

Learning Differences Glossary

504 Plan: The 504 Plan is a plan developed to ensure that a child who has a disability identified under the Rehabilitation Act and is attending an elementary or secondary educational institution receives accommodations that will ensure their academic success and access to the learning environment. These accommodations and modifications must ensure that there is no discrimination because of the child's disability.

Source: [AccessSTEM](#)

Accommodations: [Curricular adaptations](#) that compensate for learners' weaknesses without modifying the curriculum. Students receiving accommodations read the same material and take the same tests as their peers without disabilities.

Acquisition Deficit: A type of [social skills deficit](#) that stems from a lack of knowledge: a child does not understand a skill, and thus cannot master it.

Adaptations: Changes in educational environments that allow students with disabilities to participate in inclusive environments by compensating for learners' weaknesses.

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP): The measure by which schools, districts and states are held accountable for student performance under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Every state has the freedom to define AYP. All students, including those in special education programs, must demonstrate [adequate yearly progress](#), until 2014 when the law assumes all students have met the standards. It is very likely that the 2014 date and perhaps the notion of Annual Yearly Progress will be significantly changed with the reauthorization of No Child Left Behind (NCLB).

Source: Education Week <http://www.edweek.org/ew/issues/adequate-yearly-progress/>

Admission, Review and Dismissal (ARD): The name given to the committee used in some states (in other states not using the term ARD, they are called IEP teams or IEP committees) that is responsible for the development and review of a child's individualized education plan (IEP), evaluation and re-evaluation, functional behavioral analysis (FBA), and [behavior intervention plan \(BIP\)](#). The ARD committee meets at least once per year to review the IEP and construct a new plan for the coming year. In addition to the annual review meeting, other meetings can be called by teachers or parents whenever needed. This group is responsible for creating, implementing and maintaining the educational program from students with disabilities, as identified by IDEA.

Annual Review (AR): The yearly meeting of the [individualized education program \(IEP\) team](#) (or called ARD committee in some states). The AR is designed to gather all the [IEP team members](#) in one location to update one another on a student's needs and performance by reviewing progress toward goals and looking at new data like work samples and recent testing.

Antecedent Behavioral Consequences Chart (ABC): A tool used to create a record of disruptive behaviors that is utilized as part of [functional behavioral assessment \(FBA\)](#) to help to determine the triggers of and motivations behind these behaviors. ABCs are used to record what happened just before a behavior, a description of the behavior itself and the consequence of the behavior.

Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA): A technique for correcting [behavior and social skill deficits](#) in children with special needs. It is based on the understanding that children are more likely to repeat desired behaviors when these behaviors are met with positive reinforcement, and that they are less likely to repeat undesirable behaviors that are not rewarded. One significant part of ABA is discrete trial training (DTT), in which a skill is broken down into its most basic components so that these components may be taught one at a time.

Assessment: [Evaluations](#) used to identify a student's strengths, weaknesses and progress. These tests are designed to provide an overview of a child's academic performance, basic cognitive functioning and/or his or her current strengths or weaknesses; they can also test hearing and vision. Assessments can consist of anything from the observations of a teacher or aide to standardized and criterion-referenced tests to complex, multi-stage procedures such as a group of teachers assembling a large portfolio of student work.

Assessment Plan: A written description of the [assessments](#) that will be used to evaluate a student's strengths, weaknesses and progress and to determine his or her eligibility for special education services and the types of services that would help that student succeed. In some states the school district is given 15 days to decide which testing services will be used and put that into a plan, while in other states the time frame is not defined. However, IDEA gives only 60 days to complete an evaluation from the time a parent gives permission.

Assistive Technology (AT): [Assistive technology](#) is technology used by individuals with disabilities in order to perform functions that might otherwise be difficult or impossible. Assistive technology can include mobility devices such as walkers and wheelchairs, as well as hardware, software and peripherals that assist people with disabilities in accessing computers or other information technologies.

Source: AccessIT <http://www.washington.edu/accessit/articles?109>

Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD): An out-of-date term that was previously used to describe children who have difficulty paying attention, but are not significantly impulsive or hyperactive. Today the term ADD is usually used to describe the inattentive subtype of AD/HD or as a synonym for AD/HD.

