Special Education Definitions

**Activities of Daily Living (ADL)** - activities that make a student independent in his environment, such as dressing, eating, and toileting.

**Achievement Test** – A test that measures a student’s level of development in academic areas such as math, reading, and spelling.

**Adaptive Development** - development of the child in comparison to other children the same age. This might include the child's ability to dress himself, feed himself, toilet training, how he/she plays with other children, how he/she plays along, understanding dangers in crossing the street, how he/she behaves if mother leaves the room, etc.

**Adaptive Physical Education (APE)** - a related service; an individual program of developmental activities, games, sports and rhythms suited to the interests, capacities, and limitations of students with disabilities who may not safely or successfully engage in unrestricted participation in the vigorous activities of the general physical education program.

**Administrative Review** - A review process whereby disagreements between parents and school systems may be resolved by a committee of school system individuals not directly involved with the case. Also called a conciliatory conference.

**Advocate** - someone who takes action to help someone else (as in "educational advocate"); also, to take action on someone's behalf.

**Amendment** - a change, revision, or addition made to a law. Appeal – a written request for a change in a decision; also, to make such a request.

**Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)** – An anti-discrimination law giving individuals with disabilities civil rights protection similar to those rights given to all people on the basis of race, sex, national origin, or religion.

**Annual Review** – A meeting held at least once a year to look at, talk about, and study a student’s Individualized Education Program (IEP). The purpose of the review is to make decisions about changes in the IEP, review the placement, and develop a new IEP for the year ahead.

**Appropriate** - able to meet a need; suitable or fitting; in special education; it usually means the most normal situation possible.

**Aptitude Test** – A test that measures an individual’s potential in a specific skill area, such as clerical speed, numerical ability, or abstract thinking.

**Assessment** - a collecting and bringing together of information about a child's needs, which may include social, psychological, and educational evaluations used to determine services; a process using observation, testing, and test analysis to determine an individual's strengths and weaknesses in order to plan his or her educational services.

**Assessment Plan** - the description of the battery of tests (psychological, achievement, language, etc.) to be used in a particular student's assessment.

**Assessment Team** - a team of people from different backgrounds who observe and test a child to determine his or her strengths and weaknesses.
**Assistive Technology** – Any item, piece of equipment, or product system that is used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of children with disabilities; e.g., augmentative communication boards, computer input devices, special switches.

**At Risk** – a term used with children who have, or could have, problems with their development that may affect later learning.

**Audiological Services** - a related service; includes identifying children with hearing loss and providing services that will help children with hearing losses maximize their strengths and abilities.

**Auditory Processing** - the ability to understand and use information that is heard, both words as well as other non-verbal sounds.

**Autism** - a disability; characterized by severe language and communication deficits, lack of normal relatedness, bizarre movement and self-stimulatory patterns, lack of normal handling of toys and other objects, and lack of most normal functional skills.

**Behavior Disorder** - a disability; a behavior which causes a child to have difficulty learning or getting along with others, the causes of this disorder may vary greatly.

**Buckley Amendment** – More commonly known name for the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974. The law gives parents and students (over age 18) the right to see, correct, and control access to school records.

**Career Education** – A progression of activities intended to help students acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that make work a meaningful part of life. Career education has four stages: 1) awareness/orientation, 2) exploration, 3) preparation, including vocational education, and 4) job placement/follow-up.

**Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Education Act (1990)** – A federal law stipulating that students with disabilities be guaranteed the opportunity to participate in federally funded vocational programs that are equal to those afforded to the general student population.

**Child Find** - a service directed by each state's Department of Education or lead agency for identifying and diagnosing unserved children with disabilities; while Child Find looks for all unserved children, it makes a special effort to identify children from birth to six years old.

**Child Study Team or Screening Committee**: A local school-based committee, whose members determine if a student should be evaluated for special education eligibility.

**Chronologically Age-Appropriate**: making the activities, behaviors, or settings of a disabled child as similar as possible to those of a non-disabled child of the same age.

**Cognitive** - a term that describes the process people use for remembering, reasoning, understanding, and using judgment; in special education terms, a cognitive disability refers to difficulty in learning.

