

# Understanding the Language of Special Education:

A Glossary for  
Parents and  
Educators



**PaTTAN**  
Pennsylvania Training and  
Technical Assistance Network

# Introduction

Greetings! Welcome to the world of special education. As with many specialized fields, there are terms used in special education that are unique. This guide is not a legal document and was developed to give parents and educators in Pennsylvania an understanding of the language of special education so they can more easily participate in educational decision-making.

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# Agencies, Organizations, and Programs

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**The Arc of Pennsylvania** is the state chapter of the largest advocacy organization in the United States for citizens with cognitive, intellectual, and developmental disabilities and their families. The Arc of Pennsylvania works to promote active citizenship and inclusion of all children and adults with cognitive, intellectual, and developmental disabilities in every community.

**[www.thearcpa.org](http://www.thearcpa.org)**

The **American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA)** is a national professional association for speech and language therapists and audiologists.

**[www.asha.org](http://www.asha.org)**

The **Brain Injury Association of Pennsylvania** conducts programs to prevent brain injury and to improve the quality of life for people who have experienced brain injury. BrainSTEPS, which is a school reentry program, provides teams of professionals to assist those who provide educational support to students with brain injury.

**[www.biapa.org](http://www.biapa.org)**

The **Bureau of Special Education (BSE)** within the Pennsylvania Department of Education is responsible for the education of students with disabilities from ages 3 through 21.

**[tinyurl.com/PennsylvaniaBSE](http://tinyurl.com/PennsylvaniaBSE)**

**Child Find** is a federal requirement that mandates that states must actively locate children, from birth to age 21, who have disabilities or who are at risk for developing disabilities.

**ConsultLine** (1-800-879-2301) is the toll-free help line provided by the Pennsylvania Department of Education's Bureau of Special Education to assist parents of children with disabilities who have questions concerning their children's special education programs.

**[odr-pa.org/consultline](http://odr-pa.org/consultline)**

The **Council for Exceptional Children (CEC)** is the largest international professional organization dedicated to improving educational outcomes for individuals with exceptionalities, students with disabilities, and/or individuals who are gifted.

**[www.cec.sped.org](http://www.cec.sped.org)**

## Agencies, Organizations, and Programs *(continued)*

**Disability Rights Network of Pennsylvania (DRN)** is a statewide, nonprofit corporation designated as the federally-mandated organization to advance and protect the civil rights of adults and children with disabilities. DRN works with people with disabilities and their families, their organizations, and their advocates to ensure their rights.

**[drnpa.org](http://drnpa.org)**

The **Early Intervention Technical Assistance (EITA)** system, which is part of the Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network, supports Early Intervention programs through staff professional development and family informational services.

**[www.eita-pa.org](http://www.eita-pa.org)**

**Head Start** is a federal program aimed at providing comprehensive preschool education programs for children ages three to five from low-income families. Planned activities are designed to address individual needs and to help children attain their potential in mental and physical development before starting school. Ten percent of enrollment is reserved for children with disabilities.

**[paheadstart.org](http://paheadstart.org)**

**Hispanics United for Exceptional Children (HUNE)** is a Community Parent Resource Center in Pennsylvania. HUNE empowers parents of children with exceptionalities to obtain a free, appropriate, quality education for their children and other children with disabilities. HUNE provides training programs on all aspects of special education and support, including transition services. HUNE serves, but is not limited to, Hispanic parents in Philadelphia.

**[huneinc.org](http://huneinc.org)**

An **Intermediate Unit (IU)** is a regional educational agency that provides services to local educational agencies including curriculum, special education, technology and information services, human resources, instruction, and professional development.

**[www.paiu.org](http://www.paiu.org)**

A **Local Educational Agency (LEA)** is a school district, charter school, or other educational entity responsible for providing free, appropriate, public education in accordance with Pennsylvania Department of Education statutes, regulations, and policies with or without support from other agencies.

The **Medical Assistance Program (MA)** assures access to quality healthcare for Pennsylvanians eligible for services. Sometimes referred to as Medicaid, it provides payment for health care services on behalf of children with limited income and children with disabilities.

**[www.medicaid.gov](http://www.medicaid.gov)**

The **National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE)** offers support in the delivery of quality education to children and youth with disabilities throughout the country. Its activities include targeted training to address current issues, technical assistance, policy analysis, research, publications, specialized websites, national initiatives, and collaborative partnerships to enhance problem solving at the local, state, and national levels.

