

Best Practices for the Identification of Multiple Disabilities
Harford County Public Schools
Disproportionality Committee
Multiple Disabilities Workgroup
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Eloise Bralove
Bri Connaghan
Jenna Guglielmini
Lindsey Harbert
Sarah Sinclair

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Harford County Public Schools special education disproportionality committee recommended this workgroup based on previous work, research, and feedback. Originally, the disproportionality committee sought to address overidentification of specific populations of students with the educational disability of Intellectual Disability. Through other research, it was revealed that there was overidentification of the educational disability of Multiple Disabilities in Harford County Public Schools. This document was created to support IEP Teams' ability to accurately identify the educational disability of Multiple Disabilities. This document is intended to provide clarity and guidance regarding when to select this educational disability on students' IEPs. Additionally, it is our hope that this guidance document will address disproportionate identification of other disability groups within Harford County Public Schools.

The purpose of this Best Practices document is to guide IEP Teams in identifying a most impactful disability, which may or may not be Multiple Disabilities. Maryland State Department of Education does not allow IEP Teams to identify a primary and secondary disability; rather, the most impactful disability is selected as a student's identified (primary) educational disability. This is based on guidance from the section *How to indicate a most impactful disability* from the Maryland Statewide Individualized Education Program Process Guide (2021).

Although it is possible that a student may have more than one disability, enter the disability most indicative of the student's primary disability. Determination of primary disability is required as a part of the eligibility process, however, all decisions about Goals, Supports, Services, and Placement are made by the IEP team based on the individual student's needs and not the disability category.

IEP teams should select the disability that best represents the student's areas of impairment and needs. Multiple disabilities should only be considered when a most impactful disability cannot be identified due to the combination of significant disabilities in need of severe educational services. Clarification from the Maryland Statewide Individualized Education Program Process Guide (2021) is provided below.

Specify each disability from any of the three categories [cognitive, physical, sensory] of disabling conditions the student's IEP team identifies as concomitant that causes such severe educational problems that the student cannot be accommodated in special education instructional services solely for one of the impairments.

Cognitive* includes: Autism, Emotional Disability, Intellectual Disability, Specific Learning Disability, Speech or Language Impairment, and Traumatic Brain Injury.

Sensory includes: Deaf-Blindness, Deafness, Hearing Impairment, and Visual Impairment including Blindness.

Physical includes: Orthopedic Impairment, and Other Health Impairment*.

Concomitant means happening or existing along with or at the same time as something else.

**Although the process guide categorizes Other Health Impairment as Physical disability, IEP Teams should consider the cognitive impact of attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (i.e., executive functioning, attention, self-regulation, etc.), and rule out or confirm whether Other Health Impairment due to ADHD shall be categorized as a Cognitive disability.*

II. COMAR DEFINITION OF MULTIPLE DISABILITIES

The COMAR definition of Multiple Disabilities is as follows:

Multiple Disabilities

The term “multiple disabilities” is reserved for concomitant impairments, the combination of which causes such severe educational needs that they cannot be accommodated in special education programs solely for one of the impairments. Concomitant means that two or more distinct disabilities exist alongside one another at the same time. A commonality of students who are multiply disabled is that they generally need support across a number of skill areas. The analysis does not end there, however. The disabilities must also combine to create such severe educational needs that special education and related services designed to address one disability would not be sufficient to meet the unique educational needs created by the other disability. Examples include intellectual disability-blindness and intellectual disability-orthopedic impairment, but this is not an exhaustive list. While an intellectual disability will generally be one of the disabilities, the term “multiple disabilities” is not so restrictive that another combination cannot be used. In any event, the multiple disabilities involved must be both concomitant and cause severe educational needs as described above. Please note that this does not include deaf-blindness because that has its own disability category.

[34 C.F.R. §300.8(c)(7) COMAR 13A.05.01.03B(44)]

Listed below is clarification for the language used within the COMAR definition:

- **Severe educational needs**
 - Severe needs should include individuals with exceptional needs who require ongoing intensive instruction or modifications in multiple areas within the school day (academics, daily living, mobility, etc.) and/or individuals who require specialized educational placements.
 - The need for service alone does not necessarily indicate severe educational needs.
 - For example, the need of physical therapy services for a student with Specific Learning Disability may not be severe if these services can be provided within her comprehensive school with minimal disruption. The IEP Team should consider how impairing the services/needs are throughout the school day when determining whether the educational needs can be considered severe.
- **Cannot be accommodated in special education programs solely for one of the impairments**
 - The nature of the multiplicity or combination of the student’s disabilities require significant developmental and educational programming that cannot be accommodated with special education programs by addressing any one of the identified disabilities alone (Nebraska Department of Education, 2021).
 - For example, a child with SLD and OHI for ADHD may have identical IEPs with a combination of academic and self-management goals. Therefore, in many cases, Multiple disabilities may not be appropriate.

