

## 2.7: Categories of Exceptionalities and Definitions

Subsection 8(3) of the Education Act requires the Minister of Education to define exceptionalities of pupils, prescribe categories of exceptional pupils and to require school boards to employ such definitions. An Identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC) of a school board uses the categories and definitions to identify the specific needs of a pupil in order to ensure that an effective individual education plan may be developed for the pupil. Regulation 181/98, which governs the Identification, Placement and Review Committee process, contains a requirement for an IPRC to include the category and definition of any exceptionalities in its statement of decision when a pupil is identified as exceptional.

As per the Ministry's "Special Education in Ontario - Policy and Resource Guide, 2017", pages A14-A16, the broad categories of exceptionalities set out below (Behaviour, Communication, Intellectual, Physical and Multiple) are designed to address the wide range of conditions that may affect a student's ability to learn, and do not exclude any medical condition, whether diagnosed or not, that can lead to particular types of learning difficulties. All students with demonstrable learning-based needs are entitled to appropriate accommodations in the form of special education programs and services, including classroom-based accommodations. Inclusion of some medical conditions (e.g., autism) in the definitions is not intended to exclude any other medical condition that may result in learning difficulties, such as (but not limited to) Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, Tourette Syndrome, Myalgic Encephalomyelitis, Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, and Fibromyalgia Syndrome. For example, a student with ADHD may present learning needs in many ways in the school setting and the student may be identified as exceptional within one or more of the categories of exceptionalities (including Behaviour, Intellectual, Physical and/or Multiple) depending on the presentation, and the degree of the impact that ADHD has on that student's learning. Some of the areas in which a student with ADHD may have demonstrable learning needs include (but are not limited to) attention/ focus, organization, processing speed, working memory, executive functioning weaknesses, mathematical processes and skills, and expressive and receptive language. A student who presents with such learning needs can be identified within the Communication (Learning Disability) exceptionality category, regardless of whether the medical criteria for a Learning Disability are met. In other cases, involving students with ADHD, where other learning needs present, consideration can be given to identification under other categories (e.g., Behaviour, Physical, and/or Multiple).

This section will provide an overview of the Ministry categories of exceptionalities and definitions.

## **BEHAVIOUR**

A learning disorder characterized by specific behaviour problems over a period of time, and to such a marked degree, and of such a nature, as to adversely affect educational performance, and that may be accompanied by one or more of the following: |

- a) an inability to build or maintain interpersonal relationships;
- b) excessive fears or anxieties;
- c) a tendency to compulsive reaction; or
- d) an inability to learn that cannot be traced to intellectual, sensory or other health factors, or any combination thereof.

## **COMMUNICATION**

### **Autism**

A severe learning disorder that is characterized by:

- a) disturbances in:
  - rate of educational development;
  - ability to relate to the environment;
  - mobility;
  - perception, speech, and language.
- b) lack of the representational symbolic behaviour that precedes language.

### **Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing**

An impairment characterized by deficits in language and speech development because of a diminished or non-existent auditory response to sound.

### **Language Impairment**

A learning disorder characterized by an impairment in comprehension and/or use of verbal communication or the written or other symbol system of communication which may be associated with neurological, psychological, physical, or sensory factors, and which may:

- a) involve one or more of the form, content, and function of language in communication; and
- b) include one or more of the following:
  - language delay;
  - dysfluency;
  - voice and articulation development, which may or may not be organically or functionally based.

### **Speech Impairment**

A disorder in language formulation that may be associated with neurological, psychological, physical, or sensory factors; that involves perceptual motor aspects of transmitting oral messages; and that may be characterized by impairment in articulation, rhythm, and stress.

### **Learning Disability**

One of several neurodevelopmental disorders that persistently and significantly has an impact on the ability to learn and use academic and other skills and that:

- a) affects the ability to perceive or process verbal or non-verbal information in an effective and accurate manner in students who have assessed intellectual abilities that are at least in the average range;
- b) results in (a) academic underachievement that is inconsistent with the intellectual abilities of the student (which are at least in the average range) and/or (b) academic achievement that can be maintained by the student only with extremely high levels of effort and/or with additional support;
- c) results in difficulties in the development and use of skills in one or more of the following areas: reading, writing, mathematics, and work habits and learning skills;

## **Learning Disability** (continued)

- d) may typically be associated with difficulties in one or more cognitive processes, such as:
- phonological processing;
  - memory and attention;
  - processing speed;
  - perceptual-motor processing;
  - visual-spatial processing; and
  - executive functions (e.g., self-regulation of behaviour and emotions, planning, organizing of thoughts and activities, prioritizing, decision making);
- e) may be associated with difficulties in social interaction (e.g., difficulty in understanding social norms or the point of view of others); with various other conditions or disorders, diagnosed or undiagnosed; or with other exceptionalities;
- f) is not the result of a lack of acuity in hearing and/or vision that has not been corrected; intellectual disabilities; socio-economic factors; cultural differences; lack of proficiency in the language of instruction; lack of motivation or effort; gaps in school attendance or inadequate opportunity to benefit from instruction.

## **INTELLECTUAL**

### **Giftedness**

An unusually advanced degree of general intellectual ability that requires differential learning experiences of a depth and breadth beyond those normally provided in the regular school program to satisfy the level of educational potential indicated.

### **Mild Intellectual Disability**

A learning disorder characterized by:

- a) an ability to profit educationally within a regular class with the aid of considerable curriculum modification and supportive service;
- b) an inability to profit educationally within a regular class because of slow intellectual development;
- c) a potential for academic learning, independent social adjustment, and economic self-support.

## **Developmental Disability**

A severe learning disorder characterized by:

- a) an inability to profit from a special education program for students with mild intellectual disabilities because of slow intellectual development;
- b) an ability to profit from a special education program that is designed to accommodate slow intellectual development;
- c) a limited potential for academic learning, independent social adjustment, and economic self-support.

## **PHYSICAL**

### **Physical Disability**

A condition of such severe physical limitation or deficiency as to require special assistance in learning situations to provide the opportunity for educational achievement equivalent to that of pupils without exceptionalities who are of the same age or developmental level.

### **Blind or Low Vision**

A condition of partial or total impairment of sight or vision that, even with correction, affects educational performance adversely.

## **MULTIPLE**

### **Multiple Exceptionalities**

A combination of learning or other disorders, impairments, or physical disabilities, that is of such nature as to require, for educational achievement, the services of one or more teachers holding qualifications in special education and the provision of support services appropriate for such disorders, impairments, or disabilities.