**Community Advisory Committee for Special Education (CAC)** - a group of parents and professionals, mandated by law, that advises the Board of Education, Superintendent of Schools and school district administration about special education programs and policies.

**Community Mental Health Services (CMHS)** - the agency designated to provide mental health assessment and services to students with special needs.

**Community-Based Instruction (CBI)** - a model for delivery of instruction in which IEP goals are met in a "natural", age-appropriate setting. For example, math, sequencing, travel, and social skills may all be developed in the setting of a trip to the grocery store.
Communicatively Handicapped (CH) - a disability; difficulty understanding language or using language to the extent that it interferes with learning; also a disability category containing the currently-used labels of severe disorder of language, hearing handicapped, and language delay.

Compliance Complaint - the specific issue and/or resolution process involved when a school district is accused of violating educational law.

Comprehensive Service System - refers to a list of 14 areas each participating state is to provide under early intervention services. These 14 points range from definition of developmentally delayed, to guidelines for identification, assessment, and provision of early intervention services for the child and family, and include timelines and quality control.

Confidentiality: The limiting of access to a child or family’s records to personnel have direct involvement with the child.

Consent – Parental permission, usually given by signing a letter or form, agreeing to let the schools take an action which affects a child’s education. Consent is required before a child can be evaluated or receive special education services under IDEA.

Counseling - a related service; advice or help given by someone qualified to give such advice or help (often psychological counseling); includes parents and children receiving assistance from social workers, psychologists, and/or guidance counselors.

Deaf-Blind (DB) - a disability; a loss of both hearing and vision abilities requiring special education to achieve full potential.

Designated Instruction and Services (DIS) - sometimes called related services; specialized instructional, and/or support services identified through an assessment and written on an IEP as necessary for a child to benefit from special education (e.g. speech/ language therapy, vision services, etc.)

Developmental - having to do with the steps or stages in growth and development before the age of 18 years

Developmental History - the developmental progress of a child (ages birth to 18 years) in such skills as sitting, walking, talking or learning

Developmental Tests - standardized tests that measure a child's development as it compares to the development of all other children at that age

Developmentally Delayed (DD) – a term used to describe the development of children who are not able to perform the skills other children of the same age are usually able to perform.

Differential Proficiency Standards - the standards for graduation adopted by the school district for special education students who cannot attain the regular proficiency standards due to their disability.

Disability - the result of any physical or mental condition that affects or prevents one's ability to develop, achieve, and/or function in an educational setting at a normal rate

Due Process (procedure) - action that protects a person's rights; in special education, this applies to action taken to protect the educational rights of students with disabilities. Also, the legal procedures set up to resolve disagreements between parents and school districts over some part of a child's special education program.

Early Intervention Policies - see policy/policies
Early Intervention Program - a program in which problems that have been discovered in a child's development are remediated before the child's later development and learning are seriously affected.

Early Intervention Services - programs or services designed to identify and treat a developmental problem as early as possible, before age 3 (services for 3-5 year olds are referred to as preschool services)

Early Interventionist - someone who specializes in early childhood development, usually having a Master's degree or Ph.D. in an area related to the development of infants, toddler, and preschoolers

Educable Mentally Handicapped (EMH) - a disability; having a mild delay in the ability to learn and to function independently in the everyday environment; a mild delay is defined as a rate of development and learning that is 50% to 75% of what is expected of a person the same age.

Eligible - able to quality

Emotional Disorders (ED) – Disorders characterized by their effect on an individual’s emotional state. They may cause anxiety, such as separation anxiety, phobias, and post traumatic stress disorder. Other emotional disorders are affective or mood disorders, such as childhood depression, or bi-polar disorder.

Evaluation – (as applied to children from birth through two years of age) the procedures used to determine if a child is eligible for early intervention services; (as applied to preschool and school-aged children) the procedures used to determine whether a child has a disability and the nature and extent of the special education and related services the child needs

Extended School Year (ESY) - summer school for children with special needs.

Fair Hearing - the same as a due process hearing; a formal hearing that is called by parents or school district personnel when they cannot agree on a student's educational program; the decision about the student's program is made by an outside, impartial individual.

