

BERMED

# Special Education Complete Glossary

*The Essential Reference for Teachers, Parents, and School Professionals*

**210+**

Terms Defined

**8**

Thematic Sections

**Research**

Based Content

**Neuroaffirmative. Strengths-Based. Ready to Use.**



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## SECTION 1

# Neurodiversity and Disability Categories

Core profiles, conditions, and neurological differences

**Neurodiversity** The concept that variation in human neurological development is natural and valuable, not pathological.

**Ex.** A teacher reframes a student's need for routine as a strength, not a behavior problem.

**See:** Neurodivergent, Neurotypical

**Neurodivergent** A person whose brain develops or functions differently from what society considers typical.

**Ex.** Amira identifies as neurodivergent and uses this framing to understand her learning differences positively. **See:** Neurodiversity, ASD, ADHD

**Neurotypical** A person whose neurological development aligns with dominant societal norms and expectations.

**Ex.** Neurotypical peers may not understand why transitions are so difficult for some classmates. **See:** Neurodivergent, Double Empathy Problem

**Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)** A neurodevelopmental condition involving differences in social communication, sensory processing, and patterns of behavior or interest.

**Ex.** Yusuf thrives with a visual schedule and quiet lunch option that reduce sensory overwhelm. **See:** AuDHD, Masking, Stimming, PDA

**ADHD** A neurodevelopmental condition involving differences in attention regulation, impulse control, and activity level.

**Ex.** Farid completes work more reliably with chunked tasks, visual timers, and fidget tools.

**See:** Executive Functioning, Hyperfocus, Time Blindness

**AuDHD** The co-occurrence of autism and ADHD in one individual, producing a complex and often paradoxical profile.

**Ex.** Zora needs structure (autism) but also flexibility to shift tasks (ADHD). Her teacher builds a hybrid schedule. **See:** Autism, ADHD, Masking, Co-regulation

**Dyslexia** A language-based learning difference affecting accurate and fluent word reading and decoding, neurological in origin.

**Ex.** Imogen's reading accuracy improves by 18 points after one semester of structured literacy intervention. **See:** Phonological Awareness, Structured Literacy, Decoding

**Dyscalculia** A specific learning disability affecting understanding of numbers, arithmetic operations, and mathematical concepts.

**Ex.** Mateo shows consistent progress once base-ten blocks replace abstract notation. **See:** Specific Learning Disability, Number Sense, Accommodation

**Dysgraphia** A learning disability affecting handwriting, spelling, and written expression, distinct from dyslexia.

**Ex.** A student with dysgraphia produces far more text when allowed to type rather than write by hand. **See:** Fine Motor Skills, Assistive Technology, OT

**Dyspraxia (DCD)** A neurodevelopmental condition affecting motor planning and coordination of movement, both fine and gross.

**Ex.** *Theo's written output improves dramatically when his teacher provides a slanted board and pencil grip.* **See:** Occupational Therapy, Fine Motor, Proprioception

**Twice Exceptional (2e)** Students who are both gifted and have one or more disabilities, resulting in an asynchronous profile.

**Ex.** *Nadia has a profoundly high IQ and severe dyslexia. She needs both academic challenge and reading support.* **See:** Giftedness, Dyslexia, ADHD, Asynchronous Development

**PDA Profile** A profile, most often autistic, characterized by an extreme anxiety-driven need to avoid everyday demands and expectations.

**Ex.** *Elias's engagement improves when all instructions are reframed as choices and demands are reduced.* **See:** Autism, Demand Avoidance, Low-Demand Approach, Anxiety

**Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD)** A condition in which the brain has difficulty receiving and responding appropriately to sensory information.

**Ex.** *Petra's distress decreases when she has noise-canceling headphones and clothing accommodations.* **See:** Sensory Diet, OT, Proprioception, Hyper/Hyposensitivity

**Intellectual Disability (ID)** Significant limitations in both intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior, originating before age 18.

**Ex.** *Samuel participates in fourth-grade science experiments with modified learning objectives.* **See:** Adaptive Behavior, IEP, Inclusion, Functional Skills

**Developmental Delay** A significant lag in one or more developmental domains compared to age-level expectations.

**Ex.** *Lila receives early speech and physical therapy and approaches age-level language by kindergarten.* **See:** Early Intervention, IFSP, IEP, Speech-Language Pathology

**Giftedness** Exceptional ability or potential in intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership domains.

**Ex.** *Delphine re-engages when her curriculum is compacted and she joins an advanced online course.* **See:** Twice Exceptional, Asynchronous Development, Acceleration

**Tourette Syndrome** A neurological condition characterized by repetitive involuntary movements and vocalizations called tics.

**Ex.** *Marcus's anxiety drops significantly when his teacher creates a non-reactive classroom environment around his tics.* **See:** Neurodivergent, ADHD, OCD, Accommodation

**Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)** An anxiety disorder characterized by intrusive thoughts (obsessions) and repetitive behaviors or mental acts (compulsions) performed to reduce distress.

**Ex.** *A student with OCD needs extended time on tests because anxiety and compulsive checking significantly slow her pace.* **See:** Anxiety, Accommodation, 504 Plan, CBT

**Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD)** Persistent, excessive worry about a variety of topics that is difficult to control and impairs functioning.

**Ex.** *A student with GAD avoids group presentations. His 504 Plan allows alternative demonstration formats.* **See:** School Refusal, 504 Plan, Co-regulation, Trauma-Informed

**Selective Mutism** An anxiety disorder in which a person who is capable of speaking is unable to do so in specific social situations.

**Ex.** *Yasmine speaks freely at home but not at school. Her teacher accepts written and gestural responses without pressure.* **See:** Anxiety, AAC, Speech-Language Pathology, Accommodation

**Cerebral Palsy (CP)** A group of permanent movement disorders caused by damage to the developing brain, affecting muscle tone, movement, and motor skills.

**Ex.** *A student with CP uses a power wheelchair and a tablet for written work and accesses all general education content.* **See:** Physical Therapy, OT, Assistive Technology, Motor Skills

**Down Syndrome** A chromosomal condition caused by the presence of an extra copy of chromosome 21, associated with intellectual disability and specific physical features.

**Ex.** *Sofia participates in inclusive fourth grade with co-teacher support and modified learning objectives.* **See:** Intellectual Disability, IEP, Hypotonia, Early Intervention

**Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD)** A range of conditions caused by prenatal alcohol exposure, affecting brain development, behavior, and adaptive functioning.

**Ex.** *A student with FASD benefits from visual routines, short task chunks, and an emphasis on concrete rather than abstract instruction.* **See:** Executive Functioning, Trauma-Informed, IEP, Adaptive Behavior

**Prader-Willi Syndrome** A complex genetic disorder characterized by intellectual disability, behavioral challenges, hypotonia, and an insatiable appetite.

**Ex.** *The school team works with the family on food access management and builds structured, predictable routines to reduce anxiety.* **See:** Intellectual Disability, Hypotonia, Behavioral Support, IEP

**Fragile X Syndrome** The most common inherited cause of intellectual disability, caused by a mutation in the FMR1 gene, associated with autism-like features and sensory sensitivities.

**Ex.** *A student with Fragile X uses AAC, benefits from low-stimulus environments, and thrives with structured, predictable lessons.* **See:** Intellectual Disability, Autism, Sensory Processing, AAC

**Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)** An acquired brain injury caused by a sudden trauma or blow to the head, potentially affecting cognition, behavior, and physical functioning.

