

# Core Content Knowledge (0353)

## Introduction

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Children with exceptional needs differ from the norm and may be either above or below in their ability to perform and achieve. The term **exceptional children** includes all children who have disabilities and those children who are identified as **gifted or talented**. These exceptional children may require specialized services, programs, modifications, or accommodations to benefit from an education. When identifying exceptional children, it is important to review the 13 categories in federal law for students with disabilities as well as to include the separate category of *giftedness and special talents*.

The history of special education has been an ebb and flow of changes. These changes are due in part to legal actions, political situations, societal attitudes, medical technologies, instructional improvements, and the students themselves. These students may endure complications, experience hardships, and face barriers, but with adequate support, they will achieve academic success and experience positive accomplishments.

Most examinees have completed university studies or work in this field and may have discovered that the information regarding exceptional students is largely complex. Various influences impact student success including the type of exceptionality, the variety of program services, and the variations in curriculum design and instructional strategies. Pertinent information that includes current and contemporary practices about students with exceptional needs, as well as topics concerning special education is summarized in this study guide.

In preparing for the exam, review the basic concepts about exceptionalities: the characteristics, the causes, the prevalence factors, the various definitions, the facts about assessments, the placement steps, the program issues, as well as curriculum and instruction information. Since this guide is not comprehensive of the materials regarding exceptional students, examinees may need additional information, which may be found in college texts, on the Internet, or by speaking with practicing educators. Websites related to exceptional students and special education topics are provided in “Resources” at the back of the book.

This Praxis II exam (0353) is a knowledge-based assessment prepared for individuals who plan to teach in programs for exceptional students in grades preschool through 12. Examinees are allowed 1 hour to complete the 60 multiple-choice questions on the exam that focus on three content categories of core knowledge, which include *Understanding Exceptionalities* (15 to 18 questions, 25 to 30 percent), *Legal and Societal Issues* (9 to 12 questions, 15 to 20 percent), and *Delivery of Services to Students with Disabilities* (30 to 36 questions, 50 to 60 percent).

Two other Praxis II exams, titled Special Education: Knowledge-Based Core Principles (0351) and Special Education: Application of Core Principles across Categories of Disability (0352), are available and may be required for certification in some states. The study guide information for these exams can be found in *CliffsNotes Praxis II: Special Education (0351, 0352, 0690, 0371, 0381, 0321) Test Prep*, developed by the same author and published by Wiley Publishing, Inc.

*Note:* Only limited information is included in this guide about students who are deaf and/or blind since they are often supported by specialized professionals, and the information is not included on the Praxis II exams. There may, however, be some references to students who are deaf or blind since educators may need to serve students with multiple disabilities.

## Content Clusters

This Core Content Knowledge Praxis II exam will consist of multiple-choice questions based on the three specific content categories. The following set of 10 questions, although written in narrative format, should assist examinees in assessing basic knowledge related to the primary topic of students with exceptionalities in preparation to take the core knowledge exam. Examinees may prefer to answer these questions by jotting notes, outlining, or writing in paragraph form to help in their further studies.

1. Explain the primary outcome of each of the following legal cases related to the education of exceptional students: *Rowley*, *Tatro*, *Honig*, *Oberti*, *Mills*, and *Brown*.
2. Identify the influences of each type of exceptional condition throughout an individual's lifespan.
3. List some of the causes of the various exceptional conditions in the federal law and identify the prevalence rates for each.
4. Describe the historical movements and trends that have affected the connections between exceptional students and the larger society over the past 50 years.
5. Detail the purpose and process of an IEP (individual education plan), an IFSP (individual family service plan), and an ITP (individual transition plan), including the roles of the professionals, students, parents, and community.
6. Define the use of assessments for exceptional students in the following processes: screening, diagnosis, placement, and programming.
7. Provide examples of classroom management techniques and the different ways to structure and maintain effective learning environments for students with varying types of exceptional needs.
8. Analyze the transition process for exceptional students including the formal steps, important components, professional roles, and community involvement.
9. State the responsibilities of teachers, parents, the related service providers, and outside agencies in program implementation for students with exceptional conditions.
10. Name the characteristics of students with exceptional conditions in each of the special education categories (include factors related to culture, gender, socioeconomic status, genetics, language, and cognition skills).

## Preview Questions

This section includes five multiple-choice questions that pertain to topics about exceptional students. Examinees should use these questions to self-assess their recall of knowledge and to become familiar with the types of questions included on this Praxis II exam. Although practices may differ across states, consider your answer based on the terminology, policies, best practices, and the law according to IDEIA.

To practice for the Core Content Knowledge Praxis II exam, read each of the multiple-choice questions more than one time to fully understand the main idea. Read the four choices and think about each of the possibilities. Only one of the choices is correct based on the information given, but each of the others may have relevance to the topic. The answers to these questions are provided, and further information is found interspersed in the study guide that follows.

1. The case of *Timothy v. Rochester School District* required that without exception, children with disabilities must be
  - A. accommodated on all assessments.
  - B. placed in general education classes.
  - C. expelled for severe discipline actions.
  - D. provided a free and appropriate education.

2. In this federal law, funds were provided specifically for students considered economically disadvantaged, limited English proficient, or disabled if also identified as gifted or talented.

- A. Carl Perkins
- B. J. B. Hinckley
- C. Jacob K. Javits
- D. Rowley A. Garrett

3. An \_\_\_\_\_ is mandated for all children who are identified as disabled and require special education services.

- A. individual education plan
- B. inclusive environment project
- C. independent evaluation program
- D. integrated employment preparation

4. A primary factor in the diagnosis of mental retardation is the lack of appropriate

- A. motor planning skills.
- B. adaptive behavior skills.
- C. sensory integration ability.
- D. auditory processing ability.

5. The most restrictive model in the list of continuum of services considered in the *least restrictive environment* provision is

- A. self-contained.
- B. resource room.
- C. residential facility.
- D. general education class.

The correct answers are

1. **D.** The 1989 court case of *Timothy v. Rochester School District* required that children with disabilities must be provided a free and appropriate education without exception.
2. **C.** The law titled Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Student Education Act–1988 (PL100-297) provided funds specifically for students considered economically disadvantaged, limited English proficient, or disabled if also identified as gifted or talented.
3. **A.** An IEP or an individual education plan is mandated for all children who are identified with a disability and require services from the special education program to benefit from an education.
4. **B.** The area of adaptive behavior skills is critical in the assessment to identify a student with mental retardation.
5. **C.** Of the choices given, the model that is the most restrictive is the residential facility. It promotes a segregated setting with limited access to the general education curriculum and programs.

## Topic Overview

The education of exceptional students includes children with a wide range of abilities that span from one end of the curve to another, but it is difficult to assess the numbers as they constantly change. Approximately 5.5 million children are served with disabilities, and about 2.3 million are provided services as gifted or talented. These numbers are likely under represented. The reasons for these changing statistics include the definitions and procedures used for the identification of students, the numbers of students with multiple conditions, the range of culturally and linguistically diverse students, the movement of students across districts, and the manner in which states promote their programming.

Professional practices, trends, issues, and research all contribute to the richness of the education of exceptional students. The laws and organizations that pertain to exceptional students and the proper terminology used in special education is important to those who work in the field. Study the research-based instructional strategies and teaching methods and seek understanding of the interventions for exceptional students that support academic achievement.

Examinees may find that states differ in definitions, terminology, and practices, but this exam follows the required federally imposed provisions and best practices in the field. When examinees are ready to teach in a certain state, they should check with the school district or state department of education on the appropriate terminology and practices.

*Note:* The category of Gifted and Talented (G/T) is NOT a category in special education under the federal law; however, it is considered a category of exceptional students in the public schools, and these students do receive specialized services according to the particular state or district of residence. Therefore, the G/T students are represented throughout the core knowledge section of this study guide. When the terms *disability* or *students with disabilities* are used, they indicate reference to the categories defined in the federal special education law for specific disability conditions. When the terms *exceptional students* or *students with exceptional needs* are used, they refer to those disability categories in the federal special education law and include students identified as *gifted or talented*. In some states, G/T students may be served through the district or regional special education department.

## Understanding Exceptionalities

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Public schools are required to provide an essential menu of services for students who exhibit exceptional needs. These children may qualify for special education, as a gifted/talented student, or as a culturally or linguistically diverse student. In order to accommodate the varieties of exceptional needs that students possess, many professionals are involved in the programs to serve these children. Not all schools are able to provide all services, so they must be creative and flexible in the design and implementation of the programs for these children.

Understanding exceptional students is complex and requires a background in special education and knowledge of human development. A disability, or an exceptionality, involves not just the characteristics of the individual, but the attitude, the culture, the behavior, and the needs that each student emanates. Diversity is a critical element of working with exceptional students as every one is very different.

## Human Development and Behavior

Educators working with exceptional students must be familiar with the typical patterns of growth and development in all domains of learning. Knowing these stages helps in understanding the delays children with exceptional conditions exhibit. Examinees may download a copy of a growth and development chart from the Internet or obtain one at the local health department to use for further study.

Following is a brief description of each area of development.

### Social-Emotional Development and Behavior

The social-emotional area of development is a primary area of focus for students, as it is so important to have “a sense of self.” When students have developed a set of learned skills in the social-emotional domain, they can build upon their self-concept, self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-competence. Social-emotional development has been influenced by the work of Maslow (Humanism), Skinner (Behaviorism), Erikson (Psychosocial), Bandura (Social Learning), Gardner (Multiple Intelligences), Kohlberg (Moral Reasoning), and Freud (Psychoanalytical).

Environment has tremendous impact on social-emotional development. Children have the opportunity to bond with early caregivers as they depend on them to ensure that basic needs are met. Through this process, parents, gender, siblings, and individual temperament are all factors in how well a student will develop in this domain. Children gain social skills through interactive experiences and by engaging in relationships and social situations.

Communication, language, and cognition are very important to the proper growth of this area. Communication impacts the child’s ability to function with peers and affects the social-emotional status. When a child develops typically in the

cognitive and language domains, she begins to understand, which develops emotional competence and expands upon social skills. Having positive social interactions and using effective communication skills allow the child to exhibit appropriate social behaviors.

## Language Development and Behavior

Communication and language are of great importance throughout our lives, and it is from the everyday experiences that language becomes meaningful. Language affects reading, listening, writing, all academic subject areas and social relationships. Key components to a student's success in academic areas are significantly tied to communication, language, speech, and literacy.

Learning vocabulary, utilizing structures, and using correct patterns are important, but also knowing how to make word connections, use gestures, observe body movements, and figure out facial expressions are critical to using and understanding language. Bilingual and second language learners often demonstrate additional issues that cause delays in this area.

The following is a list of important terms related to the language domain.

- **Language:** The systematic use of sounds, signs, or written symbols for the purpose of communication or expression
- **Receptive language:** Ability to understand and comprehend information that is presented
- **Expressive language:** Ability to communicate thoughts, feelings, and ideas through words, gestures, sign systems, assistive devices, and so on
- **Articulation:** Using movements of the mouth area to make speech sounds
- **Pragmatics:** Knowledge of successful and appropriate language use, such as in conversation
- **Semantics:** The meaning that language communicates; it governs vocabulary development
- **Syntax:** A system of combining words into sentences with rules that govern how words work together in phrases, clauses, and sentences

## Cognition

Mental skill development (cognition) focuses on thinking and reasoning with specific clusters that are important in all aspects of learning. These clusters of mental skills include remembering, using abstractions, paying attention, problem-solving, making decisions, labeling and naming, organizing ideas, conceptual development, knowledge and recognition, developing rules and generalizations, reflecting on judgments and evaluations, understanding cause-and-effect relationships, and drawing inferences and understanding perceptions. The cognitive domain, which affects all areas of development, is the most significant domain, and can transform, through maturity, practice, and normal aging.

