***Categories of Disability in Federal Special Education Law***

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| Federal Disability Term | Alternative Terms (if applicable) | Brief Description |
| Specific learning disability | Learning disability (LD) | A disorder related to processing information that leads to difficulties in reading, writing, and computing; the most common disability, accounting for half of all students receiving special education |
| Autism |  | A developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction, generally evident before age three, which adversely affects a child’s educational performance. |
| Deaf-Blindness |  | Concomitant [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. |
| Deafness |  | A hearing impairment so severe that a child is impaired in processing linguistic information through hearing, with or without amplification, which adversely affects a child's educational performance. |
| Developmental Delay |  | Children from birth to age three (under IDEA Part C) and children from ages three through nine (under IDEA Part B), the term developmental delay, as defined by each State, means a delay in one or more of the following areas: physical development; cognitive development; communication; social or emotional development; or adaptive [behavioral] development. |
| Emotional Disturbance |  | A condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child’s 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 general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression.  (e) A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems.  The term includes schizophrenia. The term does not apply to children who are socially maladjusted, unless it is determined that they have an emotional disturbance. |
| Hearing Impairment |  | An impairment in hearing, whether permanent or fluctuating, that adversely affects a child’s educational performance but is not included under the definition of "deafness." |
| Intellectual Disability | (formerly known as Mental Retardation) | Significantly sub-average general intellectual functioning, existing concurrently, with deficits in adaptive behavior and manifested during the developmental period that adversely affects a child’s educational performance. |
| Multiple Disabilities |  | Concomitant [simultaneous] impairments (such as mental retardation-blindness, mental retardation-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. |
| Orthopedic Impairment |  | A severe orthopedic impairment that adversely affects a child’s educational performance. The term includes impairments caused by a congenital anomaly, impairments caused by disease (e.g., poliomyelitis, bone tuberculosis), and impairments from other causes (e.g. cerebral palsy, amputations, and fractures or burns that cause contractures). |
| Other Health Impairment |  | Having limited strength, vitality, or alertness, including a heightened alertness to environmental stimuli, that results in limited alertness with respect to the educational environment, that—  (a) is due to chronic or acute health problems such as asthma, attention deficit disorder or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, diabetes, epilepsy, a heart condition, hemophilia, lead poisoning, leukemia, nephritis, rheumatic fever, sickle cell anemia, and Tourette syndrome; and  (b) adversely affects a child’s educational performance. |
| Speech or Language Impairment |  | A communication disorder such as stuttering, impaired articulation, a language impairment, or a voice impairment that adversely affects a child’s educational performance. |
| Traumatic Brain Injury |  | An acquired injury to the brain caused by an external physical force, resulting in total or partial functional disability or psychosocial impairment, or both, that adversely affects a child's educational performance. The term applies to open or closed head injuries resulting in impairments in one or more areas, such as cognition; language; memory; attention; reasoning; abstract thinking; judgment; problem-solving; sensory, perceptual, and motor abilities; psychosocial behavior; physical functions; information processing; and speech.  The term does not apply to brain injuries that are congenital or degenerative, or to brain injuries induced by birth trauma. |
| Visual Impairment (Including Blindness) |  | An impairment in vision that, even with correction, adversely affects a child’s educational performance. The term includes both partial sight and blindness. |

References:

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