CHARACTERISTICS OF STUDENTS WITH: LEARNING DISABILITIES
(Perceptual/Communicative Disability)

1. Students with learning disabilities often tell us things like:
   • “It’s just harder for me to learn than for the other kids.”
   • “I feel frustrated when I can't do it.”
   • “Sometimes I don't feel very smart.”

2. Teachers often say things like this about students with learning disabilities:
   • “I know she’s bright, but she can’t perform tasks that other students can. She has so much trouble reading (or writing, or doing math).”
   • “He’s so disorganized, nothing ever gets done.”

3. Parents may tell us things like:
   • “She doesn’t have many friends.”
   • “He doesn’t like school.”
   • "She's just slower than her younger sister."
   • "He's just not motivated."

4. Research and experience tell us:
   • Students with learning disabilities:
     • are capable of learning and can be productive, participatory students and citizens.
     • form a heterogeneous group with a wide range of skills, talents and needs.
     • may experience difficulty learning throughout their lives.

     Learning disabilities are related to differences in central nervous system functioning which affect perception and language and cognitive processing. This leads to difficulty acquiring academic and social skills. As a result students may be less actively involved in learning and may be less efficient learners.

     • Students with learning disabilities may experience difficulty:

     • developing effective social skills
     • acquiring academic skills
     • applying what they've learned
     • making appropriate decisions
     • expressing themselves and understanding others
     • remembering information
     • utilizing effective, efficient learning strategies

   • Learning disabilities are not caused by mental retardation, emotional disturbance, sensory impairments, or other disabilities.
Students with learning disabilities need to learn:

1. The essential, component skills necessary to learn to read, write and do mathematics. The skills of reading, writing, speaking/listening and mathematics are essential learnings for students with learning disabilities and are inherent to the acquisition of all other learning. The development of these skills are ongoing and should be incorporated across content and grade levels.

   • Essential, component skills for reading that may prove difficult for students with learning disabilities include:
     • decoding skills
     • vocabulary skills
     • accessing essential background knowledge
     • comprehension skills
     • summarization
     • self-monitoring for accuracy and comprehension

   • Essential, component skills for writing that may prove difficult for students with learning disabilities include:
     • development of ideas
     • retrieval of background information — organization for and of writing
     • sentence formulation
     • mechanics and spelling accuracy
     • penmanship
     • self-monitoring of writing process

   • Essential, component skills for mathematics that may prove difficult for students with learning disabilities include:
     • understanding the language of math
     • understanding and applying math concepts
     • fluency and automaticity in using math facts and procedures

2. Effective techniques, strategies and tools to compensate for their learning difficulties.

   • Memory strategies
   • Study strategies
   • Listening strategies
   • Attending strategies
   • Computers and calculators
   • Manipulatives
   • Multi-sensory strategies for perceptual deficits
3. The self-management skills necessary to control their learning, their behavior and their lives.
   • Self-monitoring techniques
   • Time-management techniques
   • Effective organizational strategies
   • Long and short term goal setting techniques
   • Coping/stress management techniques
   • Conceptual maps and notebooks, clear assignment sheet for grades

4. The social skills necessary for successful interpersonal relationships.
   • Initiating and maintaining conversations
   • Cooperating with peers and adults
   • Interpreting verbal and nonverbal cues
   • Resolving conflicts through positive and socially acceptable methods
   • Identifying and using various roles appropriately in the family, community and school

5. The skills necessary to be an effective self-advocate.
   • An understanding of their own personal strengths, skills and needs
   • The ability to build on and develop strengths and talents
   • The reasons for personal success and failure, including understanding the positive results of persistence
   • Negotiation skills
   • The ability to seek assistance, including knowing when, where, and what to ask of whom

6. The problem solving techniques to respond flexibly in various situations.
   • Decision-making
   • Critical thinking
   • Awareness and knowledge of cause and effect
   • Determining appropriateness of risk taking

7. Practical life skills necessary to function effectively and with satisfaction at home and in the community.
   • Maintaining health and hygiene
   • Developing leisure activities
   • Managing personal finances
   • Choosing and maintaining appropriate living arrangements

8. Career development skills to make and pursue appropriate personal employment choices.
   • Behaviors necessary for successful employment and training
   • Awareness of career interests and aptitudes
   • Skills for considering and pursuing future education and training options
   • The specific skills necessary to obtain and maintain targeted employment when needed

9. Language skills necessary to adequately express themselves and understand others.
   • Vocabulary
   • Grammar
   • Pragmatics
CLASSROOM PRACTICES FOR STUDENTS WITH:
LEARNING DISABILITIES (LD)
(Perceptual/Communicative Disability)