**[www.nasdse.org](http://www.nasdse.org)**

The **Office for Dispute Resolution (ODR)** coordinates and manages Pennsylvania's special education mediation and due process systems. ODR provides help concerning procedural safeguards to parents, advocates, school districts, charter schools, intermediate units, and approved private schools.

**[odr-pa.org](http://odr-pa.org)**

The **Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL)**, through the Pennsylvania Departments of Education and Public Welfare, promotes opportunities for all Pennsylvania children and families by building systems and providing supports that help ensure access to high quality child and family services. Early Intervention supports and services (infants, toddlers, and preschool age children) are administered by OCDEL.

**[tinyurl.com/PAocdel](http://tinyurl.com/PAocdel)**

The **Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP)** within the U.S. Department of Education is dedicated to improving results for infants, toddlers, children, and youths with disabilities from birth through age 21 by providing oversight, leadership, and financial support to assist states and local districts. OSEP administers the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

**[tinyurl.com/osep-gov](http://tinyurl.com/osep-gov)**

The **Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR)** provides vocational rehabilitation services to help individuals with disabilities prepare for, obtain, and maintain employment.

**[tinyurl.com/PaVocRehab](http://tinyurl.com/PaVocRehab)**

## Agencies, Organizations, and Programs *(continued)*

The **Parent Education and Advocacy Leadership (PEAL) Center** is a Parent Training and Information Center (PTI) in Pennsylvania funded by the U.S. Department of Education. The PEAL Center is an organization of parents of children with disabilities reaching out to assist other parents and professionals. It provides workshops, training, and information about early intervention, special education, and inclusive education. Parent advisors are available to provide families with information about the special education process and problem-solving strategies.

**[www.pealcenter.org](http://www.pealcenter.org)**

**Parent to Parent of Pennsylvania** is a nonprofit organization that links families of individuals with disabilities or special needs.

**[www.parenttoparent.org](http://www.parenttoparent.org)**

The **Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE)** is the state agency that holds the ultimate responsibility for the state supervision of all schools and educational programs in the commonwealth. PDE's mission is to lead and service the educational community to enable each individual to grow into an inspired, productive, fulfilled, lifelong learner.

**[www.education.state.pa.us](http://www.education.state.pa.us)**

The **Pennsylvania Department of Health (DOH)** is the state agency whose mission is to promote health and sound health policy, prevent disease and disability, improve health services systems, and ensure that essential public health functions and safety net services are available.

**[www.portal.health.state.pa.us](http://www.portal.health.state.pa.us)**

The **Pennsylvania Department of Human Services** is the state agency in charge of promoting, improving, and sustaining the quality of family life. This includes child development; children, youth, and families; developmental programs; income maintenance; medical assistance; mental health and substance abuse services.

**[www.dhs.state.pa.us](http://www.dhs.state.pa.us)**

The **Pennsylvania State Board of Education** is the administrative regulatory body for elementary, secondary, and higher education in the commonwealth. It consists of 21 members, 17 of whom are nominated by the Governor and confirmed by the State Senate for over-lapping, six-year terms.

**[www.stateboard.education.pa.gov](http://www.stateboard.education.pa.gov)**

The **Pennsylvania State Task Force on the Right to Education** was developed as a result of the historic PARC Consent Agreement. The primary purpose of the State and Local Task Forces is to ensure the intent and spirit of the Right to Education for students with disabilities is carried out throughout the commonwealth through recommendations, evaluation, advocacy, and monitoring.

**[www.pattan.net](http://www.pattan.net)**

The **Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network (PaTTAN)** is an initiative of the Pennsylvania Department of Education's Bureau of Special Education, working in partnership with families and local educational agencies to support programs and services to improve student learning and achievement.

**[www.pattan.net](http://www.pattan.net)**

The **Special Education Advisory Panel (SEAP)** is a state advisory panel required by federal law to provide policy guidance with respect to special education and related services for children with disabilities. Pennsylvania's panel is established by the governor and consists of 21 members.

**[www.pattan.net](http://www.pattan.net)**

The **State Interagency Coordinating Council (SICC)** is an advisory group, made up of parents and professionals, whose purpose is to advise the Governor and the Departments of Education, Health, and Public Welfare about Early Intervention issues in Pennsylvania.

**[www.pattan.net](http://www.pattan.net)**

# Disabilities and Behaviors

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**Aphasia** is a communication disorder characterized by difficulty understanding and/or producing language.

