

WHO IS ELIGIBLE FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION?



The IDEA defines a "child with a disability" to mean a child with one or more of the following conditions:

- Mental retardation (MR)
- Hearing impairments (including deafness)
- Visual impairments (including blindness)
- Serious emotional disturbance (SED or ED)
- Orthopedic impairments (OI)
- Autism
- Traumatic brain injury (TBI)
- Other health impairments (OHI)
- Specific learning disabilities (SLD)

AND

- who, by reason of their disability, needs special education and related services

The eligibility for IDEA services is two-fold:

1. Does the child have disability condition that can be included in one or more of the disability categories listed? AND
2. Does that disability affect the child's ability to benefit from his or her education in a way that is significant enough to require specialized instruction and related services?

Iowa Uses a Non-Categorical Eligibility System

A common point of confusion arises from Iowa's adoption of a non-categorical eligibility system. Children who are identified as eligible for special education are referred to as "entitled individuals," rather than identified in terms of the category of their disability condition. This practice is intended to prevent "labeling" children with their disability, but it does not change the nature or scope of the disability conditions listed in the federal law that can qualify a child for services. It also does not change the fact that

specific data about the child's disability and the way it impacts his or her education is vital to designing an appropriate, individualized education program. As a parent or an educator, you may not need a "label," but you do need reliable and scientifically valid information about each child's strengths and needs.

Specialized instruction MAY be needed if the child has a physical or mental health condition that:

- Results in frequent absences from school
- Interferes with the ability to stay focused or on task
- Requires monitoring of physical symptoms during the school day
- Requires special assistance with moving around the school building
- Requires special assistance to participate in classroom or extracurricular activities

While modifying academic content is the most commonly recognized form of specialized instruction, specialized instruction can take many other forms, including:

- Adaptations in physical education
- Instruction outside the classroom environment (such as in a hospital or in the child's home)
- Speech and language pathology services
- Travel training
- Vocational education

For more information about the IDEA and the rights of students with disabilities and their parents, please contact:

Parent Training and Information Center

ASK Family Resource Center

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ASK Resource Center is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization serving families of children with disabilities, with projects funded by the U.S. Department of Education and supported by the Iowa Department of Education.