**Ex.** *After a TBI, a previously high-achieving student returns to school needing memory aids, extended time, and a modified schedule.* **See:** Acquired Disability, Executive Functioning, Accommodation, IEP

**Auditory Processing Disorder (APD)** A condition in which the brain has difficulty processing and interpreting auditory information despite normal hearing acuity.

**Ex.** *Marcus misunderstands spoken instructions but performs well when given written or visual directions instead.* **See:** Speech-Language Pathology, Accommodation, Sensory Processing, IEP

**Visual Impairment** Any degree of vision loss that affects a person's ability to perform daily tasks, ranging from low vision to blindness.

**Ex.** *A student with low vision uses large-print materials, a CCTV magnifier, and preferential seating near the board.* **See:** Orientation and Mobility, Braille, Assistive Technology, IEP

**Hearing Impairment** Partial or total inability to hear, ranging from mild to profound. It includes Deafness and hard-of-hearing.

**Ex.** A Deaf student uses an ASL interpreter in class and receives instruction in a bilingual ASL/English framework. **See:** Sign Language, FM System, Interpreter, IEP

**Nonverbal Learning Disability (NVLD)** A learning profile characterized by strong verbal skills alongside weaknesses in visual-spatial processing, math, and social perception.

**Ex.** A student with NVLD has an outstanding vocabulary but struggles to organize visual information and read social cues. **See:** Visual-Spatial Processing, Social Communication, Dyscalculia

**Language Processing Disorder** A specific learning disability in which a person has difficulty processing and using spoken language, impacting reading, writing, and communication.

**Ex.** A student understands concepts when demonstrated visually but consistently misinterprets complex verbal instructions. **See:** Dyslexia, APD, Speech-Language Pathology, Accommodation

**Hyperlexia** A condition characterized by early, advanced word reading ability combined with difficulty understanding spoken language and significant social communication differences, often co-occurring with autism.

**Ex.** A four-year-old reads fluently but does not understand what she reads and rarely initiates communication spontaneously. **See:** Autism, AAC, Speech-Language Pathology, Reading Comprehension

**Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA)** An alternative name for PDA Profile, emphasizing the extreme and pervasive nature of demand avoidance as a central feature.

**Ex.** Traditional reward charts and consequences are ineffective. Collaborative and low-demand approaches show results quickly. **See:** PDA Profile, Autism, Anxiety, Low-Demand Approach

**Executive Dysfunction** Difficulties with the cognitive processes that regulate planning, initiation, organization, working memory, and flexible thinking.

**Ex.** A student with executive dysfunction needs explicit step-by-step instructions, visual planners, and transition warnings. **See:** ADHD, Executive Functioning, Working Memory, Scaffolding

**Hyperfocus** A state of intense, sustained concentration on an activity of high interest, common in ADHD and autism.

**Ex.** Eli writes his most engaged, polished work of the year when allowed to research game design for a project. **See:** ADHD, Autism, Interest-Based Learning, Engagement

**Time Blindness** Difficulty perceiving and managing the passage of time accurately, commonly associated with ADHD.

**Ex.** A student with time blindness consistently underestimates how long tasks take. Visual timers and check-ins improve her pacing. **See:** ADHD, Executive Functioning, Scaffolding, Visual Supports

**Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria (RSD)** An intense emotional response to perceived or actual rejection or criticism, strongly associated with ADHD.

**Ex.** A student shuts down completely after any teacher correction. Her teacher shifts to private, low-key feedback. **See:** ADHD, Emotional Regulation, Co-regulation, Self-Esteem

**Autistic Burnout** A state of profound exhaustion, reduced functioning, and withdrawal resulting from sustained masking and social demands exceeding a person's capacity.

**Ex.** A model student becomes non-functional in December after months of exhausting social performance at school. **See:** Masking, Autism, Co-regulation, School Refusal

**Dyscommunication** A broad term describing difficulties in both understanding and producing verbal and non-verbal communication.

**Ex.** A student misreads facial expressions and tone consistently, leading to social misunderstandings. **See:** Pragmatic Language, Social Communication, AAC

**Co-occurring Conditions** The presence of two or more diagnosed conditions in the same individual, also called comorbidities.

**Ex.** A student's IEP addresses both ADHD and anxiety simultaneously rather than treating one as secondary. **See:** AuDHD, Comorbidity, IEP, Comprehensive Evaluation

## SECTION 2

# Legal, Policy, and Rights

*Laws, protections, and procedural frameworks*

**IEP** Individualized Education Program. The legally binding plan specifying goals, services, and accommodations for a student with a disability.

**Ex.** Benjamin's IEP includes annual goals, speech therapy services, and a visual schedule accommodation. **See:** IDEA, FAPE, LRE, Annual Goals, Placement

**IDEA** Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. The US federal law guaranteeing FAPE in the LRE for students with disabilities.

**Ex.** Under IDEA, a new school must honor a transferring student's IEP immediately. **See:** FAPE, LRE, Child Find, IEP, Procedural Safeguards

**FAPE** Free Appropriate Public Education. Every eligible student receives special education and related services at no cost to the family.

**Ex.** A team increases services after two years of flat progress data, restoring FAPE. **See:** IDEA, LRE, IEP, Due Process

**LRE** Least Restrictive Environment. Students must be educated alongside non-disabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate.

**Ex.** A student spends 80% of her day in general education with co-teacher support and 20% in a resource room. **See:** FAPE, Inclusion, Continuum of Services, IEP

**504 Plan** A plan under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act providing accommodations for students who do not qualify for special education.

**Ex.** Clara has anxiety and receives extended time and a separate testing room through her 504 Plan. **See:** IDEA, IEP, Accommodation, Section 504

**Child Find** The IDEA mandate requiring districts to identify, locate, and evaluate all children with disabilities who may need special education.

**Ex.** A teacher refers Tariq for evaluation after observing persistent reading difficulties despite strong effort. **See:** IDEA, IEP, Evaluation, Early Identification

**Procedural Safeguards** Legal protections for parents and students under IDEA including rights to consent, evaluation, IEP participation, and dispute resolution.

**Ex.** A family receives a written copy of their rights at the initial eligibility meeting. **See:** IDEA, Due Process, Parent Rights, IEP

**Due Process** A formal legal procedure allowing families to challenge school decisions about evaluation, eligibility, placement, or services.

**Ex.** A family files for due process after the school fails to implement the IEP for a full semester. **See:** Procedural Safeguards, Mediation, IDEA, FAPE

**Manifestation Determination** A review determining whether a student's disciplinary behavior was caused by or directly related to their disability.

**Ex.** A student's IEP team reviews a physical incident and determines it was a manifestation of his autism and BIP gaps. **See:** IEP, FBA, BIP, Disability Rights, IDEA

**Transition Planning** The IEP process preparing students aged 16+ for post-secondary education, employment, and independent living.

**Ex.** *Andre's transition plan includes a culinary elective and a community work experience at a local cafe.* **See:** Post-Secondary Goals, Self-Advocacy, Vocational Training

**Annual Goals** Measurable outcomes written into the IEP specifying what a student is expected to achieve within one year.

**Ex.** *Sadia's annual goal specifies peer communication on four of five observed opportunities across three consecutive sessions.* **See:** IEP, PLOP, Progress Monitoring, SMART Goals

**Present Level of Performance (PLOP)** The IEP section describing a student's current skills and needs across academic and functional domains based on objective data.