**Attention Deficit Disorder/Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADD/ADHD)** is a neurological disorder in which individuals display developmentally-inappropriate behavior including poor attention skills and impulsivity. These characteristics arise in early childhood, typically before age seven, and have durations of at least six months. Children with ADD/ADHD may experience difficulty in the areas of social skills and self esteem. They may be eligible for special education services under the other health impairment (OHI) disability category.

**Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)** is a developmental disability generally evident before age three that significantly affects verbal and nonverbal communication, social interaction, and educational performance. Other characteristics often associated with ASD include engagement in repetitive activities and stereotyped movements, resistance to environmental change or change in daily routines, and unusual responses to sensory experiences.

**Cerebral Palsy (CP)** is a disorder of movement and posture control resulting from injury or lack of development in the brain during fetal life, the newborn period, or early childhood. Both genetic and acquired factors may be involved. The extent and location of the brain damage determine the type of cerebral palsy and the associated symptoms.

**Cognitive Delay** is a disability in which a child's intellectual and adaptive behavior is below average, which impacts upon the child's education.

**Deaf-blindness (DB)** combines hearing and visual impairments, which cause such severe communication and other developmental and educational needs that the child cannot be accommodated in special education programs solely for children with deafness or children with blindness.

**Deafness and Hearing Loss** are terms used to describe the inability to process some or all information through the auditory channel. In audiological terms, a child who is deaf has a hearing loss of 90 decibels or greater. Culturally, an individual may have any degree of hearing loss and still consider himself/herself to be deaf.



**Developmental Apraxia of Speech (DAS)** is a muscular disorder present at birth in which a child has trouble producing what he/she wants to say correctly and consistently. It appears to affect more boys than girls. This speech disorder goes by several other names, including developmental verbal apraxia, developmental verbal dyspraxia, articulatory apraxia, and childhood apraxia of speech. DAS is different from what is known as a developmental speech delay in which a child follows the typical path of speech development but does so more slowly than do typically-developing peers.

A **Developmental Disability (DD)** is any physical or mental condition that begins before the age of 18 years, causes the child to acquire skills at a slower rate than his/her peers, continues indefinitely, and impairs the child's ability to function in society.

The **Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders V (DSM-V)** is the American Psychiatric Association's classification and description of mental disorders.

A **Disability** is a substantially limiting physical or mental impairment that affects such basic life activities as hearing, seeing, speaking, walking, learning, working, or caring for oneself.

**Dysfluency** is a rhythm disorder characterized by the repetition of a sound, word, or phrase. Stuttering is perhaps the most serious dysfluency.

**Dyslexia** is a neurologically-based, often familial, disorder that interferes with the acquisition and processing of language. Varying in degrees of severity, it is manifested by difficulties in receptive and expressive language, including phonological processing in reading, writing, spelling, handwriting, and sometimes in arithmetic. Dyslexia is not the result of lack of motivation, sensory impairment, inadequate instructional or environmental opportunities, or other limiting conditions, but may occur together with these conditions.

**Dyspraxia** is an impairment of the ability to perform coordinated physical movements.

## Disabilities and Behaviors *(continued)*

**Emotional Disturbance (ED)** is a condition in which a child exhibits one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree, adversely affecting 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 behaviors or feelings under normal circumstances; d) a tendency to develop a generally pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression; or e) a tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems.

**Functional Behaviors** are basic behaviors (e.g., mealtime skills) a child has mastered or needs to master to get along as independently as possible in society.

**Intellectual Disability (ID)** refers to a pattern of persistently slow learning of basic motor and language skills during childhood, along with deficits in adaptive behavior and a significantly below-normal global intellectual capacity during adulthood. Individuals with ID may be described as having developmental delays, global developmental delays, or learning difficulties.

A **Learning Disability (LD)** is a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or using spoken or written language, which may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or perform mathematical calculations.

**Multiple Disabilities** are simultaneous impairments (e.g., intellectual disability and blindness, intellectual disability and orthopedic impairment), the combination of which causes such severe educational need that the child cannot be accommodated in special education programs solely for one of the impairments. Multiple disabilities do not include deaf-blindness.

**Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD)** is a recurrent pattern of negative, defiant, disobedient, and hostile behavior toward authority figures, which persists for at least six months.

An **Orthopedic Impairment (OI)** is any musculoskeletal condition that adversely affects a child's educational performance.