Several theorists have influenced the perceptions about the cognitive domain. Some of the more familiar include Watson/Skinner (Behavioral), Piaget (Cognitive), Vygotsky (Socio-Cultural), and Gardner (Multiple Intelligences).

## Physical Development

Physical development is the first area of growth and learning that a child experiences. Children are capable of collecting enormous amounts of information through the motor domain and storing the data in their brains for later use. Physical development includes skills related to gross motor, fine motor, sensory-integration, and perceptual motor development, which are described here.

- **Gross motor:** Large muscle movement such as in the torso, neck, arms, legs
- **Fine motor:** Small muscle movement of the hands, fingers, feet, toes, face
- **Sensory-integration:** Use of sensory information such as tactile, vestibular, and proprioceptive
- **Perceptual motor:** How muscles coordinate movements with the information received through the environment by the senses

The theories that impact this area of development are those of Gesell, Piaget, Ayres, and Kephart.

## Adaptive Behavior

Adaptive behaviors are a composite of abilities based on a child's age and the cultural mores of the family. Adaptive behaviors are normally acquired during daily routines and activities in the early years, and acquisition often depends on the family involvement. Adaptive behaviors include self-help skills, such as feeding, dressing, and toileting. A child who can master these competencies will build upon his self-esteem and learn to function more independently.

## Characteristics of Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities exhibit their own very special qualities and unique characteristics. They should be considered individuals first, with traits specific to the disability second. The list that follows briefly explains the basic, stereotypical characteristics of each type of exceptionality with the more specific characteristics related to a certain disability listed in, "Types of Exceptionalities."

- **Medical/Physical:** Includes problems related to diseases, illnesses, trauma, genetics, fine and gross motor, sensory input, and sensory perception.
- **Educational:** Includes cognitive and meta-cognitive deficits, low academic achievement, poor memory, attention problems, hyperactivity, and perceptual disorders.
- **Social:** Includes affective behaviors, poor social skills, poor self-concept, poor motivation, and debilitating mood states.
- **Psychological:** Includes various behaviors, adaptive behavior deficits, disruptive behaviors, and withdrawal.

## Types of Exceptionalities

The following is a list of disability categories included under federal law and a brief summary of the typical characteristics for the major conditions. (Not included on this list are the categories of Deaf-Blindness, Multiple Disabilities, and Developmental Delays.)

- **Autism:** Communication and language deficits, impaired social relationships often interacting with objects and people in unusual manners, exhibition of difficult behaviors, and demonstration of limited intellectual functioning and atypical reactions to sensory stimuli.
- **Emotional Disturbance/Behavioral Disorder:** Exhibits inappropriate internalizing and externalizing behaviors, atypical emotions, and disruptive behaviors and lacks the skills for developing positive relationships
- **Hearing Impairment:** Difficulties processing linguistic information and using spoken language to communicate, problems with social relationships, deficits in emotional maturity, and delays in academics
- **Mental Retardation:** Deficits in adaptive behaviors, problems with learning related to cognition, difficulties with memory, issues with problem solving, delays in social skills, difficulties generalizing skills, and attention problems
- **Orthopedic Impairment:** Physical problems such as cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, and spina bifida, possibly requiring adaptations with devices and equipment.
- **Other Health Impairment:** Conditions of medical problems with limited strength, vitality, and alertness, such as diabetes, epilepsy, attention deficits, and disease.
- **Specific Learning Disability:** Achievement is not commensurate with abilities and demonstrates difficulties with listening, reasoning, memory, attention, social skills, perception, and processing information, which may emerge with problems in reading, written language, math, and behavior.
- **Speech/Language Impairment:** Difficulties using expressive and receptive language, delays in pragmatics and problems with fluency, voice, and articulation.
- **Traumatic Brain Injury:** Difficulties in the areas of cognition, memory, attention, judgment, and problem solving, as well as physical and sensory changes, social, behavioral, or emotional problems.
- **Visual Impairment:** Problems with developing language concepts, impaired motor development and mobility, lack of social adjustment skills, and problematic relationship interactions

## Characteristics of Gifted or Talented Students

Individuals in this exceptional student category possess a wide-range of levels, abilities, talents, and traits and include those students also affected by a cultural, a linguistic, or a disabling condition. Any individual may be considered G/T and require specialized assistance in school to benefit from an education. Some of the characteristics these students may demonstrate include high verbal abilities, intellectual curiosity, the ability to make sound decisions and solve difficult problems, perfectionism, intuitiveness, a need for mental stimulation, difficulty conforming, possessing early moral or existential conscience, and introversion.

## Basic Concepts

To obtain appropriate services, children who differ from the norm, physically, intellectually, or behaviorally, must be identified under a category of special education or as an exceptional child. Children are eligible for services only if the condition has a major impact on learning and a special program is necessary to benefit from an education. Categories of exceptionalities are defined under federal law.

## Definitions and Classifications

Although debates are prevalent regarding definitions of exceptionalities, children must be identified with a specific label through a comprehensive assessment process and determined eligible for services. Although federal law provides general categories for exceptionalities, each state may develop a precise label based on the interpretation of the law.

The following list includes the 12 disability categories suggested in federal law for students, 6 through 21 years, along with a summary of the definitions found in the federal law.

**Autism:** A syndrome related to neurological function that is evidenced by deficits in social interactions, communications, and patterns of behavior; associated with **pervasive developmental disorder** (PDD), more currently referred to as **autism spectrum disorders** (ASD); various disorders in this group are differentiated by age of onset and severity of symptoms.

**Deaf-Blindness:** Includes the combination of both auditory and visual disabilities that are the cause of severe communication deficits and other learning problems; individual may need a combination of supplementary assistance.

**Emotional Disturbance/Behavioral Disorder:** This category refers to conditions that exhibit two or more of the following: an inability to learn, an inability to maintain relationships, or the exhibition of inappropriate behaviors, pervasive moods, or a tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears.

**Hearing Impairment:** A condition that may adversely affect the educational performance of students and includes deafness and hard of hearing.

**Mental Retardation:** Defines an individual with significant subaverage general intellectual functioning concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior manifesting during the developmental period and adversely affecting performance.

**Multiple Disabilities:** A combination of concomitant impairments (mental retardation–vision impairment, learning disability–physical impairment, traumatic brain injury–hearing impairment, and so on) that causes severe educational conditions that cannot be accommodated in special education programs for only one disability.

**Orthopedic Impairment:** A physical impairment, caused by such conditions as genetic anomalies, diseases, and trauma, which adversely affect a student’s educational performance.

**Other Health Impairment:** Related to diseases or chronic health conditions a student with limited strength, vitality, or alertness that adversely affects educational performance.

**Specific Learning Disability:** This refers to a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language and may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do math.

**Speech/Language Impairment:** Communication disorders that affect the educational performance in an adverse manner, including stuttering, impaired articulation, language impairments, or voice impairments.

**Traumatic Brain Injury:** An acquired injury to the brain caused by external physical force that results in total or partial functional disability or psychosocial impairments that adversely affects educational performance and does not include brain injuries that are congenital, generative, or birth induced.

**Visual Impairment:** Includes any impairment of vision (totally blind, functionally blind, and low vision) that, even with correction, adversely affects a student's educational performance.

Another category of exceptional students not included under IDEIA is:

**Gifted/Talented (G/T):** Although students who are identified as gifted or talented are not included in the special education law, they are considered students with exceptional needs under a federal definition and are provided services accordingly in most states. This category includes students with high performance or abilities in general intellect, specific academic aptitude, creative or productive thinking, leadership abilities, visual or performing arts achievements, and psychomotor abilities. In 1992 the federal definition promoted the identification of students to not be based solely on an IQ score but also on the student's performance.

## Incidence/Prevalence

There has been some difficulty in determining the actual incidence/prevalence rates across the nation for specific categories of exceptional children as states differ in the established criteria required for students to be considered for these programs. Even school districts in the same state can establish varying levels of qualifications and accept certain components of definitions, as long as each district and state follow the basic premise of the federal laws regarding students with exceptional needs.

This section shows by division of categories for exceptional students the rates of incidence/prevalence based on those reported to the United States Department of Education (USDOE).

**Autism (A):** The most rapidly increasing category, this condition affects boys four times as often as girls. In the past 10 years, it is estimated that the numbers of children served has increased by more than four times the previous rates with 20 to 60 children per 10,000 being affected.

**Communication Disorder:** The second largest category, it is estimated that between 18 and 20 percent of children in special education programs receive communication-related services, although some estimate the numbers at 50 percent. The categories of mental retardation, learning disability, hearing impairment, autism, and others may include significant numbers of students who qualify for speech and language services. Speech and language impairments are more common among male students, with most of those served being in preschool and early elementary programs.

**Emotional Disturbance/Behavioral Disorder (ED/BD):** Estimates of 33 percent of the school population are regarded as having emotional and behavioral problems, with about 10 percent requiring specific assistance and about 3 percent identified with problems significant enough to require direct special education services. The differences in the definitions and identification requirements across the country cause the numbers to vary. As the fourth largest category, the majority of the children served are boys, but recent estimates show that just as many girls have ED/BD problems requiring special education.

**Gifted/Talented (G/T):** Students who fall in an intelligence range that is two standard deviations above the norm may fall in the population that is 3 to 5 percent of all school-age students. However, if the G/T category includes students also considered *highly talented*, the rates surge to 10 to 15 percent. Under the exceptional student categories, G/T ranks as the second largest group receiving services, although professionals believe this category is under identified and underserved.

**Hearing Impairment (HI):** In 2004, the USDOE reported that about 1.2 percent of the school-age children received special education services under the category of hearing impairment with about 0.1 percent of those students placed in residential schools. This category may be under reported because many deaf and hard of hearing children are also identified with other disabling conditions that may include learning disability, emotional disorder, mental retardation, vision impairment, or speech disorders. There seems to be an even division of children who are deaf and those who are hard of hearing.

**Learning Disability (LD):** This is the largest category served, estimated at about 3 million students each year, which represents about 50 percent of the school-age population. These numbers have multiplied greatly over the last few years, which may be a result of the definition changes and over representation of minority groups.

**Mental Retardation (MR):** The reported calculations may be difficult to assess accurately, due to the varying attitudes across the states to correctly identify and service those students who qualify under the mild mental retardation criteria. Additionally, some students with mild mental retardation may be provided regular education services and are not reported under this category. The current reporting numbers are about 10 percent of the special education population or 1 percent of the school-age population making this category the third largest.

On a historical basis, the federal numbers reflected for mental retardation were based on the intelligence quotient (IQ) scores, so it was estimated that about 3 percent of the school age population would be expected to be identified as mentally retarded. If the adaptive behavior function is also considered, these estimates fall between 0.8 and 1.3 percent of the population.

**Other Health Impaired or Physical Disability (OHI):** Together, these categories support about 8 to 9 percent of the special education population receiving services in schools. There is an estimate of about 20 percent of the total school-age population affected by chronic medical conditions, but who may not receive special education services since their condition does not adversely affect their educational performance.

**Multiple Disabilities (MD) (mild, moderate, profound and severe):** There is no specific definition to base this category, but most professionals consider students who perform in the lowest one percent of the school population may be severely multiply disabled. Children who are served in this category exhibit two or more conditions of disability, with one being a category of sensory impairment.

**Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI):** It has been reported that the most commonly acquired disability in children is a traumatic brain injury. Although injuries to the head are very common among children, very few receive special education services under this category of TBI. This may be due to the brain's recovery and natural ability to compensate or because the injuries occurring are primarily mild and have no adverse effects on educational performance. Most children with brain injuries are served under other categories in special education (MR, LD, ED/BD, and so on).

**Vision Impairment (VI):** A low incidence disability, vision impairment accounts for about 0.4 percent of children, and there are very few children served under this category alone. Most students labeled as VI receive services under other categories and may be categorized with a multiple disability.

## Causation/Prevention

There are thousands of known causes for conditions of disability, and some may influence the development of several different disabilities, but sometimes the cause is unknown. Common causes related to a specific disability are listed here.

