

Specific Learning Disability (SLD)

Specific Learning Disability

In education, the term learning disability most often describes specific kinds of problems that a student has with understanding or using spoken or written language. A student with learning disabilities may have difficulty listening, thinking, speaking, reading, writing, spelling, or doing math problems. You may have heard of Dyslexia. This is a learning disability that affects reading. Likewise, Dysgraphia refers to a learning disability in writing. Dyscalculia refers to difficulties in math. All of these are considered learning disabilities, and since they're not visible (like those of individuals with physical disabilities), they are often unrecognized. They can't be "fixed" or "cured." But special instruction, accommodations, support services, and aids can help lessen the negative impact these disabilities have on student learning.

How the Brain Works: Integration, Sequencing, and Abstraction

A professional learning disorders specialist might refer to the importance of "integration" to learning. Integration refers to the understanding of information that has been delivered to the brain, and it includes three steps: sequencing, which means putting information in the right order; abstraction, which is making sense of the information; and organization, which refers to the brain's ability to use the information to form complete thoughts.

Each of these three steps is important, and your child may have a weakness in one area or another that causes learning difficulty. For example, in math, sequencing (the ability to put things in order) is important for learning to count or do multiplication (as well as learn the alphabet or the months of the year). Similarly, abstraction and organization are important parts of numerous educational skills and abilities. If a certain brain activity isn't happening correctly, it will create a roadblock to learning. Children with learning disabilities are not "dumb" or "lazy"; in fact, they usually have average to above average intelligence. They just process information differently.

Signs of a Learning Disability

Almost one million children ages 6-21 have some form of a learning disability and receive special education in school. In fact, one-third of all children who receive special education have a learning disability. Most signs of a learning disability are identified in elementary school because school is where the focus is placed on the very skills that are difficult for the child: reading, writing, math, listening, speaking, and reasoning. If a child is exhibiting a number of problems, then the teacher and parent should consider the possibility that the child has a learning disability.

When a child has a learning disability, she or he may:



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1-have trouble learning the alphabet, rhyming words, or connecting letters to their sounds;

2-make many mistakes when reading aloud, repeat and pause often;

3-not understand what she reads

4-have real trouble with spelling;

5-have very messy handwriting or hold a pencil awkwardly;

6-struggle to express ideas in writing;

7-have trouble remembering the sounds that letters make or hearing slight differences between words;

8-not know left from right;

9-have trouble understanding jokes or sarcasm;

10-have difficulty following directions;

11-not follow the social rules of conversation, such as taking turns, and may stand too close;

12-confuse math symbols and misread numbers;

13-not be able to retell a story in order (what happened first, second, third); or

14-not know where to begin a task or how to go on from there.

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AAC definition:

Specific learning disability means a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations, including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and development aphasia. Specific learning disability does NOT include learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, of intellectual disability, of emotional disability, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage.

AAC 290-8-9.03(10)(a)

school-aged children, including preschoolers (ages 3-21). The federal special education law called IDEA, and corresponding state law called Alabama Administrative Code (AAC), require that special education and related services be made available free of charge to every eligible child with a disability, including preschoolers. These services are designed to address the child's individual needs in the classroom resulting from the disability.

HELP IS AVAILABLE

If you are concerned that your child may have a learning disability, contact the school and ask for an evaluation to see if a learning disability is causing your child difficulties in school. Services are available through the public school system for

REFERRAL AND EVALUATION

If you feel your child is in need of special education and related services, the first step is to make a referral to your child's school indicating the learning issues or challenges you've noticed, and request an evaluation for a disability. The team will

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review all data and if the referral is accepted, a formal referral form is completed. You must give written consent for the evaluation to be done. The school has 60 calendar days from written consent to complete the evaluation process. If the referral is not accepted, written notice is given to the parent, and the child is referred to the problem-solving team. You can decide to have your child evaluated by an independent evaluator, and pay for it yourself. You can ask for mediation which gives you the chance to be heard, and disagree with the schools decision not to evaluate. Mediation gives the school the opportunity to change its decision.

Keep in mind that a child does not have to fail in school to be eligible for special education services. A referral for special education should never be denied based solely on the student having passing grades.