An **Other Health Impairment (OHI)** is an educational classification that describes children who have acute or chronic health problems that cause limited strength, vitality, or alertness, and that adversely affect a child's educational performance.

**Pervasive Developmental Disorders (PDD)** is an overall category of developmental disorders that includes autism, Rett syndrome, Asperger's syndrome, pervasive developmental disorders not otherwise specified, and childhood disintegrative disorder.

**Self-Stimulation**, also known as stereotypical behavior, is repetitive body movement or object movement, such as hand flapping, watching the fingers wiggle, or rocking side to side, that may interfere with the child's ability to "sit still" and pay attention or participate in meaningful activities. This behavior is common in many individuals with developmental disabilities; however, it appears to be most common in autism.

A **Specific Learning Disability (SLD)** is a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or perform mathematical calculations.

**Speech / Language Impairment** refers to problems in communication that affect a child's ability to talk, understand, read, and write. Disorders may range from a few speech sound errors to a total loss of ability to understand and use language.

**Tactile Defensiveness** is an abnormal sensitivity to touch indicated by avoidance or rejection of touching and handling. The child who has tactile defensiveness may resist something of an unusual texture, temperature, pressure, or wetness.

**Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)** is an acquired brain injury, which is sustained after a period of normal development. TBI is caused by an external force and results in physical, behavioral, or mental changes depending on which area of the brain is injured. TBI could impact upon a child's education in that special education services may be needed.

A **Visual Impairment (VI)** is impairment in vision that, even with correction, adversely affects a child's educational performance.

# Educational Terms

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An **Accommodation** changes **how** a student learns material or demonstrates knowledge. It can relate to classroom instruction or to district/state administered assessments that measure achievement. An accommodation does not change the content of an assignment or alter what a test or quiz measures. It should be agreed upon by the educational team and listed in the child's Individualized Education Program (IEP).

**Adapted Physical Education (APE)** is a component of the educational curriculum in which physical, recreational, and other therapists work with children who exhibit delays in motor development and perceptual motor skills. APE is a related service that some children need in addition to, or in place of, physical education.

**Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)** is the degree of progress expected of children in academic areas. AYP is annually established by the Pennsylvania Department of Education.

The **Annual Performance Report (APR)** is the report submitted by the Pennsylvania Departments of Education and Public Welfare to the U.S. Department of Education that provides compliance data and the results of special education for children with disabilities. Results may be found on PaTTAN's website, [www.pattan.net](http://www.pattan.net).

An **Approved Private School (APS)** is a private school that is licensed by the State Board of Private Academic Schools or Pennsylvania Charter Schools. APSs are eligible to receive funds from school districts and/or the commonwealth for the education of students with severe disabilities.

A **Basic Education Circular (BEC)** is an official document used by the Pennsylvania Department of Education to communicate with school districts regarding policy. Unless adopted and published in the Pennsylvania Bulletin, BECs are only informational and advisory and are not binding on local school districts. BECs can be accessed online at [www.education.state.pa.us](http://www.education.state.pa.us).

**Career and Technical Education (CTE)** provides learning experiences where students develop skills that are applicable and necessary for employment in specific career areas or postsecondary study.

**Career and Technical Education Centers (CTC)** are public schools that provide career and technical education to secondary school students, youth out

of school, and adults in a geographical area comprised of, and operated by, one or more school districts. CTCs offer courses that are directly related to the preparation of individuals for paid employment in such areas as carpentry, auto mechanics, child care, and cosmetology. Currently there are over 80 CTCs in Pennsylvania.

A **Charter School** is an independent public school established and operated under a charter from the local board of school directors. A charter school must be organized as a public, nonprofit corporation and may not be granted to any for-profit entity.

A **Cyber Charter School** is an independent public school established and operated under a charter from the Department of Education. Cyber charter schools deliver a significant portion of instruction to their students through the Internet or other electronic means. A cyber charter school must be organized as a public, nonprofit corporation and may not be granted to any for-profit entity.

**Due Process** is a process for resolving a dispute between a family and an early intervention program or a local educational agency related to the identification, evaluation, placement, or program of a child with disabilities.

A **Due Process Hearing** is a legal proceeding similar to a court proceeding wherein a hearing officer is presented with evidence by disagreeing parties and writes a decision.

A **Due Process Hearing Officer** is a trained and neutral individual who conducts a due process hearing.

**Early Intervention (EI)** refers to specialized services and supports designed to help families with children birth to age five who have developmental delays.