- **Autism:** Not a specific known cause, but may be related to neurobiological conditions, abnormal brain development, genetics, multiple biological causes, and environmental factors.
- **Emotional Disturbance/Behavioral Disorder:** Two major areas may contribute to these disorders: biological factors (brain disorders, genetics, temperament) and environmental factors (home, community, school).
- **Hearing Impairment:** Many causes, but the more common are genetic factors, illness, prematurity, disease, noise-induced.
- **Mental Retardation:** Causes classified as either biomedical, environmental, or unknown and that result from factors that occur in one of three stages: prenatal, perinatal, or postnatal.
- **Orthopedic Impairment:** Primarily related to illness, disease, trauma, accident, or injury.
- **Other Health Impairment:** Primarily related to illness, disease, trauma, accident, or injury.
- **Specific Learning Disability:** Cause is often unknown; however, the four most prevalent known causes are brain damage, heredity, biochemical imbalance, and environmental.
- **Speech/Language Impairment:** Many possible causes, most likely attributed to damage or dysfunction of a specific part of the body, environmental factors, cognitive impairments, hearing loss, brain injury, or disease.

- **Traumatic Brain Injury:** Primarily related to illness, disease, trauma, accident, or injury.
- **Visual Impairment:** Damages or changes in the optical, muscular, or nerve system, which may be related to diseases, trauma, malnutrition, or genetics.

Disability conditions may result from unknown causes, and some may remain lifelong problems. With the improvements available to the health of individuals, some disabilities are preventable through the following:

- Proper and early medical care
- Appropriate mother and child nutrition
- Advances in medical treatments
- Genetic counseling for families
- Testing such as a PKU or amniocentesis
- Environmental improvements
- Early intervention programs
- Parent training programs
- Elimination of childhood diseases, traumas, and accidents
- Availability of vaccinations and immunizations

## Behaviors

The varieties of behaviors that children display are unlimited and may be specifically related to a type of disability or to a particular group of students. Managing these behaviors can be complex, so using methods and strategies that are particular to an exceptionality group may be beneficial. Those tips would be described in specific materials about certain conditions.

The following list provides terms and definitions related to behavior interventions.

- **Duration:** The measure of the length of time a student engages in a particular behavior.
- **Degree of severity:** The measure of how problematic or complicated a particular behavior is.
- **Extinction:** A reinforcement for a previously reinforced behavior is withheld, so the behavior will decrease until it no longer exists.
- **Frequency:** The amount of time (how often) that a behavior reoccurs.
- **Intensity:** The degree to which a behavior is repeated.
- **maintenance:** The extent that a previously learned behavior continues after the intervention to support it has been ended.

## Multiple Exceptionalities

Multiple conditions can concomitantly exist in students. According to the federal law, a multiple disability is defined as the presence of more than one impairment that causes severe educational problems where the student cannot be completely serviced or accommodated in a program for just one condition. Some of the more complicated multiple combinations are deaf-blindness, gifted-learning disabled, and mental retardation–emotional disturbance. Many of these individuals with multiple exceptionalities require a multitude of services based on the student’s specific and unique characteristics as well as the current functioning level.

Students with multiple exceptionalities or severe disabilities may demonstrate slow learning rates, poor generalization of skills, delays in language and physical development, deficits in adaptive behaviors, demonstration of inappropriate or challenging behaviors, and deficits in social-emotional development.

## Life Span Influences

Attitudes and laws have changed since the mid-1950s in favor of more inclusive involvement in communities for adults with exceptional needs. These individuals live outside of institutions in independent housing, in group homes, and in assisted-care centers while working in integrated community settings.

There are still societal problems that individuals with exceptional needs face today. Unfortunately, it is the social-emotional areas that continue to have a negative impact on adults with exceptional needs. Many of these adults find it difficult to establish and maintain social friendships and work focused relationships.

These individuals are entitled to the same opportunities to participate in the living, working, and recreational activities of the community that other typical adults partake (“quality of life issues”). Planning and preparing for proper transitions and transition programs include instruction in self-advocacy, problem solving, self-care, employment skills, community development, behavior management, leisure activities, and independent living. It is the specific characteristics of the exceptional individual that affect the long-term goals and long-range plans as well as the adjustment into the local society across the life span.

## Legal and Societal Issues

Litigation and legislation have been the key factors in identifying the services and programs for students with disabilities, as well as other groups with exceptional needs. Laws and regulations have been influenced by judicial decisions handed down as a result of legal cases.

### Federal Laws

Special education programs have a long history dating as far back as the early 1950s, but the primary impetus for the development of the special education laws began during the peak of the civil rights movement. In 1954, the decision from the *Brown v. Board of Education* case caused a movement in the education field that has been unequalled. This influence then focused on children with disabilities, resulting in a series of laws to protect students with exceptional needs. The passage of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA, also EHA) in 1975 (PL94-142) is considered landmark legislation and signifies a remarkable change in how the needs of exceptional students were addressed in public school settings (free and appropriate public education). The current federal law for special education defines *children with disabilities* and the services they are entitled to receive.

Since EHA, the federal law has been amended and reauthorized five times.

1983—Amendments to the Education of the Handicapped Act

1986—Education for the Handicapped Act Amendments

1990—Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments (PL101-476)

1997—Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (PL105-17)

2004—Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA), also known as IDEA-2004 (PL108-446)

The advocacy actions surrounding the rights of individuals with disabilities and the collaborative efforts of professionals, parents, political figures, and community members were instrumental in making changes in the law. The federal special education law is designed for the provision of educational rights to children with disabilities and their parents in accessing services in public schools. States may individually and appropriately interpret this law, but all states must comply with the basic provisions if they accept federal funding to the schools.

The purpose of IDEIA is identified in four key statements:

1. To ensure all children with disabilities are guaranteed a free and appropriate public education (FAPE)
2. To assist all states in establishing early intervention services for infants and toddlers with disabilities

3. To ensure that educators and parents have the necessary tools to improve the education for all children with disabilities
4. To assess the effectiveness of the education for children with disabilities

## IDEIA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act)

Also known as IDEA-2004, IDEIA extends the right to an education for all students with disabilities in the public school system across the country, not including those identified as gifted or talented. There are six major principles:

1. Zero reject (**Child Find** system): No child with a disability may be excluded from a public education.
2. Protection in the evaluation process (**non-bias testing**): Nondiscriminatory identification and evaluation must be conducted, which includes procedures followed and tools utilized.
3. **Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)**: The education of students with disabilities must be at the public expense based on the development of an **IEP (Individualized Education Program)** that includes **related services**.
4. **Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)**: Children with disabilities must be educated with non-disabled children to the maximum extent appropriate and a continuum of placement services must be imposed.
5. **Due Process Procedures (Procedural Safeguards)**: Requires parent and student rights regarding assessment, placement, and service implementation of education program be instituted.
6. Parent and Student Participation (**Shared Decision-Making**): Parents and students (as appropriate) must be included in the special education process helping to make plans and decisions.

Other provisions stressed for students with disabilities include the following:

- Extension of services to children ages 5 and under
- Access and participation in the general education curriculum
- Participation in and accommodations for district and statewide high-stakes tests
- Related services and Assistive Technology (**AT**) to access and benefit from special education
- Federal funding to states to support special education programs
- Tuition reimbursement costs for private school placement

When IDEA-1997 was reauthorized to IDEIA (IDEA-2004), all of the major provisions and components were still intact, but some changes were added, and the impact they may have on school programs for exceptional children remains to be seen. The following were included:

- Paperwork reduction
- Short-term objectives and benchmarks eliminated from IEPs
- Implementation of comprehensive and multiyear (3-year) IEPs
- Focus on **highly qualified** teachers to align IDEA with NCLB

Specific under the federal special education law are two main sections that pertain to students with exceptional needs. Schools and states must utilize them to provide the most appropriate services to children with special needs. These components, Part B and Part C, are outlined here to demonstrate the similarities and the differences.

**IDEIA-Part B** focuses on the following:

- Students with disabilities ages 3 through age 21
- Educational programs in public schools settings
- Educators, staff, and other school professionals providing services
- Yearly evaluations and an annual review of a student's program
- Participation in transition services from Part C
- An IEP that describes the individual student's needs

**IDEIA-Part C** focuses on the following:

- Students with disabilities ages birth to 3 years
- Family and child services in natural environments, such as the home
- A service or case manager to coordinate the necessary services
- Evaluations two times per year with regular reviews
- Participation in the transition services to Part B
- An IFSP to describe the child’s and family’s needs

Students identified in public schools as gifted or talented (*G/T*) also need a form of special education; however, they are no longer included in the federal special education laws. Separate laws, funding, and requirements are established for this population and are further explained in the following section. Students who are *G/T* require modifications and accommodations to the general education curriculum, as well as for instructional activities. It is helpful for this population to be served by persons specially trained to support their unique needs.

## Other Federal Laws

**Section 504 (Rehabilitation Act of 1973):** Extends civil rights to individuals with disabilities focused on prohibiting discrimination in education, employment, and other community settings; requiring compliance by any recipient of federal funds even though these requirements are not monetarily supported by the federal government.

**ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act–1990):** Based on Section 504, it extends civil rights to individuals with disabilities in private sector employment, public services, public accommodations, transportation, and telecommunications. These employment and public service entities must accommodate persons with disabilities in an appropriate and nondiscriminatory manner.

**NCLB (No Child Left Behind-2001), the Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act):** Primary goal is for *all* children to be proficient in *all* subject matter by 2014 and imposes a requirement that *all* teachers must be “highly qualified.” There are four key principles:

- Stronger accountability through district and state testing for every student
- Increased flexibility to schools for use of federal funds
- Additional options for parents regarding the education of their child
- Focus on curriculum and instructional methods with scientifically researched and proven effects

**FERPA (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act):** Although not a specific special education law, it affects schools, education programs, and those persons associated with students who have exceptional needs. This federal law protects the privacy of all students’ educational records and applies to any and all schools receiving federal funds.

**Gifted and Talented Children’s Education Act-1978 (PL95-561):** Allows for funding to support the exceptional needs of students in the areas of identification, education, and programming.

**Education Consolidation Act-1982:** Merged the federal Office of Gifted and Talented with other federal programs and states received block grants to determine which programs and students to support.

**Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Student Education Act-1988 (PL100-297):** Federal funds provided specifically to students who are considered economically disadvantaged, who demonstrate limited English proficiency or have a disability while also identified as gifted or talented.

## Legal Issues

There have been a multitude of issues raised related to special education programs, children with disabilities, and the services provided in school systems. These issues have often been taken through the judicial system to be resolved as they typify difficulty for parents and school personnel to debate and settle. These issues can be packed with emotional

and philosophical ideals. The decisions made by the courts have proven to be critical indicators of the interpretations and changes that have occurred in the special education laws as they have been continually amended over the years.

The interpretations of the provisions that are outlined in IDEIA remain with the powers of the individual states. The interpretations and decisions that occur in one region of the United States may not be the same as those in another region. Decisions finalized at the Supreme Court level produce a different standard of expectations regarding compliance in all states. Some of the specific areas that are repeatedly tried in the courts include:

- Assessment and identification
- Free and appropriate education (FAPE) opportunities
- Least restrictive environment (LRE) definitions
- Related services and implementations
- Discipline
- Students' and parents' rights
- Medically related conditions

Although the law does not clearly define many of the provisions and requirements, schools should strive to define parameters and avoid the confrontational proceedings, as they are costly and time-consuming. There is a process for due process hearings, but in some states, filing a complaint or participating in mediation are viable options.

One of the most difficult rulings for districts and schools is the requirement to provide health-related services for medically fragile students. These services could include a one-on-one nurse and medical equipment necessary for a student with a disability and may impose a financial burden.

The following is a list of the more significant historical cases that have changed laws and procedures for services to children with disabilities. It is not inclusive of the many cases across the country but does provide the examinee with an idea of the types of issues that have been presented. Cases every year cause schools to change their perspective and plans for implementing services to exceptional students.