**Ex.** *Kofi's PLOP states his reading fluency, decoding strengths, and family-reported frustration with reading at home.* **See:** IEP, Annual Goals, Assessment, Strengths-Based

**Related Services** Developmental, corrective, and supportive services required to assist a student with a disability to benefit from special education.

**Ex.** *Related services in Silas's IEP include speech therapy, OT, and transportation support.* **See:** IEP, SLP, OT, Physical Therapy, IDEA

**Placement** The educational setting in which a student with a disability receives their instruction and services.

**Ex.** *The IEP team determines that a student's placement is the general education classroom with co-teacher support.* **See:** LRE, IEP, Continuum of Services, Inclusion

**Eligibility** The determination that a student meets criteria under IDEA to receive special education services in one of the 13 disability categories.

**Ex.** *A multidisciplinary team reviews evaluation data and determines Amira is eligible under the learning disability category.* **See:** IDEA, Evaluation, IEP, Child Find

**IEP Team** The legally mandated group responsible for developing, reviewing, and revising a student's IEP, including parents, teachers, and administrators.

**Ex.** *Kezia participates in her own IEP meeting and identifies which accommodations are working for her.* **See:** IEP, Parent Rights, Student Voice, IDEA

**Prior Written Notice (PWN)** A written document schools must provide to families before making any changes (or refusing to make changes) to a student's identification, evaluation, placement, or services.

**Ex.** *The district sends a PWN explaining why it is declining to evaluate a student referred by his teacher.* **See:** Procedural Safeguards, IDEA, Parent Rights, IEP

**Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE)** An evaluation by a qualified examiner not employed by the district, which parents may request at public expense when they disagree with the school's evaluation.

**Ex.** *A family requests an IEE and an independent neuropsychologist identifies executive functioning deficits not found in the school's assessment.* **See:** Procedural Safeguards, Evaluation, Parent Rights, Due Process

**Section 504** A section of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 prohibiting discrimination against individuals with disabilities in programs receiving federal funding.

**Ex.** *A student with chronic asthma receives a 504 Plan allowing rest breaks and an inhaler at the classroom door.* **See:** 504 Plan, Disability Rights, Accommodation, ADA

**Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)** A federal civil rights law prohibiting discrimination against individuals with disabilities in employment, public accommodations, and education.

**Ex.** A post-secondary student uses the ADA to request accommodations at a community college. **See:** Section 504, Disability Rights, Self-Advocacy, FAPE

**IFSP** Individualized Family Service Plan. The early intervention equivalent of an IEP for children ages birth to three.

**Ex.** Lila's IFSP includes speech therapy and physical therapy twice weekly, coordinated with her family's daily routines. **See:** Early Intervention, IEP, Developmental Delay, Part C of IDEA

**Continuum of Services** The full range of educational placements available to students with disabilities, from full inclusion to specialized school settings.

**Ex.** The IEP team considers options across the continuum and selects the co-taught general education classroom. **See:** LRE, Placement, Inclusion, IEP

**Compensatory Education** Services provided to make up for a school's failure to provide FAPE during a specific period.

**Ex.** After a due process ruling, a student receives an additional year of reading intervention to compensate for denied services. **See:** FAPE, Due Process, IDEA, IEP

**Part B of IDEA** The section of IDEA governing special education services for children ages 3 to 21.

**Ex.** A student turns three and transitions from the IFSP under Part C to an IEP under Part B. **See:** IDEA, IEP, Part C, Transition

**Part C of IDEA** The section of IDEA governing early intervention services for children from birth to age three.

**Ex.** A pediatrician refers an eight-month-old with developmental concerns to the Part C early intervention program. **See:** IFSP, Early Intervention, Developmental Delay, Part B

## SECTION 3

# Assessment and Evaluation

*Tools, frameworks, and processes for identifying and measuring student needs*

**Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA)** A process identifying the function of challenging behavior by examining antecedents, behaviors, and consequences.

**Ex.** An FBA for Rowan reveals that his loud noises occur specifically to escape difficult writing tasks. **See:** BIP, ABC Data, Function of Behavior, Antecedent

**Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP)** A proactive, function-based plan that teaches replacement behaviors and reduces the likelihood of challenging behavior.

**Ex.** A BIP for elopement includes advance transition warnings, a break card, and consistent adult responses. **See:** FBA, Replacement Behavior, Positive Behavior Supports

**MTSS / RTI** Multi-Tiered System of Supports. A framework providing increasingly intensive evidence-based supports across three tiers.

**Ex.** After eight weeks of Tier 2 intervention, five of eight students return to Tier 1. Three move to Tier 3 and are referred. **See:** Progress Monitoring, Universal Screening, Evidenced-Based Practice

**Progress Monitoring** Regular, systematic data collection on student performance to evaluate whether instruction or intervention is producing expected growth.

**Ex.** Flat progress monitoring data over six probes prompts the team to change Kofi's reading intervention approach. **See:** IEP, Annual Goals, Data-Based Decision Making, CBM

**Curriculum-Based Measurement (CBM)** Brief, standardized assessments of core academic skills (reading, math, writing) used to monitor progress over time.

**Ex.** A teacher uses one-minute oral reading fluency probes every two weeks to track progress toward an IEP reading goal. **See:** Progress Monitoring, Universal Screening, Baseline Data

**Universal Screening** Brief assessments administered to all students at regular intervals to identify those at risk for academic or social-emotional difficulties.

**Ex.** Fall reading screening identifies 12 students below benchmark who are immediately placed in Tier 2 interventions. **See:** MTSS, CBM, Child Find, Early Identification

**Psychoeducational Evaluation** A comprehensive assessment by a qualified professional to determine eligibility and inform intervention planning.

**Ex.** Results reveal average intelligence alongside a significant phonological processing deficit confirming a reading disability. **See:** Eligibility, PLOP, IEP, School Psychologist

**Accommodation vs. Modification** An accommodation changes how a student learns; a modification changes what is expected. Both must be documented in the IEP or 504 Plan.

**Ex.** Extended time is an accommodation. A simplified text at a lower reading level is a modification. **See:** IEP, 504 Plan, FAPE, Access to Curriculum

**Baseline Data** A measurement of student performance before an intervention begins, used as the reference point for measuring progress.

**Ex.** Three oral reading probes over three separate days give an average baseline of 48 words per minute. **See:** Progress Monitoring, IEP, Annual Goals

**Adaptive Behavior Assessment** Evaluation of a student's practical everyday functioning skills including self-care, communication, and community participation.

**Ex.** Adaptive behavior scores below average alongside average cognitive scores support an intellectual disability determination. **See:** Intellectual Disability, Vineland Scales, IEP, Functional Skills

**IEE (Independent Educational Evaluation)** A parent-requested evaluation by an outside qualified professional when families disagree with the school's findings.

**Ex.** An independent neuropsychologist identifies executive dysfunction not captured in the school's original assessment. **See:** Procedural Safeguards, Parent Rights, Evaluation

**Norm-Referenced Assessment** A standardized test that compares a student's performance to a normative sample of same-age or same-grade peers.

**Ex.** The school psychologist uses a norm-referenced cognitive assessment to compare a student's performance to national peers. **See:** Standardized Testing, Psychoeducational Evaluation, Percentile Score

**Criterion-Referenced Assessment** An assessment that measures a student's performance against a fixed set of predetermined standards or learning targets.