**Extended School Year (ESY)** refers to the delivery of special education and related services during summer vacation or other extended periods when school is not in session. Not all students who receive special education require extended school year services. The Individualized Education Program (IEP) team must consider the need for ESY at each meeting and must describe those services specifically with goals and objectives. ESY services must be individually crafted.

**Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)** is a federal mandate that all children with disabilities must receive appropriate educational programs, tailored to their unique needs, from which they receive educational benefit at no cost to families.

## Educational Terms *(continued)*

**Gifted and Talented** students have intellectual abilities significantly above average.

An **Individualized Education Program (IEP)** is a written statement of a child's current level of educational performance and of the child's individualized plan of instruction, including the goals, specific services to be received, the staff members who will carry out the services, the standards and timelines for evaluating progress, and the amount and degree to which the child will participate with typically-developing peers (see Least Restrictive Environment). The IEP is developed by the child's parents and the professionals who evaluated the child and/or who are providing the services. It is required by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) for all children who are in need of special education services.

An **Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP)** is a written document that defines the Early Intervention services provided to a child and the child's family based upon family-identified priorities.

An **Intelligence Quotient (IQ)** is a score derived from a standardized intelligence test that estimates a child's capacity to learn.

An **Interagency Agreement** is a document signed by the authorized representatives of at least two agencies, outlining mutually agreed-upon responsibilities to perform certain duties under specified conditions.

**Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)** is an IDEA requirement indicating that children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, must be educated with children who are not disabled, to the maximum extent possible. Removal of children with disabilities from the general education environment occurs only when the nature and/or severity of their disabilities are such that education in general classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily.

**Limited English Proficiency (LEP)** refers to children whose primary language is not English.

**Mediation** is a process in which parents and school personnel try to settle disagreements with the assistance of a specially-trained impartial mediator provided by the Pennsylvania Department of Education.

A **Modification** changes **what** a student is taught or expected to learn.

**Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS)** is defined as a comprehensive system of supports that includes standards-aligned, culturally responsive and high quality core instruction, universal screening, data-based decision-making, tiered services and supports, parental engagement, central/building level leadership, RtII/SLD determination and professional development. PA-MTSS represents a broad set of evidence-based practices that may be implemented across a system to help all students meet with continual academic and behavioral success.

**National Instructional Materials Accessibility Standards (NIMAS)** is the standard file format established by IDEA 2004 for producing and distributing digital versions of textbooks and other instructional materials so they can be easily converted to accessible formats, including Braille, large print, audio, and e-text versions.

A **Natural Environment** is a place, including the home and community settings, where a child would be if the child did not have a disability.

A **Neighborhood School** is the school closest to a child's home.

A **Notice of Recommended Educational Placement (NOREP)** The purpose of the Notice of Recommended Assignment/Prior Written Notice is to summarize for the parents the recommendations of the local education agency (LEA) for the child's educational program and other actions taken by the LEA.

The **Pennsylvania Alternate System of Assessment (PASA)** is designed for students with severe disabilities who are unable to participate meaningfully in the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA), even with accommodations. The PASA consists of a series of on-demand performance items that require the use of reading and math skills.

The **Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA)** is a standards-based criterion-referenced assessment used to measure student attainment of Pennsylvania's academic standards while also determining the degree to which school programs enable students to attain proficiency of the standards.

The **Pennsylvania Value-Added Assessment System (PVAAS)** is a statistical analysis used to measure the influence of a district and school on the academic progress rates of individual children and groups of children from year-to-year.

## Educational Terms *(continued)*

A **Preschool Early Intervention** program is one designed to meet the unique developmental needs of an individual child with a disability who is three, four, or five years of age. It is a child-focused educational effort sometimes referred to as Section 619 of the law.

**Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance** are statements written into an IEP that describe a child's current functioning including strengths, weaknesses, and learning styles.

The **Procedural Safeguards Notice (PSN)** is a summary of parents' rights and procedures that safeguard their rights under state and federal special education law.

**Recoupment** refers to a child's ability to recover, in a reasonable time, critical skills that are lost following an extended break in the school year (e.g., summer vacation). Recoupment is a critical factor in determining the need for extended school year services.

**Regression** refers to the loss of critical skills within an extended break in the school year (e.g., summer vacation). Regression is a critical factor in determining the need for extended school year services.

**Response to Instruction and Intervention (RtII)** is a comprehensive, multi-tiered, and standards-aligned approach that enables early identification and intervening for children at academic or behavior risk.

