

Fulfilling the Promise for Students with Specific Learning Disabilities

A Snapshot of Federal Data, Terms, & Definitions

What is a specific learning disability (SLD)?

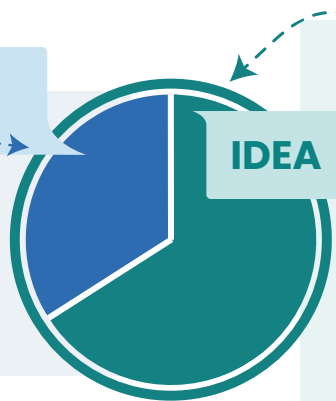
An **SLD** is a brain-based disorder that affects an individual's ability to read, write, and do math (e.g., dyslexia, dysgraphia, and dyscalculia). Students identified with **SLD** receive special education services under the **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)**, a law that provides free and appropriate public education to children with disabilities. **IDEA** requires that schools provide special education services to eligible students as outlined in their Individualized Education Program (IEP).

Of the **13%** of the U.S. school-age population who received disability services under **IDEA** in the 2020–2021 academic year, **34%** received services for **SLD** as the primary disability.

6.6 Million Students Served Under IDEA in 2020–2021

2.3 million **SLD** students

Students with **SLD** represent the largest proportion (**34%**) of U.S. students served under **IDEA** in 2020 – 2021.



Under **IDEA**, an **SLD** is defined as “a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations.”

SLD is not due to “visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, of mental retardation (now known as intellectual disability), of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage.”

Fast Facts



More than 90% of 4th- and 8th-grade students with **SLD** are not proficient in reading or math. Illiteracy and innumeracy have dire implications for future success (including significantly predicting whether a student drops out of high school).



Students with **SLD** drop out at over **twice the rate** as their non-disabled peers. Dropout is linked to many adverse outcomes, such as poverty, unemployment, incarceration, and poor health.

Fulfilling the Promise: What You Can Do for Students with SLD.

Act Now

Congress can influence the trajectory for students with learning disabilities:

- **Fulfill funding promises for programs** that support students with disabilities, their families, and their educators such as (but not limited to) the **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)** and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

States received approx. \$14 billion for IDEA in FY 2023, only about 12% of the additional costs of educating students with disabilities and a far cry from the pledged 40% full funding level.

- **Hold education leaders accountable** for school performance and student learning:
 - Maintain the current ESEA accountability framework to improve outcomes for every student subgroup, including students with disabilities.
 - Allocate additional funds to innovate assessments through the State Assessment Grants and Competitive Grants for State Assessments programs.
 - Create priorities focused on assessment in other research and development programs that the U.S. Department of Education administers.
- **Reduce disproportionality** in identifying specific learning disabilities.
 - Closely monitor compliance and enforce the **Equity in IDEA** regulations.
 - Provide comprehensive technical assistance to school districts with significant disproportionality based on race/ethnicity in identification, placement, and discipline of students with disabilities.
 - Issue guidance to states and school districts on best practices for evaluating students who may have a disability and who come from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

See NCLD's State Snapshots for data from your home state
via the QR Code. Learn more by visiting nclid.org