Source: The Child Mind Institute <http://www.childmind.org/en/posts/ask-an-expert/2014-6-30-what-difference-between-add-and-adhd>

Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD): A condition that can make it hard for a person to sit still, control behavior and pay attention. Children with AD/HD are sometimes eligible for special education services under IDEA's "[other health impairment](#)" disability

category.

Source: NICHCY <http://nichcy.org/disability/specific/adhd>

Augmentative and Alternative Communication Device (AAC): AAC includes all forms of communication (other than oral speech) that are used to express thoughts, needs, wants, and ideas. An AAC device is a [tool](#) that uses a non-speech mode of communication to augment spoken language. AAC devices include electronic devices that digitize or synthesize speech and non-electronic communication aids such as manual communication boards.

Sources: ASHA.org <http://www.asha.org/public/speech/disorders/AAC/> and NYC Department of Education http://schools.nyc.gov/Academics/SpecialEducation/D75/for_employees/AssistiveTechnology

Autism (AUT): [Autism](#) is a complex developmental disability that typically appears during the first three years of life and affects a person's ability to communicate and interact with others. Autism is defined by a certain set of behaviors and is a "spectrum disorder" that affects individuals differently and to varying degrees.

Source: Autism Society <http://www.autism-society.org/about-autism/>

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD): A [disorder](#) characterized, in varying degrees, by difficulties in social interaction, verbal and nonverbal communication and repetitive behaviors. Autism spectrum disorders include autistic disorder, Rett syndrome, childhood disintegrative disorder, pervasive developmental disorder-not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS) and Asperger syndrome.

Source: Autism Speaks <http://www.autismspeaks.org/what-autism>

[Behavior Intervention Plan \(BIP\):](#) A plan that targets one to three of a student's undesirable behaviors with interventions that are linked to the functions of the behavior; each intervention specifically addresses a measurable, clearly-stated targeted behavior. A BIP can include prevention strategies, which stop the behavior before it begins, as well as replacement behaviors, which achieve the same function as the disruptive behavior without causing disruption.

[Behavior Management:](#) Responding to, preventing and de-escalating disruptive [behavior](#).

Behavior Support Plan (BSP): A proactive [action plan](#) to address behavior(s) that are impeding learning of a student or of others in his or her classroom.

Source: Positive Environments, Network of Trainers <http://www.pent.ca.gov/beh/bsp/bsp.htm>

[Child Find Program:](#) A program, mandated by IDEA, that continuously searches for and evaluates children who may have a disability. Child Find Programs can vary widely from school district to school district.

[Classroom Management:](#) The way in which a class is arranged. This involves planning every aspect of a lesson, routines, procedures, interactions and the discipline in the classroom.

[[LINK](#) to Behavior and Classroom Management-intro]

Collaborative Teaching: A [teaching strategy](#) in which two or more teachers work together, sharing responsibilities to help all students succeed in the classroom.

Curriculum-Based Measurements (CBM): Small, regular evaluations used to determine how well a student is learning in various subject areas. CBM can involve checklists or oral questions which the teacher uses to gauge student understanding and skill in a particular curriculum. These measurements are part of the monitoring [component of the RTI process](#).

Cut Point, Cut Scores: Scores on screening tools, usually selected by a school district, that are used to determine whether or not a student needs additional testing or [intervention](#).

Data-Based Decisions: A [component of the RTI process](#) that involves using information collected through the screening process to determine the intensity and duration of the needed intervention.

[Deaf-Blindness \(DB\):](#) 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.

Deaf-Hard of Hearing (DOHH): See Deafness and/or Hearing Impairment.

[Deafness:](#) A hearing impairment that is so severe that the child is impaired in processing linguistic information through hearing, with or without amplification.

Developmental and Social History: A [narrative assessment](#) formulated by a child's classroom teacher, parents, pediatrician and school specialists, focusing on issues such as the child's health history, developmental milestones, genetic factors, friendships, family relationships, hobbies, behavioral issues and academic performance. A developmental and social history is a common element of an assessment plan.

Developmental Delay (DD): A delay in one or more of the following areas of [childhood development](#): cognitive development, physical development (including vision and hearing), communication development, social and/or emotional development and adaptive development (including eating skills, dressing and toileting skills and other areas of personal responsibility).

Source: Indiana Family and Social Services

Administration <http://www.in.gov/fssa/ddrs/3382.htm>

Developmental Milestones: A [set of functional skills](#) or age-specific tasks that most children can do at a certain age range.