Fine Motor Skills – Body movements which use small muscles; for example: picking up a small object, writing, or eating.

Free Appropriate Public Education (often referred to as FAPE) - one of the key requirements of IDEA, which requires that an education program be provided for all school-aged children (regardless of disability) without cost to families; the exact requirements of "appropriate" are not defined, but other references within the law imply the most "normal" setting available

Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) – a program designed to meet the educational needs of students with above average intelligence in specific learning areas; a student may be eligible for both special education and GATE.

Gross Motor Skills – Body movements which use large muscles; for example: sitting, walking or climbing.

Guidance – a related service; similar to counseling.

Habilitation – The process of helping an individual develop specific skills and abilities (e.g., dressing, eating, maneuvering a wheelchair) in order to become as independent and productive as possible.

Handicap – see disability

Handicapped Children’s Protection Act – The law providing for the reimbursement of reasonable attorneys’ fees to parents who win their cases in administrative proceedings under IDEA.
**Health and Nursing Service** - a related service; health-related services provided by a school nurse or by another trained professional.

**Hearing Handicap/Hearing Impairment (HH)** - a disability; a hearing loss that interferes with the ability to understand or use language and that affects learning in school.

**Heterogeneous Classroom** - a grouping of children with similar educational needs but with dissimilar disabilities.

**Homogeneous Classroom** - a grouping of children with similar disabilities.

**Identification** – the process of locating and identifying children needing special services. Also, the referral to the school district of a child who might be eligible for special education services.

**Identification and Assessment (I & A)** - the process or unit where students' special educational needs are evaluated.

**Inclusion** – Ensuring that necessary supports and services are provided so that children with disabilities can participate with children who do not have disabilities in school, community, and recreation activities.

**Independent Living Skills** – Basic skills needed by people with disabilities to function on their own, with as little help as possible. Skills include self-help (e.g., bathing, dressing), housekeeping, community living (e.g., shopping, using public transportation), etc.

**Individualized Education Program (IEP)** - a written education plan, mandated by law, for a school-aged child with disabilities developed by a team of professionals (teacher, therapists, etc.) and the child's parents that defines a child's disability, states current levels of educational performance, describes the child's learning and educational needs, what services the child will need, and specifies annual goals and short-term objectives. It is reviewed and updated yearly. (For children ages birth through 2 years, the IFSP is used.)

**Individual Transition Plan (ITP)** - an educational plan designed to facilitate a student's move from one setting to another (e.g. from one classroom or school to another, or from school to work).

**Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP)** - a written statement for an infant or toddler (ages birth through 2 years old) developed by a team of people who have worked with the child and the family; the IFSP must describe the child's development levels; family information; major outcomes expected to be achieved for the child and family; the services the child will be receiving; when and where the child will receive these services; and the steps to be taken to support the transition of the child to another program; the IFSP will also list the name of the service coordinator assigned to the child and his/her family.

**Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)** - The authorizing federal legislation which mandates a free, appropriate public education for all children with disabilities. Former known as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act. Part B of the act refers to special education services for children age three through twenty-one. Part H refers to the early intervention program for infants and toddlers with disabilities from birth through age two and their families.

**Individuals With Exceptional Needs (IWENS)** - legislative term for students with special needs.

**Individual Program Plan (IPP)** – an annually-reviewed record of program and service needs provided by the regional center (e.g. respite care, behavior management training, etc.).

**Integration** - the joining of two groups that were previously separated; in this case, non-disabled children and children with disabilities. For example, a child in a special day class has opportunities to interact and learn with non disabled peers; these interactions can occur in the regular education classroom or during nonacademic activities such as recess, lunch, or physical education.
**Job Coach** - A service agency professional who works with an individual with disabilities at the job site, providing support by helping the employee to improve job skills, interpersonal relations, or any other job-related needs.

**Language Delay** - a delay in the development of a child's ability to use or understand language.

**Lead Agency** - the agency (office) within a state or territory in charge of overseeing and coordinating service systems for children ages birth through 2.