1954, *Brown v. Board of Education*: Based on the segregation of students according to race, it was tried at the Supreme Court who ordered that education must be on equal terms for *all* children.

1967, *Hobson v. Hansen*: Determined the tracking system for regular and special education students based on intelligence scores was discriminatorily unconstitutional for some populations of students and could not be used.

1972, *Mills v. Board of Education*: Determined that financial problems cannot be a reason for the lack of appropriate programs to children with disabilities.

1972, *Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Citizens v. the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania*: Established the right for all children with mental retardation to a free public education.

1979, *Armstrong v. Kline*: Ordered schools to provide extended school year services for students with disabilities who may regress over long periods without attending formal school programs.

1979, *Larry P. v. Riles*: Ruled that IQ tests could not be used as the primary or sole basis of placing students in special programs.

1982, *Board of Education of the Hudson School District v. Rowley*: Upheld that each child with a disability has the right to an individualized program and supportive services deemed appropriate and necessary.

1983, *Abrahamson v. Hershman*: Ruled that the training and education for a student with multiple disabilities required in private residential placement would be supported through district funds.

1984, *Department of Education v. Katherine D.*: Ruled homebound instruction for a student with multiple health problems did not comply with the LRE and required the student be placed in a class with non-disabled children and receive the necessary related medical services.

1984, *Irving Independent School District v. Tatro*: Forced the school to provide non-physician required medical services to allow a physically impaired student to attend school.

1988, *Honig v. Doe*: Ruled that students with disabilities may not be excluded for misbehavior that is disability-related, but services could cease if the behavior was not related to the disability.

1989, *Timothy v. Rochester School District*: Upheld that all children with disabilities must be provided a free and appropriate public education without exception.

1993, *Zobrest v. Catalina School District*: Determined that a student in a parochial school should be provided the assistance of a related service pertaining to the disability and that these findings did not violate the constitution of the separation of church and state.

1993, *Oberti v. Board of Education*: Ruled to support a family preference to educate a child with mental retardation in the general education classroom.

1998, *Foley v. Special School District of St. Louis County*: Affirmed that public schools are not obligated to provide special education services if parents choose to place their child in a private school.

1999, *Cedar Rapids v. Garrett F.*: Ruled that medical services necessary to a student with a disability to access and benefit from special education must be provided by the school as long as the service does not require a physician.

## Issues of Family, School, Community

Families, schools, and communities may positively or negatively contribute to student achievement and life outcomes. In the early years, it is the family who has the most powerful influences on a child and after the school becomes a partner, collaboration of these two entities is critical for continued success. The attitudes of community members are also important, but they are an essential ingredient in the development of a transition plan for a high school student and the transition into adulthood. Combined efforts of these three will impact exceptional individuals throughout their lifetimes.

### Advocacy

Advocacy is defined as the process of supporting the abilities of and promoting the causes for persons with exceptional needs. Advocacy by parents, educators and community members for exceptional individuals has an impact on the laws, the programs, and the delivery of services. Whether those changes happen because of amended laws, court cases, or awareness rallies, the influence on those with exceptional needs can be overwhelming.

**Advocacy instruction** should be a part of the educational program for students with exceptional needs, especially as a component of a transition plan for students 16 years and older. Through instruction on advocacy issues and self-advocacy actions, individuals with exceptional needs are better able to understand their rights and their capabilities, as well as develop a more positive self-concept and be involved in meeting their own needs.

When students transition into the community as adults, they may face barriers, such as discrimination, problems with employment, and issues about living conditions. Joining an advocacy group for persons with exceptional needs helps them to protect their rights, allows them to access information, and supports them in maintaining their dignity. When a person with exceptional needs joins in advocacy efforts, it provides an opportunity to meet others with the same conditions and together pursue positive outcomes.

### Parent Partnerships and Roles

Parents of children with exceptional needs play demanding roles, as they must meet the child's basic needs, take on additional expenses, understand complicated issues, and support programs. Considering parents and family members as equal partners in a child's education and creating partnerships through respect and dignity will result in explicit outcomes for the child. Parents and other family members can be positive influences in improving a child's performance.

One of the six principles of IDEIA is that parents should be included in **shared-decision making** regarding their child. Involving parents as a team member is a critical aspect of developing proper IEP goals, providing support and consistency to the child, accessing additional resources and providing opportunities for additional learning situations. Educators who demonstrate devotion to the child and are considerate of the parents will gain the trust and the commitment necessary to support the child. Improving the lines of communication and respecting culturally and linguistically diverse families are critical elements in encouraging parent partnerships.

Professionals must practice active listening when working with families and promote communication efforts. There are many methods of providing home-school communication that effectively involve parents on a regular basis. Here are several types:

- Parent-teacher conferences
- Telephone calls or e-mails
- Written messages
- Class newsletters or websites
- Parent group meetings
- Parent classroom volunteers
- Family homework activities
- Class activities with family spectators

### Public Attitudes

How others react to an individual with exceptional needs affects her life in school and later as an adult. In spite of advocacy efforts, there remain problems with the lack of overall acceptance of individuals who are different. Because exceptional individuals exhibit unique characteristics and diverse abilities, they face problems from the ignorance of others and with discrimination, teasing, and cruelty. **Handicapism** is a term used to describe this phenomenon of the biased reactions to those with disabilities. However, public attitudes toward exceptional individuals are far less negative and more accepting, tolerant, and respectful today than in previous decades.

Educators must prepare exceptional students for community life by effectively guiding and supporting them to use their realistic potential, to reach reasonable academic and behavioral performance, to improve their self-esteem, and to develop independence. Teachers must also provide awareness to the community about individuals with exceptional abilities so the public is better informed and better able to allow effective integration for these individuals.

### Cultural and Community Influences

Communities and the cultures represented have great influence on the development and progress of exceptional individuals. Society establishes rules about how people should function, and in the past, individuals with disabilities were not completely approved as members of society due to their lower and differently functioning abilities. Since attitudes have changed more individuals with exceptional needs have become positive contributors to established communities. A community that embraces these individuals in work environments, local businesses, and neighborhood living situations has a positive influence that will be reflected in the performance of those individuals.

Addressing cultural and community influence begins with transition services. Educators must collaborate with agencies to find opportunities for students to prepare for the adult world. Awareness and acceptance are two critical factors in sustaining positive situations for individuals with exceptional needs.

### Interagency Agreements

Primary responsibility for the transition of services to students with disabilities from a secondary school into the community lies within the school. Because **transition** means moving from one major service program to another, it is critical that schools collaborate with and work through the community agencies available to individuals with disabilities. Although these differ among communities and across states, this list may include potential employers, postsecondary education facilities, residential care and housing providers, vocational training or rehabilitation centers, and so on.

Collaboration, communication, and consideration of the individual student's needs are all very important to the implementation of an effective transition plan (ITP). The involvement of agencies in student assessment, planning, and consultation is critical to supporting the student and the family in this end of service/beginning of service process. When school and community entities voluntarily cooperate and involve the student and the family, they demonstrate a valid cohesion in the delivery of much-needed services.

## Historical Movements and Trends

The history of individuals with exceptional needs spans centuries. Even before federal laws mandated services, dedicated adults and teachers educated exceptional children in homes and in schools. Yet, some children were institutionalized and prior to 1970, schools could deny enrollment to children with exceptional needs.

After schools began allowing educational access to these unique children, they were served through the practice of segregation. Although students with mild learning problems remained in the general education classes and were considered “slow learners,” other children with more severe needs were placed in schools or other facilities that specialized in certain conditions. The recommended practice of inclusion did not occur until recently, and the issue of placement for children with exceptional needs is an on-going and debated topic.

## Community-Based Placement

After students transition into adult services in a community setting, variables will influence the individual’s success. Community placements should be based on the individual’s preferences and the services and resources available. There are three main areas of community-based placements: residential, employment, recreation. Although there are pros and cons to consider in each area, final decisions should be made with the knowledge of the individual’s needs, abilities, supports, and future plans.

## Inclusion

The basic premise of **inclusion**, which began in the 1990s is that it is a philosophy, not a place or a program. It surmises that students with exceptional needs should be placed in classrooms along with students who are non-disabled so they may receive the general education curriculum instruction with supportive services. The inclusion practice was encouraged by professionals who worked with exceptional children, to avoid placements in segregated settings.

Students with varying disabilities and unique exceptional needs are diverse learners and often require adaptations, modifications, and accommodations to meet their needs. The methods and strategies these students need require special consideration and additional time to implement, which may cause difficulty for a general education teacher. It is important that the special education teachers support and assist the general education teachers for inclusion to work.

## Application of Technology

A requirement of IDEIA is the provision of technology as a related service for students to access and benefit from special education. This requirement may be met in two ways. One is through the implementation of technology in classrooms for all students. Basic computer programs, use of video tools, amplification devices, or dual auditory/visual modalities to aid in instruction are highly effective instructional strategies and techniques for exceptional students. The second way is through **assistive technology** (AT), the more individually directed use of technology. AT includes specific devices, equipment, and services, based on an assessment of the student with the disability. It may also incorporate other advances in technology, such as cochlear implants for the deaf or basic computer systems or auditory/visual modalities for all disability conditions.

## Transition

Adults with exceptionalities face daily challenges that encompass under-employment, job dissatisfaction, dependent living arrangements, social skills deficits, lack of work skills, and isolation from leisure activities. These barriers prevent some of them from being independent or successful. It is for these reasons that federal special education law mandates guidelines for school personnel to assist and prepare students for the future in the adult community.

Under the special education law, a transition plan must begin at age 16 for a student with a disability. The transition plan must outline the activities and resources needed to support the student’s movement from school to adulthood. The process of transition requires that the team, which may consist of school personnel, the student, the community, and agency personnel assist the student in preparing for post-school activities. If able, the student should be involved in the

creation and development of this plan, since consideration of the student's ideas, interests, and preferences is important to the outcomes. The areas to be incorporated are listed here:

- Postsecondary education
- Integrated or supported employment
- Vocational training
- Continuing and adult education
- Adult services
- Independent living
- Community participation
- Recreation and leisure activities

State laws are in effect regarding the **majority age**, which is the legal age that a student becomes an adult. When a student reaches majority age, parents may not be included in educational programming, unless invited by the student or if decided by a court proceeding.

Another formal transition period mentioned in the law occurs when a child moves from Part C services (early intervention) to the Part B services (early childhood–school age). Prior to the child's third birthday, an IEP should be developed based on the assessments conducted and the services implemented under the IFSP. The Part C personnel, the Part B professionals, and the parents must convene to discuss the student's present needs, create an educational program, and make an appropriate placement.

## Accountability

Two distinct laws require accountability of programs for students with disabilities: IDEIA and NCLB (refer to section "Federal Laws"). For the exceptionality of gifted/talented, there are also supportive laws, however, the accountability requirement is identified under NCLB.

Under IDEIA, one of the four major purposes is "to assess, and ensure the effectiveness of efforts to educate children with disabilities." State and federal reporting requirements are set to analyze the efficacy of school programs across the country regarding this population. Under this law is the inclusion of the term "highly qualified special educators", which attempts to align IDEIA with NCLB. A highly qualified special education teacher must be certified as a special education teacher or pass the state special education teacher licensing exam. There may be additional requirements based on the state of residency or employment.

Under NCLB, the term "highly qualified" teacher has districts and states scrambling to organize and identify educators who are certified to teach children of all abilities, in all programs, in the public schools. The requirement for the Praxis II exam is an example of an accountability feature for certain states. A highly qualified teacher is considered a teacher, who is competently trained in the subject area he will teach. Included in this law is the requirement that every educator who teaches a core academic subject be certified as **highly qualified** by the end of the school year 2006.