To provide effective classroom practices to students with learning disabilities, educators need to:
1. Teach using effective instructional strategies.
   • Present the same information and directions through various modalities.
   • Utilize materials such as charts, maps, tapes, overheads, flannel boards, chalk boards, VCRs, video cameras, and hands-on materials to present information
   • Color code written material provided to students when appropriate. (For example, all information that needs to go home could be on yellow paper, all science material could be on blue paper, the student can edit or highlight with different colors, or written directions can be consistently highlighted in the same color.)
   • Give directions in both oral and written formats. Written directions may be on the chalkboard, on the overhead, on chart paper, or on handouts or outlines

   • Provide opportunities for active learning.
     • Provide a variety of experiential activities such as math manipulatives, music and physical movement, role playing, science experiments
     • Provide opportunities for students to have frequent, short exchange of ideas and information with each other
     • Present challenging, relevant problems to students to solve

   • Establish relevance so the student can relate learning to real life experiences.
     • Provide opportunities for community members to work with students to enhance the relevancy of the skills being taught
     • Provide opportunities for students to learn and apply skills outside the school setting

   • Provide outlines, study guides, and graphic organizers prior to and during instruction.
     • Have visual charts and diagrams to help students see relationships between and among concepts
     • Help students learn to develop their own visual organizers

   • Modify assignments and tests when appropriate.
     — Provide a) alternative assignments, b) shortened assignments, c) alternative resources (large print books, reading materials on tape, calculators, alphabet strips, Franklin spelling devices) and d) worksheets with clear and limited print
     • Give students more time and support to process information.
       • Allow extra time for students to answer oral questions or opportunities to "pass" and answer later
       • Provide quiet time and/or extra time to facilitate the processing of new information
       • Ask students to repeat or rephrase directions
       • Redefine terms or rephrase information to facilitate student understanding

   • Thoughtfully and deliberately select and use specific instructional methods for students needing alternative approaches to develop essential reading, writing and mathematics skills.
• select from a variety of approaches so that the instruction matches student's learning style and needs
• select from a variety of approaches including direct, explicit instruction and exploratory, discovery activities as determined by student need and task constraints
• select from a variety of approaches including multi-sensory phonetic, linguistic, and whole language to teach language skills

• Check frequently to ascertain student understanding.
  • have students paraphrase or put information in his or her own words
  • have students use hand signals to indicate whether they are with you or not (thumbs up, "yes", thumbs down, "no")
  • use frequent, short quizzes

2. **Establish supportive classroom environments.**
• Group and regroup students using a variety of arrangements.
  • group and regroup students by multi-age, ability and mixed ability levels, learning styles, and cooperative learning
  • provide small group or one-on-one instruction

• Arrange the classroom so there are quiet places and social places.
  • provide areas in the classroom for students to be away from others (a study carrel, sofa, bean bag, or desk which is separated from the other desks)
  • provide seating arrangements and activities to facilitate development of social skills

• Establish and communicate high, yet realistic and specific expectations for performance.
  — provide opportunities for learning from errors and for over learning through review, repetition, drill and practice, direct instruction
  — provide grading criteria prior to student beginning a project so student knows what is expected of him/her
  — consistently and positively reinforce students when they meet the expectations
  — consistently provide immediate and informative feedback on student performance when appropriate
  — allow opportunities for the student to monitor, evaluate and describe to others his/her own progress and record growth and changes on graphs, learning or behavior contracts, or incentive charts
  — provide ongoing home-school communication about student progress, resources for appropriate emotional and academic support, and appropriate way parents can help students
  — establish and follow classroom routines
  — teach with enthusiasm
• Provide frequent opportunities for student success and acknowledge the strengths and positive aspects of students' work and behavior.
  • provide opportunities for enriching, challenging work in strength areas
  • assist students in understanding and using their strengths and talents
  • assist students to understand and explain to others their learning strengths and needs

3. **Deliberately focus instruction on what students need to learn.**
• Identify and focus on the most important information/concepts of the curriculum.
  • develop a master list of essential information to be learned for each class, unit, or subject area and teach it
  • model and provide guided practice of material presented in class before expecting the student to practice on his/her own
  • teach concepts in several different ways to facilitate student's application to several different situations

• Make sure that the important terminology is clear.
  • provide direct, explicit instruction in essential vocabulary
  • teach procedural terms as well as subject and concept vocabulary

