

## **What Is the Federal Definition of Specific Learning Disability?**

Federal law requires that all of the following must exist for a child to be eligible for special education services due to a specific learning disability.

### **1. Discrepancy between Ability and Achievement**

A severe discrepancy between intellectual ability (acquired learning and learning potential) and academic achievement (skills and knowledge of subject matter that have been taught in school and measured by standardized achievement tests) has to exist in one or more of these of these academic areas:

- Oral expression
- Listening comprehension
- Written expression
- Basic reading skills
- Reading comprehension
- Mathematics calculation
- Mathematics reasoning

The discrepancy should be supported by other information, such as:

- Standardized tests, individual and/or group
- Criterion-referenced tests
- Rating scales
- Anecdotal records
- Observations
- Work samples
- Information provided by parents
- Information provided by the current classroom teacher
- Consideration of the student's age, particularly for young children

Federal Regulations developed by the Department of Education also ask that the team predict whether your child could achieve at a level appropriate for his age and ability if he were given learning experiences at his level. In other words, if there's a discrepancy because his intellectual ability is above average and his academic skills are average, the multidisciplinary team should consider whether the discrepancy is due to a learning disability or the fact that he hasn't had instruction at the higher level.

### **2. Psychological Processing Disorder**

The discrepancy must be due to a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or using language:

- Attention
- Visual processing
- Auditory processing
- Sensory-motor skills

- Cognitive abilities, including association, conceptualization, and expression

The discrepancy can't be caused primarily by any of the following:

- Environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage
- Limited school experience or poor school attendance
- Vision, hearing, or motor impairment
- Mental retardation
- Emotional disturbance
- Unfamiliarity with the English language; normal process of learning a second language
- Lack of instruction in reading and math

After reviewing assessments, the multidisciplinary team must decide if your child has a specific learning disability.

Source: [SchwabLearning.org](http://www.schwablearning.org)  
<http://www.schwablearning.org>