**Learning Disability (LD)** - see "specific learning disability."

**Learning Handicapped (LH)** - a disability; a child's regular education classroom performance is significantly below expected levels; also a disability category containing the currently used labels of severely learning disabled, educable mentally handicapped, and mildly mentally handicapped.

**Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)** - a term referring to a federal mandate that students with special education needs are offered programs to promote maximum interaction with regular education students as close to home as possible. The LRE is an educational setting or program that provides a student with disabilities with the chance to work and learn to the best of his or her ability; it also provides the student as much contact as possible with children without disabilities, while meeting all of the child's learning needs and physical requirements.

**Limited English Proficiency (LEP)** - refers to students whose primary language is other than English; a student may be eligible for both bilingual and special education.

**Low-Incidence Disability** - a state defined disability that qualifies for certain extra funding; includes visual and/or hearing impairments.

**Mainstreaming** - a term referring to the time during which a special education student participates in chronologically age-appropriate regular education activities, either academic or non-academic (e.g. math and reading or lunch, recess, and art).

**Mediation** - an informal meeting held when parents and school district personnel cannot agree on a child's educational program; this step comes before a due process hearing.

**Medical Therapy Unit (MTU)** – the unit providing assessment and remediation services by occupational therapists, physical therapists and adaptive physical education teachers to children who have fine and gross motor problems that are interfering with their educational progress.

**Mildly Mentally Handicapped** - see educable mentally handicapped.

**Moderately Mentally Disabled** – a disability; having a moderate delay in the ability to learn and to function independently in the everyday environment; a moderate delay is defined as a rate of development and learning 25% to 50% of what is expected of a child the same age.

**Multidisciplinary** - a team approach involving specialists in more than one discipline, such as a team made up of a physical therapist, a speech and language pathologist, a child development specialist, an occupational therapist, or other specialists as needed.

**Multiply Handicapped (MH)** - a disability; having two or more disabilities.

**Nondiscriminatory Evaluation** – An evaluation in which the materials and procedures used are not racially or culturally biased. In addition, an individual’s disability must be accommodated such as by allowing more time, using a computer, etc.
Non-Public School (NPS) - private placement of a child whose needs cannot be served by the special education programs offered within the school district.

Occupational Therapy – a therapy or treatment provided by an occupational therapist that helps individual development of physical skills that will aid in daily living; it focuses on sensory integration, on balance and coordination of movement, and on fine motor and self-help skills, such as dressing, eating with a fork and spoon, etc. Given when assessment shows that motor and perceptual difficulties interfere with classroom performance.

Orientation and Mobility (O&M) - a related service; a child with visual impairments is trained to know where his or her body is in space and to move through space.

Orthopedically Handicapped (OH) - a disability; a disability involving the neuromuscular skeletal system that affects the ability to move, as in paralysis or cerebral palsy.

Other Health Impaired (OHI) - a disability; having a chronic health problem which affects learning in school.

P.L. 94-142 - Education For All Handicapped Children Act which guarantees a free, appropriate education for children with exceptional needs.

Parent Counseling - a related service; parents receive help and support in understanding the special needs of their child.

Parent Training and Information Programs - programs that provide information to parents of children with special needs about acquiring services, working with schools and educators to ensure the most effective educational placement for their child, understanding the methods of testing and evaluating a child with special needs, and making informed decisions about their child's special needs.

Parent Training – a related service; parents receive specific training in skills required to implement their child's IEP as well as an understanding of special education law and parental rights and responsibilities under these laws.

Perceptual Motor Skills – the ability to perceive a situation, evaluate it and make a judgment on what action to take (e.g. copying shapes or crossing a street).

Physical Therapy – treatment of (physical) disabilities given by a trained physical therapist (under doctor's orders) that includes the use of massage, exercise, etc. to remediate mobility and gait and to modify strength, balance, tone, and posture and help the person improve the use of bones, muscles, joints, and nerves. Given when assessment shows a discrepancy between gross motor performance and other educational skills.

Placement – the classroom, program, service, and/or therapy that is selected for a student with special needs. Placement occurs after the IEP is written.

Policy-Policies - rules and regulations; as related to early intervention and special education programs, the rules that a state or local school system has for providing services for and educating its students with special needs.

