

Special Education Glossary



See the Nebraska Department of Education's Parent Resource Page at <https://www.education.ne.gov/sped/parent-information/> for additional information and resources.

ACCOMMODATIONS: Supports or services provided to help students access the general education curriculum and validly demonstrate learning. They do not change or alter the content being learned. Examples include extended time, different test formats, quiet test locations.

ACTIVITIES OF DAILY LIVING (ADLS): Tasks usually done as part of a daily routine of self-care. This includes managing money, caring for children, doing housework, preparing meals, and completing daily hygiene routines

ADAPTIVE BEHAVIORS: Practical, conceptual, motor, and social skills needed for self-care. This includes performing personal care tasks, cleaning, making friends, following rules, using appropriate social skills, and taking personal responsibility.

AGE-APPROPRIATE: Right or suitable for an individual's age, usually meaning physical, cognitive, emotional, motor, and social development.

AGE OF MAJORITY: Age at which an individual is a legal adult and at which legal rights are transferred to the individual. In Nebraska, the age of majority is 19 years. For more information on reaching the age of majority, see the [Nebraska State Bar Foundation Age of Majority Document](#).

ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT: Different type of statewide assessment designed to allow students with significant cognitive disabilities to demonstrate their knowledge and skills. For more information on alternate assessment, see the [NDE Alternate Assessment Website](#).

AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT (ADA): Federal law that prohibits discrimination and guarantees that people with disabilities have the same opportunities as those without a disability. For more information on ADA, see the [Americans with Disabilities Website](#).

ANNUAL GOAL: Statement that describes what the student with a disability can reasonably accomplish within twelve months in the student's special education program. There should be a direct link between the annual goals and the present levels of academic achievement and functional performance.

ASSESSMENT: Methods or tools used for measuring present levels of academic achievement and functional performance and educational needs; progress toward achieving annual goals and objectives (benchmarks), progress in meeting State standards. For more information on assessment, see the [NDE Assessment, Learning, and Instruction Website](#).

ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY (AT) DEVICE: Any item, piece of equipment, or product system, whether acquired commercially off the shelf, modified, or customized, that is used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of a student with a disability. For more information about AT, see the [Nebraska ATP Website](#).

ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY (AT) SERVICES: Any service that directly assists a student with a disability in the selection, acquisition, or use of an assistive technology device. For more information about AT, see the [Nebraska ATP Website](#).

AUGMENTATIVE AND ALTERNATIVE COMMUNICATION (AAC): Communication methods used by an individual to enhance or replace natural speech. For more information about AAC, see the [American Speech-Language and Hearing \(ASHA\) AAC Website](#).

BASELINE PERFORMANCE: Measurement at a point in time from which one can monitor changes or improvement in student performance.

BEHAVIORAL INTERVENTION PLAN (BIP): Plan that describes positive behavioral strategies that will be implemented to improve a student's social, emotional, and behavioral development. For students whose behavior prompts disciplinary action by the school, the behavioral intervention plan addresses the behavior(s) of concern that led to a functional behavioral assessment. For more information on behavior, see the [NDE Positive Behavior and Interventions and Support Website](#).

BENCHMARKS: Specific skill or performance level a student needs to accomplish toward reaching his or her annual goal.

CASE MANAGER: Special education teacher responsible for coordinating and implementing a student's special education program.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Protecting a student's educational records. Federal law protects a student's personal information, limits the sharing of information to those who directly educate and serve the student, and allows parents the right to review records.

CONSENT: Written permission to conduct a special education evaluation, provide special education services to a student, and/or release personal records. Consent is voluntary and can be revoked at any time.

CONTENT STANDARDS: Goals for student achievement. Content standards outline what students should know and be able to do in subject areas.

CONTINUUM OF SERVICES: Includes instruction in regular education classes, special classes, special schools, home instruction, instructing in hospitals and institutions, and provisions for supplementary services to be provided in conjunction with general education class placement.

CORE ACADEMIC SUBJECTS: Core academic subjects include English, reading or language arts, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, arts, history, and geography.

COURSE OF STUDY: Multi-year description of a student's core academic subjects, elective courses, and educational experiences that align with the student's postsecondary goals. The course of study is based on the student's vision and their needs, interests, and preferences.

CRITICAL SKILLS: Knowledge or performance skills that are essential to student progress.

