

# UNDERSTANDING DISABILITY CATEGORIES AND DIFFERENTIATION IDEAS FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS WITH DISABILITIES (ELWD)



VIRGINIA IS FOR LEARNERS

The intended audience for this document is teachers of English Learners (EL) who do not have a formal background with special education. The purpose of this document is to provide a foundation for professional conversations about appropriate supports according to a specific category of need that is influenced by a specific disability or combination of disabilities. **Decisions about appropriate instructional programs, services, and strategies should be individualized for each EL specific strengths and needs.**

## KEEP IN MIND...

- Not all students with an identified disability will have additional challenges learning a new language.
- Each disability functions as a continuum. It is critical to know the ELWD’s current performance levels and influences of the disability within a variety of contexts.
- The descriptions below will not provide the complete picture of your ELWD’s needs. Please work with families and any assigned special education experts and related service providers (e.g., occupational or physical therapist) for a more comprehensive portrait of your student and how the disability/ies influence/s the ELWD’s learning.

## CONSIDER THE DISABILITY AND IMPLICATIONS ON LEARNING

Disability	<u>Description of Disability Category according to Virginia Regulations</u> The following descriptions were built on the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) with attention to the Virginia Regulations Governing Special Education Programs for Children with Disabilities in Virginia	Additional Resource(s)
<b>Autism</b>	Developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction, generally evident before age 3 that adversely affects a child’s educational performance. Other characteristics often associated with autism are engagement in repetitive activities and stereotyped movements, resistance to environmental change or change in daily routines, and unusual responses to sensory experiences.  Autism does not apply if a child’s educational performance is adversely affected primarily because the child has an emotional disturbance	<a href="#">Models of Best Practice in the Education of Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders</a>
<b>Deaf/Blindness</b>	Simultaneous hearing and visual impairments, the combination of which causes such severe communication and other developmental and educational needs that they cannot be accommodated in special education programs solely for children with deafness or children with blindness	<a href="#">Teaching an EL Who is Deaf Blind</a>

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<b>Developmental Delay</b>	A disability affecting a child age 2 by September 30 through age 6 (i) Who is experiencing developmental delays, as measured by appropriate diagnostic instruments and procedures, in one or more of the following areas: physical development, cognitive development, communication development, social or emotional development, or adaptive development, or (ii) who has an established physical or mental condition that has a high probability of resulting in developmental delay; 2. The delay(s) is not primarily a result of cultural factors, environmental or economic disadvantage, or limited English proficiency; and 3. The presence of one or more documented characteristics of the delay has an adverse effect on educational performance and makes it necessary for the student to have specially designed instruction to access and make progress in the general educational activities for this age group.	<a href="#"><u>Meeting Learning Challenges: Working with Children Who Have Developmental Delays</u></a>
<b>Emotional Disability</b>	A condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child’s educational performance: (34 CFR 300.8(c)(4)) 1. An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors; 2. An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers; 3. Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances; 4. A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression; or 5. A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems. Emotional disability includes schizophrenia. The term does not apply to children who are socially maladjusted, unless it is determined that they have an emotional disability as defined in this section.	<a href="#"><u>Social and Emotional Learning and Traditionally Underserved Populations</u></a>
<b>Hearing Impairment, including deafness</b>	<p>An impairment in hearing in one or both ears, with or without amplification, whether permanent or fluctuating, that adversely affects a child’s educational performance but that is not included under the definition of deafness.</p> <p>Deafness means a hearing impairment that is so severe that the child is impaired in processing linguistic information through hearing, with or without amplification that adversely affects the child’s educational performance.</p>	<a href="#"><u>Teaching English to Hearing Impaired Learners</u></a>
<b>Intellectual Disability;</b> <b>Formerly known as “mental retardation”</b>	Significantly sub-average general intellectual functioning, existing concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior and manifested during the developmental period that adversely affects a child’s educational performance.	<a href="#"><u>American Association of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities FAQ On Intellectual Disability</u></a>  <a href="#"><u>Language Development for Children with Down Syndrome</u></a> (not all students with Down Syndrome have an intellectual disability)

