



Missouri Disability Categories, Definitions, and Criteria

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) defines students with disabilities as those children, ages three (3) to twenty-one (21), who have been properly evaluated as having Intellectual Disability, Hearing Impairments and Deafness, Speech or Language Impairments, Visual Impairments including Blindness, Emotional Disturbance, Orthopedic Impairments, Autism, Traumatic Brain Injury, Other Health Impaired, a Specific Learning Disability, Deaf Blindness, or Multiple Disabilities and, who because of that disability, require special education and related services. As allowed under 34 CFR 300.8 implementing IDEA, the State of Missouri also defines a child with a disability to include children ages three (3) through five (5) who have been properly identified as a young child with a developmental delay.

No child may be determined to be eligible if the determinant factor for that eligibility determination is lack of appropriate instruction in reading, including the essential components of reading instruction (as defined by section 1208(3) of the ESEA), or lack of appropriate instruction in math or limited English proficiency 34 CFR 300.306(b)(1).

Several conditions may be diagnosed by other professionals such as physicians, psychologists, etc. that are not specified by IDEA. These may include such conditions as Tourette syndrome, diabetes, sickle cell anemia, leukemia, etc. Students who present significant learning problems by virtue of the condition may demonstrate eligibility for special education under one or more of the disabilities identified above.

Missouri Eligibility Criteria can be found in the Missouri State Plan for Special Education, Regulation III- Identification and evaluation; <https://dese.mo.gov/special-education/compliance/standards-indicators>. Definitions for each eligibility category can be found on DESE's website: <https://dese.mo.gov/media/pdf/regulation-iii-identification-and-evaluation-2>

Disability Categories, Definitions, and Criteria in alphabetical order:

- | | |
|------------------------------------|---|
| A. Autism | N. Traumatic Brain Injury |
| B. Deaf/Blindness | O. Visual Impairment/Blindness |
| C. Emotional Disturbance | P. Young Child with a Developmental Delay |
| D. Hearing Impairment and Deafness | |
| E. Intellectual Disability | |
| F. Multiple Disabilities | |
| G. Orthopedic Impairment | |
| H. Other Health Impairment | |
| I. Specific Learning Disability | |
| J. Language Impairment | |
| K. Sound System Disorder | |
| L. Speech/Fluency | |
| M. Speech/Voice | |

Autism Definition

"Autism" means a developmental disability significantly affecting verbal or nonverbal communication and social interaction, generally evident before age three (3) that adversely affects a child's educational performance. Other characteristics often associated with autism are engagement in repetitive activities and stereotyped movements, resistance to environmental change or change in daily routines, and unusual responses to sensory experiences.



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The term does not apply if a child's educational performance is adversely affected primarily because the child has an emotional disability as defined in this document.

A child who manifests the characteristics of autism after age three (3) could be identified as having autism if the criteria are satisfied.

Criteria for Initial Determination of Eligibility

A child displays autism when:

- A. Through evaluation that includes a review of medical records, observation of the child's behavior across multiple environments, and an in-depth social history, the following behaviors are documented:
 - 1) Disturbances of speech, language-cognitive, and nonverbal communication: The child displays abnormalities that extend beyond speech to many aspects of the communication process. Communicative language may be absent or, if present, language may lack communicative intent. Characteristics may involve both deviance and delay. There is a deficit in the capacity to use language for social communication, both receptively and expressively.
 - 2) Disturbance of the capacity to relate appropriately to people, events, or objects: The child displays abnormalities in relating to people, objects, and events. There is a deficit in the capacity to form relationships with people. The capacity to use objects in an age appropriate or functional manner may be absent, arrested, or delayed. The child may seek consistency in environmental events to the point of exhibiting rigidity in routines.
- B. The condition adversely affects the child's educational performance.
- C. The autism is not a result of an emotional disability as defined in this document.