CURRICULUM: Academic content that is expected to be learned in a particular grade or class. Curriculum also means all of the courses and educational programming offered by a school district.

CURRICULUM-BASED ASSESSMENT (or curriculum-based measurement/CBM): Ongoing assessment of academic skills in a given grade or course. The information gathered in curriculum-based assessments is used to record progress and make instructional decisions.

DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITY (DD): Group of conditions diagnosed before age 22 that cause lifelong impairment in physical, learning, language, or behavior areas. These impairments impact learning, living independently, using and understanding language, and earning a living. For more information on developmental disabilities, see [Nebraska DHHS Developmental Disabilities Website](#).

DISABILITY: Based on special education evaluation, verification of one of the following conditions: intellectual disability, hearing impairment (including deafness), speech or language impairment, visual impairment (including blindness), emotional disturbance, orthopedic impairment, autism, traumatic brain injury, other health impairment, specific learning disability, deaf-blindness, or multiple disabilities.

DISTRICT STANDARDS: District goals for student achievement and performance that can be obtained by measuring the improvement of students' skills in reading, writing, speaking, listening, mathematics, reasoning, studying, and technological literacy.

DISTRICT-WIDE ASSESSMENT: A large-scale academic achievement assessment administered to all students in a school district.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES (DHHS): Nebraska DHHS is a state agency that consists of five divisions - behavioral health, children and family services, developmental disabilities, Medicaid and long-term care, and public health. For more information, see the [Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services Website](#).

DUE PROCESS: Formal dispute resolution process in which a party alleges a student has not received a free, appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment. It is a legal proceeding in which both parents and school officials present their case to a Nebraska Department of Education hearing officer.

EARLY DEVELOPMENT NETWORK (EDN): Nebraska EDN provides early intervention services for families with children birth to age three with developmental delays and/or health care needs and connects families to needed services. For more information on EDN, see the [Nebraska Early Development Network Website](#).

EARLY INTERVENTION SERVICES: Services for families with children birth to age three with developmental delays and/or health care needs. Providers connect families to services such as occupational, speech, or physical therapy, to help infants and toddlers grow and develop to their full potential. For more information on early intervention services, see the [Nebraska Early Development Network Webpage](#) or [NDE Early Childhood Special Education Website](#).

EDUCATIONAL SERVICE UNIT (ESU): ESUs are intermediate agencies providing supplementary educational services to Nebraska's school districts. Currently, there are 17 units across Nebraska serving school districts in multiple counties.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNER (ELL): Students who are learning English as an additional language. Students are screened to determine if support is needed to learn the English language and gain academic success. For more information on ELL, see the [NDE English Language Learner Website](#).

EQUITABLE SERVICES PLAN: A plan specific to a student in a nonpublic (private) school system. It is written to describe the special education services provided to a child attending a private school outside of their resident boundaries whose parents have declined special education services from the resident district. For more information on equitable services plans, see the [NDE Equitable Services Document](#).

EXTENDED SCHOOL YEAR SERVICES (ESY): ESY services are a provision in state and federal law that addresses special education and related services provided to eligible students when school is not in session. It is meant to maintain IEP goals and objectives, not to introduce new skills.

EVALUATION: An evaluation determines eligibility for special education, gathers information to determine a student's educational needs, and guides decision making about how to meet a student's educational needs. A special education evaluation must occur at least once every 3 years, unless the parent and the school district agree that a reevaluation is unnecessary.

FAMILY EDUCATIONAL RIGHTS AND PRIVACY ACT (FERPA): Federal law that provides parents the right to access their children's education records, have records changed, and have control over the disclosure of personally identifiable information. For more information about FERPA, see the [US Department of Education FERPA Website](#).

FREE APPROPRIATE PUBLIC EDUCATION (FAPE): The federal and state requirement that all eligible students with a disability have the right to a free, appropriate public education (FAPE). This includes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs.

FUNCTIONAL BEHAVIORAL ASSESSMENT (FBA): Assessment to determine the purpose and function of a student's behaviors. This assessment provides information that leads to positive behavior interventions and supports.

FUNCTIONAL LIFE SKILLS: Learning that focuses on skills needed to live independently, such as cooking, shopping, doing laundry, socializing, and accessing community supports and services.