**Ex.** A teacher uses a criterion-referenced math probe to determine whether a student has mastered two-digit subtraction with regrouping. **See:** Mastery, Progress Monitoring, Curriculum-Based Measurement

**Ecological Assessment** An evaluation examining how a student functions across multiple natural environments such as home, school, and community.

**Ex.** An OT observes a student in the classroom, cafeteria, and recess to assess sensory and motor functioning across contexts. **See:** Functional Skills, OT, Transition Planning, Adaptive Behavior

**Portfolio Assessment** A collection of a student's work samples over time used to document learning progress and demonstrate competencies.

**Ex.** A student with dysgraphia uses a portfolio of typed work samples to demonstrate writing skill growth rather than handwriting. **See:** Progress Monitoring, UDL, Authentic Assessment

**Dynamic Assessment** An approach evaluating not only what a student knows but their capacity to learn with mediation or support.

**Ex.** A psychologist provides scaffolded prompts during assessment and documents how much support the student needs to succeed. **See:** Zone of Proximal Development, Scaffolding, Vygotsky

**Functional Academic Assessment** Assessment of academic skills within real-world contexts to determine practical instructional needs.

**Ex.** A teacher assesses a student's ability to read bus schedules and count change rather than only academic texts. **See:** Functional Skills, Life Skills, Transition, IEP

**Speech-Language Evaluation** A comprehensive assessment of a student's articulation, language comprehension, expression, and social communication skills.

**Ex.** An SLP evaluation reveals strong receptive vocabulary but significant pragmatic language and narrative structure weaknesses. **See:** SLP, IEP, AAC, Language Development

**Occupational Therapy Evaluation** An assessment of a student's sensory processing, fine motor, visual-motor, and daily living skills by an occupational therapist.

**Ex.** An OT evaluation identifies tactile defensiveness and fine motor delays informing recommendations for classroom accommodations. **See:** OT, Sensory Processing, Fine Motor, IEP

**ABC Data** Antecedent-Behavior-Consequence data collection used to identify patterns in challenging behavior.

**Ex.** ABC data collected over two weeks shows that Rowan's disruptions reliably follow the assignment of writing tasks. **See:** FBA, Antecedent, Behavior, Consequence

**Antecedent** The event, condition, or context that immediately precedes a behavior and may trigger or influence it.

**Ex.** The antecedent to Zaid's elopement is consistently identified as unstructured transition periods. **See:** ABC Data, FBA, BIP, Behavior

**Discrepancy Model** An older eligibility model requiring a significant difference between ability and achievement scores to qualify for learning disability services.

**Ex.** Under the discrepancy model, a student with average IQ but very low reading scores qualifies for LD services. **See:** Learning Disability, Eligibility, RTI, Evaluation

**Assistive Technology Evaluation** A formal assessment determining which AT tools and strategies best support a student's access to learning.

**Ex.** An AT evaluation results in text-to-speech software and voice-to-text recommendations for a student with dysgraphia. **See:** Assistive Technology, IEP, AT, UDL

**Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Assessment** Tools used to evaluate a student's social-emotional competencies including self-awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

**Ex.** A school uses a validated SEL screener to identify students needing targeted social skills support. **See:** SEL, Zones of Regulation, Mental Health, MTSS

**Eligibility Meeting** The IEP team meeting held after evaluation to review results and determine whether a student qualifies for special education.

**Ex.** At the eligibility meeting, the team reviews the psychoeducational report and determines the student meets criteria under OHI. **See:** IDEA, Evaluation, IEP, Eligibility

## SECTION 4

# Instructional Strategies and Approaches

*Evidence-based methods, frameworks, and tools for diverse learners*

**Universal Design for Learning (UDL)** A framework building multiple means of representation, expression, and engagement into lessons from the start.

**Ex.** A teacher offers content in print, audio, and video, and allows written, verbal, or visual demonstrations of learning. **See:** Differentiation, Scaffolding, Accommodation, Inclusion

**Scaffolding** Temporary, targeted support provided to students to help them access skills they cannot yet manage independently.

**Ex.** A writing scaffold progresses from graphic organizer to outline to sentence frames to independent writing over eight weeks. **See:** UDL, Fading, ZPD, Prompting

**Explicit Instruction** A structured teaching approach using clear modeling, guided practice with feedback, and supported practice leading to independence.

**Ex.** I do, We do, You do sequence ensures every student practices multi-digit addition with corrective feedback at each stage. **See:** Scaffolding, Structured Literacy, Modeling

**Structured Literacy** An explicit, systematic approach to reading instruction addressing phonological awareness, phonics, morphology, and syntax.

**Ex.** After transitioning to structured literacy, a student's decoding accuracy improves by 22 percentage points in one semester. **See:** Dyslexia, Phonics, Phonological Awareness, Explicit Instruction

**AAC** Augmentative and Alternative Communication. Methods and tools supporting communication for individuals who cannot rely on oral speech.

**Ex.** Silas uses a speech-generating device to request, protest, and comment within three months of introduction. **See:** Communication, PECS, SLP, Autism

**Visual Supports** Tools using pictures, symbols, or written words to help students understand expectations, communicate, and navigate routines.

**Ex.** A visual schedule and first-then board reduce transition-related meltdowns from daily to fewer than one per week. **See:** AAC, Autism, ADHD, Social Stories

**Task Analysis** Breaking a complex skill into small, sequential, teachable steps.

**Ex.** A 14-step task analysis for sandwich-making allows a student to achieve independence through systematic instruction. **See:** Prompting, Fading, Life Skills, Functional Skills

**Prompting Hierarchy** A structured sequence of prompts from most to least intrusive used to help students perform a skill correctly.

**Ex.** A teacher moves from physical to model to gestural to natural cue over six weeks as a student masters lining up independently. **See:** Fading, Task Analysis, Errorless Learning, Independence

**Fading** The systematic reduction of prompts or supports over time to build independent performance.

**Ex.** A paraprofessional moves from beside the student to across the room as the student demonstrates consistent independent responding. **See:** Prompting, Scaffolding, Independence, Task Analysis

**Errorless Learning** An instructional technique providing prompts before errors occur to ensure correct responding from the start.

**Ex.** A teacher physically guides a student to the correct symbol before any attempt, building accurate responding from the beginning. **See:** Prompting, Task Analysis, Confidence, IEP Goals

**Differentiation** Adjusting content, process, product, or learning environment to meet the varied needs of students.

**Ex.** A teacher provides three versions of a science reading: grade-level, below-grade, and visual summary format. **See:** UDL, Scaffolding, Accommodation, Modification

**Multisensory Instruction** Teaching that simultaneously engages two or more sensory pathways to reinforce learning.

**Ex.** Students say, see, and trace letter-sound combinations simultaneously during phonics instruction. **See:** Structured Literacy, Dyslexia, Explicit Instruction, Kinesthetic Learning

**Social Stories** Short, personalized narratives describing a social situation and appropriate responses, developed by Carol Gray.

**Ex.** A social story helps Yusuf understand what to do when the cafeteria is noisy: go to the quiet corner and use his headphones. **See:** Autism, Pragmatic Language, Visual Supports, Carol Gray

**Video Modeling** A teaching strategy in which a student watches a video of a skill being performed correctly before attempting it.

**Ex.** A student watches a video of appropriate peer greeting three times before practicing it in a role-play with his SLP. **See:** Social Skills, Pragmatic Language, AAC, Autism

**Peer-Mediated Instruction** Instructional approaches in which trained peers support the learning and social participation of students with disabilities.