Other Behaviors Which the Child May Exhibit Include:

- A. Disturbance of developmental rates and sequences: The child may also exhibit delays, arrests, or regressions in physical, social, or learning skills. Areas of precocious skill development may also be present, while other skills may develop at normal or extremely depressed rates. The order of skill acquisition frequently does not follow normal developmental patterns.
- B. Disturbances of responses to sensory stimuli: The child's behavior may also range from being hyperactive to being unresponsive to people and objects in their environment and can alternate between these two (2) states over periods ranging from hours to months. Disturbances may be apparent in auditory, visual, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, and kinesthetic responses. The child may respond to stimulation inappropriately and in repetitive or non-meaningful ways.

Deaf/Blindness Definition

"Deaf/Blindness" means concomitant hearing and visual impairments, the combination of which causes such severe communication and other developmental and educational needs that they cannot be accommodated in special education programs solely for children with deafness or children with blindness.

Criteria for Initial Determination of Eligibility

A child is deaf/blind when:

- A. both visual and hearing impairments are present as described in the criteria for Hearing Impairment/Deafness and Visual Impairment/Blindness, and
- B. the impairments together cause severe communication, developmental, and educational needs.



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Emotional Disturbance Definition

“Emotional Disturbance” means a condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child’s educational performance:

- A. an inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors;
- B. an inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers;
- C. inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances;
- D. a general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression; and,
- E. a tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or social problems.

The term includes schizophrenia, but does not apply to children who are socially maladjusted unless it is determined they have an emotional disturbance.

Criteria for Initial Determination of Eligibility

A child displays an emotional disturbance when:

- A. Through evaluation procedures that must include observation of behavior in different environments and an in-depth social history, the child displays one of the following characteristics:
 - 1) an inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors;
 - 2) an inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers;
 - 3) inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances;
 - 4) a general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression; and,
 - 5) a tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or social problems.
- B. the characteristic(s) must have existed to a marked degree and over an extended period of time. In most cases, an extended period of time would be a range from two (2) through nine (9) months depending upon the age of the child and the type of behavior occurring. For example, a shorter duration of disturbance that interrupts the learning process in a younger student might constitute an extended period of time. Difficulties may have occurred prior to the referral for evaluation; and,
- C. the emotional disturbance adversely affects the child’s educational performance.

NOTE: Manifestations of an emotional disturbance can be observed along a continuum ranging from normal behavior to severely disordered behavior. Children who experience and demonstrate problems of everyday living and/or those who develop transient symptoms due to a specific crisis or stressful experience are not considered to have an emotional disturbance.

Hearing Impairment and Deafness Definition

"Hearing Impairment" means impairment in hearing, whether permanent or fluctuating, that adversely affects a child’s educational performance, but is not included in the following definition for deafness.

"Deafness" means a hearing impairment that is so severe that the child is impaired in processing linguistic information through hearing, with or without amplification that adversely affects a child’s educational performance.

Criteria for Initial Determination of Eligibility

A child displays a Hearing Impairment/Deafness when:

- A. a hearing impairment has been diagnosed by an audiologist, and



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- B. the hearing impairment adversely affects the child's educational performance.

Intellectual Disability Definition

"Intellectual Disability" means significantly sub average general intellectual functioning existing concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior manifested during the developmental period that adversely affects a child's educational performance. The term "Intellectual Disability" was formally termed "Mental Retardation". The use of the term "Mental Retardation" is no longer socially acceptable.

Criteria for Initial Determination of Eligibility

A child displays intellectual disability when:

- A. the child performs 2.0 Standard Deviations below their peers of equivalent age, ethnic, and cultural background when measured by a standardized instrument of cognitive ability;
- B. the child displays adaptive behavior consistent with measured cognitive ability. Adaptive behavior refers to the effectiveness with which a student meets standards of personal independence and social responsibility expected of his/her age and cultural group. There should be a significant positive correlation between the student's intellectual ability and adaptive behavior; and,
- C. the disability adversely affects the child's educational performance.

Multiple Disabilities Definition

"Multiple Disabilities" means concomitant impairments (such as intellectual disability- blindness, intellectual disability, orthopedic impairment, etc.), the combination of which causes such severe educational needs that they cannot be accommodated in special education programs solely for one of the impairments. The term does not include deaf/blindness.