In addition to the teacher requirements, both of these laws require that states demonstrate a system and verify the results for student achievement and academic success. Individual states and many districts are implementing **high-stakes** testing, expecting that all students will meet this requirement. Under NCLB, annual school **report cards** allow parents to choose a school for their child based on the school's **annual progress**. IDEIA has always had a system of accountability for students and programs through the IEP process and state reporting at the end of each school year.

## Delivery of Services

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The education of exceptional students spans as diverse a field as the students who are served in the programs. These students, whether identified with a disability or giftedness, differ from the norm, and it is those very differences that set them apart from their peers that will impact their success. Educators must ensure that exceptional students benefit from an education.

Students with disabilities must be provided an individualized program consistent with IDEIA, according to the premise that services be a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment. Students who are gifted or talented are also supported by federal laws, state policies, district guidelines, educational procedures, and best practices but are not included in the specific special education mandates at the federal level.

## Background Knowledge

Educating students with exceptionalities is more acceptable and more possible than ever before. The numbers of exceptional students has multiplied over the years, and they are significantly dispersed in the general school population. Research shows that when exceptional students are educated with typical students, both groups benefit academically and socially. Educators must determine the most suitable ways to educate and support these students in inclusive environments so they may lead productive and independent lives.

A student's team makes difficult decisions when designing and implementing a program specifically for the exceptional student. Imperative in delivering the appropriate services to exceptional students is the consideration of several essential elements: the student's abilities and assessed needs, the learning environment, the recommended strategies, the professionals involved, the parent partnership, and the available resources. The delivery of services may include the assessments, the curriculum components, the instructional strategies and methods, and the management of the environment.

## Conceptual Approaches

Theories related to learning are vastly important to educators, although different theories work best for certain students in particular situations. The conceptual approaches selected to support an individual's needs must be based on research, theoretical information, and the specific student. When educators formalize their own personal philosophy about how students learn, and apply that to the selection of one or more theories specific to the children served, needs will be met, and academic achievement will soar.

In this section are descriptions of several theories related to learning and academic achievement: Cognitive, Constructionist, Psychodynamic, Behavioral, Sociological, Ecological, Therapeutic, and Medical.

### Cognitive

Cognitive theorists believe that an individual constructs the acquisition of new information and skills based on prior knowledge. Stemming from the work of Gestalt and Piaget, this theory examines the internal mental processes that include problem solving, memory, and language while focusing on how people understand, analyze, and solve problems.

Instruction must be delivered at the student's academic level (stage of development) in a managed environment while allowing the student to develop the necessary skills and learn to generalize them. The instructional application of the cognitive theory includes the strategies of addressing styles of learning, encouraging metacognition, teaching learning strategies, using peer tutoring, providing scaffolded instruction, analyzing behavioral temperaments, and understanding the social context of learning. Employing motivational activities should enhance and encourage learning.

### Constructionist

Learning is an active process in which the learner must be involved. This reinforces learning so it may be effective and successful. Piaget's ideas of experiential learning where individuals are engaged in actively creating things and constructing mental models are based on this theory. Students may be involved in experimentation and hands-on learning while the teacher is the facilitator of the educational experiences. Constructionist theory examples include the **inquiry-based learning** most often used in science and math instruction.

### Psychodynamic

The psychodynamic theory is the study of human **behavior** based on **motivation** and **drives**, and the functional significance of **emotions**. According to Brucke, Jung, and Freud, an individual's personality and her reactions to situations are the result of interactions within her mind, genetic constitution, emotional state, and environment. These interactions

affect behavior and the individual's mental state, and internal forces can affect a person's behavior. This approach is based on the premise that human behaviors and relationships are shaped by both conscious and unconscious influences.

### Behavioral

The behavioral theory emphasizes a systematic approach to learning and instruction. Based on the work of Skinner, it incorporates the ABC model of instruction, which stands for **antecedent** or stimulus, target behavior or response, and consequences or reinforcement. Examples of this theory include the development of an **individual education plan** (IEP) and the use of **functional behavior assessments** and **behavior intervention plans** (FBA, BIP). These processes demonstrate measurable learning behaviors that can be observed, measured, and documented.

Skinner believed that learning is a function of the changes in behaviors and the responses to those events; therefore, the key components of the behavioral theory promote the effectiveness of explicit teaching and direct instruction. This specific type of instruction focuses on the tasks to be learned, the skills to be developed, and the use of the environmental setting. Educators can assess a student's learning by examining the presented task and how well the student performs to the response, known as **operant conditioning**.

### Sociological

Bandura based the social (sociological) learning theory on student observation in order to gain knowledge. Because individuals may learn from watching others, educators should provide modeling and demonstrations that allow students to learn through observation.

### Ecological

This theory is based on the study of how humans may develop within their specific environments. From the influences of home, school, and the community along with the interaction among these factors, the learning and development of an individual are impacted. This theory focuses on how social experiences and culture affect an individual's development and future success. The **family systems theory** is a classic example of the ecological influences and how academic success is related to these experiences.

### Therapeutic

A collaborative approach, the therapeutic theory utilizes the expertise of specific related service providers such as the speech-language pathologist, the occupational therapist, the physical therapist, and medical personnel, as appropriate. It focuses on the specific needs of the exceptional student across all educational settings, and therapy may be conducted and interventions implemented through a rich array of reach-in and pull-out models.

### Medical

Students with exceptional conditions often have medically related issues. Conditions are due to genetic causes, diseases, illnesses, accidents, and other etiologies. Through the medical field, educators may gain information about a student's diagnosis, treatment, and prognosis, while sharing opinions about the delivery of services. Clinical therapy and support from medical practitioners such as physicians, public health professionals, and mental health professionals aid the educational team in making appropriate decisions. Medical theory does not apply specifically to school programs, but the factors of medical issues should be considered in developing an individual's educational program.

### Placement and Program Issues

According to the law, students with disabilities should be placed in the environments with non-disabled peers to the maximum extent possible as long as their needs are met. The inclusive programs allow students to access an education in a more natural environment and prepare to participate as adults in community settings. The setting selection is made by the IEP team based on a comprehensive assessment and should be the primary placement for all services provided.

Program issues include debates regarding inclusion, addressing cultural and linguistic diversity, involving parents as partners, utilizing assistive technology, encouraging integrated therapies, participating in high-stakes testing and aligning with No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requirements.

## Early Intervention

From the research on brain development and human growth, as well as the professional knowledge of early learning and interventions, the field of early childhood education has received credibility regarding its importance to children with exceptional needs. Young children are entitled to individualized programs of instruction that focus on their exceptional needs according to IDEIA, Part B, and Part C provisions. States are encouraged to establish statewide interagency programs for early interventions services for children under the age of 3 but are mandated to implement services for children in early childhood settings ages 3 through 5 years. Categories for identification and placement of these children differ among the states, but the federal label used is **developmental delay**.

Additional information may be found in the Wiley Publishing, Inc. study guide, *CliffsTestPrep Praxis II: Special Education (0351, 0352, 0690, 0371, 0381, 0321)*, specifically the “Preschool/Early Childhood” section.

## IEP Team

An individual education plan is a requirement of IDEIA and is used to manage a student’s school program. Participants of the IEP team may include the parents, the student, a regular education teacher, a special education teacher, a school representative, the evaluator, therapists, community agency personnel, and others with knowledge or expertise that pertains to the student’s needs. As the team members work together, they enhance the educational programs to exceptional students, since they all contribute expertise to implement and support an appropriate program. This approach is called **collaborative teaming**, and it usually focuses on the successful programs of inclusion models.

If collaborative teaming is to be effective, the members should determine their shared goals, apply voluntary participation procedures, use proper on-going communications, practice team decision-making, share the responsibilities, schedule planning time together, and pool resources. Team members may work collaboratively in several different ways: **coordination**, **consultation**, and **co-teaching**.

**Coordination** is a simple form of collaboration that includes communication and cooperation so student services are ensured delivery. Professionals may not directly share their expertise, information, or ideas with one another, but they do provide updates on the progress of the student.

**Consultation** is the process in which professionals work with one another by directly communicating and sharing expertise to improve services to students. Teachers and other professionals share strategies and methods to help the student access the educational program.

**Co-teaching** is an effective tool for inclusion settings. When two or more teachers work together to plan activities, deliver instruction, and assess students, additional supports are provided to all students in the classroom, thereby improving achievement.

Three team models exist in schools and are critical to the effectiveness and implementation of the special education process.

**Multidisciplinary Team:** Described as professionals with defined roles, working independently of one another. This is not an encouraged practice as it promotes fragmentation of student programs. These team members often conduct separate assessments, deliver services independent of others, and work with the families apart from other professionals. This team may exhibit a lack of communication or understanding of the student’s needs.

**Interdisciplinary Team:** Members conduct independent assessments, but unlike the multidisciplinary team, this team works to promote communication and collaboration. This team uses more formal communication efforts by meeting together to share information and develop a plan of interventions and strategies to enhance student educational success. Team members implement their portion of the program, while remaining in contact with other members.

**Transdisciplinary Team:** Highly recommended, this team model demonstrates coordination and involvement; however, due to schedules and the numbers of professionals involved, it may be difficult to achieve this team status. This team delivers services in an integrated approach across disciplines, to include assessment, sharing information, program development, and implementing interventions, while including the family at all stages. Members work together sharing roles and responsibilities unlike other teams, who work in isolation.

## Continuum of Services

Under IDEIA, the provision that relates to a range of placement and service options for students with special needs is called the **continuum of services**, and it must be available in each district. It includes discussion of where students will receive special education services, what the necessary related services are, and how they will access their education.

This continuum of services options is discussed by the IEP team who decides what will best meet the social and educational needs of the student. The general education setting is the first recommended placement (and **least restrictive environment** for all students) to be considered. Many students with disabilities are successful when appropriate services, accommodations and supports are implemented in the general education environment. Usually, the more restrictive options are available to the more severely disabled, but the process must be reflected in the final decision.

## Least Restrictive Environment

The **least restrictive environment (LRE)** is a provision of the federal special education law that pertains to the educational placement of students with disabilities. It is described as the setting for service delivery that most closely resembles a regular school program while meeting the student's exceptional needs. After the student's educational needs are determined and the goals and related services are outlined, the IEP team considers the most appropriate environment according to the options which include:

- General education classroom (inclusive model)
- General education classroom (consultative model)
- Co-teaching setting (collaborative model)
- Resource room (pull-in model, integrated model)
- Self-contained program (separate, segregated model)
- Separate school (private setting)
- Residential facility
- Homebound placement
- Hospital setting

Each student with a disability has the right to be educated with non-disabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate. Special classes, segregated programs, and separate schools are to be the chosen placement only when the severity of the condition prohibits the education of a student with a disability in a more typical setting. A **natural environment** is recommended under the law for a student with a disability, as it is the setting that would typically be selected if the child did not have the disability.

## Related Services

According to IDEIA, students with disabilities must be provided additional services in order to access and benefit from special education. These services are called **related services** and are a component of the IEP. Decisions to include specific related services are based on the comprehensive assessment of a student. How the services are provided and where they are conducted is at the discretion of the professionals who implement the services. Related services may include transportation, speech therapy, physical therapy, occupational therapy, counseling, behavior coach, or a paraprofessional.

## Accommodations

Accommodations, modifications, and adaptations are terms that have been used in the special education field interchangeably when referring to the supports to a student in the instructional program, the educational environment, and the general curriculum. Some professionals use these three terms as one in the same, and others believe they are quite different. The following definitions reflect the opinion and experience of the author and other respected resources.

**Accommodations:** Instructional supports or services necessary to access instruction or the learning environment and to demonstrate individual knowledge. These supports and services may not change the curriculum or the subjects covered, but may reduce the barriers caused by a deficit or disability, providing an “equal opportunity” to students with exceptional needs.

Examples of accommodations most often used in general education settings may include an amplification system, a Braille writer, preferential seating, additional time for completing tasks, using books on tape, access to a note taker, or delivering an oral rather than written report.