A **School-Based Behavioral Health (SBBH)** partnership is one established between a school entity and a behavioral health provider to deliver behavioral health services within the school environment to children needing assistance.

**Schoolwide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS)** is an approach comprised of intervention practices and organizational systems for establishing the social culture, learning and teaching environment, and individual behavior supports needed for students to achieve academic and social success.

**Short-Term Objectives** break down annual IEP goals into small, measurable steps. These may not be included in all IEPs but must be included in IEPs of students who take the PASA.

**Special Education** is specialized instruction tailored to fit the unique learning strengths and needs of students with disabilities. A major goal of special education is to teach the skills and knowledge a child needs to be as independent as possible. Special education programs



focus on academics, therapy, and other related services to help the child overcome difficulties in all areas of development. These services may be provided in a variety of educational settings but are required by IDEA to be delivered in the least restrictive environment.

**Standards** refer to the state academic standards, which are benchmark measures that define what students should know and be able to do at specified grade levels beginning in grade three. The standards are state regulations and must be used as the basis for curriculum and instruction in Pennsylvania's public schools.

**Supplementary Aids and Services (SaS)** are aids, services, and other supports provided in general education classes or other education-related settings to enable children with disabilities to be educated with nondisabled children to the maximum extent appropriate.

**Universal Design for Learning (UDL)** is an approach to creating instructional materials and activities that are accessible to all, rather than simply adapting existing curricula and materials to provide access for persons with disabilities. UDL allows for multiple means of representation, expression, and engagement.



# Assessments, Services, and Therapies

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An **Advocate** is an individual who represents or speaks on behalf of another person's interests, as in a parent for his/her child.

**American Sign Language (ASL)** is a form of communication that uses the face, hands, and body to convey meaning in a grammatical structure very different from English. ASL is the native language of the deaf community of the United States.

**Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA)** is the scientific use of the principles of behavior (i.e., what we know about behavior) to increase desired behaviors or decrease problem behaviors in children.

**Assessment** is the gathering of information by qualified personnel about a child's development and the needs and priorities of his/her family. This information is used in planning the child's Individualized Education Program (IEP).

An **Assistive Listening Device (ALD)** is a device that amplifies sound for a child who is deaf or hard of hearing.

**Assistive Technology (AT)** refers to any item, piece of equipment, product, or system (whether acquired commercially, modified, or customized) that is used to increase, maintain, or improve functional capabilities of children with disabilities. All public schools, including charter schools, are required to consider the assistive technology needs of children with disabilities.

A **Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP)** is a plan that is put in place to teach a child proper behavior and social skills. It should be positive in nature, not punitive.

A **Behavior Specialist Consultant (BSC)** is an individual who assists in the development of a treatment plan and works collaboratively with a team to closely monitor a child's progress and make any necessary adjustments or changes to the treatment plan.

A **Certified Occupational Therapist Assistant (COTA)** is an individual who has received specialized training in the area of occupational therapy and can implement treatment plans created by an occupational therapist under the supervision of the occupational therapist.

An **Educational Interpreter** is an individual who provides interpreting or transliterating services, in an educational setting, to students who are deaf and hard of hearing.

An **Evaluation** is a series of tests and observations performed by a multidisciplinary team to find out if a child has a disability and requires special education services. A parent may share with the team any assessment information provided by a qualified individual who is not employed by the local educational agency (LEA). The LEA is required to discuss the results of the evaluation with the child's parents.

A **Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA)** is an assessment used to identify the reason for, or purpose of, a child's problem behavior(s); to develop and implement a plan to change the things that maintain the behavior; and to teach the child appropriate replacement behaviors.

A **Mobile Therapist (MT)** is a member of a behavior support team who provides intensive therapeutic services to a child and family in settings other than a provider agency or office (e.g., in the child's home). Services can include assessment of strengths and therapeutic needs of child and family; inclusion of child, parents, or other caretakers as members of the treatment team and as partners in treatment; formulation, development, implementation, and monitoring of treatment efforts; and determination, with a family and a case manager, of necessary family support services.

An **Occupational Therapist (OT)** is a professional who provides therapy based on engagement in meaningful activities of daily life (e.g., self-care skills, education, work, social interaction) especially to enable or encourage participation in such activities despite impairments or limitations in physical or mental functioning.

