

## Access, Equity, and Inclusion for Individuals with Disabilities

### GLOSSARY OF TERMS



#### A

**Autism (or) autistic disorder** A pervasive developmental disorder. This diagnosis is reserved for individuals who display social interaction and communication impairments, as well as repetitive, stereotypic, and restricted interests and activities prior to thirty-six months of age; often accompanied by moderate or severe mental retardation. Autism is considered part of autism spectrum disorders.

**autism spectrum disorders** Contemporary term used to speak collectively about autism

**American Sign Language (ASL)** Visual-gesturing language that has its own rules of grammar distinct from English; used primarily by culturally deaf individuals.

**assistive technology** Tools and devices, systems and services that improve the functional capabilities of students with disabilities and others in order to access the living and learning environment.

**Asperger syndrome** A pervasive developmental disorder that is considered part of autism spectrum disorders and characterized by impairment in social interactions.

#### C

**cerebral palsy** Group of non-progressive conditions involving muscle control, posture, and movement; literally means brain paralysis.

**cognitive disability** A condition in which an individual has significant limitations processing information and has adaptive behaviors that interfere with learning. This term is sometimes used synonymously with *mental retardation*, although it also may include other conditions (e.g., autism)

**cognitive impairment** Term sometimes used synonymously with mental retardation and often considered a newer, less stigmatizing description of this disability.

**communication disorder** Term sometimes used synonymously with *speech and language*

*disorders*, but also likely to be used in discussing individuals who have hearing loss.

**comorbidity** The simultaneous occurrence of two disabilities, disorders, or conditions.

**culture** Complex blend of thoughts, feelings, attitudes, beliefs, values, and behavior patterns that are shared by racial, ethnic, religious or social groups of people.\*

## D

**deaf** Hearing loss that is so severe that the student has difficulty processing linguistic information through hearing (with or without amplification) and the student's educational performance is adversely affected.

**developmental disability** A significant, chronic condition, typically physical, cognitive, or a combination of both, that results in the need for special education and related services. This term is sometimes used synonymously with *mental retardation*.

**differentiation** Adapting the curriculum and other services to meet specific needs of individual learners.

**disproportionate representation** Instances in which a particular group is represented significantly more or less than would be expected based on the percentages of those who comprise that group in the general population.

**dyscalculia** An impairment in the ability to solve mathematical problems or to comprehend mathematical concepts.

**dysgraphia** An impairment in the ability to produce written language.

**dyslexia** An impairment in the ability to read or comprehend written language.

## E

**emotional and behavioral disorders** Behavioral or emotional responses in school programs that are significantly different from appropriate age, cultural, and ethnic norms that adversely affect academic performance. Also known as *emotional disturbance/disorder*.

**English as a second language (ESL) instruction** Practice of directly teaching English to individuals whose native or first language is not English.

**English language learners (ELLs)** Students who are learning English as a second language or as an additional language to their native/first language.

**epilepsy** Neurological condition in which damage to the brain leads to sudden, uncontrolled bursts of electrical activity that may result in seizures.

## F

**free appropriate public education (FAPE)** Core principle in the U.S. federal legislation titled *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA), now *Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act* (IDEIA), specifying that students with disabilities are entitled to receive an education designed to address their special needs, at no cost to parents.

## G

**genetic hearing loss** Hearing loss caused by the presence of an abnormal gene within one or more chromosomes.

**giftedness** Advanced development across intellectual areas within a specific academic or arts-related area or unusual organizational power to bring about desired results. Also, outstanding abilities capable of leading to high intellectual and/or academic performance.

## H

**hard of hearing** Hearing loss, whether permanent or fluctuating, that adversely affects a student's educational performance but that is not included under the definition of "deaf."

## I

**inclusion** A practice and belief system that emphasizes including all students in a school learning environment. Students with disabilities are integrated into general education classrooms with their nondisabled peers using appropriate supports and interventions to address academic and behavioral outcomes within the standard curriculum, and they are recognized as full members of those classrooms.