Criteria for Initial Determination of Eligibility

A child displays multiple disabilities when:

- A. concomitant impairments occur, and
- B. the impairments together cause severe educational needs.

Orthopedic Impairment Definition

"Orthopedic Impairment" means a severe orthopedic impairment that adversely affects a child's educational performance. The term includes impairments caused by congenital anomaly (e.g., club foot, absence of some member, etc.), impairments caused by disease (poliomyelitis, bone tuberculosis, etc.), and impairments from other causes (e.g., cerebral palsy, amputations and fractures, or burns that cause contractures).

Criteria for Initial Determination of Eligibility

A child displays a physical impairment when:

- A. an orthopedic impairment has been diagnosed by a licensed physician, and
- B. the physical impairment adversely affects the child's educational performance.

Other Health Impairment Definition

"Other Health Impairment" means having limited strength, vitality, or alertness, including a heightened alertness to environmental stimuli, that results in limited alertness with respect to the educational environment that is due to chronic or acute health problems, such as asthma, attention deficit disorder or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, diabetes, epilepsy, a heart condition, hemophilia, lead poisoning,

leukemia, nephritis, rheumatic fever, sickle cell anemia, and Tourette Syndrome, and adversely affects a child's educational performance. In 2021 OCR and OSERS provided information adding "Long COVID" as a disability. The "Long COVID" guidance letter can be found here: <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/ocr-factsheet-504-20210726.pdf>

Criteria for Initial Determination of Eligibility

A child displays a Health Impairment when:

- A. a health impairment has been diagnosed by a licensed physician, licensed psychologist, licensed professional counselor, licensed clinical social worker, or school psychologist, and
- B. the health impairment adversely affects the child's educational performance.

Specific Learning Disability Definition

"Specific Learning Disability" means a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations. The term includes such conditions as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. The term does not include learning problems that are primarily the result of a visual, hearing, or motor disability; intellectual disability; emotional disturbance; cultural factors; environmental or economic disadvantage; or, limited English proficiency.

Criteria for Initial Determination of Eligibility

A child has a specific learning disability when:

- A. The child does not achieve adequately for the child's age or to meet State approved grade-level standards in one or more of the following areas, when provided with learning experiences and instruction appropriate for the child's age or State approved grade-level standards:

| | |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Oral Expression | Listening Comprehension |
| Written Expression | Basic Reading Skill |
| Reading Fluency Skills | Reading Comprehension |
| Mathematics Calculation | Mathematics Problem Solving; and, |

- B. The child does not make sufficient progress to meet age or State approved grade-level standards in one or more of the areas identified in A above when using a process based on the child's response to scientific, research-based intervention; or
The child exhibits a pattern of strengths and weaknesses in performance, achievement, or both, relative to age, State approved grade-level standards, or intellectual development, that is determined by the group to be relevant to the identification of a specific learning disability, using appropriate assessments, consistent with 34 CFR 300.304-300.305. A pattern of strengths and weaknesses is defined as a severe discrepancy between achievement and intellectual ability of at least 1.5 standard deviations; and,
- C. The group determines that its findings under A and B of this section are not primarily the result of:
 - 1) a visual, hearing, or motor disability;
 - 2) Intellectual disability;
 - 3) Emotional disturbance;
 - 4) Cultural factors;
 - 5) Environmental or economic disadvantage;



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- 6) Limited English Proficiency;
 - 7) Lack of appropriate instruction in reading, including the essential components of reading instruction (as defined in section 1208 (3) of the ESEA) ;
 - 8) Lack of appropriate instruction in math; and,
- D. To ensure that underachievement in a child suspected of having a specific learning disability is not due to lack of appropriate instruction in reading or math, the group must consider, as part of the evaluation:
- 1) Data that demonstrate that prior to or as part of the referral process, the child was provided appropriate instruction in regular education settings, delivered by qualified personnel, and
 - 2) Data-based documentation of repeated assessments of achievement at reasonable intervals, reflecting formal assessment of student progress during instruction, which was provided to the child's parents.