Source: University of Michigan Health

System <http://www.med.umich.edu/yourchild/topics/devmile.htm>

Direct Assessment: A component of [functional behavioral assessment \(FBA\)](#) that involves recording objective information about a student's disruptive behavior. This can entail using a scatter plot form to show the behavior's frequency and time of day, as well as using an antecedent-behavioral-consequences chart (ABC).

Discrete Trial Training (DTT): A part of [applied behavioral analysis \(ABA\)](#) in which a skill is broken down into its most basic components so that these components may be taught one at a time.

Early Intervention (EI): Services for at-risk children from birth to their third birthdays, as mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). [[LINK](#) to Early Intervention – IDEA Part C]

Emotional Disturbance (ED): A mental health issue including, but not limited to, anxiety disorders, bipolar disorder (sometimes called manic-depression), conduct disorders, eating disorders, obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) and psychotic disorders.

Source: NICHCY <http://nichcy.org/disability/specific/emotionaldisturbance>

Emotional or Behavioral Disturbance (EBD): A condition exhibiting one or more specific emotional and/or behavioral difficulties over a long period of time and to a marked degree, which adversely affects [educational performance](#).

Source: University of Minnesota <http://ici.umn.edu/index.php?topics/view/100/>

Fluency Deficit: A type of [instructional deficit](#) in which a child needs to practice a skill or receive coaching in order to use a skill effectively. An example is a reading fluency deficit, where the child cannot read smoothly or does so at too slow a rate.

Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE): The education to which [every student is entitled under IDEA](#). Every student is entitled to an education that is appropriate for his or her unique needs and that is provided free of charge.

Functional Behavior Analysis (FBA): A process which describes a student's disruptive behaviors, looks for the reasons behind the behaviors and offers interventions that teach new behaviors to replace the undesired ones.

Group Intelligence Tests: Tests, often administered in the general education classroom, that measure academic ability as well as a child's cognitive level. It is through these [types of tests](#) that a teacher might first suspect that a student has a learning disability.

Hearing Impairment: An impairment in hearing, whether permanent or fluctuating, that adversely affects a child's educational performance.

Source: NICHCY <http://nichcy.org/disability/specific/hearingloss>

Highly Qualified Teachers (HQT): An initiative of the No Child Left Behind Act, the federal definition of a highly qualified [teacher](#) is one who meets all of the following criteria: Fully certified and/or licensed by the state; holds at least a bachelor degree from a four-year institution; demonstrates competence in each core academic subject area in which the teacher teaches. The term highly qualified is not always synonymous with state certification.

Source: Washington OSPI <http://www.k12.wa.us/TitleIIA/HighlyQualifiedTeachers.aspx>

[Inclusion, Inclusive Classroom:](#) The term inclusion communicates an all-embracing societal ideology. Regarding individuals with disabilities and special education, inclusion secures opportunities for students with disabilities to learn inside mainstream classrooms. Mainstream classrooms in which students with disabilities learn are known as inclusive classrooms.

Indirect Assessment: A component of [functional behavioral assessment \(FBA\)](#) that involves interviewing teachers, parents and other adults who have contact with a student, asking questions about that student's disruptive behavior and when and where it occurs.

[Individualized Education Program \(IEP\):](#) A legal document that defines [special education services](#) between the school district and the parents.

IEP Team: The team of qualified professionals made up of the parent, special education teacher, interpreter of test data, district representative, and general education teacher at a minimum. This group makes all decisions related to the instructional program of a child with special needs, including placement and services provided. In some states this team is called the admission, review and dismissal (ARD) team.

Individual Intelligence Tests: Intelligence tests that are administered to a student one on one. These tests are often part of the [assessment process](#). Two common individual intelligence tests are the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC) and the Stanford Binet Intelligence Scale.

[Individualized Family Services Plan \(IFSP\):](#) A written treatment plan that maps out the early intervention services a child (age birth to his/her third birthday) will receive, as well as how and when these services will be administered. It details a child's current levels of functioning, specific needs and goals for treatment (referred to as outcomes).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA): A law that [guarantees educational rights to all students](#) with disabilities and makes it illegal for school districts to refuse to educate a student based on his or her disability.