GENERAL CURRICULUM: A description of the standards and benchmarks adopted by a school district that applies to all students, including those with disabilities. It is the basis of planning instruction of all students.

INDIVIDUALIZED HEALTHCARE PLAN (IHP): Plan of care for the student with special health care needs who requires medical attention and services during the school day. The student's condition may create an emergency or crisis. The IHP addresses health issues that may impact the student's academic performance, attendance, and extracurricular activities.

IEP FACILITATION: Process in which a trained, neutral facilitator helps keep the IEP team discussion centered around developing the student's educational plan. For more information, see the NDE IEP Facilitation Guide 2020.

INCLUSION: Educating students with disabilities in the same setting as students without disabilities. Accommodations, modifications, specialized instruction, and related services are provided within the general education classroom and nonacademic settings.

INDEPENDENT EDUCATIONAL EVALUATION (IEE): Special education evaluation completed by someone who doesn't work for the school district. Some IEE's are conducted at public expense (meaning, the school system pays for the evaluation), and others are paid for by the parents.

INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAM (IEP): An IEP is the written document that describes the special educational services that a student will receive. This document must be reviewed and updated annually.

INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAM TEAM (IEP TEAM): The IEP team develops the Individualized Education Program (IEP) for students with a disability. The IEP team consists of parents, teachers, administrators, and related services providers that serve the student. It may also include other professionals outside of the school district.

INDIVIDUALIZED FAMILY SUPPORT PLAN (IFSP): A process and document written for children with disabilities ages birth to 3. The IFSP outlines the early intervention supports provided to the child and their family in the natural environment. For more information on early intervention and IFSPs, see the [Nebraska Early Development Network Website](#).

INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES EDUCATION ACT (IDEA): The Federal special education law that provides free education to eligible students with disabilities. IDEA ensures the provision of special education and related services. For more information on IDEA, see the [US Department of Education IDEA Guide](#).

INITIAL EVALUATION: The first evaluation conducted to determine if a student has a disability and is eligible for special education and related services.

INTELLIGENCE QUOTIENT (IQ): A number value or score intended to describe an individual's cognitive functioning as assessed by their ability to perform complex problem-solving tasks. Generally, an IQ score of 85-115 is meant to reflect a score within the average intelligence range.

JOB COACH (also called Work Site Skills Trainer): Person hired by a school or agency to assist the student on a job site. The job coach helps the student in learning and performing the job and adjusting to the work environment.

LEAST RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENT (LRE): To the maximum extent appropriate, students with disabilities are educated with students who are not disabled. Removing students with disabilities from the general educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved. For more information on LRE, see the [NDE LRE Guidance Document](#).

LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY (LEP): Refers to a student whose primary language is something other than English. For more information on LEP, see the [NDE English Language Learners Website](#).

LOCAL EDUCATION AGENCY (LEA): Local school district. An LEA representative is a required multidisciplinary (MDT) and individualized education program (IEP) team member.

MANIFESTATION DETERMINATION: An IEP team meeting, held within 10 days after a student with a disability violates a school rule and is suspended for 10 or more days. It is an investigation of whether or not the behavior is caused by their disability or is the result of the IEP not being properly implemented.

MEASURE OF ACADEMIC PROGRESS (MAP) TESTING: A computer adaptive test that measures students' academic skills. The information gathered from MAP testing is used to make decisions that support academic growth. For more information about MAP, see the [NWEA MAP Website](#).

MEDIATION: Mediation is a meeting where families and schools try to work out areas of disagreement. The mediation process is facilitated by someone trained by the Nebraska Department of Education and is not affiliated with the district or state.

MEDICAID: A state-run health care program that helps people from low-income households pay for medical expenses. Medicaid is a form of health insurance. People must meet the eligibility requirements to get Medicaid coverage. For more information about Medicaid in Nebraska, see the [Nebraska DHHS Medicaid Website](#).

MODIFICATIONS: Changes made to the curriculum content and performance expectations for students with disabilities.

MULTIDISCIPLINARY TEAM: An evaluation team that gathers information from a variety of sources to determine whether a student is eligible for special education and related services.

MULTIDISCIPLINARY TEAM REPORT: The MDT report shares the assessment results that were used in determining whether a student is eligible for special education. The report will state if the student has a disability, and if the disability is such that the student is eligible for specially designed instruction (special education and related services).