**Ex.** A trained peer partner supports a student with autism during cooperative science activities, facilitating genuine interaction. **See:** Inclusion, Social Skills, Paraprofessional, Peer Support

**Choice Boards** Visual menus offering students structured choices for how they demonstrate learning or engage with content.

**Ex.** Students choose to respond to a history prompt through a written paragraph, illustrated timeline, or recorded summary. **See:** UDL, Engagement, PDA Profile, Motivation

**Graphic Organizers** Visual frameworks helping students organize information, plan writing, or make thinking visible.

**Ex.** A student with ADHD uses a graphic organizer to plan her essay before writing, reducing the overwhelm of blank-page paralysis. **See:** Executive Functioning, UDL, Writing, Scaffolding

**Chunking** Breaking large tasks or information into smaller, more manageable segments.

**Ex.** A teacher breaks a 30-minute assignment into three 10-minute segments with brief check-ins between each. **See:** ADHD, Executive Functioning, Scaffolding, Visual Timers

**Spaced Practice** Distributing learning sessions over time rather than massing them together, improving long-term retention.

**Ex.** Vocabulary words are reviewed in short daily sessions over two weeks rather than one long session before a test. **See:** Memory, Learning, Retrieval Practice, Dyslexia

**Retrieval Practice** The act of recalling learned information from memory, which strengthens retention more effectively than re-reading.

**Ex.** Daily low-stakes quizzes on science vocabulary improve retention for students with learning disabilities more than review sheets. **See:** Memory, Spaced Practice, Explicit Instruction

**Concrete-Representational-Abstract (CRA)** A three-phase instructional sequence moving from physical objects to pictures to symbols for teaching math concepts.

**Ex.** A student learns multiplication using arrays of physical blocks before diagrams, then finally abstract number sentences. **See:** Dyscalculia, Explicit Instruction, Scaffolding, Math

**Phonological Awareness** The ability to recognize and manipulate the sound units of spoken language, including rhymes, syllables, and phonemes.

**Ex.** A kindergartener who cannot identify rhymes receives daily phonological awareness training before beginning phonics instruction. **See:** Phonics, Dyslexia, Structured Literacy, Reading

**Decoding** The ability to apply letter-sound knowledge to accurately read words.

**Ex.** A student improves decoding accuracy by 20 points after six months of systematic phonics instruction. **See:** Phonics, Phonological Awareness, Dyslexia, Fluency

**Fluency** The ability to read text accurately, at an appropriate rate, and with expression. It bridges decoding and comprehension.

**Ex.** A student reads with perfect accuracy but very slowly, suggesting fluency is the target rather than decoding. **See:** Decoding, Comprehension, Dyslexia, CBM

**Reading Comprehension** The ability to understand and construct meaning from text.

**Ex.** A student who decodes well but does not comprehend receives instruction in visualization, inference, and text structure. **See:** Fluency, Language Processing, ASD, Hyperlexia

**Writing Scaffolds** Structured supports for written expression such as sentence starters, frames, templates, and planning guides.

**Ex.** A student with dysgraphia uses a paragraph template with sentence frames to produce organized, grade-level writing. **See:** Scaffolding, Dysgraphia, UDL, Executive Functioning

**Interest-Based Learning** Structuring instruction around topics of high personal interest to leverage motivation and engagement.

**Ex.** Eli's teacher allows him to research game design for a research project, producing his most engaged writing of the year. **See:** ADHD, Autism, Hyperfocus, Motivation, UDL

**Flexible Grouping** Organizing students into varied instructional groups based on skill, need, or interest that change frequently.

**Ex.** A teacher rotates students through three groups weekly so that groupings are never fixed or stigmatizing. **See:** Differentiation, Inclusion, Small-Group Instruction

**Self-Monitoring** Teaching students to observe, record, and evaluate their own academic or behavioral performance.

**Ex.** A student uses a checklist to verify he has completed each step of an assignment before submitting it. **See:** Executive Functioning, Metacognition, Self-Regulation, ADHD

**Metacognition** Thinking about one's own thinking and learning. Awareness of one's cognitive processes and strategies.

**Ex.** A teacher explicitly teaches students to identify when they do not understand text and what to do about it. **See:** Self-Monitoring, Executive Functioning, Scaffolding, Comprehension

## SECTION 5

# Behavior, Regulation, and SEL

*Emotional regulation, behavioral support, and social-emotional learning*

**Co-regulation** A calm, regulated adult actively supporting a student to manage their emotional and physiological state.

**Ex.** *A teacher sits quietly beside a dysregulated student, lowers her voice, and removes the task until the student resets.* **See:** Self-Regulation, Polyvagal Theory, Trauma-Informed

**Self-Regulation** The ability to manage one's emotions, attention, impulses, and arousal in response to environmental demands.

**Ex.** *A student uses a personal regulation toolkit, checking in with her body each morning and choosing a strategy proactively.* **See:** Co-regulation, Interoception, Zones of Regulation

**Zones of Regulation** A framework categorizing emotional states into four color-coded zones to support identification and regulation.

**Ex.** *A teacher models: 'I am in Yellow today. I am using deep breathing to return to Green before we start.'* **See:** Self-Regulation, SEL, Interoception, Social-Emotional Learning

**Masking** The suppression of natural neurodivergent traits to appear more neurotypical, at significant psychological cost.

**Ex.** *Phoebe appears perfect at school but collapses in exhaustion every afternoon. Assessment reveals years of chronic masking.* **See:** Autism, AuDHD, Autistic Burnout, Neurodivergent Identity

**Stimming** Repetitive self-stimulatory behaviors serving regulatory, communicative, and pleasurable functions.

**Ex.** *Zaid's rocking improves his focus. His new teacher provides a rocker cushion rather than redirecting him.* **See:** Autism, Sensory Processing, Co-regulation, Masking

**Meltdown** An involuntary, intense neurological response to sensory or emotional overwhelm, not a tantrum or manipulation.

**Ex.** *A student who has a meltdown cannot process language or instruction during it. Wait for regulation first.* **See:** Shutdown, Co-regulation, Sensory Overload, Autism

**Shutdown** A withdrawal response to overwhelm in which a person becomes quiet, unresponsive, or immobile.

**Ex.** *A student who goes silent and stares blankly after lunchtime is shutting down, not being defiant.* **See:** Meltdown, Co-regulation, Autism, Sensory Overload

**Interoception** The sense that perceives internal bodily signals including hunger, pain, heartbeat, and emotional states.

**Ex.** *A student cannot tell he needs the bathroom until it is urgent. Interoception training improves awareness over time.* **See:** Self-Regulation, OT, Autism, Body Awareness

**Trauma-Informed Practice** An approach recognizing the impact of trauma on learning and behavior, building safety and trust rather than compliance.

**Ex.** *Asha's combativeness decreases when teachers offer choices, build relationship first, and respond with curiosity not punishment.* **See:** Co-regulation, ACEs, Polyvagal Theory, Adverse Childhood Experiences

**PBIS** Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports. A school-wide tiered framework for teaching and supporting positive behavior.

*Ex.* A school's PBIS data shows a 40% reduction in office referrals after one year of universal implementation. **See:** FBA, BIP, MTSS, School Climate

**Demand Avoidance** Extreme, anxiety-driven resistance to everyday requests and expectations.

*Ex.* Milo's refusals decrease when every instruction is reframed as a choice and direct demands are removed. **See:** PDA Profile, Autism, Anxiety, Low-Demand Approach

**Replacement Behavior** An alternative, appropriate behavior taught to replace a challenging behavior that serves the same function.