**Modifications:** Include actual changes made to the curriculum, to the environment, or to the expectations of an instructional task in order to meet the student’s specific needs. These changes are often imposed when the task is above the student’s ability level, so they reduce the expectations or content to support the severity or type of disability.

Examples of modifications that are used in school settings include selecting a limited number of math problems, completing half of the spelling words, exempting some learners from certain tasks, and providing a different task with the same concept.

**Adaptations:** Most widely used in reference to facilities and equipment and may be reflected under the requirements of Section 504. Adaptation supports may make changes in *how* the student accesses the environment or in instructional delivery but may be confused with accommodations and modifications.

Examples of common adaptations in schools include wheelchair accessibility, use of head gear on computers, access to specialized furniture, or posting a daily picture chart.

Accommodations, modifications, and adaptations should be consistently applied and used to support an individual’s program. Accommodations utilized during the regular school day are also allowed in testing situations; however, modifications may not be allowed on tests, as they alter the validity and reliability.

Accommodations and modifications are most useful when implemented in inclusion models to help address individual student needs. Training and monitoring the general education staff in the selection of and the use of accommodations and modifications is recommended. Accommodations and modifications may be used across a broad range of general topic areas: accessing the general education curriculum, conducting instruction and activities, implementing strategies, providing therapy, and participating in extracurricular activities.

## Due Process

Due process is allowable under IDEIA and emphasizes certain rights for children with disabilities and their parents (**procedural safeguards**). It ensures that schools follow the procedures set forth in the law for assessment, identification, placement, instructional services, and related or supplementary services. If parents believe that a **free and appropriate public education** is not being provided to their child with a disability, they may file for a **due process hearing**. Many states encourage parents to resolve their issues in a preliminary process called the **complaint process or mediation** in which solutions are discussed with the school team or an appointed mediator prior to requesting a legal due process hearing. The right to reasonable legal fees may be awarded to the prevailing party depending on the outcome of the decision.

## Integrating Best Practices/Research/Literature

The most critical tool in the success of students with exceptional needs is the quality of instruction provided, which depends solely on the educators who deliver it. Students with disabilities require intensive, specialized, and systematic instruction and interventions that are the result of scientific research, a base of best practices, and professional knowledge. For educators to address issues related to prevention, factors related to remediation, and support disability compensation, they must be knowledgeable about an enormous amount of information and know when and how to apply it.

Issues and trends are on-going concerns, but fads and cures come and go. The key to knowledge is deciphering the best practices and scientifically based knowledge that best suits the population being served. Professional literature, published journals, and related organizations allow educators to seek new information in the fast paced field of exceptional students.

Empirical research studies are based on realistic school situations and actual students with disabilities. These scientific studies provide information about students that are similar to current school situations and, therefore, may indicate the outcomes that may be expected. Studies on exceptional students include information on brain development, gifted/talented, poverty and achievement levels, cultural diversity, advocacy, and behaviors. Scientific research is valuable to a classroom teacher as it provides content regarding instructional strategies, interventions, motivation, behaviors, enhancing skill development, early intervention, transitions, and vocational training.

## Curriculum and Instruction

Curriculum design for exceptional students is an important factor in their education. Curriculum and instructional program choices can be difficult as they must consider the special characteristics of each student. The need for special materials, distinctive methods, and individualized adaptations, modifications and accommodations of the general curriculum are all necessary to address their very unique needs and all levels of abilities.

Exceptional students need systematic direct instruction, proven procedures, and effective strategies that allow them to organize, comprehend, and remember educational information and acquire skills. The general education curriculum may be appropriate for some exceptional students with accommodations, while others will need a more intense and specialized instructional program and supplementary materials to gain appropriate skills and academic knowledge.

Different curriculum types are available for students with disabilities.

- **Behavioral-based curriculum:** Demonstrates student interactions in the environment in order to instruct students in functional and age appropriate skills
- **Cognitive-developmental curriculum:** Provides age appropriate activities that are discovery-based and interactive, such as DAP
- **Life skills curriculum:** Uses functional skills training to support transition into the community
- **Social skills curriculum:** Improves social skills areas such as engaging in personal interactions, following directions, handling situations, increasing self-competence, and utilizing appropriate behaviors
- **Functional curriculum:** Helps develop knowledge and skills to support independence in school, community, employment, personal, social, and daily living situations

## IEP/IFSP/ITP Process

Mandated under IDEIA is the development and implementation of plans designed to manage educational programs for students with disabilities: an **individual education plan**, an **individual family service plan**, and an **individual transition plan**. These plans are created according to a systematic team-decision process based on the results of a comprehensive, non-discriminatory, and individualized assessment conducted on the student. Each written plan should reflect the characteristics of the disability, establish realistic, measurable goals, and ensure an appropriate program according to the strengths and needs of the student.

These three plans, each developed and implemented by specific personnel, are constructed for particular age groups at specific times in the special education process. An IEP supports services for school-aged children 3 through 21 and an IFSP is prepared for families and children ages birth through 3, enrolled in state intervention programs. An ITP is an additional component of an IEP for students ages 16 through 21.

## Individual Education Plan-IEP

The primary purpose of an IEP is to guide the instruction of a student with a disability in the least restrictive environment and measure program accountability. It requires team work and planning to determine the correct type of program for each student. Seven components must be included in an IEP:

1. Statement of present levels of educational performance pertaining to disability
2. Statement of measurable annual goals and may include objectives
3. Description of the method to measure progress
4. Statement of related services, supplementary aids, and services
5. Explanation of the extent of involvement in general education programs
6. Statement of accommodations and participation in state and district testing
7. Description of the date, frequency, location, and duration of services

Specifically discussed under these seven components are the requirements of the least restrictive environment, assistive technology, related services, the scope and sequence of the curriculum, the methods and strategies for instruction, participation in high-stakes testing, and regularly scheduled progress reports.

## Individual Family Service Plan-IFSP

The primary purpose of an IFSP is support for the entire family of an infant who exhibits a developmental delay. Resources and needs are assessed to design a plan with specific outcomes for the child and the family. The plan outlines family goals, identifies the service providers, and establishes the specific services. Family members are considered team members who provide input about their child's development and share goals to support the program. A service coordinator assists the family during the implementation of the services, and each six months, the family has the option to accept or decline continued services.

Components of an IFSP are similar yet differ from an IEP. The present levels of educational performance provide an overall statement of functioning across all developmental abilities, creating general goals primary to the family's needs and the child's needs, with progress reviewed every six months.

Transition services are required under an IFSP as a child moves from early intervention to a public preschool program. A re-evaluation of the family needs and the child's progress helps to identify the current educational needs that must be addressed in the pending IEP. The law does allow an IFSP be used for preschool-aged children or an IEP for children aged 2 transitioning within a year to a preschool program.

## Individual Transition Plan-ITP

To become a successful contributing adult, a student with a disability needs assistance and training prior to graduation. **An individual transition plan** is required, in addition to an **individual education plan**, for all students, ages 16 and over. The student's needs, interests, and preferences must be addressed through non-bias assessment instruments and procedures. The student, the parents, the teachers, and appropriate community partners are involved in the process, and throughout program development, resource identification, and service implementation. The areas addressed include employment, continued education, daily living, health, leisure, communication, and self-determination/advocacy.

## Instructional Implementation

Instruction for exceptional students must be more individualized than that for a typical child. Because exceptional learners are so diverse, the instruction delivered must include specific activities, curricular materials, resources, equipment, specific classroom personnel, tutoring, and the use of technology. Integrating all of these features into a general education classroom requires the support of the special education teachers.

Instructional variables related to learning and student achievement make a difference in the success of the program and the outcomes for the student. When preparing to implement instruction, teachers should do the following:

- Focus on learning time
- Ensure high rates of success for students
- Provide easy access to materials and supplies
- Impart a quality educational environment

- Plan and maintain motivation
- Participate in teacher training programs

Enrichment and remediation are important for special needs learners. **Enrichment** extends the lesson for those capable of more, which may help students with learning disabilities, autism, deafness, blindness, orthopedic impairments, and emotional disabilities. **Remediation** is important for its use of various strategies to teach and reinforce skills to those needing more practice. Although this technique may apply to all students, it is particularly helpful to those with mental retardation, deafness, speech-language problems, other health impaired, and traumatic brain injury.

## Gifted/Talented

Recommended for students who are gifted or talented is a **differentiated** curriculum that is responsive to the needs of these students, based on their individual strengths, and allows them opportunities to use their exceptional abilities, talents, and skills. It should reflect an interdisciplinary focus so the many aspects of academic subjects, and student interests are covered. Some G/T students may need **acceleration** of this curriculum which is a modification of the pace allowed for the student to proceed. Some strategies for acceleration include: self-paced instruction, compacting or telescoping the curriculum, mentoring programs, tiered lessons, summer programs, special focus courses, ability grouping, advanced placement courses, extracurricular programs and skipping grade levels.

## Teaching Strategies and Methods

Individualization is the key to the selection of instructional strategies and teaching methods for exceptional learners. Since students with disabilities are ensured an appropriate education through the IEP format, the chosen strategies and methods should flow from that content and the team decisions regarding the student's needs. For other exceptional learners, an assessment drives instruction, as the results should deliver a realistic view of the student's present levels of educational performance.

The strategies and methods chosen for each student must support the learner in the areas of strengths and needs, encourage independence, and focus on the generalization of skills and knowledge. Most strategies used with exceptional learners are an outcome of empirical research. However, strategies work with certain groups of students, and some are more beneficial to particular subject areas.

Due to the diversity of exceptional students, teachers must know how to use a multitude of different instructional programs and materials. Many marketed curricula options available are specifically designed for special learners. But, these published materials cannot address all the unique needs of students. When educators select methods, strategies, or curriculum, they must know which will meet the educational goals appropriate for a classroom of diverse students.

There are two distinct methods of providing instruction and these are used for various student groups depending on the functioning level and the subject area:

**Explicit instruction:** The teacher provides the information and content to support the learning process.

**Implicit instruction:** The focus is on the student as an active and involved learner who constructs knowledge by using previously learned information.

Following are some of the terms related to instructional strategies and teaching methods:

**ability grouping:** Placement of students in educational activities according to performance and academic achievement levels.

**accommodation:** An adjustment that enables a student to participate in educational activities.

**active student response:** A measure of the engagement of the learner in tasks and activities.

**adaptation:** A change made to the environment or curriculum.

**authentic learning:** Instruction using real-world projects and activities to allow students to discover and explore in a more relevant manner.

**chained response:** The breaking down of a task into component parts so a student finishes the task by starting with the first step in the sequence and performing each component progressively until the task is completed.