Postsecondary Education – Education programs for students who have completed high school, such as community and junior college, four-year colleges, and universities.

Pre-School – refers to classrooms which serve three to five-year-old children. Private Agency - a non-public agency which may be receiving public funds to provide services for some children.
Private Therapist - any professional (therapist, tutor, psychologist, etc.) not connected with the public school system or with a public agency.

Program(s) – in special education, a service, placement, and/or therapy designed to help a child with special needs.

Psychological Services - a related service; includes psychological testing and psychological counseling for children and parents.

Psychologist - a specialist in the field of psychology, usually having a Master's degree or Ph.D. in psychology.

Public Agency - an agency, office, or organization that is supported by public funds and serves the community at large.

Public Law (P.L.) 94-142 – a law passed in 1975 requiring that public schools provide a "free appropriate public education" to school-aged children ages 3-21; and provides funds for states and territories to plan a comprehensive service system for infants and toddlers (ages birth through 2 years) with disabilities.

Referral – the request to identify and assess a child's special education needs; a referral may be made by a parent, teacher, medical personnel, or anyone with specific knowledge of the child.

Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1992 - Federal legislation that requires state vocational rehabilitation agencies to work cooperatively with local agencies, including schools, to create a unified system to serve people with disabilities.

Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504) - A nondiscrimination statute. Section 504 of the Act stipulates that individuals with disabilities may not be excluded from participating in programs and services receiving federal funds. It also prohibits job discrimination against people with disabilities in any program receiving federal financial assistance.

Related Services - transportation and developmental, corrective, and other support services that a child with disabilities requires in order to benefit from education; examples of related services include: speech pathology and audiology, psychological services, physical and occupational therapy, recreation, counseling services, interpreters for the hearing impaired, and medical services for diagnostic and evaluation purposes.

Resource Room - a classroom in which a student may receive resource specialist instruction.

Resource Specialist Program (RSP) - students receiving special education instruction for less than 50% of the school day are enrolled in the RSP; these students can be "pulled out" of the regular education classroom for special assistance during specific periods of the day or week and are taught by credentialed resource specialists;

Reverse Mainstreaming - when non-disabled children go to the special education classroom to play and learn with children who are disabled.

Screening – A brief examination of a child designed to pick up potential difficulties and to identify children who need further evaluation and diagnosis.

Self-Advocacy – The abilities required to take primary responsibility for one’s life and to make choices regarding one’s actions free from undue interference. Also called self-determination.

Self-Contained Classroom – a classroom in which a group of students with disabilities receive their entire instructional program with little or no interaction with nondisabled students.

Self-Help Skills - see activities of daily living.
Seriously Emotionally Disturbed (SED) - a disability; having a behavior problem which prevents learning and/or getting along with other people; the behavior must have continued for at least six months and be severe.

Service Coordinator - someone who acts as a coordinator of an infant's or toddler's services, working in partnership with the family and providers of special programs; service coordinators may be employed by the early intervention agency.

Services/Service Delivery - the services (therapies, instruction, treatment) given to a child with special needs.

Severe Disorder of Language (SDL) - a disability; having extreme difficulty acquiring, understanding or using language.

Severely Handicapped (SH) - a disability category containing the currently used labels of trainable mentally handicapped, severely/profoundly handicapped, severely emotionally disturbed, autistic, and multihandicapped.

Severely/Profoundly Handicapped (SPH) – a disability; having a very severe delay in the ability to learn and function independently in the everyday environment; a severe delay is defined as a rate of development and learning that is below 25% of what is expected of a person the same age.

Social Worker – A professional who may provide services to the family including: arranging or attending parent-student conferences, providing family counseling, family education, information, and referral; writing a social-developmental history; and/or conducting a behavioral assessment. Social workers sometimes conduct parent education in the school and community.

Special Day Class (SDC) - a self-contained classroom in which only students who require special education instruction for more than 50% of the school day are enrolled.

Special Education (sped) – instruction or education that is required to meet the needs of children with special needs that cannot be supplied through some modification in the regular education program.