MULTI-TIERED SYSTEMS OF SUPPORT (MTSS): An educational framework for continuous improvement, problem-solving and decision-making. It offers a meaningful and effective way to organize instruction and intervention to help improve outcomes for all students in the state. For more information on MTSS, see the [NDE MTSS Website](#).

NEBRASKA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION (NDE): The Nebraska Department of Education is Nebraska's state education agency responsible for administering public education funding from the US Department of Education and the Nebraska State Legislature. NDE supports Nebraska students in public, private, and nonpublic school systems. For more information about NDE, see the [Nebraska Department of Education Website](#).

NEBRASKA VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (VR): A state-specific program that helps people with disabilities prepare for, find, and keep jobs. Nebraska VR also helps businesses recruit, train, and retain employees with disabilities. Nebraska VR assists individuals with injuries, illnesses, or impairments achieve competitive employment and increased independence. For more information about Nebraska VR, see the [Nebraska VR Website](#).

NATIVE LANGUAGE: The language normally used by an individual, or, in the case of a child, the language normally used by the parents of the child.

OFFICE OF CIVIL RIGHTS (OCR): Federal agency tasked with enforcing federal anti-discrimination laws and ensuring equal access to education. For more information about OCR, see the [US Department of Education Office of Civil Rights Website](#).

PARAPROFESSIONAL (PARA): Paras, also called teacher assistants, teacher aides, or paraeducators, provide support to students under the supervision of certified teachers or other licensed and endorsed professionals.

PARENT TRAINING AND INFORMATION (PTI) CENTERS: PTI Centers provide training, information, and support to parents and professionals who are interested in children ages birth through twenty-six, who receive or should receive special education or special health-related services. For more information about PTI Nebraska, see the [PTI Nebraska Website](#).

PLACEMENT: Once an IEP is developed, the IEP Team decides where to provide special education services. This is called the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) and is also your child's placement. LRE usually means your school will teach your child with his/her classmates in the regular education classroom in your neighborhood school.

POSTSECONDARY GOALS: Goals based on strengths, preferences, interests, and needs (SPIN). For more information, see the [NDE Transition Website](#).

PRIOR WRITTEN NOTICE (PWN): A written document sent to parents from a school district, outlining important decisions regarding a student receiving special education and related services. PWN is sent when a school district proposes to initiate or change, or refuses to initiate or change, the identification, evaluation, or placement of a child. For more information, see the [NDE PWN Guidance Document](#).

PROGRESS MONITORING: Data collected and used to make decisions about a student's progress and is used to determine if adequate progress is being made towards the annual goals.

PRESENT LEVEL OF ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AND FUNCTIONAL PERFORMANCE (PLAAPF): A description of a student's current strengths, needs, preferences, and interests. This includes information about progress on the current IEP, the evaluation team report, input from the parents and student, interventions, assessment, observations, and special factors.

RE-EVALUATION: Process in which the Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) will collect new and updated information regarding a student's areas of strength and concern. The MDT will meet to determine if your child continues to meet the eligibility requirements as a child with a disability according to state and federal law.

REGRESSION: Loss of skills students with disabilities demonstrate after a break in instruction. For example, some students with disabilities regress over extended breaks or summer vacation.

RELATED SERVICES: Developmental, corrective, and other services required to assist a student with a disability benefit from special education. For a complete list of related services and definitions, see the [US Department of Education Related Services Website](#).

RESOURCE SERVICES: Another term for special education services provided by a special education teacher (sometimes referred to as a resource teacher).

SECTION 504: Requirement that school districts provide a free appropriate public education (FAPE) to qualified students who have a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities. For more information about Section 504, see the [US Department of Education 504 Document](#).

504 PLAN: A plan that provides for a free appropriate public education (FAPE) to qualified students who have a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities; students with 504 plans do not meet the eligibility requirements for special education under federal law. For more information about 504 plans, see the [US Department of Education 504 Document](#).

SELF-ADVOCATE: An individual with a disability who makes choices and decisions. Self-advocates speak up for themselves, know their rights and responsibilities, and locate resources and assistance in their community.

SELF-DETERMINATION: Belief that individuals with disabilities have the right to direct their own destiny and make their own decisions as informed consumers.

