

Who is a student with a significant cognitive disability?

The term significant cognitive disability does not in itself denote a specific IDEA disability category or categories but rather a set of educational considerations based upon individual student needs as determined through the IEP process. A significant cognitive disability is not determined by a specific cognitive assessment score, but by a comprehensive understanding of the whole student, which indicates the disability significantly affects intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior.

Significant cognitive disabilities refers to a small number of students who are within one or more existing categories of disability under the IDEA (e.g. autism, multiple disabilities, traumatic brain injury, and intellectual disability).

IEP Team Considerations/descriptions/examples of evidence

There are several factors that the IEP team must consider in determining if a student has a significant cognitive disability. All considerations should be based on evidence derived from cognitive, adaptive, and district wide assessments, present levels of performance, IEP goals, work samples, and data from scientific research-based interventions. The Utah State Board of Education (USBE) defines a student with a significant cognitive disability (SWSCD) as a student who:

- Has documentation that indicates the disability significantly impacts intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior (the definition of adaptive behavior is the actions essential for an individual to live independently and function safely in daily life).
 - The student's cognitive functioning and adaptive behavior demonstrated in the home, school, and community environments are significantly below age expectations, even with program modifications, adaptations and accommodations.
- Requires intensive, repeated, modified, and direct individualized instruction that requires substantial supports to learn, maintain, and generalize skills in the grade-and-age-appropriate curriculum and transfer of skills across multiple settings.
- The student's severe and complex disabilities limit the student from meaningful participation in the standard academic core curriculum or achievement of the academic content standards established at grade level, without substantial support, modifications, adaptations and accommodations.
 - Requires instruction through the Utah alternate achievement standards (Essential Elements and Extended Core)
 - The student's course of study includes functional and life skills instruction and,
 - May be eligible to participate in alternate assessments (DLM, UAA, KEEP Alternate, DIBELS Alternate, etc.).
- The student's disability increases the need for dependence on others for many, if not all, daily living needs, and the student is expected to require extensive ongoing support through adulthood.

34 C.F.R. §200.6(d); Utah Admin. Code R277-705-2(8)