**Orientation and Mobility (O & M)** is a related service provided to children who are blind or visually impaired by qualified personnel to enable them to move safely in school and other environments.

A **Paraprofessional** is a special education professional who works side-by-side with a special education teacher to provide appropriate and meaningful educational programs to students with special needs. A paraprofessional might be called a paraeducator, an educational aide, an instructional aide, an instructional assistant, or a teacher's aide depending on the school district, charter school, or intermediate unit where he/she works.

## Assessments, Services, and Therapies *(continued)*

A **Physical Therapist (PT)** is a professional who improves a child's physical abilities through activities that strengthen muscular control and motor coordination.

**Positive Behavior Support (PBS)** refers to a comprehensive set of strategies meant to redesign environments in such a way that problem behaviors are prevented or inconsequential, and to teach students new skills, making problem behaviors unnecessary.

A **Reevaluation** is a series of tests and observations performed by a multidisciplinary team to find out if a child with a disability continues to require special education and related services. Reevaluations for children not diagnosed with mental retardation (MR) are performed every three years and may be waived by parents. Reevaluations for children with MR diagnoses are performed every two years and cannot be waived.

**Related Services** are support services needed by a child in order to benefit from special education services. These may include transportation; speech/language, physical, occupational therapies; social work; or other services deemed necessary by the IEP team.

**Screening** is the process of looking at a child's development to determine if there are any areas of concern. It is used to recommend more in-depth evaluation of the child.



**Sensory Integration (SI)** is a technique of occupational therapy that provides playful, meaningful activities to enhance a child's sensory intake and lead to more adaptive functioning in daily life.

A **Speech Language Pathologist (SLP)** provides treatment to help a child develop or improve the production of speech and language skills.

**Therapeutic Staff Support (TSS)** providers establish one-on-one relationships with youth within their own communities; and help youth to explore and enjoy recreational activities, identify career options, and evaluate educational alternatives.

**Therapy** in early intervention and special education programs refers to treatment provided by specialized service providers, most commonly in the form of occupational therapy, physical therapy, and speech language therapy.

**Transition** refers to the movement from one service, location, or program to another. Young children with disabilities transition at age three from early intervention to preschool in special education or other community settings. At age five they transition to school-aged services. In adolescence they transition from school to adult services.

**Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)** is a service that assists individuals with disabilities in training for employment, maintaining employment, and living independently. In Pennsylvania students are eligible to register with the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation at age sixteen.

**Wraparound Services** are community mental health services that are prescribed by physicians to be provided in home and school settings. Services are based on medical necessity criteria (MNC) and funded through Medical Assistance. Three components can be provided in almost any combination – behavior specialist consultation (BSC), mobile therapy (MT), and therapeutic staff support (TSS).

# Government Regulations and Legalities

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The **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)** of 1992 (Public Law 101-336) defines the term *disability* and prohibits discrimination by employers, by facilities open to the general public, and by state and local public agencies that provide such services as transportation.

**Chapter 14** is the section of Pennsylvania State Education Law that provides special education regulations in compliance with Federal education law, namely IDEA 2004.

**Chapter 711** is the section of Pennsylvania State Education Law that provides special education regulations in compliance with Federal education law, and specifically pertains to students with disabilities who are enrolled in charter, cyber charter, or regional charter schools.

The **Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)** protects the privacy and transfer of student education records.

The **Health Insurance Portability Accountability Act (HIPAA)** outlines the confidentiality and protection of medical records.

The **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)** provides the legal authority for early intervention and special education services for children from birth to age 21. Part B outlines services for children ages three to 21. Part C outlines services for children from birth to age three.

**No Child Left Behind (NCLB)** is the primary federal education legislation addressing kindergarten through high school for children at risk.

**Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act** protects the civil rights of individuals with disabilities. This law is closely intertwined with IDEA. Children with disabilities who are not eligible for special education may qualify for accommodations under Section 504.

A **State Performance Plan (SPP)** is a six-year plan built around 20 federally-required indicators of compliance and performance. It contains measurable goals, rigorous targets for each year of the plan, and improvement activities to meet the targets, all of which are reported in an annual performance report (APR).

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## Additional Information

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Also available from PaTTAN is *Education ABCs*, a list of the most commonly used special education acronyms and initialisms. To order, go to [www.pattan.net](http://www.pattan.net).



**Commonwealth of Pennsylvania**

Tom Wolf, Governor

**PaTTAN**  
Pennsylvania Training and  
Technical Assistance Network

