

# IDEA Eligibility Categories



## Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

As part of making special education and related services available to children with disabilities in public schools, Part B of IDEA defines the term “child with a disability.” There are **13 eligibility categories** that a child can qualify for special education services. In order to qualify for these services, a child’s educational performance must also be affected due to the disability.

### Eligibility Categories:



**Autism:** Does not include emotional disabilities. It greatly affects communication (verbal and nonverbal) and social skills. It usually shows up before the age of 3 and impacts a student’s ability to learn.



**Deaf-Blindness:** Hearing and vision impairments happening at the same time. These combined problems are so severe that the student’s needs can’t be met as just a student with deafness or blindness alone.



**Deafness:** Is so severe that the student is impaired in understanding spoken language through hearing, with or without amplification.



**Emotional Disturbance:** A condition that shows one or more of the following signs for a long time and to a serious degree, affecting a student’s ability to learn:

- a) Trouble learning that isn’t caused by intellectual, sensory, or health problems.
- b) Difficulty forming or keeping good relationships with classmates and teachers.
- c) Behaviors or feelings that don’t match normal situations.
- d) A constant feeling of sadness or depression.
- e) Physical symptoms or fears connected to personal or school problems.



**Hearing Impairment:** Means an impairment in hearing, whether permanent or fluctuating, that affects a student’s ability to do well in school.



**Intellectual Disability:** Means overall thinking and learning abilities that are much lower than average. It affects how a student performs in school, includes problems with everyday skills, and starts during early childhood.



**Multiple Disabilities:** When a student has more than one impairment, like an intellectual disability combined with blindness. These combined disabilities make learning so challenging that they need support beyond what one disability alone would require.



**Orthopedic Impairment:** Physical disabilities caused by things like birth conditions (e.g., clubfoot), diseases (e.g., polio), or injuries (e.g., amputations or burns).



**Other Health Impairment:** When a student has limited strength, energy, or alertness in school due to a health condition like asthma, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), diabetes, epilepsy, heart conditions, or others.



**Specific Learning Disability:** A condition that affects basic processes like understanding or using language. It can show up as trouble with listening, thinking, speaking, reading, writing, or math skills.



**Speech or Language Impairment:** An impairment with specific speech or language skills that is diagnosed by professionals.



**Traumatic Brain Injury:** A brain injury caused by an outside force, leading to physical, emotional, or mental challenges that impact the student's ability to learn and perform well in school.



**Visual Impairment, including Blindness:** A vision impairment, even with correction (e.g., glasses), that affects a student's school performance. This includes partial sight and total blindness.

This 14<sup>th</sup> category is only used for early childhood age children (ages 3-7). The above 13 categories are used for all school-age children.



**Developmental Delay:** Occurs when a child does not meet their milestones in comparison to their peers; can include gross and fine motor, speech and language.

**Use the links below if you would like to read the full descriptions of each of these categories:**

- Adapted from <https://www.parentcenterhub.org/categories/>
- [Sec. 13a.05.01.03. Definitions, Chapter 13A.05.01. Provision of a Free Appropriate Public Education, Subtitle 05. SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAMS, Title 13A. Maryland State Board of Education, Code of Maryland Regulations \(elaws.us\)](#)