- chaining:** A technique in which student performance is reinforced so the student will continue to perform more complex tasks in the sequence.
- choral responding:** Oral response of students (in unison) to a question or problem presented by the teacher.
- chunking:** A strategy that allows a student to remember and organize large amounts of information.
- Cloze procedure:** The use of semantic and syntactic clues to aid in completing sentences.
- concept generalization:** The ability for students to demonstrate concept knowledge by applying the information to other settings without prompts from teacher.
- content enhancements:** Techniques used to aid in the organization and delivery of curriculum such as guided notes, graphic organizers, mnemonics, and visual displays.
- contingent teaching:** A strategy for helping a student and eventually fading out the support as he gains mastery.
- cooperative learning:** Classroom is divided into groups to work together to complete a task or participate in an activity.
- cues and prompts:** Provides assistance to ensure adequate support of instruction.
- diagnostic-prescriptive method:** Individualizing instruction to develop strengths and remediate weaknesses.
- differentiated instruction:** To address the varying abilities, strengths, and needs of learners and their styles of learning by imposing a choice of learning activity, tasks that suit the learning style, student groupings, authentic lessons, and problem-based activities.
- direct instruction:** A systematic approach of teaching with specific goals, active learner engagement, and positive reinforcement for student performance (synonymous with explicit instruction).
- direct measurement:** Checking on student achievement during a period for a specific opportunity to perform and recording the response.
- facilitated groups:** Students engage in active learning with lessons designed and overseen by the teacher but managed by the students.
- fluency building:** A measure that encourages practice of skills to improve the accuracy and rate of use.
- generalization:** The ability to use skills learned across various settings.
- graphic organizer:** A visual-spatial organization of information to help students understand presented concepts.
- guided practice:** Providing opportunities to gain knowledge by offering cues, prompts, or added sequential information.
- learning centers:** Specific areas or activities that enhance the curricular content and allow independent or small group instruction.
- learning strategy:** An approach that teaches students how to learn and remember particular content.
- mediated scaffolding:** A procedure that provides cues and prompts, while gradually removing them so students can perform and respond independently.
- mnemonics:** A strategy that enhances memory through key words, acronyms, or acrostics.
- modeling:** A method that helps make connections between the material to be learned and the process to learn it by acting out sequences while students observe and then imitate the task.
- modification:** Changing the content, material, or delivery of instruction.
- multiple intelligence strategies:** The nine areas of learning that are addressed in classroom instruction: linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, naturalistic, and existential.
- naturalistic teaching:** Procedures that involve activities interesting to students with naturally occurring consequences.
- peer tutoring:** Under the guidance of a teacher, a non-disabled student with competencies in a particular area works with a student with a disability who needs assistance to enhance an area of study.
- precision teaching:** An approach that identifies the skills to be taught and uses direct daily measure of the student's performance to acquire the skills.
- prompting:** A technique in which a visual, auditory, or tactile cue is presented to facilitate the completion of a task or to perform a behavior.

**remediation:** A program technique to teach students to overcome an exceptionality through training and education.

**repetition:** Continual work on a specific skill or content concept to help build rote memory skills.

**response cards:** A method that allows all students to answer simultaneously by using signs, cards, or items held up to demonstrate responses.

**scaffolding:** Applying stages to learning content and tasks by first observing the student to see what she can do and then helping her understand the how and why until she can perform herself (direct instruction, tutoring, modeling, independence).

**skill drill:** Repetition and practice of new skills until the learner performs without cues and prompts.

**strategic instruction:** A planned, sequential instruction to show similarities and differences between acquired and new knowledge.

**systematic feedback:** Providing positive reinforcement and confirmation to improve learning.

**task analysis:** A strategy in which the goals are broken into smaller steps and sequenced while keeping the learner's pace in focus.

**time trial:** A procedure that improves fluency of new skills through time limits.

**transfer of stimulus control:** Providing instructional prompts to aid in correct responses.

**universal design:** The concept that everything in the environment, in learning and in products, should be accessible to everyone.

## Study Skills

The use of appropriate study skills promotes student achievement, so providing exceptional students with extensive instruction in acquiring these skills has value. Students should be assessed in study skill areas so the most appropriate strategies for study skills instruction are implemented. Topics for study skills instruction include reading, listening, note taking, outlining, report writing, oral presentation, graphic aids, test taking, library use, time management, and behavior self-management. For students in secondary settings, a higher level of study skills are necessary and may consist of maintaining a schedule, learning to ask questions, skimming for information, outlining a chapter, using mnemonics, and paraphrasing.

## Social Skills

Social skills development is critical for most exceptional students. An assessment in this area should identify those who lack the ability to perform in a social situation, are unable to maintain behaviors in various settings, have difficulty developing relationships, or those who find it hard to participate in activities with others. In general, students in the following exceptionality areas need focused instruction on social skills: autism, emotional disabilities, gifted-talented, hearing and vision impairments, learning disabilities, and mental retardation.

## Self-Management

**Self-management** is a term that spans all exceptionality groups. It is the ability of the individual to maintain control of one's self and to generalize skills learned across various settings. For a child with mental retardation it may mean that he is capable of using functional life skills in a group home. For a student with emotional disabilities, it may mean that she is able to control her behaviors during a basketball game.

## Instructional Components

Instructional formats vary according to the individuals, the environment, and the instructional content. Formats may include facilitated groups, cooperative learning situations, peer tutoring, one-to-one instruction, small groups, large groups, segregated settings, and inclusive settings. Choosing the one that is best for each student requires careful thought and planning and knowledge of the student and the educational materials. Some of the other components that affect instructional periods and academic gain for exceptional students are described here: groupings, functional needs, ESL programs, literacy acquisition, self-care/daily living skills, and vocational skills.

## Small Groups

Teachers of exceptional students utilize various groupings at different times during the day, but an effective method of working with these students is in small group settings. Although there are advantages to one-to-one instruction, such as minimal distractions and an intensive instructional period, as well as to large group instruction, such as learning from others, and being cost-effective, the small group instruction period offers significant advantages to exceptional students.

Small group instruction helps students learn to generalize skills more quickly, allows for social interactions, permits more flexible involvement with the teacher, and helps students learn from other peers. Small groups may be established through the general education class programs, in resource rooms, in pull-out models, and in self-contained classes.

## Functional Needs

Training students with exceptional needs in the competencies necessary for everyday living in selected environments and then being able to generalize those skills is a critical component of the integrated curriculum for moderately to severely impaired students. Learning functional skills reduces the dependence on others and allows the individual a chance to participate in less restrictive environments. These skills include dressing, toileting, eating, using simple sight words, managing self in a familiar environment, making independent choices, and handling small purchases. In most instances, using realistic objects in authentic settings to teach functional skills is most effective.

Functional training terms follow:

- **functional academics:** Focuses on basic educational concepts that may be useful in daily life, such as basic reading using survival sight words, basic math involving money and time, and basic writing like name, address, and telephone number.
- **functional curriculum:** Emphasizes the skills necessary to perform adequately in the community and is most often used with students who have mental retardation, autism, and other moderate to severe conditions.
- **functional skills:** The independent living skills considered important for self-care, social circumstances, employment, vocational situations, and recreational activities.
- **functional language:** The skills used to make a basic need or desire known.
- **functional literacy:** The level of communication and language that a person needs to live independently in the community.

## ESL

Students who are described under the term *English as a Second Language* face barriers with language and culture in addition to their exceptional needs. Laws require that schools address issues of diversity and ensure that both the educators and the curriculum are responsive to the cultural heritage, ethnic backgrounds, and linguistic differences. For students with disabilities, rights related to diversity are reflected in the law and pertain to assessments and programming.

## Self-Care Skills and Daily Living Skills

Self-care skills or daily living skills are an area of weakness exhibited by adults with disabilities. Student educational programs should be designed to daily integrate these skill areas so students have the opportunity to practice and generalize these skills. Instruction in the areas of personal hygiene, housekeeping, social skills, daily tasks, and social communications will prepare students to function appropriately in their communities. Students who retain these skills become more independent across various settings. Use of direct instruction, modeling, and utilizing environmental cues are effective strategies in learning these skills.

## Vocational Skills

The selection of vocational skills training imposed depends on the type and characteristics of the individual's exceptionality. A thorough assessment of abilities and vocational needs should be conducted as a component of the transition plan described under federal law. Collaboration of school educators and outside agency personnel will enhance the student's program and help determine additional resources for vocational skills training.

Exceptional students should be trained to gain the proper skills for a productive life of independent living, access and maintenance of employment, enjoyment of leisure activities, utilization of routine living skills, and joining community events. To aid students with disabilities in learning these skills, they require structured learning experiences in integrated settings. **Community-based instruction** is one highly recommended method that includes hands-on, interactive opportunities in vocational and life skills training. **Supported employment** is another recommended method that is used with students who have more severe conditions.

## Assistive Technology

Federal regulations state that assistive technology is any item, piece of equipment, or product system, whether acquired commercially off the shelf, modified, or customized, which is used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of children with disabilities. Students must be assessed in the area of **assistive technology** in order for the proper program and device to be selected and training is necessary for the student, parents, and staff.

Assistive technology may consist of high- or low-tech devices used to remove barriers or help solve everyday problems for individuals with disabilities. The devices can aid individuals with writing, reading, communicating, listening, doing math, organizing, and remembering. These devices may be environmental controls, voice-activated, augmentative communication systems, or switch controlled. They may include simple tools such as a reaching device, or more complicated devices like audio instruction.

Following are some of the terms related to assistive technology:

**augmentative and alternative communication (AAC):** A set of strategies that aid a student to meet communication needs through symbols and other transmission devices

**augmentative technology:** Supports students with disabilities who have oral language problems

**facilitated communication:** A type of communication in which a person provides assistance to a student by pointing to symbols or letters

**instructional technology:** Provides drill and practice for students who have problems in the basic skill areas and with motivation issues

**oral reading software:** For use with students who exhibit reading problems

**voice recognition system:** Replaces the keyboard and the input device

**voice synthesizer:** Converts text from a computer into sound

**word processing software:** To support students with written expression deficits

## Assessment

Schools are required to utilize non-bias, multifaceted methods of assessing students for the purpose of determining a disability or exceptionality and what, if any, special services may be needed. Tests must be administered in the student's native language and free from any racial, culture, or language discrimination. Identification, placement, and program decisions may not be based solely on one test. Further information about the assessment process for special education is found in the provision under IDEIA called the **protection in evaluation procedures**.

The primary purpose of an assessment is to determine the specific needs of the student (discover the present levels of educational performance) and to identify the instructional strategies and methods that would provide the most benefit to the academic achievement of the student. The assessment results may lead the development of an educational plan and decisions that will support the student in accessing an education. Additional purposes are as follows:

- To determine the nature of the problem
- To decide the need for related services
- To target skills or identify content areas
- To ascertain which factors support learning
- To manage the data related to instruction

## Gifted/Talented

Each state develops identification procedures for students who exhibit gifted or talented tendencies. Both quantitative and qualitative approaches to assessment for gifted and talented students are essential for accurate identification. Using a quantitative approach may include any number of standardized or teacher-gathered measurements. These may include past student performances, family history, standard achievement or intelligence quotient tests, teacher reports, teacher, parent or student recommendations, and current classroom achievements. The qualitative measures include portfolios, interventions, and observations.

## Assessment Process

The steps in the assessment process are as follows:

**Pre-referral:** The initial step of the special education procedures, it also begins the assessment process. An informal step in the process, it helps the teacher to more specifically identify a student's problem areas. A student exhibiting problems in the general education classroom is provided interventions to determine any benefit from them. These concerns may be discussed with the school assistance team for more ideas and support. If the student makes adequate progress, the referral for special education is concluded. If the expected progress does not occur, the process moves to the second step.

**Screening:** Professionals provide a quick and simple test that covers basic skills and gathers additional information that may detect a student who is in need of a more comprehensive evaluation and possible support of special education services.

**Referral:** Professionals use information from a variety of sources, conduct an observation to study classroom performance and behaviors and then refer for further evaluations.

**Evaluation and identification:** This step necessitates a comprehensive evaluation by professionals to determine the student's disability and possible eligibility for special education services. Timelines are imposed and requirements for the types of measurement tools used must align with federal law. A **multifactor assessment**, conducted by a team, is an evaluation of a student using a variety of test instruments and procedures.

**Instructional program planning:** Assessment information is essential for program planning in order to create goals, determine placement, and make plans for instructional delivery. The team meets to share results of the evaluations and make critical decisions about the student and the services.

**Placement:** After the team designs the instructional program (IEP), decisions about the LRE and specifications about the services are made, and the program is implemented.

**Review and evaluation:** Monitoring the progress of a student according to the IEP is required in order to develop regular progress reports and adjust the IEP. A review of the student's achievements and progress is conducted using various approaches, such as formal, informal, or alternate measurements.

## Procedures and Materials

Appropriate assessment procedures are required under the law and must be implemented for each evaluation and for every student. A variety of assessment tools and strategies must be administered in the student's primary language and be free from racial or cultural bias, because they are used with diverse groups of students. The assessment tools used must be appropriate for each student so relevant functional, developmental and academic information may be collected to help determine the educational needs of the student.

Several types of measurement tools may be used throughout the assessment process, whether during a comprehensive evaluation or for an evaluation of student progress. Following are some of the assessment types that may be administered.