Informed Consent: The [signed consent of a parent](#) that describes what the parent is consenting to; informed consent must be obtained before a district assesses, makes a major revision to a child's program, continues, or stops service for a child's disability.

Intellectual Disability (ID): Significantly subaverage general intellectual functioning, existing simultaneously with deficits in adaptive behavior and manifested during the developmental period, that adversely affects a child's educational performance. ID has been referred to as "Mental Retardation" (MR) in the past, and the term and its acronym may be used colloquially or on older documentation. (The federal government has passed legislation changing this term, but the legislation gave the states no deadline for changing the term in state laws/documents. Most states have already changed the term.) It is not, however, a currently accepted practice to refer to individuals with intellectual disabilities as mentally retarded.

Interventions: Sets of [teaching procedures](#) used by educators to help students who are struggling with a skill or lesson succeed in the classroom.

Intelligence Quotient (IQ): One of the measures used to determine eligibility for special education services.

Source: Medline Plus <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/001912.htm>

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE): The environment in which students with disabilities must be educated, as [mandated by The Individuals with Disabilities Act \(IDEA\)](#). Students with disabilities must be educated in a classroom setting that is as close to the general education setting as possible.

Modifications: Curricular adaptations that compensate for learners' weaknesses by changing or lowering expectations or standards.

Monitoring: A [component of the RTI process](#) that involves assessing, keeping accurate records of and monitoring student progress, responsiveness to instruction and intervention. The term is also used for a state's evaluation of each district's compliance with mandates of IDEA and state special education code.

Multidisciplinary Evaluation Team (MET or MDT): The name used for the group of trained professionals that conduct eligibility and review assessments. These members are often the same as the IEP Team, but the law does not define a MET or MDT, simply calls them a group of qualified professionals.

Multiple Disabilities: 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. [**LINK** to Multiple Disabilities]

Multiple Intelligences Theory: A theory which outlines [students' varied approaches](#) for processing information (known as "intelligences") and how teachers can access these pathways.

Native Language: The first language of an individual. A school district is [required to evaluate a student in his or her native language](#), or document proficiency in English, before they can identify that student as having a disability and provide special education services. In addition, parents must be offered evaluation plans and individualized education plans (IEPs) in their native language before giving informed consent.

Natural Environment: An educational setting that is [comparable](#) to the setting provided to children without disabilities.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB): The current reauthorization of President Lyndon Johnson's Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), passed in 2001 and implemented in 2002, the purpose of which was to raise achievement and close achievement gaps.

Source: National Education Association <http://www.nea.org/home/NoChildLeftBehindAct.html>

Observational Records: Information about a child's academic performance provided by anyone who works with a child. Observational records are a common element of an [assessment plan](#).

Occupational Therapist (OT): A professional who treats patients with injuries, illnesses or disabilities through the therapeutic use of everyday activities. They help these patients develop, recover and improve the skills needed for daily living and working.

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/occupational-therapists.htm>

Orthopedic Impairment (OI): Physical disabilities which could affect the academic process.

Other Health Impairment (OHI): A disability category under IDEA that lists examples of health-related conditions that may qualify a child for special education: attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, diabetes, epilepsy, heart conditions, hemophilia, lead poisoning, leukemia, nephritis, rheumatic fever, sickle cell anemia and Tourette syndrome.

Source: NICHCY <http://nichcy.org/disability/specific/emotionaldisturbance>

Outcomes: Short-term goals that are a critical component of an [individualized family service plan \(IFSP\)](#). They must be relevant, specific and measurable.

Performance Deficit: A [social or academic skills deficit](#) in which a student understands a particular skill, but fails to implement it consistently.

Performance-Based Tests: Evaluations, such as the Woodcock Johnson, Third Edition (WJIII) or the Wechsler Individual Achievement Test (WIAT), that are used to help determine a child's [eligibility for special education services](#).

Physical Therapist (PT): Professionals who help people who have injuries or illnesses improve their movement and manage their pain. They are often an important part of rehabilitation and treatment of patients with chronic conditions or injuries.

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/physical-therapists.htm>

Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS): A type of augmentative alternative communication (AAC) originally developed for children with autism. The primary purpose of PECS is to teach individuals with autism to initiate communication. Individuals are taught to initiate by handing a picture to a communication partner in exchange for a desired item.