III. IDENTIFICATION AND CASE EXAMPLES

The chart below is based on charts used within other school districts in Maryland (Carroll County Public Schools, n.d.; MSDE, 2019) and across many other states that are used to guide IEP Teams in determining whether a student meets criteria for the educational disability of Multiple Disabilities. The various educational disabilities are separated into three categories: cognitive, sensory, and physical. Generally, districts require that a student is eligible in at least two of the three categories. The educational disability of Multiple Disabilities is generally not appropriate for two disabilities within the same category, such as Intellectual Disability and Speech Language Impairment, which are both within the cognitive category. While there are always exceptions to this rule, those exceptions should be made on a case-by-case basis and should be limited rather than frequent. IEP Teams should keep in mind that Multiple Disabilities is a low incidence disability, representing approximately 2% of all students within special education (American Academy of Special Education Professionals, 2007; National Center for Education Statistics, 2022).

Guides considerations, the final decision

Refer to the table below for the three categories and where various disabilities may fall within each category:

Cognitive	Sensory	Physical
Autism Emotional Disability Intellectual Disability Specific Learning Disability Speech or Language Impairment Traumatic Brain Injury Other Health Impairment Impacting cognition (ADHD, Down Syndrome)	Deaf-Blindness Deafness Hearing Impairment Visual Impairment	Orthopedic Impairment Other Health Impairment Impacting physical/health (epilepsy, leukemia, sickle cell anemia, etc.)

Please consider the following case study examples:

Examples of Multiple Disabilities:

- Specific Learning Disability and Other Health Impairment due to Brittle Bone Disease for a student who requires significant environmental and physical modifications due to her Brittle Bone Disease, but she also requires specialized instruction in math. The documented processing deficit in math is not related to the Other Health Impairment but requires additional specialized instruction and support.
- Intellectual Disability and Orthopedic Impairment for a student who needs a significantly modified environment throughout the day and specialized instruction due to physical needs as well as significantly modified curriculum due to cognitive and adaptive needs.
- Specific Learning Disability and sensory-based disability (Deafness, Hearing Impairment, Visual Impairment, etc.) for a student who needs specialized instruction and/or significantly modified environment to address sensory needs as well as specialized instruction to address academic needs.

- Intellectual Disability and Other Health Impairment due to epilepsy for a student who experiences uncontrolled, recurrent seizures and requires accommodations and additional monitoring or nursing support as well as significantly modified curriculum due to cognitive and adaptive needs.
- Autism and Visual Impairment for a student who needs social/emotional/behavioral supports related to Autism but also needs specialized instruction for the Visual Impairment.

Nonexamples of Multiple Disabilities:

- Intellectual Disability and Orthopedic Impairment for a student whose physical needs can be addressed through related services and accommodations alone.
- Intellectual Disability and Speech/Language Impairment generally is a nonexample of Multiple Disabilities because Intellectual Disability includes a global delay that encompasses any speech/language deficits. Speech/language goals and services can still be included within the IEP.
- Intellectual Disability and Other Health Impairment for attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) generally is a nonexample of Multiple Disabilities because Intellectual Disability includes a global delay that encompasses any attention deficit. Self-management goals and services can still be included within the IEP.
- Specific Learning Disability and Other Health Impairment for ADHD is generally a nonexample of Multiple Disabilities because a child with Specific Learning Disability and Other Health Impairment for ADHD may have identical IEPs with a combination of academic and self-management goals. Therefore, these students can be accommodated in special education programs solely for one of the impairments. The most impacting educational disability should be selected as the identified disability.
- Emotional Disability and Specific Learning Disability, Other Health Impairment, or Autism are generally nonexamples of Multiple Disabilities because these students can be accommodated in special education programs solely for one of the impairments. The most impacting educational disability should be selected as the most impactful disability.
- Intellectual Disability and Other Health Impairment for Down's Syndrome may be generally considered a nonexample because these students can be accommodated in special education programs solely for one of the impairments. The most impacting educational disability should be selected as the identified disability.
- Intellectual Disability and Autism may be considered a nonexample because many students can be accommodated in special education programs solely for one of the impairments. The most impacting educational disability should be selected as the identified disability. Please note that exceptions may be made based on individual student needs or profiles, including, but not limited to access to community-based services. Always consider whether there is the presence of severe educational needs that cannot be accommodated based solely on one of the identified impairments.