- **Achievement test:** A formal tool used to measure student knowledge or proficiency in a subject or topic area.
- **Active student response:** This is a frequency-based measure used to determine a student's participation rate during an instructional period.

- **Anecdotal record:** An informal measurement of teacher notes based on observation of student work and performance, often used in parent conferences.
- **Aptitude test:** A formal measure of standardized or norm-referenced tests that evaluate a student's ability to acquire skills or gain knowledge.
- **Authentic assessment:** An informal method of determining a student's comprehension and performance of a skill, particularly used in classroom assessments of specific criteria.
- **Behavior assessment:** A variety of behavior evaluation tools are available to track student behaviors and to document progress on a behavior intervention plan or on the use of self-management techniques.
- **Criterion-referenced test:** A formal measure that evaluates a student on specified information, most often used to check a student's knowledge on subject areas by answering specific questions and does not compare one student to another.
- **Curriculum-based measure:** Evaluates student progress and performance of skills based on the curriculum and lessons presented, helping teachers determine how to assist the student and share with parents.
- **Ecological-based assessment:** Involves the use of an informal observation of the student interacting with the environment during a regular schedule.
- **Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA):** The process of gathering information about problem behaviors of an individual student and used to evaluate the need for behavior intervention and a behavior plan.
- **Intelligence test (IQ test):** A norm-referenced test used to assess a student's learning abilities or intellectual capacity as it measures cognitive behaviors.
- **Norm-referenced test:** Formal tool referred to as a standardized test is used when comparing a student to other peers in the same age group, primarily helpful in developing curriculum and identifying interventions needed.
- **Observation:** Teachers or professionals watch a student in several settings and take notes regarding performance and behaviors, particularly helpful in developing behavior plans and for use in comprehensive assessments.
- **Performance assessment:** An informal measure used by teachers to assess a student's ability to complete a task specific to a topic or subject area, such as a mathematic equation or an oral report.
- **Portfolio assessment:** An informal method of gathering information based on completed products (art work or compositions) over a period of time. Particularly helpful for evaluating progress and sharing information with parents.
- **Standards-based assessment:** Formal evaluation and either a criterion-referenced or norm-referenced test, it measures progress toward meeting goals or standards as previously established by district or state.
- **Summative evaluation:** Informal procedure is used to assess student achievement and teacher instruction.

## Instructional Decisions

A comprehensive evaluation assesses all aspects of a student's growth and development. The results are used to help a team make quality decisions about the student's overall educational program. Scores and wide-ranging results should be translated into educational terms and a statement of present levels of educational performance. The team can construct a set of measurable goals that reflect the student's educational strengths and needs. Following these steps is the identification of the materials, methods, and strategies best suited for the student.

Certain assessments guide instructional decisions and are helpful in gathering additional information for periodic progress reports and for consideration at the IEP annual review. Some of these assessment options include systematic observations, criterion-referenced tests, curriculum-based assessments, functional behavior assessments, anecdotal records, rating scales, interviews, and alternative assessments.

## Preparation of Reports

Report writing is a professional skill, and examiners must conform to the criteria required in preparing an assessment report. A written report must indicate the exceptionality, identify the pertinent characteristics, and explain how the exceptionality affects learning, as well as suggest methods and interventions for instruction. A review of the student's past performance, a summary of the health and developmental history, student behaviors and family influences, as well as the types of assessments conducted, and the related scores should be described in the final report.

The oral presentation of the assessment findings should be provided at a team meeting. The examiner, or a person qualified, will review the scores and collected data in order to interpret the results for other team members. Each separate participating examiner should present assessment information that will aid the team in making appropriate educational decisions about the student. After the results have been shared, the team may proceed with the development of the student's program (IEP).

## Structuring and Managing the Environment

Effective instruction is the foundation for successful classroom management. A positive environment is bound to increase appropriate behaviors, encourage student-teacher interactions, and reinforce individual education programs. Management of the environment builds upon academic success.

Organizing a classroom requires established expectations and set criteria for several areas: the class tone, classroom rules, engaging the learners, organizing the instruction, and using accommodations. Including students in creating specific guidelines may help them accept the limitations and perform appropriately in the environment.

## Classroom Organization and Management

Organizing and managing a classroom for diverse and exceptional learners is a tremendous task. Classroom management is especially essential in inclusion models, as there are many types of learners. In order to maintain classroom management, student behaviors must be under control, whether imposed by the teacher or self-regulated by the student. Educators must understand how behaviors impact learning and the influences that the classroom environment has on positive behavior management.

Procedures are a key component for classroom management. Students need to know the expectations so learning becomes their primary focus. A reduction in disruptive and inappropriate behaviors should result if these procedures are established: classroom rules, homework processes, transitions, discipline techniques, work guidelines, dismissal procedures, and so on.

Helpful in classrooms for exceptional students are effective learning strategies implemented so all learners may participate at their rate and level. Using a multimodal approach involves the use of teaching methods and strategies that are visual, auditory, tactile, and kinesthetic, as they address all styles of learning.

Some strategies for classroom management may include: removal of visual and auditory distractions, providing clear directions, modeling or demonstrating new tasks, providing access to materials, and delivering feedback and reinforcements.

## Behavior Management Strategies

Behavior management is a designed program that integrates the needs of the individual student with the environment. Setting standard guidelines for behavior in a classroom with a system of rewards and consequences helps outline the expectations for students. An assessment of the student's academic skills and behaviors, along with an examination of how they impact the student's learning will provide a foundation for individual expectations. For those having problems managing behaviors, other strategies may be necessary followed by establishing **incentives**.

Students in special education are provided behavior management tools according to their Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA) and Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP).

General strategies to help individualize behavior management techniques are as follows:

- Make the environment comfortable and safe.
- Involve students in creating rules.
- Avoid power struggles and confrontations.
- Implement and track behavior plans.
- Develop expectations for appropriate behaviors.
- Use immediate feedback and consistent reinforcements.

The following terms will be helpful in the study of behavior interventions and management with exceptional students.

**acting out behavior:** Inappropriate behavior (aggressive or disruptive) considered more damaging and serious than other behaviors.

**Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA):** Method of behavior scrutiny to determine how and why a student responds to certain events, situations, or the environment and allows for a training component of rewards and reinforcements to help the student learn the target behavior.

**alternative school placement:** Public school option that may be utilized when a student cannot function in the traditional public school system due to uncontrolled behaviors or due to a disruption that caused a suspension or expulsion.

**antecedent:** Stimulus used in behavior management and behavior modification that occurs prior to the behavior and establishes the reason for the behavior.

**behavior intervention:** Strategies or actions used to extinguish, change, or redirect an inappropriate behavior; three types are positive reinforcement, negative reinforcement, and aversive intervention.

**behavior rating scales:** An evaluation tool that lists specific observable behaviors to assess the severity, frequency, and type of exhibited behaviors completed by staff, parents, or student.

**consequences:** Stimulus that follows a behavior action used in behavior management or behavior modification to increase or decrease the behavior.

**contingency contract:** Written agreement between the student and the teacher that outlines the expected performance and the consequences or reinforcers used.

**discrete trial training:** Strategy in which the function or task is broken down into steps that are rewarded immediately in a trial-by-trial basis.

**manifestation determination:** Team review of the relationship between a student's inappropriate behavior and the disability, required under IDEIA when a student violates a code of conduct.

**modeling:** Use of imitation to set in place the desired behaviors.

**negative reinforcement:** Used in behavior modification in which the student is motivated to use a desired behavior in order to avoid a negative consequence.

**perseveration:** When a behavior continues repeatedly beyond the typical endpoint and the student demonstrates difficulty switching tasks.

**positive reinforcement:** Used in behavior modification in which the student is motivated to use a desired behavior because of the reward to be obtained.

**response generalization:** Application of a learned behavior or skill to another setting.

**target behavior:** The behavior selected for intervention, most often to be extinguished or changed, although it may be a positive behavior that should be used in other school situations.

## Professional Roles and Responsibilities

The roles and responsibilities of teachers cover a broad expanse. When educators and other professionals share their expertise and respect one another's roles, the delivery of services to exceptional students is enhanced.

The inclusion movement changed how services to exceptional students are implemented and improved the interactions of educators. They share their expertise, their skills, their perspectives, and their ideas to enrich services and programs. Both the special education teacher and the general education teacher have important team roles working in inclusive settings.

The primary **role of the special education teacher** is to manage the IEP team, implement the IEP, provide accommodations to general education, and support the student and other teachers.

The basic **role of the general education teacher** is to instruct students in the general education curriculum according to district standards and state requirements, while implementing accommodations, modifications, or adaptations for exceptional students.

Specific duties of a special education teacher include the following:

- Conduct assessments.
- Plan for specifically designed instruction.
- Implement instruction and accommodations.
- Monitor student progress.
- Collaborate, consult, and confer with team members.
- Schedule and run IEP meetings.
- Conduct transition assessments and create ITP.
- Train staff and students in advocacy.
- Communicate with parents.
- Facilitate programs and activities.
- Supervise paraprofessionals.
- Manage behavior assessments and plans.
- Participate in staff development and workshops.
- Join professional organizations and attend conferences.
- Read research, articles, and journals about current trends.

In a segregated setting, a resource room, or an inclusive model, the roles of a special education teacher remain similar. Whether working with students who have disabilities or students with other exceptional needs, educators need to maintain a schedule and remain organized, using school resources to meet deadlines and complete tasks.

## Paraprofessionals

As the numbers of identified exceptional students increase, the expansion of programs and services is possible with paraprofessionals. This position related to exceptional student programs has become an essential staff position that encompasses a wide range of duties and responsibilities. They may work with a wide variety of students, many types of exceptional conditions, and in various settings. Under the supervision of a certified teacher, a paraprofessional helps the teacher by providing more direct services and additional instructional opportunities on a regular basis. Establishing clear guidelines and outlining the roles and responsibilities of the paraprofessional are essential to ensure a successful working relationship and positive delivery of services to students. The traits most preferred in paraprofessionals include flexibility, dependability, motivation, tolerance, patience, cooperativeness, resourcefulness, and positiveness.

## Documentation Management

Special education and regular education follow requirements for the completion of specific paperwork and management of these documents. Access to student information is protected, under IDEIA and FERPA, so storing student documents and records must meet the requirements of these laws. Parents have certain rights regarding access to their child's files.

Organization is a critical step in maintaining proper files and documents so record retrieval is simplified. Keep valuable written information about students prepared for meetings, progress reports, and annual reviews. The IEP and BIP are often used documents for classroom teachers, as goals and interventions are reviewed regularly, so easy access is important.

Some student records, which teachers may access, are stored in school offices. Special education offices may keep medical records, assessment results, psychological information, behavioral information, therapy summaries, progress notes, communications, meeting notes, and parent information on file. Records and files about special education students may not be destroyed without permission from the special education office as there are laws that regulate the destruction of such confidential records in each state.

## **Confidentiality**

Confidentiality is a legal and professional practice that does not allow personnel to disclose information about an exceptional student without the express written consent of the parents or guardian. This information includes, but is not limited to, the diagnosis, the educational program, the behaviors, the medical information, the family history, the assessments, and classroom performance, unless the information is shared with another staff member who works directly with the student. However, should a student become a danger to himself or others, or if the student has committed a crime and the authorities are called, school personnel may provide certain information to protect the student.

## **Communication with Families**

Under federal law, professionals working with exceptional students are encouraged to include parents and families as partners in the education process and during the implementation of special programs. This partnership should be based on reciprocal respect and dignity.

Research shows that parent involvement can be a positive influence on their child's education, which helps the child perform at a more successful level. Involving parents is a meaningful component to an education program as they can help develop goals, provide constant support to the child, access additional resources, and add opportunities for more learning situations.

Examples of providing home-school communication include the following: parent-teacher conferences, regular telephone or e-mail contact, written messages or daily log, newsletters, and group meetings.