which the child has difficulty with reading due to difficulty distinguishing written symbols. For example, transposing letters and words such as reading “top” as “pot.”



**Dyspraxia:** Difficulty with planning and performing coordinated movements although there is no apparent damage to muscles.

**Early Intervention (EI):** Specialized services provided to infants and toddlers ages birth to three who are at risk for or are showing signs of developmental delay.

**Educational Assistant (EA):** A person who provides assistance to students under the supervision of the teacher.

**Emotional Disturbance (ED):** A condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects educational performance.

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



**Music Therapy:** A therapeutic service to meet recreational or educational goals. Music therapy includes playing instruments, moving to music, singing, and listening to music. It is utilized in a variety of applications in schools, hospitals, and private settings through both individual and group approaches, often in conjunction with other types of therapy. Both music education and music therapy contribute to special education by promoting learning and self-growth through enjoyable activities.



**National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE):** The national organization for State special education directors, which provides support in the delivery of quality education to children and youth with disabilities throughout the country. <http://www.nasdse.org/>

**National Early Childhood and Technical Assistance Center (NECTAC):** The organization funded by the U.S. Department of Education that provides technical assistance in the area of early childhood special education.

**Natural Environment:** The natural or everyday settings for your child. These are places where the child would be if they didn't have a special developmental concern. It is where all children would be (for example, home, childcare, parks, etc.).

**No Child Left Behind (NCLB):** Reauthorized in 2001, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) is the principal federal law affecting education from kindergarten through high school for children “at risk.” The NCLB provides opportunities for children to learn and progress.

**Individualized Health Care Plan (IHCP):** A plan developed by the school nurse in collaboration with parents and teachers that outlines specific health care procedures to be provided to a student.

**Intelligence Quotient (IQ):** The score of an intelligence test that is a form of psychological testing of an individual's capacity to learn and deal effectively with his/her environment.

**Learning Disability (LD):** A disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or using spoken or written language, which may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, or spell or to do mathematical calculations.

**Least Restrictive Environment (LRE):** The placement that is as close as possible to the general education environment. This is the educational setting that permits a child to receive the most educational benefit while participating in a regular educational environment to the maximum extent appropriate. LRE is a requirement under the IDEA.

**Limited English Proficiency (LEP):** Children whose primary language is other than English.

**Local Education Agency (LEA):** The public schools operating in accordance with statutes, regulations, and policies of the State Department of Education.

**Mountain Plains Regional Resource Center (MPRRC):** One of six Regional Resource Centers funded through the Office of Special Education Programs that provides technical assistance services to 10 States in the mountain plains area, as well as the Bureau of Indian Affairs. [www.usu.edu/mprrc](http://www.usu.edu/mprrc)

**Extended School Year (ESY):** The delivery of special education and related services during the summer vacation or other extended periods when school is not in session. The purpose for ESY is to prevent a child with a disability from losing previously learned skills. The IEP team must consider the need for Extended School Year at each meeting and must describe those services specifically with goals and objectives. Not all special education students require an extended school year. Extended school year services must be individually crafted.

**Family Infant Toddler Program (FIT):** A program that provides early intervention services to help families who have concerns about the development of their young child (birth to three).

**Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA):** A federal law that protects the privacy and transfer of student education records.

**Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE):** An individualized educational program that is designed to meet the child's unique needs and from which the child receives educational benefit.

**Focused Monitoring:** A monitoring approach that examines those requirements most closely relating to improving results for children with disabilities and those States most in need of support to improve compliance and performance.

**Functional Behaviors:** Behaviors (basic skills, such as meal-time skills) the child has mastered, or needs to master, in order to get along as independently as possible in society.

**Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA):** A process that examines why a child behaves the way he or she does given the nature of the child and what is happening in the environment. It is a process for collecting data to determine the possible causes of problem behaviors and to identify strategies to address the behaviors.

**Gifted & Talented (GT):** Those students with above average intellectual abilities.

**Head Start:** A federal program started in 1965 aimed at providing a comprehensive preschool program for children ages three to five from low-income families. Planned activities are designed to address individual needs and to help children attain their potential in growth and mental and physical development before starting school. Ten percent of enrollment is required to be for children with disabilities.

**Health Insurance Portability Accountability Act (HIPAA):** Federal regulation that outlines the confidentiality and protection of medical records.

**Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE):** An evaluation conducted by a qualified examiner who is not employed by the school district responsible for the education of the child.

**Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA):** The federal law that provides the legal authority for early intervention and special educational services for children birth to age 21. Part B outlines services for children ages three to 21. Part C outlines services for children birth to age three.

**Individualized Education Program (IEP):** A written statement of a child's current level of educational performance and an individualized plan of instruction, including the goals, specific services to be received, the staff who will carry out the services, the standards and timelines for evaluating progress, and the amount and degree to which the child will participate with typically developing peers (Inclusion/Least Restrictive Environment). The IEP is developed by the child's parents and the professionals who evaluated the child and/or are providing the services. It is required by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) for all children eligible for special education.

**Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP):** The written document that defines the early intervention services provided to the child and family. The program is designed to meet the needs of the child and the family, and is based on family-identified priorities.

**Interagency Agreement:** A document signed by authorized representatives of at least two agencies outlining mutually agreed upon responsibilities to perform certain duties under specified conditions.

**Interagency Coordinating Council:** A council established for the purpose of advising and assisting in the development and implementation of quality services for infants and toddlers with disabilities. State councils are required by IDEA.