*Ex.* A student is taught to hand a break card instead of eloping from the classroom. Both serve the same escape function. **See:** FBA, BIP, Function of Behavior, Prompting

**Function of Behavior** The purpose or reason behind a behavior, most commonly to obtain something desired or to escape something aversive.

*Ex.* Loud noises during writing serve an escape function. The intervention targets writing instruction, not the noise. **See:** FBA, ABC Data, BIP, Replacement Behavior

**Emotional Regulation** The ability to monitor, evaluate, and modify emotional reactions to achieve goals and adapt to situations.

*Ex.* A student with ADHD and RSD learns to pause before reacting to correction using a personal sensory tool. **See:** Self-Regulation, Co-regulation, Zones of Regulation, Interoception

**Polyvagal Theory** A framework by Stephen Porges explaining how the autonomic nervous system regulates safety responses through three states: safe, mobilized, and immobilized.

*Ex.* A teacher understands that a shutdown student is in an immobilized state and uses proximity, voice, and reduced demands to restore safety. **See:** Co-regulation, Trauma-Informed, Shutdown, Nervous System

**Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)** Potentially traumatic events occurring before age 18 including abuse, neglect, and household dysfunction.

*Ex.* A student with a high ACE score has persistent difficulty with trust and regulation. Relationship-based strategies are prioritized. **See:** Trauma-Informed, Co-regulation, Mental Health, Behavioral Support

**Window of Tolerance** The zone of arousal in which a person can function effectively and regulate. Outside it, learning is not possible.

*Ex.* A teacher recognizes that a student is outside his window of tolerance and removes academic demands until he is regulated. **See:** Polyvagal Theory, Co-regulation, Trauma-Informed, Arousal

**Sensory Diet** A personalized activity plan providing specific sensory experiences throughout the day to support regulation.

*Ex.* Luca's sensory diet includes heavy work before circle time, a rocker cushion, and a movement break after 20 minutes of seat work. **See:** OT, Proprioception, Sensory Processing, Self-Regulation

**De-escalation** Strategies used to reduce the intensity of a student's emotional or behavioral escalation.

**Ex.** A teacher reduces volume, removes demands, creates physical space, and uses brief, calm statements to de-escalate. **See:** Co-regulation, Meltdown, Trauma-Informed, Restraint Prevention

**Collaborative Problem Solving (CPS)** An approach developed by Ross Greene in which adults and students collaboratively identify and solve the problems behind lagging skills and challenging behavior.

**Ex.** A student and teacher identify together that incomplete homework is caused by after-school anxiety, not laziness. A joint plan is built. **See:** Demand Avoidance, PDA Profile, Lagging Skills, Relationship-Based

**Proactive Strategies** Preventive measures implemented before challenging behavior occurs rather than in response to it.

**Ex.** Providing a visual schedule, transition warnings, and a quiet work option are all proactive strategies for a sensory-sensitive student. **See:** BIP, FBA, Sensory Diet, Visual Supports

**Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)** The process of developing self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

**Ex.** A school implements a daily SEL check-in and teaches students to name emotions and choose coping strategies. **See:** Zones of Regulation, Self-Regulation, Mental Health, CASEL

**Growth Mindset** The belief that abilities can be developed through dedication and hard work, contrasted with a fixed mindset.

**Ex.** A teacher praises a student's effort and strategy rather than outcome, reinforcing a growth mindset after a failed test. **See:** Self-Efficacy, SEL, Motivation, Carol Dweck

**Self-Efficacy** A person's belief in their own ability to succeed in specific situations or accomplish a task.

**Ex.** A student who avoided all written tasks builds self-efficacy gradually through small, successful writing experiences. **See:** Growth Mindset, Motivation, SEL, Scaffolding

**School Refusal** Difficulty attending school due to emotional distress, anxiety, or avoidance, distinct from truancy.

**Ex.** A student with anxiety and ASD gradually increases school attendance through a planned exposure schedule and reduced demands. **See:** Anxiety, PDA Profile, Autistic Burnout, Trauma-Informed

## SECTION 6

# Sensory, Motor, and Communication

*The body's sensory systems, motor skills, and communication tools*

**Proprioception** The sensory system providing information about body position, movement, and force through muscle and joint receptors.

**Ex.** Luca's rocking and crashing behaviors decrease when his teacher provides heavy work and a therapy ball chair. **See:** Sensory Diet, OT, Vestibular System

**Vestibular System** The inner ear system detecting movement, balance, and spatial orientation.

**Ex.** A student who becomes anxious during balance activities has vestibular over-responsivity addressed through OT. **See:** Proprioception, OT, Sensory Processing, Sensory Diet

**Tactile Defensiveness** An over-responsivity to touch input resulting in discomfort, avoidance, or distress.

**Ex.** A student who refuses art activities due to paint and clay textures receives OT and tactile desensitization supports. **See:** Sensory Processing, OT, Hypersensitivity, Sensory Diet

**Hypersensitivity** Over-responsivity to sensory input resulting in heightened, often distressing reactions.

**Ex.** Petra covers her ears in the gymnasium and refuses certain clothing due to hypersensitivity to sound and touch. **See:** SPD, Sensory Diet, OT, Autism

**Hyposensitivity** Under-responsivity to sensory input, often resulting in sensory seeking behaviors.

**Ex.** A student who constantly chews on pencils and seeks deep pressure has hyposensitivity to proprioceptive input. **See:** SPD, Sensory Diet, Proprioception, Sensory Seeking

**Sensory Seeking** Behaviors motivated by the need for additional sensory input to reach an optimal arousal level.

**Ex.** A student who constantly spins and crashes into furniture is seeking vestibular and proprioceptive input. **See:** Hyposensitivity, Sensory Diet, Stimming, OT

**Sensory Overload** A state in which sensory input exceeds an individual's processing capacity, often triggering meltdown or shutdown.

**Ex.** The cafeteria during peak lunch causes sensory overload for an autistic student. A quiet lunch option prevents daily meltdowns. **See:** Meltdown, Shutdown, SPD, Co-regulation

**Occupational Therapy (OT)** A related service supporting a student's ability to participate in school activities through sensory, motor, and functional skill intervention.

**Ex.** An OT addresses fine motor delays, sensory processing differences, and handwriting challenges. **See:** Fine Motor, Sensory Diet, IEP, Related Services

**Physical Therapy (PT)** A related service addressing gross motor skills, mobility, strength, and physical functioning to support school participation.

**Ex.** PT services help a student with cerebral palsy navigate the school environment safely and participate in adapted PE. **See:** Gross Motor, CP, IEP, Related Services

**Fine Motor Skills** Precise movements of small muscles in the hands and fingers required for writing, cutting, and manipulating objects.

**Ex.** A student with dyspraxia produces far more written output when allowed to type rather than write by hand. **See:** OT, Dyspraxia, Dysgraphia, Assistive Technology

**Gross Motor Skills** Large muscle group movements including walking, running, jumping, and maintaining posture and balance.

**Ex.** A student with Down syndrome receives PT twice weekly and participates in adapted PE alongside peers. **See:** PT, Vestibular, Dyspraxia, Adaptive PE

**Hypotonia** Low muscle tone affecting strength, stability, and motor control across fine and gross motor domains.

**Ex.** A student with hypotonia fatigues by midday. Her schedule is adjusted to place demanding academics in the morning. **See:** Down Syndrome, OT, PT, Fine Motor

**Assistive Technology (AT)** Any device or software helping a student with a disability access and benefit from education.