**individualized education program (IEP)** Legal document prepared and updated annually by a school's multidisciplinary team or annual review team that specifies a student's level of functioning and needs; instructional goals and objectives for that student and how he/she will be evaluated; the nature and extent of special education and supplementary aids and related services the student will receive; and the initiation date and duration of the student's services.

**individualized family service plan (IFSP)** Legal document prepared by a family service coordinator that is centered around an infant or toddler with a disability and outlines the family's needs, the child's needs, what services should be received and for how long, and how the child with the disability should be transitioned into any intervention or special education

program.

**Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA)** Federal law, first enacted in 1975, that protects the educational rights of infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities (ages birth to twenty-one).

**intellectual disabilities** Contemporary term often used in place of the term *mental retardation*.

## L

**language disorder** Impairments that interfere with language comprehension and use.

**learning disabilities** Condition in which a student has a dysfunction in processing information typically found in language-based activities, resulting in interference with learning. Students with learning disabilities (LD) have average or above average intelligence but experience significant problems in learning how to read, write, and/or compute, as well as uneven ability patterns across academic content areas.

**least restrictive environment (LRE)** Setting most like the one in which the majority of students are educated, where a student with a disability can also succeed. The presumption in current federal law is that the LRE for most students is the general education classroom.

## M

**multicultural education** An approach to education that includes perspectives from, and content about, culturally diverse groups, embraces diverse cognitive styles, and promotes equity in a diverse society.

**multidisciplinary team** Team of teachers, specialists, administrators, and parents who assess a student's individual needs, determine eligibility for special education, and develop the Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

## N

**No Child Left Behind Act of 2001** Federal school reform legislation reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 that includes increased school accountability for student learning, more choices for parents and students, greater flexibility for schools in the use of funds, and an emphasis on early reading intervention.

## O

**other health impairment** IDEA term for students having medical conditions that result in limited strength, vitality, or alertness.

## P

**P.L. 94-142** A federal law called Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 that was renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in 1990. The law is now known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA), and it seeks to protect the educational rights of students with disabilities.

**pervasive developmental disorder (PDD)** Clinically described disorder in which autism is included, characterized by severe and pervasive impairment in several areas of development: reciprocal social interaction skills, communication skills, or the presence of stereotypic behavior, interests, and activities.

## R

**related services** Services required through IDEA for students with disabilities that enable them to benefit from special education. May include transportation, speech/language therapy, and adaptive physical education, among others.

**response to intervention (RTI)** Approach (first authorized in IDEA 2004) to identifying students as having learning disabilities based on the extent to which their learning accelerates or fails to accelerate when provided with increasingly intense instructional interventions. Also known as *responsiveness to instruction*.

## S

**Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973** Federal civil rights law protecting individuals with functional disabilities. Provides protection for some students not eligible for services through IDEA.

**special education** Specialized instruction that students with disabilities are entitled to receive as articulated in IDEA.

**specific language impairment** Language disorder that cannot be explained by a physical disability, mental retardation, hearing loss, or another disability.

## T

**three-tiered intervention approach** Use of research-based and increasingly intense interventions, usually in reading, as part of a response to intervention (RTI) model for identifying students as having learning disabilities.

## U

**universal design for learning (UDL)** An instructional planning approach that adapts concepts from architecture and product development to address diverse student learning needs by providing students multiple opportunities to engage in the curriculum.

## REFERENCES

Friend, M. (2008). *Special education: Contemporary perspectives for school professionals* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.).

Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Friend, M., & Bursuck, W. D. (2009). *Including students with special needs: A practical guide for classroom teachers* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

\* Zion, S., Arnold, S., & Ritter, S. (2007). *Understanding culture and culture responsiveness.*

Report for the National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems (NCRESt) (p. 11).

Denver, CO.