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<b>Multiple Disabilities</b>	Simultaneous impairments (such as intellectual disability with blindness, intellectual disability with orthopedic impairment), the combination of which causes such severe educational needs that they cannot be accommodated in special education programs solely for one of the impairments. The term does not include deaf-blindness.	See specific disability categories.
<b>Orthopedic Impairment</b>	A severe orthopedic impairment that adversely affects a child’s educational performance. The term includes impairments caused by congenital anomaly, impairments caused by disease (e.g., poliomyelitis, bone tuberculosis, etc.), and impairments from other causes (e.g., cerebral palsy, amputations, and fractures or burns that cause contractures).	<a href="#">Teaching Students with Disabilities: Orthopedic Impairment</a>
<b>Other Health Impairment</b>	<p>Having limited strength, vitality or alertness, including a heightened alertness to environmental stimuli, that results in limited alertness with respect to the educational environment, that is due to chronic or acute health problems such as asthma, attention deficit disorder or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, diabetes, epilepsy, a heart condition, hemophilia, lead poisoning, leukemia, nephritis, rheumatic fever, sickle cell anemia and Tourette syndrome that adversely affects a child’s educational performance.</p> <p>There are quite a number of disabilities and disorders that fall under the umbrella of “other health impairment.” and those disabilities are very different from one another. Research the student’s specific health impairment, specifically looking for any impacts on learning and strategies to support the student.</p>	<p><a href="#">Other Health Impairments</a></p> <p><a href="#">Teaching Students with ADHD</a> (not all students with ADHD qualify under other health impairment)</p>
<b>Specific Learning Disability</b>	<p>A disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell or to do mathematical calculations, including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. Specific learning disability does not include learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities; of intellectual disabilities; of emotional disabilities; of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage. (§ 22.1-213 of the Code of Virginia; 34 CFR 300.8(c)(10))</p> <p>Dyslexia is distinguished from other learning disabilities due to its weakness occurring at the phonological level. Dyslexia is a specific learning disability that is neurobiological in origin. It is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction. Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede growth of vocabulary and background knowledge.</p>	<p><a href="#">Learning Disabilities in English Learners</a></p> <p><a href="#">Virginia's Guidelines for Educating Students with Specific Learning Disabilities</a></p> <p><a href="#">Specific Learning Disability Supplementary Guide Dyslexia: Frequently Asked Questions</a></p> <p><a href="#">Strategies for Teachers (Dyslexia)</a></p>

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<b>Speech or Language Impairment</b>	A communication disorder, such as stuttering, impaired articulation, expressive or receptive language impairment, or voice impairment that adversely affects a child's educational performance.	<a href="#"><u>Language Disorders: Recommendations for Teachers</u></a>
<b>Traumatic Brain Injury</b>	An acquired injury to the brain caused by an external physical force, resulting in total or partial functional disability or psychosocial impairment, or both, that adversely affects a child's educational performance. Traumatic brain injury applies to open or closed head injuries resulting in impairments in one or more areas, such as cognition; language; memory; attention; reasoning; abstract thinking; judgment; problem-solving; sensory, perceptual, and motor abilities; psychosocial behavior; physical functions; information processing; and speech. Traumatic brain injury does not apply to brain injuries that are congenital or degenerative, or to brain injuries induced by birth trauma.	<a href="#"><u>Teaching Strategies for Students with Brain Injuries</u></a>  <a href="#"><u>Brain Injury and the Schools: Educators Guide</u></a>
<b>Visual Impairment, including blindness</b>	An impairment in vision that, even with correction, adversely affects a child's educational performance. The term includes both partial sight and blindness.	<a href="#"><u>Paths to Literacy for Students Who are Blind or Visually Impaired</u></a>  <a href="#"><u>English Instructional Strategies for Students who are Blind/Visually Impaired</u></a>

Descriptions of the Disability Categories taken from [Regulations Governing Special Education Programs for Children with Disabilities in Virginia](#).

## DIFFERENTIATION AND SUPPORT IDEAS BY TYPE OF INSTRUCTIONAL CONCERN

There is not a *one-size-fits-all* approach within disability categories. Each ELWD is unique and the differentiation strategies and supports used should be based on the ELWD's individual strengths and needs. The chart below outlines common differentiation ideas and supports based on the type of instructional concern impacted by the students' disability. This list is not exhaustive and not meant to limit instruction and scaffolding practices that any specific student may need.

Type of Instructional Concern or Challenge	Differentiated Instruction and Support Ideas
<b>All</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Apply <i>Universal Design for Learning (UDL)</i>.</li> <li>• Incorporate hands-on learning experiences.</li> <li>• Consider in which contexts the student is most productive and responsive and recreate those to the extent possible.</li> <li>• Reinforce an asset-based mindset with the student, using affirmations as needed to build confidence as a learner.</li> <li>• Tailor supports and interventions to the student's patterns of strengths and needs for growth.</li> <li>• Provide meaningful tasks with actual uses and functions of language needed in the student's day-to-day life.</li> </ul>
<b>Attention, Memory, and Organization</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Maintain consistent daily routines, use familiar lesson structures and cues to regain attention.</i></li> <li>• Post schedules with pictures and use a timer (auditory or visual). Ensure that schedules meet the student's comprehension needs.</li> <li>• Provide as much structure to each day and lesson as possible. Alert student to changes to typical routine.</li> <li>• Keep the learning environment as free from distractions as possible. Ensure the student's attention before you provide instructions.</li> <li>• Signal to students before calling on them.</li> <li>• Provide organizers and checklists to support organization and predictability.</li> <li>• Make expectations and objectives clear with models and demonstrations, (e.g., organization strategies).</li> <li>• Break down tasks into small steps and model chunking and categorizing information.</li> <li>• Ask the student to repeat directions for tasks.</li> <li>• Teach the student to develop and use their own visual/text schedules.</li> <li>• Ask the student to summarize frequently.</li> <li>• Use common experiences and hands-on, interactive tasks.</li> </ul>