IV. REFERENCES

- American Academy of Special Education Professionals. (2007, September 6). *Chapter 9: Multiple Disabilities*. Special Education Eligibility. Retrieved July 12, 2022, from <http://aasep.org/professional-development/board-certification-in-special-education-program/certificate-of-advanced-professional-development/special-education-eligibility/index.html>
- Carroll County Public Schools. (n.d.). *Multiple Disabilities*. Carroll County Public Schools Office of Special Education Eligibility Determination Tool.
- Maryland State Department of Education Division of Early Intervention/Special Education Services. (2019, January 1). *Maryland Online IEP User & Process Guide*. Retrieved July 12, 2022, from <https://md-online-iep.elevio.help/en/articles/7-moiep-user-process-guide>
- National Center for Education Statistics (2022, May). *Percentage distribution of students ages 3-21 served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), by selected disability type: School year 2020-2021* [Graph]. Retrieved July 12, 2022, from <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cgg/students-with-disabilities>
- Nebraska Department of Education. (2021, January). *Eligibility Guidelines: Multiple Disabilities*. Determining Special Education Eligibility. Retrieved July 12, 2022, from <https://www.education.ne.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Eligibility-Guidelines-Multiple-Disabilities-.pdf>

V. IEP TEAM DOCUMENTATION OF MULTIPLE DISABILITIES FORM



IEP Team Documentation of Multiple Disabilities

<u>Student name:</u>	<u>Date of birth:</u>	<u>Date of meeting:</u>
<u>School:</u>	<u>Grade:</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> Initial or <input type="checkbox"/> Reevaluation

Use this form to guide discussion regarding whether a student qualifies for the educational disability of Multiple Disabilities. Completion of this form is required when Multiple Disabilities is identified as the educational disability or when a student's disability is changed from Multiple Disabilities to another disability.

Multiple Disabilities

The term "multiple disabilities" is reserved for concomitant impairments, 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 disabilities must combine to create such severe educational needs that special education and related services designed to address one disability would not be sufficient to meet the unique educational needs created by the other disability. Please note that this does not include deaf-blindness because that has its own disability category.

[34 C.F.R. §300.8(c)(7) COMAR 13A.05.01.03B(44)]

IEP teams should select the disability that best represents the student's areas of impairment and needs. Multiple disabilities should only be considered when a most impactful disability cannot be identified due to the combination of significant disabilities in need of severe educational services.

Specify each disability from any of the three categories below [cognitive, physical, sensory] of disabling conditions the student's IEP team identifies as concomitant that causes such severe educational problems that the student cannot be accommodated in special education instructional services solely for one of the impairments. Use the chart below to document the disabilities the student meets criteria for when considering the educational disability of Multiple Disabilities:

Cognitive	Sensory	Physical
<input type="checkbox"/> Autism <input type="checkbox"/> Emotional Disability <input type="checkbox"/> Intellectual Disability <input type="checkbox"/> Specific Learning Disability <input type="checkbox"/> Speech or Language Impairment <input type="checkbox"/> Traumatic Brain Injury <input type="checkbox"/> Other Health Impairment impacting cognition* (ADHD, Down Syndrome)	<input type="checkbox"/> Deaf-Blindness <input type="checkbox"/> Deafness <input type="checkbox"/> Hearing Impairment <input type="checkbox"/> Visual Impairment	<input type="checkbox"/> Orthopedic Impairment <input type="checkbox"/> Other Health Impairment impacting physical health* (epilepsy, leukemia, sickle cell anemia, etc.)

*Although the process guide categorizes Other Health Impairment as Physical disability, IEP Teams should consider the cognitive impact of attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (i.e., executive functioning, attention, self-regulation, etc.), and rule out or confirm whether Other Health Impairment due to ADHD shall be categorized as a Cognitive disability.

Eligibility Criteria		Has criteria been met?	
1. There is evidence/documentation that the student meets eligibility criteria in at least two** of the impairment categories listed above which are concomitant, causing such severe educational problems that the student cannot be accommodated in special education instructional services solely for one of the impairments. As a result, a most impactful (primary) educational disability could not be identified.		Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
2. There is documentation that the combination of the identified impairments causes such severe educational needs that they cannot be accommodated in special education programs solely for one of the impairments. Consider the frequency, intensity, and duration of support in daily, major life activities such as self-care, home living, participation in community resources, independence throughout the school day, dressing skills, eating skills, hygiene, recreation/leisure, gross motor, fine motor, mobility, and travel.		Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Criteria 1 and 2 have been met, and the IEP Team is identifying the student with the educational disability of Multiple Disabilities.		Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>

**While there may be exceptions where it is appropriate to identify a student with Multiple Disabilities based on two disabilities within the same category, those exceptions should be made on a limited case-by-case basis. IEP Teams should keep in mind that Multiple Disabilities are a low incidence disability, representing approximately 2% of all students within special education (American Academy of Special Education Professionals, 2007; National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). In the majority of cases where two disabilities fall within the same category, Multiple Disabilities is not appropriate. Please refer to the Best Practices Document (2022) for further clarification.

Document basis for team decision: