– GLOSSARY –

COMMONLY USED TERMS IN SPECIAL ED

WORD	DEFINITION	EXAMPLE
Accommodations	Changes in how your child learns so they can fully participate.	Extra time on tests, breaks, or listening to audio instead of reading.
Achievement Testing	Tests that show what your child knows or has learned in a subject.	A reading or math test.
Activities of Daily Living (ADLs)	Basic life skills your child uses every day.	Eating, dressing, brushing teeth.
Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)	A law that protects people with disabilities from being treated unfairly.	Access to buildings, transportation, and services

WORD	DEFINITION	EXAMPLE
Adaptive Development	How your child learns everyday life skills compared to other children their age.	Playing with others, dressing themselves.
Advocate	Someone who speaks up to make sure your child gets the support they need.	A parent, family member, or trained professional.
Alternative Assessment	Different ways to show what your child knows besides regular tests.	Projects, drawings, or portfolios
Annual Goal (IEP)	A goal your child is expected to work toward within one year.	Improving reading skills or communication.
Assessment	A way of gathering information about your child's strengths and needs.	Observations, tests, and teacher input.

General information, not legal advice. Rules differ by state; see your school's procedural safeguards notice. Reviewed October 2026.

WORD	DEFINITION	EXAMPLE
Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)	A developmental difference that affects communication, behavior, and social interaction.	May communicate or interact differently, but may have strengths in memory, patterns, or art
Basic Skills	Core school skills.	Reading, writing, math.
Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP)	A plan to understand and support your child's behavior.	If your child gets upset and leaves the classroom, the plan may teach them to ask for a break instead.
Child Find	A program that helps find children who may need extra support in school	A teacher notices your child is struggling with speech or learning and refers them for an evaluation.
Cognitive	How we think, learn, and understand.	How your child solves problems, remembers information, or follows directions.

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WORD	DEFINITION	EXAMPLE
Consent	Your permission for the school to take action	Note: You can say no or change your mind.
Counseling	Support to help with emotions, behavior, or mental health.	Your child meets with a counselor to talk about anxiety or coping skills
Deaf-Blindness	A combination of hearing and vision challenges that affect learning and communication.	Your child may use touch or special tools to communicate and learn
Hearing Impairment	Hearing loss that affects learning	A student may use hearing aids or need captions
Developmental Delay	When a child is learning skills slower than expected for their age.	A child may start talking or walking later than others

WORD	DEFINITION	EXAMPLE
Disability	A condition that may affect how a child learns, communicates, or moves.	Note: It does not define your child's abilities or future.
Due Process Hearing	A formal way to resolve disagreements between families and schools.	A parent disagrees with services and asks for a hearing
Early Intervention (EI)	Services for babies and toddlers, birth to age 3, to support development.	Speech therapy for a toddler learning to talk
Emotional Disturbance	Emotional or behavioral challenges that affect learning (Anxiety, Bipolar, OCD)	A student may have trouble managing emotions at school
Evaluation	Testing and observation used to understand your child's needs.	A school psychologist assesses learning and behavior

WORD	DEFINITION	EXAMPLE
Extended School Year (ESY)	Extra services during school breaks if your child needs them.	Summer support to prevent loss of skills
Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)	Your child has the right to a free education that meets their needs.	The school provides services like therapy at no cost
Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA)	A process to understand why a behavior is happening.	Figuring out if a child acts out to avoid work or get attention
Functional Skills	Skills needed for everyday independence.	Cooking, using money, or staying safe
General Curriculum	What all students are expected to learn in school.	Grade-level math, reading, and science

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WORD	DEFINITION	EXAMPLE
Health Related Services	Support services that help your child benefit from school.	Nursing care or therapy during school
Inclusion	Students with disabilities learning with other students	A student stays in a general classroom with support.
Intellectual Disability	A condition that affects learning and daily skills	A student may need extra time and support to learn
Independent Evaluation	An evaluation done outside the school system.	A parent gets a private psychologist's evaluation
Individualized Education Program (IEP)	A plan that outlines your child's support, goals, and services.	Includes your child's annual plan, services, and placement

WORD	DEFINITION	EXAMPLE
IEP Team	A group (including you) that makes decisions about your child's education.	Teachers, specialists, and parents meet together
Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP)	A plan for young children (birth to 3) and their families.	Early support services for a 2-year-old
Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)	The federal law that gives your child the right to special education services.	Secures access to services and support
Infants & Toddlers Program	Maryland's early intervention program, birth to age 3	Home visits to support development
Intelligence Quotient (IQ)	A score from a test that looks at learning ability	Used as one part of understanding a child's needs

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Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)	A place where your child learns with other students as much as possible while still getting the support they need.	Staying in a general classroom with help when needed
Mediation	A free meeting where a neutral person helps you and the school agree.	A neutral person helps both sides talk it through
Modifications	Changes to what your child is expected to learn, or how much.	Shorter assignments or easier material
Multiple disabilities	A child has more than one disability	Your child may have both physical and learning needs
Native Language	The main language spoken at home	Spanish, Chinese, Haitian Creole

WORD	DEFINITION	EXAMPLE
Occupational Therapy (OT)	Help with daily skills and fine motor skills	Learning to hold a pencil or button a shirt
Orthopedic impairment	A physical condition that affects movement	A student with this condition may use a wheelchair
Other Health Impairment (OHI)	A health condition that affects learning	Asthma, ADHD, or Diabetes
OHI: Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)	Difficulty with attention, focus, or impulse control	Trouble staying seated or focusing in class
OHI: Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD)	Difficulty with attention (without hyperactivity)	Trouble staying focused or organized

WORD	DEFINITION	EXAMPLE
Physical Therapy (PT)	Help with movement and strength	Improving walking or balance.
Placement	Where your child receives services	General classroom, Separate classroom, Regular classroom with services
Positive Behavioral Supports	Teaching better behaviors instead of punishing	Rewarding positive actions
Portfolio	A collection of your child's work	Homework, Classwork, Projects, Artwork, Tests
Prior Written Notice (PWN)	Written notice when the school wants to make changes.	Note: The school explains changes to services before they happen

WORD	DEFINITION	EXAMPLE
Special Education Services	Extra support for students with disabilities	Specialized instruction or therapy
Special Needs	A child who needs extra support to learn or develop	Extra help in class or services at school
Specially Designed Instruction (SDI)	Teaching that is tailored to your child's needs	A teacher uses different methods to help your child learn
Specific Learning Disability (SLD)	A learning difference in reading, writing, or math	Trouble with reading or solving math problems
SLD: Dyslexia	Difficulty with reading and understanding words	Trouble recognizing words or reading smoothly

WORD	DEFINITION	EXAMPLE
SLD: Dysgraphia	Difficulty with writing	Writing may take longer or feel harder than expected
SLD: Dyscalculia	Difficulty with math skills	Trouble understanding numbers or solving problems
Speech-Language Impairment	Difficulty with speaking or understanding language	Trouble forming words or sentences
Traumatic Brain Injury	A brain injury that affects learning or behavior	After an accident, a student may need extra support
Visual Impairment	Vision problems that affect learning	Your child may use large print or braille to read