Source: Autism Spectrum Institute at Illinois State

University <http://www.education.illinoisstate.edu/downloads/asi/PictureExchangeCommunicationSystem.pdf>

Positive Behavior Support (PBS): An approach to [eliminate challenging behaviors](#) and replace them with pro-social skills.

Source: NASP Resources <http://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources/mental-health/positive-behavior>

Present Levels: A component of an [individualized education program \(IEP\)](#) that defines a student's strengths and weaknesses, current levels of academic achievement, and current levels of functional performance. Before 2004 this part of the IEP was called present levels of performance; the current term is present levels of academic achievement and functional performance (PLAAFP).

Professional Learning Community (PLC): A group of professionals that review data, create needed [interventions](#) and make decisions, with the goal of helping students learn and achieve. While the exact definition of a PLC can vary from school to school, in general, the PLC serves the entire school and members collaborate to analyze data and support student learning.

Response to Intervention (RTI): A process used by educators to help students who are struggling with a skill or lesson. If a child does not respond to the initial interventions, more focused interventions are used to help the child master the skill. RTI strategies address both learning and behavior.

Scatter Plot: A form used in direct assessment to record [disruptive behavior](#) and show the behavior's frequency and the time of day at which it occurs.

Skill Evaluation: Diagnostic measures for determining a child's gross motor skills, fine manipulative skills and hearing, sight, speech and language abilities, administered by specialists such as a school speech pathologist or general practitioner. A skills evaluation is a common element of an [assessment plan](#).

Special Education (SPED): Term used in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) that is defined as specially designed instruction to increase the student's chances for success.

Specific Learning Disability (SLD): A disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using spoken or written language, that may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell or to do mathematical calculations. Specific learning disabilities include conditions such 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 mental retardation, of emotional disturbance or of environmental, cultural or economic disadvantage.

Source: Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education <http://www.doe.mass.edu/sped/links/learndisability.html>

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

Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP): Also known as a speech therapist, a professional who diagnoses and treats communication and swallowing disorders.

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/speech-language-pathologists.htm>

Stanford Binet Intelligence Scale (derived from the Binet-Simon Test): A norm-referenced individual intelligence test, administered by the school psychologist or special education team. The questions are designed to help educators differentiate between students performing below grade level because of cognitive disabilities and those who do so for other reasons.

“Stay Put” Law: A law which states that a parent can request that a child remain in his or her current educational placement while an IEP or offer of FAPE is in dispute.

Student Baseline: A student's starting point, determined by data collected through universal screening tools. A student's baseline is used to measure his or her progress throughout the year.

Student Study Team (SST): A more common term is Multidisciplinary Evaluation Team (MET or MDT). It is a team comprised of the school psychologist, parents and the school's special education team that meets when a child continues to struggle after attempts have been made to remedy problems without special education services. The SST or MET decides if the student should be evaluated, or if he or she will continue without special education services.

Transition/Transition Plan: Transition is a general term used to describe a change in a student's school or program. A transition plan is [specific to an IEP](#): a student who will turn 16 within the life of his or her individualized education program must have a transition goal and plan that outlines how he or she will transition to life beyond high school.

Transition Meeting: A meeting of the individualized education program (IEP) team prior to a [student moving](#) into a new program or school.

Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI): An acquired injury to the brain caused by an external physical force, resulting in total or partial functional disability and/or psychosocial impairment, that adversely affects a child's educational performance.

Triennial Review (Tri): An [IEP review meeting](#) that takes place every three years. During this meeting, the IEP team meets to discuss a student's continuing [eligibility for special education services](#). It is often combined with the IEP annual review (AR).

Universal Design: An approach that makes a [curriculum accessible to all students](#), regardless of their backgrounds, learning styles and abilities.

Universal Screening Tool: A test that can correctly identify students who are struggling with grade-level concepts or skills. A universal screening tool is used as part of the [RTI process](#).

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

Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC): An [individual intelligence test](#), usually administered by the school psychologist, which measures a student's intelligence in a variety of areas, including linguistic and spatial intelligence. This is a norm-referenced test, meaning that it has statistical validity and reliability for what it states it measures.

Widening Gap: The gap between what a [child with a disability](#) knows and what his or her peers know, which widens as he or she advances to higher grades.

Woodcock Johnson, Third Edition (WJIII): A performance-based test commonly used to help to determine a student's eligibility for [special education services](#).

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