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<p><b>Academic</b></p> <p>Related to learning content</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use a multisensory approach to make use of multiple senses within each lesson: oral, visual, tactile (touch), and kinesthetic.</li> <li>• Accept a variety of ways a student may show comprehension, (e.g., drawings, diagrams, photos, video, voice recording, speech-to-text)</li> <li>• Provide all appropriate assistive technologies.</li> <li>• Make expectations and objectives clear with models and demonstrations.</li> <li>• Highlight the main points and essential information.</li> <li>• Break down tasks into small steps and model chunking and categorizing information.</li> <li>• Keep the learning environment as free from distractions as possible.</li> <li>• Provide more time for tasks involving texts and reduce the amount of work or the number of questions per task to focus on what is essential for meeting the standard.</li> <li>• Ask student to summarize frequently.</li> <li>• Use common experiences and hands-on, interactive tasks.</li> <li>• To support following directions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Simplify written directions and use step-by-step instructions.</li> <li>• Ask the student to repeat directions.</li> <li>• Underline or highlight the most important parts of the directions.</li> <li>• Provide immediate feedback.</li> <li>• Adjust the pace of instruction and directions as needed.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>Behavior</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider culturally responsive and appropriate behavior and redirection strategies.</li> <li>• Provide appropriate sensory supports (e.g., calming area, music or movement, stress ball, fidget tool, wiggle seat).</li> <li>• Note triggers or patterns of episodes and proactively plan to avoid those to the greatest extent.</li> <li>• Focus on modeling and practicing emotional regulation strategies during times when the student is calm.</li> <li>• Manage the learning environment proactively to prevent behavior problems and promote learning (e.g.; posting a clear and predictable daily schedule, using visual clues, making directions and expectations clear and easy-to-understand).</li> <li>• Ensure that the student has an effective means of communication that allows them to express a variety of emotions. Teach appropriate language and sentence frames for expressing those emotions.</li> <li>• Identify effective reinforcers for engaging in appropriate behaviors.</li> <li>• Include the student in behavior goal-setting and creating classroom expectations. Refer to classroom expectations to redirect without arguing.</li> </ul>

Type of Instructional Concern or Challenge	Differentiated Instruction and Support Ideas
<p><b>Communication</b></p> <p><i>This is not to be confused with language development.</i></p> <p>Appears anywhere in the school environment; refers to the ability to receive, send, process, and comprehend concepts or verbal, nonverbal and graphic symbol systems. Communication challenges may be evident in the processes of hearing, language, and/or speech.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allow for a longer silent period or delayed response.</li> <li>• Reduce any activities that reinforce verbal debate or competitiveness.</li> <li>• Face the student whenever possible, maximize light, and reduce shadows.</li> <li>• Place the student close to the teacher and away from any chatty or more easily-distracted students.</li> <li>• Incorporate nonverbal skills, gestures, and visuals to support verbal language, prompt responses, and as a means for providing responses.</li> <li>• Model simple language and tasks. Limit use of idiomatic expressions and sarcasm.</li> <li>• Encourage repetition and imitation.</li> <li>• Focus on message as opposed to grammatical accuracy.</li> <li>• Explicitly teach language skills appropriate to the student's level of understanding.</li> <li>• Use sheltered English techniques to aid English comprehension. Examples of sheltered English techniques are using visual aids, such as props, pictures, gestures, and facial expressions, to help convey meaning; encouraging the student to expand and elaborate responses to help develop oral expression abilities; and structuring oral input based on the level of understanding that the student has.</li> <li>• Be patient and encourage the students' peers to be patient when the student is speaking in class. Avoid correcting speech difficulties.</li> <li>• Teach classmates to use simple signs or movements to represent ideas.</li> <li>• Learn which learning conditions to avoid that may cause more stuttering (e.g., when asked to speak unexpectedly).</li> </ul>
<p><b>Functional</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integrate the practice into the student's daily routine, designing any activities around the student's interests or around the motor development needs.</li> <li>• Incorporate real life experiences when reviewing and practicing skills.</li> <li>• Evaluate the physical classroom: seating (e.g., desk with attached chairs vs. tables), floor traction, lighting, board visibility, width of aisles, work surface accessibility, location of classroom supplies, and location of the student in the classroom. Create a physical environment that allows the student to easily interact with their peers and access instruction and instructional materials.</li> </ul>

## EXPLORE ADDITIONAL REFERENCES AND RESOURCES FOR EXTENDED LEARNING

[About Universal Design for Learning](#) (CAST)

[Assistive Technology Consideration Guide](#) (VDOE)

[Dual Language Learners and English Learners with Disabilities](#) Report Brief (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2017)

[English Learners with Special Needs Meetings](#) (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition)

[Evidence-based Specially Designed Instruction in Mathematics Resource Guide](#) (VDOE, 2020)

[Individuals with Disabilities Education Act \(IDEA\); Sec 300.8 Child with a disability](#) (Amended 2017)

[Special Education and ELLs: Resource Section](#) (Colorín Colorado)

[Specific Disabilities](#) (VDOE webpage)

[Students with Disabilities in Mathematics: Frequently Asked Questions](#) (VDOE, 2020)

[Supporting World Language Learning for Students with Disabilities](#) (VDOE, 2017)

[Virginia Department of Education Resources for Serving Students with Sensory Disabilities](#) (2020)