Special Education Coordinator - the person in charge of special education programs at the school, district, or state level.

Special Education Intake Unit (SEIU) - the intake center within the Special Education Department which processes the referrals and conducts the assessments of children referred for special education services.

Special Education Local Plan Area (SELP) - the county office from which some special education services are funded.

Special Education Programs/Services - program, services, or specially designed instruction (offered at no cost to families) for children over 3 years old with special needs who are found eligible for such services; these include special learning methods or materials in the regular classroom, and special classes and programs if the learning or physical problems indicate this type of program.

Special Needs – (as in "special needs" child) – a term to describe a child who has disabilities or who is at risk of developing disabilities and who, therefore, requires special services or treatment in order to progress, or who require special adaptations made to their instruction or environment in order to learn.

Specific Learning Disability (SLD) - a disability; a chronic condition that selectively interferes with the development, integration, and/or demonstration of verbal and/or nonverbal abilities.
Speech Therapy – a related service - helps children learn to speak and use language; speech therapy is given by a speech pathologist or a speech and language therapist.

Speech/Language Pathology - a planned program to improve and/or correct communication problems.

Student Study Team (SST) - a regular education process designed to make preliminary modifications within the regular education program of a student not succeeding in class.

Supplemental Security Income (SSI) - A federal program administered through the Social Security Administration that provides payments to the individuals who are elderly and/or have disabilities. Children may be eligible for SSI if they have disabilities and are from families with low income. In addition, children who are hospitalized for 30 days or more and have a disability expected to last 12 months or more may receive SSI.

Timeline – time limit.

Trainably Mentally Handicapped (TMH) – see moderately mentally handicapped.

Trade and Technical Schools – Schools which prepare students for employment in recognized occupations such as secretary, air conditioning technician, beautician, electrician, welder, carpenter, etc.

Transdisciplinary Team - an approach to education in which a number of professionals from different fields work together and teach each other when they are working with a child with disabilities.

Transition - a time in a child's life when he or she moves from one educational program to another (e.g. from an infant program to preschool or from school to work).

Transition Coordinator – School personnel chosen to manage transition services for students with disabilities.

Transition Planning - Careful preparation by the student, parents, educators, and other service providers, for the time when the student leaves high school. The plan is written in the Individualized Transition Plan.

Transition Planning Team – The people who are involved in transition planning for a student, including the student, parents, school personnel (teachers, guidance counselor, vocational coordinator, school administrator), and adult service agency representatives (vocational rehabilitation counselor, independence living center staff).

Transition Services - A coordinated set of activities for a student that promotes movement from school to post-school activities, including postsecondary education, vocational training, integrated employment, continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation.

Transitional Employment - A relatively short-term program designed to help an individual obtain a job, or to develop the work habits and learn the skills needed for a particular job.

Traumatic Brain Injury - An acquired injury to the brain caused by an external physical force causing a disability which affects a child’s educational performance; e.g., cognition, memory, language, motor abilities.

Triennial Review – Every three years, a student in special education must be given a completely new evaluation/assessment to determine the student’s progress and to make a new determination of eligibility for continued special education services.

Travel Training – training to enable a student to be independent on public transportation.
**Vision Services** - a related service; instruction that helps children with visual impairments maximize their visual abilities.

**Visual Motor Skills** - the ability to adjust movement based on what is seen - includes eye-hand coordination (activities such as cutting and handwriting) as well as gross motor skills (like kicking and throwing).

**Visually Handicapped/Visually Disabled/Visually Impaired (VH)** - a disability; a vision loss affecting the ability to learn in school.

**Vocational Education (voc ed)** - education beginning a middle school through age 21, in which special education students participate in an adequately and appropriately supported work model that will include off-site job training, travel training, stranger training, social interaction, time management and communication skills.

**Work Sampling Test** – The portion of a vocational assessment which tests a student’s hands-on performance in certain simulated and actual work environments.

**Work Study Programs** – Education programs in which the student receives employment training and earns credit toward graduation through employment.

Adapted from "Dictionary of Special Education Terms", "Parent's Dictionary of Terms Used in Special Education", “Negotiating the Special Education Maze”