



Handout #1

IDEA 2004 Definitions of Students With Disabilities

During the 2009-2010 school year, the most recent year for which full data are available, approximately 6,481,000 children and youth ages 3-21 were served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).¹ These students were found to require special education and related services under one of the following disability categories²:

1. **Autism:** The 378,000 children with autism have a developmental disability that significantly affects their verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction. This disability is generally evident before age three.
2. **Deaf-Blindness:** The 2,000 children with deaf-blindness have both 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.
3. **Deafness and Hearing Impairment³:** The 79,000 children with deafness or hearing impairments have limitations to their hearing, whether permanent or fluctuating, that adversely affect their educational performance.
4. **Developmental Delay:** The 368,000 children aged three through nine with developmental delay experience developmental delays in one or more of the following areas: physical development, cognitive development, communication development, social or emotional development, or adaptive development.
5. **Emotional Disturbance:** The 407,000 children with emotional disturbance exhibit one or several characteristics—over a long period of time and to a marked degree—that adversely affect the child's educational performance. These characteristics include
 - An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors;
 - An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers;
 - Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances;
 - A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression; and/or
 - A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems.

¹ Number of students served, reported in thousands, were retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=64>

² Definitions were retrieved from <http://idea.ed.gov/explore/view/p/%2Croot%2Cregs%2C300%2CA%2C300%252E8%2C>

³ Deafness and hearing impairment are defined separately, with deafness being a hearing impairment so severe that the child is impaired in processing linguistic information through hearing. These two categories are listed together here because counts are only available for hearing impairments.



6. **Mental Retardation (Intellectual disability):** The 463,000 children with mental retardation exhibit significantly sub-average general intellectual functioning, existing concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior and manifested during the developmental period.
7. **Multiple Disabilities:** The 131,000 children with multiple disabilities have concomitant impairments (such as mental retardation–blindness or mental retardation–orthopedic impairment), the combination of which causes such severe educational needs that they cannot be accommodated in special education programs solely for one of the impairments.⁴
8. **Orthopedic Impairment:** The 65,000 children with orthopedic impairments include children with impairments caused by a congenital anomaly, by disease (e.g., poliomyelitis, bone tuberculosis), or from other causes (e.g., cerebral palsy, amputations, and fractures or burns that cause contractures).
9. **Other Health Impairments:** The 689,000 children with other health impairments have limited strength, vitality, or alertness, including a heightened alertness to environmental stimuli, which results in limited alertness with respect to the educational environment. This condition may be 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, or Tourette syndrome.
10. **Specific Learning Disability:** The 2,431,000 children with specific learning disabilities have a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations, including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia.
11. **Speech or Language Impairment:** The 1,416,000 children with speech or language impairments have a communication disorder, such as stuttering, impaired articulation, a language impairment, or a voice impairment, that adversely affects their educational performance.

⁴ Deaf–blindness is its own disability, and is therefore not included in this category.



12. **Traumatic Brain Injury:** The 25,000 children with traumatic brain injuries have an acquired injury to the brain caused by an external physical force, resulting in total or partial functional disability or psychosocial impairment.⁵
13. **Visual Impairment:** The 29,000 children with visual impairments, including blindness, have impairment in their vision such that, even with correction, it adversely affects their educational performance. The term includes both partial sight and blindness.

⁵ This category does not include congenital or degenerative conditions, or brain injuries induced by birth trauma.