• Develop students' thinking skills.
  • provide direct instruction, modeling and practice to develop problem solving and decision making skills
  • plan activities that require students to remember facts, understand information, apply learned information, synthesize information, analyze information, and evaluate information

• Teach specific skills necessary to be a successful student and learner.
  • provide instruction, modeling and practice in listening, speaking, and attending
  • provide instruction, modeling, and practice in memorization strategies such as clustering and mnemonic devices
  • provide instruction, modeling and practice in self-monitoring and regulation skills
  • teach the skills necessary to be successful in cooperative learning activities in which each student is responsible for decision-making, responsibility, and sharing his/her portion of the work

• Provide and teach the students to use learning aids and technology.
  — alphabet strips, number lines, Franklin spelling devices, calculators, word processing, computer-aided instruction, tape recorder, amplification devices, and spell checkers when appropriate
• Teach career related skills.
  — provide career awareness, exploration, choice and preparation experiences as part of various thematic units
ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES FOR STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES (LD) (Perceptual/Communicative Disability)

In assessing the learning of students with learning disabilities, educators need to:

1. Consider the following factors in the development, norming and standardization of tests used to determine whether students meet a standard:
   - Alternative assessment methods that are specific to individual strengths and needs (i.e., portfolios, paper-pencil tests, demonstrations, interactive computer presentations).
   - Language and readability levels (i.e., simple instructions with controlled vocabulary and short, declarative statements are most easily understood).
   - Test format
     - variety of question formats (multiple-choice, fill-in-the-blank, matching, etc.)
     - computerized presentation versus paper-pencil tasks
     - enlarged print as appropriate
     - white space on paper to provide organizational cues, work space for problem-solving and assist in visual tracking
   - Assessment of a range of thinking skills (for instance, representative of a hierarchical taxonomy, i.e., Bloom’s).
   - Test design to allow for various response methods
     - untimed administration
     - expression of learning through oral, written and graphic/pictorial responses — oral versus written responses
     - short and long forms of the test
     - score is based on content mastery rather than quality of written response (i.e., avoid grading content acquisition based on grammatical structure, spelling, neatness)

2. Consider the following in administrating standards-based assessments:
   - Provide for technological accommodations for student responses — computer access, calculator, tape recorder, an extra copy of the test (to mark or write on), etc.
   - Provide individuals with procedural accommodations
     - readers, writers for oral responses,
     - extra paper for making notes,
     - extended time
     - more than one opportunity to take the test
     - people to supervise procedural changes, i.e., when the time allowed for taking the test is extended, when the test is administered a second time, when taped administrator/ responses are to be used.
   - Provide for environmental accommodations
     - preferential seating based on specific needs (seating away from windows or hall noise)
     - control for distractions (separate room or smaller room rather than a large group setting)
3. Consider the following for classroom assessments of standards.

- Teacher observation across time and settings
- Anecdotal records
- Student self-assessment
- Mastery of skills related to “essential learnings”
- Hands-on performance
- Demonstration of learnings (written, oral, projects, visual arts, performing arts)
- Interviews of students
- Assessments of developmental milestones for age appropriate skills
- Social skills assessment
- Reports/observations from internships and vocational experiences
- Products from cooperative groups
- Grading assessments using alternative grading methods
SERVICE OPTIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH: LEARNING DISABILITIES (LD) (Perceptual/Communicative Disability)

For students with learning disabilities to have adequate opportunities to learn, schools need to:

1. Provide staff development and follow-up activities to assist staff in working with students with learning disabilities.
2. Provide trained staff to help students acquire communication skills, motor skills, social skills, academic skills, and affective skills.
3. Support collaboration between special educators and classroom teachers by establishing common planning time, flexible scheduling, and team meetings.
4. Utilize teams (including parents, teachers, students, and agencies) to problem-solve and determine appropriate and timely interventions for students experiencing difficulties.
5. Adjust student-teacher ratios to allow for effective instruction, frequent student feedback, opportunities for individual instruction, and effective classroom management.
6. Provide opportunities for students to receive direct instruction in small group and individual settings--in or outside the regular classroom--to address student needs.
7. Provide alternative scheduling options for students.
8. Enhance the learning environment through the use of current technologies and multimedia equipment to compensate for students’ learning differences.
9. Provide planning and instruction for students’ post secondary goals.
10. Collaborate with parents and families to gain mutual understanding of their child’s needs and strengths.
11. Provide opportunities for students to help other students.
12. Help parents and students explore community resources to provide experiences for students to participate in community groups and activities.
13. Collaborate with community agencies to help students, preschool - 12th grade, attain the skills needed for educational success and independent living.