SHORT-TERM OBJECTIVES: Statements that describe the measurable, intermediate steps between a student's present level of academic achievement and functional performance and the student's annual goals.

SPECIAL EDUCATION: Specially designed instruction that meets the unique needs of a student with a disability. This includes instruction in the classroom, in the home, in hospitals, institutions, and in other settings. This instruction is provided at no cost to the parents.

SPECIALLY DESIGNED INSTRUCTION: Adapting and individualizing the content, methodology, or delivery of instruction to meet the student's unique needs that result from their disability; and ensuring access to the general curriculum so that the student can meet the general educational standards.

STANDARD: Clear statement of what all students are expected to know and be able to do. They are clear, measurable, and challenging, and cover content in math, language arts, social studies, science, and other subjects. For more information, see the [NDE Content Area Standards Website](#).

SUPPLEMENTAL AIDS AND SERVICES: Services provided so a student with a disability can be served in the general education classroom to the maximum extent appropriate. This may include intensive short-term specially designed instruction; readers for individuals with visual impairments; special education paraprofessionals or assistants; and other supports as determined by the IEP team.

SUPPLEMENTAL SECURITY INCOME (SSI): Government benefit for individuals with disabilities who have little-to-no income. At age 18, a young adult's financial resources are considered, rather than parental resources. This typically pertains to young adults with lifelong developmental disabilities.

TRANSITION PLANNING AND SERVICES: A process designed to provide a student with a disability the necessary skills and services to move smoothly from high school to adult life. Transition plans are built into the Individualized Education Plan (IEP). In Nebraska, transition planning must be included in the IEP by age 16. For more information on transition planning and services, see the [NDE Transition Website](#).

TRANSPORTATION: A related service that refers to how a student travels to and from school.

VERIFICATION: Determining a student with a disability is eligible for special education and related services through the process of completing an evaluation by the school district. Verification criteria are defined in Nebraska Rule 51. For more information on verification, see [Nebraska Rule 51](#).

For more information about the special education process, contact your child's special education teacher, a PTI Nebraska parent/professional at (800) 284-8520 and pti-nebraska.org, or the Nebraska Department of Education at (402) 471-2471 and education.ne.gov/sped/.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a law that makes available a free appropriate public education to eligible children with disabilities throughout the nation and ensures special education and related services to those children. See <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/> for more information on IDEA.

Rule 51 is the document that outlines regulations and standards for special education programs in Nebraska. Rule 51 can be found on the Nebraska Department of Education's website: https://cdn.education.ne.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Rule51_2017.pdf.

Rule 55 is the document that outlines rules of practice and procedure for due process hearing in special education contest cases. Rule 55 can be found on the Nebraska Department of Education's website: https://cdn.education.ne.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Rule55_2012.pdf

SOURCES

A Parent's Dictionary - Special Needs Guide: National PTA. National Parent Teacher Association, www.pta.org/home/family-resources/Special-Education-Toolkit/A-Parents-Dictionary.

Brochures & Tool Kits. Parent Information Center of NH, 1 Oct. 2020, picnh.org/brochures-tool-kits/.

Disability Discrimination. US Department of Education (ED), 25 June 2020, www2.ed.gov/policy/rights/guid/ocr/disability.html

Facts About Developmental Disabilities. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 26 Sept. 2019, www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/developmentaldisabilities/facts.html

Glossary. IRIS Center, iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/resources/glossary/.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, sites.ed.gov/idea/?src=policy-page.

Introduction to the ADA, www.ada.gov/ada_intro.htm.

Key Definitions in Part B of IDEA: A Reference List for Parent Centers. Center for Parent Information and Resources, 13 June 2017, www.parentcenterhub.org/idea-key-defs-reference-list/.

Nebraska Early Development Network. Nebraska Early Development Network, edn.ne.gov/cms/

NeMTSS Framework: Nebraska Department of Education. NeMTSS Framework. Nebraska Department of Education. 2020, nemtss.unl.edu/.

Setting Goals ... Achieving Results: Nebraska IEP Technical Assistance Guide. Nebraska Department of Education, 2014.

Special Education - Glossary of Special Education Terms, www.gfschools.org/Page/645.

Special Education Terms and Definitions. Understanding Special Education: A Parent Guide, www.understandingspecialeducation.com/special-education-terms.html