Matching Disability Categories, Learning Challenges and SDI Strategies

Understanding that disability categories have commonly associated learning challenges is a starting point for educators when designing SDI. This document provides an overview of each disability category as defined in the Definitions and Eligibility criteria section of the WVBE Policy 2419, Chapter 4, Section 3 (2023). The disability categories are viewed next to common associated learning challenges as well as the SDI strategies that may support successful access to the general education curriculum. Though this information is helpful, educators must not assume that all learners within a disability category will respond in the same way to an SDI strategy. All learners are different, unique, and require an individualized approach for SDI development. Knowing this information will help educators start the SDI planning process and match strategies more efficiently.

Disability Category and Definition	Common Learning Challenges	Possible SDI Strategy Matches
Autism A developmental disability affecting social interaction, communication, and behavior.	• Difficulty understanding and using language effectively • Sensory sensitivities or avoidance behaviors • Challenges with attention and executive functioning • Struggles with adapting to schedule/ routine changes • Social interaction differences	• Social skills training • Sensory accommodations (noise-canceling headphones, fidget tools) • Visual schedules and structured transitions • Direct instruction on social-emotional learning • Highly structured learning environment
Blindness and Low Vision A condition affecting visual processing and access to visual information, ranging from low vision to total blindness.	• Limited access to information through text/media (may require Braille, large print, audio) • Gaps in background knowledge development • Reduced access to visually presented learning activities • Social interaction challenges due to limited access to nonverbal cues	• Braille instruction • Screen readers and magnification tools • Orientation and mobility training • Explicit instruction in social skills • Descriptive verbal instruction

Disability Category and Definition	Common Learning Challenges	Possible SDI Strategy Matches
Deafblindness A condition involving significant impairments in both vision and hearing, affecting communication and access to information.	• Complex language and communication needs • Limited access to information and experiences • Challenges developing skills across multiple areas • Difficulty with social interactions due to communication barriers	• Tactile communication systems • Personalized assistive technology • Orientation and mobility supports • Direct instruction in social interaction skills
Deafness A hearing condition that significantly impacts the ability to perceive and use spoken language.	• Communication differences (ASL, Cued Speech) • Delays in reading and language development • Difficulty building background knowledge • Challenges with social interaction due to communication barriers	• ASL interpretation or instruction • Captioning and speech-to-text technology • Explicit phonics and literacy instruction • Social communication training
Developmental Delay A delay in the development of cognitive, social, and adaptive skills in early childhood.	• Delays in emergent academic skills (reading, numeracy) • Challenges with social interactions and relationships • Difficulty participating in classroom routines and activities • Struggles with independence and self-management	• Play-based learning interventions • Explicit early literacy and numeracy instruction • Structured behavioral support • Social-emotional learning

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Emotional Disturbance A condition that significantly impacts emotional regulation and behavior, affecting learning and relationships.	• Difficulty with peer relationships • Challenges in building connections with adults • Inconsistent participation in learning and activities • Attendance concerns	• Social-emotional learning (SEL) interventions • Check-in/check-out supports • Self-regulation strategies • Positive behavior supports
Hard of Hearing A partial loss of hearing that affects communication and language development.	• Difficulty communicating in noisy environments • Challenges with reading and language development • Background knowledge development delays • Struggles with social interaction due to communication differences	• Hearing assistive technology (FM system) • Visual supports • Amplified instruction • Explicit vocabulary and language instruction
Intellectual Disability A condition characterized by significant limitations in intellectual functioning and adaptive skills.	• Challenges acquiring and retaining new information and skills • Slower rate of learning • Difficulty applying skills to new contexts • Slower processing and response times • May have difficulties with independence and self-management	• Explicit, repetitive instruction • Life skills and functional academics • Simplified, structured tasks • Assistive technology • Task analysis and gradual independence-building

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Orthopedic Impairment A physical condition that affects mobility, motor skills, and access to the learning environment.	• Limited access to and engagement with learning materials/activities • Challenges with independence in the learning environment • Difficulty with written expression and typical modes of demonstrating learning	• Adaptive equipment • Voice-to-text and alternative writing tools • Modified physical environments • Occupational and physical therapy supports
Other Health Impairment A condition that affects strength, energy, or attention, such as ADHD or chronic illnesses.	• Difficulty maintaining attention and focus • Variability in energy levels • Attendance concerns • Executive functioning deficits	• Behavioral supports • Sensory and movement breaks • Task segmentation and scaffolding • Organizational coaching • Self-monitoring strategies
Specific Learning Disability (SLD) Challenges in one or more of the processes involved in understanding or using language, spoken or written. This may include difficulties with listening, thinking, speaking, reading, writing, spelling, or doing mathematical calculations. This category includes conditions such as dyslexia, dyscalculia, and dysgraphia.	• Difficulties with reading skills (decoding, fluency, comprehension) • Spelling and written expression challenges • Struggles with executive functioning (working memory, organization) • Listening comprehension difficulties (for some students) • Challenges with math calculations and problem-solving	• Read, Ask, Put/Paraphrase • Concrete – Representational - Abstract • Question, Answer, Relationship • PLEASE Paragraph Writing Strategy • Explicit and Systematic instruction • Self-Regulation Strategies • Contextualized Instruction • Error Analysis • Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies • Chunking • Repetition

Disability Category and Definition	Common Learning Challenges	Possible SDI Strategy Matches
Speech or Language Impairment A disorder affecting speech, language, or communication skills.	• Difficulty understanding academic content • Struggles with spoken and written expression • Social interaction difficulties • Behavior concerns due to frustration and an inability to communicate needs and wants	• Sentence starters and modeling • Social skills training (Social Stories and pragmatic language instruction) • Explicit vocabulary instruction
Traumatic Brain Injury A brain injury that impacts cognitive, behavioral, and physical functioning.	• Cognitive processing challenges (memory, processing speed) • Difficulty acquiring and applying knowledge and skills • Struggles with communication • Attention and executive functioning deficits • Difficulty with self-regulation	• Memory and cognitive strategy instruction • Speech-language therapy • Self-monitoring and metacognitive supports • Structured routines and organization aids