Professional Judgment

If a responsible public agency uses a severe discrepancy method: A child who does not display a discrepancy of at least 1.5 standard deviations as defined in B above, may nonetheless be deemed to have a specific learning disability if :

- 1) the child meets the other criteria of this rule; and
- 2) based upon professional judgment and review of formal and informal assessments, the evaluation team concludes that a severe discrepancy exists. In such cases, sufficient data must be presented in the evaluation report to document the existence of a specific learning disability.

It is the policy of the State of Missouri that any agency using a Response to Intervention model for the identification of Specific Learning Disability, must have written procedures for implementation that, at a minimum, incorporate guidelines developed by the SEA which are found on the Department website.

Speech or Language Impairment Definition

"Speech or Language Impairment" means a communication disorder, such as stuttering, impaired articulation, language impairment, or voice impairment that adversely affects a child's educational performance.

A. Criteria for Initial Determination of Eligibility - Language

A language impairment is present when:

- 1) the child consistently exhibits inappropriate use in any of the structures of language (e.g., morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics) as measured by language sampling or other clinical tasks;
- 2) the child's language functioning is significantly below the child's abilities as measured by two (2) or more standardized language assessments. Significantly below is defined as two (2) standard deviations below the mean for children three (3) to five (5) years of age but not eligible for kindergarten, and 1.5 standard deviation below cognitive ability for children who are kindergarten age eligible and older;
- 3) the language impairment adversely affects the child's educational performance; and,
- 4) the language impairment is not a result of dialectal differences or second language influence.

Professional Judgment

A child may also be deemed eligible if the evaluation documents through formal and informal assessment that a language impairment is present even though the standard scores do not meet the criteria in A above. In such



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cases, sufficient data must be presented in the evaluation report to document the existence of the language impairment.

B. Criteria for Determination of Initial Eligibility - Sound System Disorder

A Sound System Disorder, which includes articulation and/or phonology, is present when:

- 1) the student exhibits a delay of correct sound production based on state designated normative data. The child's sound system is significantly delayed based on a single word test and/or a sentence/phrase repetition task and a connected speech sample with consideration given to the type of error recorded (substitutions, omissions, distortions, and/or additions). These errors may be described as single sound errors or errors in phonological patterns or multiple errors in the child's speech that compromise intelligibility and/or listener perception even though the recorded errors are considered within normal developmental guidelines;
- 2) the Sound System Disorder adversely affects the child's educational performance; and,
- 3) the sound system disorder is not a result of dialectal differences or second language influence.

Sufficient data is present in the evaluation report to document the existence of a disorder due to multiple errors in the sound system which compromise the child's intelligibility and/or the listener's perception even though the recorded errors are considered within normal developmental guidelines (professional judgment).

C. Criteria for Initial Determination of Eligibility - Fluency

A fluency impairment is present when:

- 1) the child consistently exhibits one or more of the following symptomatic behaviors of dysfluency: sound, syllabic, or word repetition; prolongations of sounds, syllables, or words; blockages; or, hesitations;
- 2) the child's fluency is significantly below the norm as measured by speech sampling in a variety of contexts. A significant discrepancy is defined as five (5) or more dysfluencies per minute or a ten (10) percent dysfluency rate and distracting to the listener; and,
- 3) the fluency impairment adversely affects the child's educational performance

Professional Judgment

A child may also be deemed eligible if the evaluation documents through formal and informal assessment that a fluency impairment is present even though the criterion in C above is not met. In such cases, sufficient data must be presented in the evaluation report to document the existence of the fluency impairment.

D. Criteria for Initial Determination of Eligibility - Voice

A voice impairment is present when:

- 1) the child consistently exhibits deviations in one or more of the parameters of voice: pitch, quality, or volume;
- 2) the child's voice is discrepant from the norm as related to his/her age, sex, and culture and is distracting to the listener;
- 3) the voice impairment is not the result of a temporary problem such as: normal voice changes, allergies, colds, or other such conditions; and,
- 4) the voice impairment adversely affects the child's educational performance.