**Ex.** Text-to-speech, word prediction, and voice-to-text tools allow a student with dyslexia and dysgraphia to demonstrate true knowledge. **See:** AAC, IEP, UDL, OT, SLP

**Speech-Language Pathology (SLP)** The discipline assessing and treating speech, language, voice, fluency, and communication differences.

**Ex.** An SLP provides direct therapy for articulation and pragmatic language and consults with the teacher on generalization. **See:** AAC, Pragmatic Language, IEP, Related Services

**Pragmatic Language** The social use of language including turn-taking, topic maintenance, inferencing, and adjusting communication for context.

**Ex.** Julian's SLP teaches conversation rules explicitly through video modeling and role-play twice weekly. **See:** Autism, Social Communication, SLP, Social Stories

**Echolalia** The repetition of words or phrases heard previously, serving communicative functions including expression, regulation, and processing.

**Ex.** Theo's team treats his repeated phrases as intentional communication and responds to the meaning, not the form. **See:** Autism, AAC, SLP, Communication

**PECS** Picture Exchange Communication System. A structured program teaching communication through picture card exchange.

**Ex.** A three-year-old autistic child reaches consistent Phase 3 PECS use within six months of introduction. **See:** AAC, Communication, Autism, SLP

**Aided Language Stimulation (ALS)** A strategy in which communication partners model language on an AAC device during natural interactions.

**Ex.** Silas's teacher points to symbols on his device while giving instructions, modeling how to use it functionally. **See:** AAC, Modeling, SLP, Autism

**Articulation** The physical production of speech sounds. Articulation errors involve incorrect production of specific sounds.

**Ex.** A student who substitutes 'w' for 'r' receives individual SLP sessions targeting correct sound production. **See:** SLP, Speech Development, IEP, Related Services

**Fluency Disorder** A communication disorder affecting the flow of speech, including stuttering and cluttering.

**Ex.** A student who stutters receives accommodations including extended response time and a no-rushing policy during class. **See:** SLP, Stuttering, Accommodation, IEP

**Motor Planning** The ability to conceive, organize, and carry out a sequence of unfamiliar motor actions, sometimes called praxis.

**Ex.** A student with poor motor planning takes significantly longer to complete novel physical tasks despite understanding them. **See:** Dyspraxia, OT, Task Analysis, Fine Motor

**Visual-Motor Integration** The ability to coordinate visual information with hand movements, essential for writing, drawing, and cutting.

**Ex.** An OT addresses visual-motor integration delays through structured tracing, copying, and construction activities. **See:** OT, Fine Motor, Dysgraphia, Visual Perception

**Augmentative Communication** Any strategy, tool, or system used to supplement existing communication, from gestures to high-tech devices.

**Ex.** A student uses low-tech picture communication boards in addition to some verbal speech. **See:** AAC, SLP, Communication, Autism

**Core Vocabulary** A small set of high-frequency words used across many contexts, forming the foundation of AAC systems.

**Ex.** 'Want', 'more', 'go', 'stop', and 'help' are core vocabulary words programmed into every student's AAC device. **See:** AAC, Language Development, SLP, Communication

**Orientation and Mobility (O&M)** A related service teaching students with visual impairments to navigate safely and independently in their environment.

**Ex.** An O&M specialist teaches a student to use a white cane and navigate the school hallways independently. **See:** Visual Impairment, IEP, Related Services, Independence

## SECTION 7

# Inclusion, Collaboration, and Family Partnership

*Systems, relationships, and rights supporting every student's belonging*

**Inclusion** Educating students with disabilities in general education settings alongside peers, with appropriate supports.

**Ex.** A student with ID participates in fourth-grade science and literacy with modified objectives and co-teacher support. **See:** LRE, Co-teaching, UDL, IEP

**Co-teaching** Two teachers, one general education and one special education, sharing responsibility for planning and instruction.

**Ex.** Two teachers use station teaching in chemistry so all students access the same content through differentiated pathways. **See:** Inclusion, UDL, Paraprofessional, IEP

**Paraprofessional** A school employee supporting students with disabilities under the supervision of a licensed educator.

**Ex.** A paraprofessional moves to the back of the room as a student builds independence, reducing prompt dependency. **See:** Fading, Prompt Dependency, Inclusion, IEP

**Advocacy** Actions taken to promote and protect the rights and interests of students with disabilities.

**Ex.** A parent files a state complaint after learning the district has been denying evaluations without consent. **See:** Procedural Safeguards, Self-Advocacy, Parent Rights, IDEA

**Culturally Responsive Practice** Teaching that recognizes and incorporates students' cultural backgrounds, languages, and community assets.

**Ex.** A team identifies that behaviors reflecting culturally different communication styles are being mislabeled as disability. **See:** Equity, Disproportionality, Family Partnership, Assessment

**Parent and Family Partnership** The active, meaningful collaboration between families and school teams in planning and evaluating educational services.

**Ex.** A Moroccan family receives evaluation results in French with an interpreter and participates meaningfully in the IEP. **See:** IEP Team, Parent Rights, Cultural Responsiveness, IDEA

**Push-in vs Pull-out** Push-in delivers services within the general education classroom; pull-out delivers services in a separate setting.

**Ex.** A student receives pull-out articulation therapy and push-in social communication support in her classroom. **See:** LRE, Placement, Continuum of Services, IEP

**Consultation Model** A service delivery model in which a specialist supports a student's teacher rather than working directly with the student.

**Ex.** An OT consults with a teacher weekly to embed sensory strategies into the classroom rather than pulling the student out. **See:** Co-teaching, Related Services, Push-in, Collaboration

**Peer Support Programs** Structured programs training non-disabled peers to support students with disabilities socially and academically.

**Ex.** A trained peer facilitator sits with an autistic student during lunch and helps initiate shared conversations. **See:** Inclusion, Social Skills, Paraprofessional Fading, Peer Relationships

**Person-Centered Planning (PCP)** A planning process building an individualized future vision around the student's dreams, strengths, and relationships.

**Ex.** At age 14, Dani's MAPS session identifies her goal of living independently and volunteering at an animal shelter. **See:** Transition Planning, Self-Advocacy, Post-Secondary Goals

**Self-Determination** The ability to make choices and decisions about one's own life, a critical outcome of special education.

**Ex.** A student with intellectual disability chooses her own transition goals and communicates them at her IEP meeting. **See:** Self-Advocacy, PCP, Transition Planning, Autonomy

**Disproportionality** The over- or under-representation of specific racial, ethnic, or linguistic groups in special education.

**Ex.** A district reviews data and finds Black male students are over-referred for emotional disturbance at nearly three times the expected rate. **See:** Culturally Responsive, Equity, Child Find, Evaluation

**Home-School Communication** Consistent, bi-directional communication between teachers and families about student progress, strategies, and supports.

**Ex.** A special educator sends weekly data updates to a family using a shared communication notebook. **See:** Family Partnership, IEP, Progress Monitoring, Trust

**Interpreter Services** Qualified interpreters supporting communication between school staff and families who speak languages other than English.

**Ex.** A Vietnamese-speaking family receives full interpretation at IEP meetings and translated copies of all procedural safeguards. **See:** Family Partnership, Cultural Responsiveness, Parent Rights, ELL

**Wraparound Services** A team-based, community support approach coordinating school, family, and community services around a student's complex needs.

**Ex.** A student with trauma, mental health needs, and academic delays receives coordinated services from the school, mental health agency, and family support worker. **See:** Family Partnership, Mental Health, MTSS, Community

**Mediation** A voluntary dispute resolution process in which an impartial mediator helps families and schools reach agreement outside of due process.

**Ex.** A family and school resolve a placement disagreement through state-funded mediation without pursuing a due process hearing. **See:** Due Process, Procedural Safeguards, IDEA, Parent Rights

**Student Voice** The meaningful inclusion of students' perspectives, preferences, and choices in their own educational planning.

**Ex.** A student identifies at his IEP meeting which accommodations are working and proposes his own annual goal for next year. **See:** Self-Advocacy, IEP Team, Person-Centered, Self-Determination

**Least Intrusive Support** Providing only the amount of support a student actually needs, preserving as much independence as possible.

**Ex.** A teacher waits five seconds before prompting a student, giving them time to initiate independently. **See:** Prompting Hierarchy, Fading, Independence, Paraprofessional

**Universal Precautions in Education** The principle of designing instruction and environment to benefit all students, reducing the need for reactive supports.

**Ex.** A teacher implements UDL, sensory supports, and visual schedules for the whole class, reducing individual reactive requests. **See:** UDL, Proactive Strategies, PBIS, Inclusion

**Natural Supports** The relationships and assistance available to a person from their own community and environment.

**Ex.** A co-worker at a job site provides natural support to a new employee with ID, reducing reliance on a job coach. **See:** Supported Employment, Inclusion, Peer Support, Transition

## SECTION 8

# Transition and Life Skills

*Preparing students for adult lives with dignity, autonomy, and belonging*

**Post-Secondary Goals** Measurable statements in the IEP describing what the student will do in education, employment, and independent living after school.

**Ex.** *Andre's post-secondary employment goal is to work in a restaurant. All transition services are built around this vision.* **See:** IEP, Transition Planning, Self-Advocacy, PCP

**Self-Advocacy** The ability to understand one's own needs and rights and communicate them effectively to access appropriate supports.

**Ex.** *Kezia role-plays requesting disability accommodations at college and independently contacts disability services her first week.* **See:** Transition Planning, IEP, Self-Determination, Advocacy

**Person-Centered Planning** A planning approach organizing services and supports around the individual's vision, strengths, and relationships.

**Ex.** *Dani's MAPS plan drives her IEP goals and transition activities for four years, centering her voice throughout.* **See:** Transition Planning, Self-Advocacy, Post-Secondary Goals

**Vocational Training** Instruction and community-based experiences preparing students for real employment in integrated settings.

**Ex.** *Students spend Fridays at community job sites matched to their interests. Marcus builds skills at a bakery and cafe.* **See:** Supported Employment, Transition, Community-Based Instruction

**Independent Living Skills** Practical everyday abilities including personal care, cooking, money management, and community navigation.

**Ex.** *A student practices grocery shopping with a calculator app weekly at a real store as part of her IEP.* **See:** Transition Planning, Adaptive Behavior, Life Skills, PCP

**Supported Employment** A model placing individuals with disabilities in real jobs first, then providing individualized coaching that fades over time.

**Ex.** *Marcus works 20 hours per week at a hotel laundry after six weeks of supported job coaching.* **See:** Community Integration, Vocational Training, Job Coaching, Transition

**Community-Based Instruction (CBI)** Teaching functional skills in real community environments rather than simulated classroom settings.

**Ex.** *Students practice bus navigation, bank deposits, and restaurant ordering at real community locations each week.* **See:** Functional Skills, Independent Living, Transition, Community Integration

**Community Integration** The full participation of individuals with disabilities in community life alongside people without disabilities.

**Ex.** *A transition program includes weekly gym visits, library use, and recreational activities in integrated community settings.* **See:** Supported Employment, Olmstead, CBI, Transition

**Job Coaching** On-site support provided by a job coach at an employment placement, faded as the employee becomes more independent.

**Ex.** A job coach works alongside Marcus for six weeks, then fades as a co-worker takes over natural workplace support. **See:** Supported Employment, Fading, Natural Supports, Transition

**Age-Appropriate Transition Assessment** Ongoing assessments gathering information about a student's strengths, preferences, interests, and needs to inform post-secondary goals.

**Ex.** Interest inventories, work experience observations, and family interviews are all age-appropriate transition assessments. **See:** Transition Planning, IEP, Post-Secondary Goals, Self-Determination

**Self-Determination** The ability to direct one's own life, including making choices, setting goals, and advocating for oneself.

**Ex.** A student with ID selects her own job training site and communicates her preferences at every team meeting. **See:** Self-Advocacy, PCP, Autonomy, Transition

**Person-First Language** Language placing the person before the disability: 'student with autism' rather than 'autistic student'.

**Ex.** A district's communication policy defaults to person-first language while acknowledging that many autistic adults prefer identity-first. **See:** Identity-First Language, Disability Rights, Respectful Language

**Identity-First Language** Language placing the disability as part of identity: 'autistic person' rather than 'person with autism', preferred by many in the disability community.

**Ex.** Many autistic adults prefer identity-first language as it affirms that autism is integral to who they are, not separate. **See:** Person-First Language, Neurodivergent Identity, Disability Culture

**Micro-Credentials and Certificates** Short-term, competency-based credentials that validate specific skills for students in transition programs.

**Ex.** A student earns a food safety certificate as part of his vocational transition preparation for restaurant work. **See:** Vocational Training, Transition, Post-Secondary Goals

**Person-Centered Thinking** A set of skills and tools helping support professionals understand and apply an individual's vision, preferences, and strengths in planning.

**Ex.** A transition coordinator uses person-centered thinking tools to identify a student's 'important to and important for' distinction in planning. **See:** PCP, Self-Determination, Transition, Life Quality

**Employment First** A policy framework asserting that competitive, integrated employment is the first and preferred outcome for people with disabilities.

**Ex.** A state's Employment First policy requires transition teams to prioritize competitive employment goals over sheltered work options. **See:** Supported Employment, Community Integration, Transition, Disability Rights

**Medicaid Waiver** A funding mechanism allowing states to use Medicaid funds for home and community-based services for people with disabilities.

**Ex.** A family applies for a Medicaid waiver when their child turns 18 to fund supported living and employment services. **See:** Supported Employment, Independent Living, Disability Services, Transition

**Transfer of Rights** The legal process at age of majority (18 in most US states) when IEP rights transfer from parents to the student.

**Ex.** At 17, Kezia's team discusses the upcoming transfer of rights and prepares her to sign her own IEP the following year. **See:** IDEA, Self-Advocacy, IEP, Parent Rights

**Benefits Counseling** Guidance helping individuals with disabilities understand how work and earnings may affect their public benefits.

**Ex.** A transition coordinator connects a student with a benefits counselor to understand how working part-time will affect his SSI. **See:** SSI, Supported Employment, Transition, Self-Advocacy

**Interagency Collaboration** Coordination among multiple agencies (school, vocational rehabilitation, developmental services, mental health) to support student transition.

**Ex.** A transition IEP meeting includes representatives from vocational rehabilitation and the state disability services agency. **See:** Transition Planning, Vocational Training, Community Integration, Wraparound

# References and Further Reading

*Selected peer-reviewed sources and foundational texts*

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