An evaluation is the process of gathering information about your child, their potential disability, strengths, weaknesses, and areas of need. If your child is struggling in school and you are concerned about their learning, educational progress, social skills, or behavior, comprehensive special education evaluation may be the information that can help you and your child's school to meet your child's educational needs. The

initial evaluation will serve to answer these questions:

- 1-does my child have a disability?
- 2-does his disability affect his educational performance?
- 3-does my child need special education and related services?

Just the mere presence of a disability does not automatically qualify your child as **“a child with a disability”** under special education laws. Alabama uses three paths in evaluation for specific learning disabilities and they are: 1-severe discrepancy; 2- Response to intervention; and 3-pattern of strengths and weaknesses. Using one of these paths, your child must meet the criteria listed for Specific Learning Disability using certain minimum evaluative components. The severe discrepancy path requires a large gap between the child's intelligence or aptitude and his or her actual performance scores. The response to intervention (RTI) path is where the school provides the student with research-based intervention (instruction) and keeps close track of the student's performance. Analyzing the student's response (progress or lack of progress) to the intervention may be considered in the process of identifying that a child has a learning disability. Pattern of Strengths and Weaknesses is the third path used by utilizing research-based procedures for determining presence of disability. There are numerous other aspects required during the evaluation and these include individual intellectual, and achievement tests, behavior and adaptive behavior rating scales,

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and observation of the child in the classroom to document academic performance and behavior in the areas of difficulty.

DETERMINING ELIGIBILITY

When the evaluation process has been completed, the team has 30 days to review all the assessment data and scores, meet with all the other team members, including parents, and make an eligibility decision.

The team will collaborate and create a written report of the testing results. The report will describe your child's strengths and needs, how your child's skills compare to others of the same age or grade level, whether your child has a qualifying disability, and what individualized instruction and related services are recommended to help your child. If you disagree with the report, you have the right to request an independent educational evaluation or IEE, paid for by the school. The school is also allowed to deny your request for IEE, but it must take additional steps to prove its evaluation is appropriate.

If your child is identified as **"a child with a disability"** and determined to be eligible, a meeting to develop the Individualized Education Program (IEP) must be held within 30 calendar days of the initial eligibility determination. The data obtained during the evaluation is used to determine what services are required for the child to make educational progress. An IEP must be developed and in effect before special education and related services are provided. The school must obtain

written informed consent from the parent before the initial provision of services to the child.

The types of services provided to each child are designed to meet their unique needs, but could include assistive technology ranging from low-tech equipment such as tape recorders, to high-tech tools such as reading machines which read books aloud, or voice recognition systems which allows the student to "write" by talking to the computer. Accessible instructional materials (AIM) are also very helpful to students whose learning disability affects their ability to read and process printed language.

Classroom accommodations to address the student's needs could include:

- 1-breaking tasks into smaller steps, and giving directions verbally and in writing
- 2-giving the student more time to finish schoolwork or take tests
- 3-letting the student with reading problems use instructional materials that are accessible to those with print disabilities
- 4-letting the student borrow notes from a classmate or use a tape recorder
- 5-provide visuals for emphasizing important points; use color coding or highlighting
- 6-use multi-sensory approach
- 7-provide tactile-kinesthetic support
- 8-teach in logical format and use concrete methods



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What's Next?

Sometimes the test scores and data do not meet the qualifying criteria for disability, and your child is denied eligibility for special education services. If you disagree with the ineligibility decision, you have the right to appeal this decision and should inform the school. You will receive a written copy of your Special Education Rights from the school, which contains information on due process procedures to follow. Ask about eligibility for 504 Plan services. You can also contact our staff for assistance.

RESOURCES

Alabama Department of Education, Special Education Services www.alsde.edu/sec/ses/

Alabama Scottish Rite Foundation <https://alsrlcenter.org/>

Alabama Game Changers <https://www.alabamagamechangers.org/>

National Center on Accessible Instructional Materials <http://aem.cast.org/>

Reading Rockets www.readingrockets.org

National Center for Learning Disabilities www.understood.org/en

Learning Disabilities Assoc of Alabama <http://ldaalabama.org/>

YOUR OPINION MATTERS

Stakeholder opinion is very important to our center. We invite you tell us what you think and make suggestions for trainings and publications. Complete a brief survey, call our center, or join our advisory committee. Your input is always welcome. <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/ALPT>
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APEC IS HERE TO HELP

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