

Common Terminology in Early Childhood Special Education

As a result the [CT Preschool Special Education Needs Assessment completed by the National Institute for Early Education Research](#) several action items were recommended. One of the recommendations was the development of a glossary of early special education terminology for community-based providers and the families that they serve. Stakeholders were engaged to identify what terms should be included and ensure that definitions are accurate and easy to understand.

This list is not considered to be exhaustive but is a general guide to the frequently used terms related to special education.

Accommodations: Support and services that the student may require to successfully demonstrate learning. Accommodations should not change curriculum grade-level expectations. Examples include visual schedules, extra time for assignments or tests, the use of taped textbooks, and alternative assessment formats such as multiple-choice, fill in the blank, portfolio, etc.

Alignment: The effort to ensure that what teachers teach is matched with what the curriculum says will be taught and what is assessed.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA): A civil rights law that prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in all areas of public life, including jobs, schools, transportation, and all public and private places that are open to the general public. The purpose of the law is to make sure that people with disabilities have the same rights and opportunities as everyone else.

Appropriate: Able to meet a need; suitable or fitting the child's individual needs and abilities.

Assessment: Measuring the learning and performance of students or teachers. Different types of assessment instruments include achievement tests, minimum competency tests, developmental screening tests, aptitude tests, observation instruments, performance tasks, and authentic assessments.

Assistive Technology: Any item, piece of equipment, or product system, whether acquired commercially, off the shelf, modified, or customized, that is used to increase, maintain or improve functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities.

Baseline: Information/data on a student's current level of performance, before intervention or instruction begins.

BCBA: Board Certified Behavior Analyst

Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP): A behavior intervention plan takes the observations made in a Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA) and turns them into a concrete plan of action for managing a student's behavior.

Child Find: A federal requirement that all districts identify, locate and evaluate students, ages birth through 21, who may need special education and related services. [Click here for more information on Child Find](#)

Complaint: A written request by a parent or other interested party to the CT Bureau of Special Education to investigate if a local school district is in violation of federal or state special education law.

Curriculum: A plan outlining what students will be taught. For example, the curriculum of a PreK classroom usually includes language arts, mathematics, social-emotional, self-help, science, and social studies. The curriculum should be based on the CT Early Learning Development Standards (CT ELDS). [Click here for more information on CT ELDS](#)

Data-based Decisions: Using valid data that is gathered on a regular basis (and additional information, as needed) to inform planning, decision-making, and reporting to assist in providing the most appropriate program for students.

Disproportionality: The over-representation of minority students identified with a type of disability under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Due Process: A legal action that protects a person's rights. In special education, due process applies to action taken to protect the educational rights of students with disabilities. [Click here for more information on Due Process](#)

Early Intervening Services: The term used to describe the services and supports that are available to babies and young children with developmental delays and disabilities and their families. These publicly funded programs provide services for free or at a reduced cost for any child who is eligible.

Eligibility: Criteria states that to be eligible for special education services, a child must have one of the 13 disabilities as defined by IDEA AND the impact of the disability must create a need for services to benefit from their educational experience.

English Language Learner (ELL): ELLs are defined as students who lack sufficient mastery of English to “assure equal educational opportunity in the regular school program” (C.G.S. 10-17e). This statutory definition highlights ELs’ lack of English proficiency but it is important to note that the CSDE takes an assets and strengths-based approach to ELs and considers how to best support them in Connecticut’s schools. This means that the CSDE values the linguistic, cultural, and ethnic diversity that ELs bring to their communities and sees multilingualism as a great asset, which positively impacts students, schools, and communities. The CSDE highly regards these students and the broad range of linguistic and cultural diversity that they bring to the state’s schools. [Click here for more information about English Language Learners in Connecticut](#)

Evidence-Based Practice: Educational practices and instructional strategies that are supported by scientific research.

Extended School Year (ESY): Special education and related services that are provided to a student, in accordance with the student's IEP, beyond the normal school year and at no cost to parents. The determination of the need for ESY services for a student is determined by the PPT on an individual basis.

Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA): A federal law that gives all parents or students over the age of 18 or attending post-secondary schools, the right to see, correct, and control access to student records.

Fluency: The ability to read text accurately with speed and intonation.

Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE): One of the key principles of IDEA, which requires that an education program be provided for all school-aged children (regardless of disability) without cost to families.

Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA): An assessment that looks at why a child behaves the way he or she does, given the nature of the child and what is happening in the environment. It is a process for collecting data to determine the possible causes of concerning behaviors and to identify strategies to address the behaviors. A process of collecting data around a child's behavior that includes the antecedent, behavior, and consequence.

Grade Level Expectations: A description of what students should know and be able to do at the end of a grade level.

Independent Education Evaluation (IEE): An evaluation conducted on a child from an agency/professional outside of the school system at the school district's expense if the parent disagrees with the district's evaluation. If a parent requests an IEE at public expense, a school district shall, without unnecessary delay, either:

1. File a due process complaint to request a hearing to show its evaluation is appropriate; or
2. Ensure the IEE is provided at public expense unless the school district demonstrates in a due process hearing that the evaluation obtained by the parent does not meet the school district's IEE criteria.