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Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) Definition

“Traumatic Brain Injury” means an acquired injury to the brain caused by an external physical force, resulting in total or partial functional disability, psychosocial impairment, or both that adversely affects a child’s educational performance. The term includes open or closed head injuries resulting in impairments in one or more areas, such as, cognition, language, memory, attention, reasoning, abstract thinking, judgment, problem solving, sensory, perceptual and motor abilities, psychological behavior, physical functions, information processing, and speech. The term does not include brain injuries that are congenital or degenerative or to brain injuries induced by birth trauma.

Initial Eligibility Criteria for Traumatic Brain Injury

A child has a Traumatic Brain Injury when:

- A. a traumatic brain injury/head injury has been diagnosed by a licensed physician or
- B. through a neuropsychological assessment, and the student's educational performance is adversely affected by deficits in acquisition, retention, and/or generalization of skills. Students with a brain injury may have rapidly changing profiles, therefore, educational assessment should include current documentation of the student's functional capabilities and indicate deficits in one or more of the following areas:
 - 1) building or maintaining social competence;
 - 2) performance of functional daily living skills across settings;
 - 3) the ability to acquire and retain new skills; and,
 - 4) the ability to retrieve prior information.

Professional Judgment

A child may also be deemed eligible if the child displays characteristics of TBI even though a medical diagnosis of head injury has not been made by a physician. In such cases, substantial data to document the medical basis for a head injury must be present in the evaluation report.

Visual Impairment/Blindness Definition

Visual Impairment, including blindness, means an impairment in vision that, even with correction, adversely affects a child’s educational performance. The term includes both partial sight and blindness.

Criteria for Initial Determination of Eligibility

A child displays a Visual Impairment when:

- A. a visual impairment or a progressive vision loss has been diagnosed by an optometrist or ophthalmologist;
- B. visual acuity has been determined to be:
 - 1) for visual impairment of 20/70 to 20/200 in the better eye with best correction by glasses;
 - 2) for blindness of 20/200 or less in the better eye after best correction by glasses or a visual field measuring 20 degrees or less; and,
- C. the visual impairment adversely affects the child’s educational performance.

Young Child with a Developmental Delay Definition

“Young Child with a Developmental Delay” means a child ages three (3) through five (5) who is experiencing developmental delays, as measured by appropriate evaluation instruments and procedures, in one or more of



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the following areas: physical development, cognitive development, communication development, social or emotional development, or adaptive development, and who need special education and related services.

Note: LEAs in Missouri are not required to adopt and use the term “Young Child with a Developmental Delay” for any children in their jurisdiction. However, if an LEA uses the term “Young Child with a Developmental Delay,” the LEA must conform to both the State’s definition of the term and the age range.

Criteria for Initial Eligibility for Young Children with a Developmental Delay

A child has a developmental delay when:

For children ages three (3) through five (5) (not kindergarten age eligible)

- A. The child’s development is at or below 1.5 standard deviations, or equivalent levels, of the mean in any TWO areas of development OR at or below 2.0 standard deviations, or equivalent levels, in any ONE area of development. Areas of development that can be used to determine eligibility include physical, cognitive, communication, social/emotional, or adaptive.
- B. The child needs special education and related services.

Professional Judgment

A child may also be deemed eligible when:

- A. the evaluation report documents through formal and informal assessment that a significant deficit exists and a child is eligible for services even though the standard scores, or equivalent levels, do not meet the stated criterion levels in A above, or
- B. the team may determine that a child, who is functioning above the stated criterion level and because of intensive early intervention, is eligible for services based on expected regression if services were to be terminated.

For children ages five (5) (kindergarten eligible)

- A. Children kindergarten age eligible may continue eligibility as a Young Child with a Developmental Delay if they were identified as such prior to attaining kindergarten age eligibility.

Resource for Developmental Delay Eligibility

<https://dese.mo.gov/early-learning/parent-education/first-steps/eligibility>