Individualized Education Program (IEP): A written document designed for a child with an identified disability to ensure they receive specialized instruction and related services in order to access their education.

Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP): A plan and a process used for an infant or toddler that is found eligible for early intervention.

Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA): A nationwide Act that provides free and appropriate education to children identified in one of the 13 federally recognized categories of disability, 14 in Connecticut, which includes Developmental Delay or children under the age of 6, that require specialized instruction to access their education.

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE): As part of IDEA, a child with disabilities should spend as much time as possible in a learning environment with peers that do not receive special services that allow them to access their education. LRE for the majority of children in general education but not for all children all of the time.

Literacy: The ability to understand a variety of print and written materials and use the information to communicate, analyze and interpret.

Local Education Agency (LEA): The authorized agency that legally has control to perform a service to local schools such as a Board of Education.

Modifications: Changes to the curriculum or what is taught to a child (modifications changes "what" is being taught).

Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP): Mission is to improve outcomes for children with disabilities, birth through 21, and their families, ensuring access to fair, equitable, and high-quality education and services through leadership and financial support to assist states and local districts including the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) which authorizes formula grants to states.

OT: Occupational Therapy

Planning and Placement Team (PPT): A meeting to determine if evaluations are warranted if a student qualifies for special education, and to plan an educational program for the student to be successful in the LRE.

Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS): Three-tier framework that involves evidence-based strategies to improve students' outcomes with a focus on behaviors working with the school's systems, data, and practice.

Present Levels of Achievement and Functional Performance: Part of the IEP (page 4 and 5) that include the student's current levels, strengths, areas of concerns. The areas of concern MUST have goals and objectives that address the skills.

Prior Written Notice: Tells parents what action the school intends to take (or intends not to take) with regards to special education planning (page 3 in the IEP).

Procedural Safeguards: Federal and state regulations that the student is protected under from the time a referral is made until the student is found ineligible or no longer qualifies for special education services.

Proficiency: Documented evidence that a student has met the required level of skill and knowledge set by benchmarks.

Progress Monitoring: Used to assess students' academic and/or behavioral performance. Measure their rates of improvement or progress toward goals.

PT: Physical Therapy

Referral: When there are concerns with a student's development or academic and/or behavioral performance in regular education the referral can be initiated in writing or verbally by the school, parents, Doctor, etc.

Related Services: Transportation, developmental, corrective, and other supportive services that a child with disabilities requires in order to benefit from special education. Are part of an IEP that help students benefit from regular education May include: Speech-language and audiology services, Interpreting services, Psychological services, Occupational and Recreation, including therapeutic recreation, early identification, and evaluation of disabilities in children, counseling services, including rehabilitation counseling, Orientation and mobility, Medical services (but only for diagnostic or evaluation purposes, not for ongoing treatment), School health and/or school nurse services, Social work services, Parent counseling and training.

Scientific Research-Based Interventions (SRBI): Connecticut's framework for Response to Intervention (RTI). A general education model that refers to a tiered approach to instruction. This model is used to promote the early identification of students who may be at risk for learning or behavioral difficulties.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973: A federal civil rights statute that protects the rights of persons with disabilities in programs and activities that receive federal financial assistance, which includes public schools.

SLP: Speech and Language Pathologist

SMART Goal: A goal that is specific, measurable, achievable, relevant/realistic, time-bound (e.g Given 5th-grade material, Emily will read 125 words per minute with 0-2 errors). By (date) student will increase their ability to (specific skill) from (baseline data) to (mastery data) as measured by (a tool used) over three consecutive sessions.

Special Education: Specially designed instruction to meet the unique needs of students with disabilities to specially designed instruction, at no cost to the parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability, including— (i) Instruction conducted in the classroom, in the home, in hospitals and institutions, and in other settings; and. (ii) Instruction in physical education.

Supplementary Aids and Services: Aids, services, program modifications, and/or supports for school personnel that is provided in general education classes or other education-related settings to enable students with disabilities to be educated with students who are non-disabled.

Transition: The movement from one service, location, or program to another. Young children with disabilities transition at age three from early intervention to preschool special education services or to other community settings and services (early intervention and special education). Adolescents transition from school to adult services.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL): The design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design. The purpose is to improve student's access to the general curriculum.

Common Terminology in Early Childhood Education was developed by:

Andrea Brinnel: Early Childhood Consultant, Connecticut State Department of Education

Claire Consonni: Special Education Preschool Teacher, Bristol Public Schools

Karen Gray: Supervisor of Early Childhood Initiatives, Manchester Public Schools

Kristen Peck: Supervisor of Early Childhood, Bristol Public Schools

David Scata: Executive Director, Connecticut Council of Administrators of Special Education

Alison Ward: Director of Special Education, Hartford Public Schools

Thank you to Maegan Adams, Bristol Preschool Child Care Center; Linda Bamonte, Connecticut Birth to Three System; Kendra Brown, APPLES Early Childhood Stamford; Maureen Brummett, Newington Public Schools; Allison Camp, Bristol Preschool Childcare Center; Janett DAprile, Bristol Preschool; Lore Minich and Coral Richardson, ImagineNation, A Museum Early Learning Center; Jaclyn Vazquez, Parkville; Irene Garneau, West Hartford Public Schools; and many others for their feedback during the creation of this document.