



## Multiple Disabilities

### What are Multiple Disabilities?

"Multiple disabilities" is defined as a student who has coexisting impairments, the combination of which causes such severe educational needs that those needs cannot be accommodated in special education programs solely for one of the impairments. The term shall not include deaf-blindness (K.A.R. 91-40-1(pp)).

Children who are deaf-blind have a combination of two primary sensory disabilities (but one categorical area of deaf-blind). Therefore, students who are identified as deaf-blind are not included in the legal definition for children with multiple disabilities. This exception is true unless the student identified as deaf-blind and has an additional disability or as a secondary disability. Frequently, these children are identified as children who have multiple disabilities (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA, 2004)).

### Prevalence of Multiple Disabilities

The National Center for Educational Statistics (2018) reported for the 2016 to 2017 school year, 2% students (ages 3-21), were identified as students with multiple disabilities out of the 13% for the total population of children who received special education services.

### Causes and Characteristics of Students with Multiple Disabilities

There are a number of causes for children who are born with multiple disabilities. The Center for Parent Information and Resources (2015) identified the following common causes:

- chromosomal anomalies,
- hereditary and genetics,
- prenatal,
- postnatal,
- infections,
- genetic disorders, and
- traumatic brain injury (TBI).

Characteristics associated with multiple disabilities largely depends on: the number of disabilities a child has; which disabilities are involved; or how severe each disability is. Traits that are commonly shared for children with multiple disabilities include:

- difficulty with generalizing skills from settings that are familiar to settings that are unfamiliar, and from one activity that has the same attributes as the next activity;
- difficulty in maintaining skills that are learned if the student is absent for a period of time (i.e. skill regression and recoupment);
- difficulty with interactions that require longer response latencies, such as communicative interactions or social engagement stimuli;
- difficulty in mobility, and tonicity (e.g., hypertonic, hypotonic, ataxia, crossing midline, etc.); asymmetric tonic neck reflex (ATNR);

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- health conditions (e.g., seizures, arousal contractures, aspiration pneumonia, suctioning tracheostomy tube gastrointestinal tube, gag reflex, etc.);
- difficulty in oral speech production;
- difficulty with initiating, maintaining, and ending social interactions; and
- difficulty with stabilization of medications.

## Resources

Kansas Special Education Process Handbook <http://www.ksde.org/Default.aspx?tabid=598>

KSDE Eligibility Indicators <https://www.ksde.org/Portals/0/SES/misc/iep/EligibilityIndicators.pdf>

KSDE SETS <http://www.ksde.org/Default.aspx?tabid=506>

Kansas Technical Assistance System Network (TASN) <https://ksdetasn.org/>

Center for Parent Information and Resources <https://www.parentcenterhub.org/multiple/>

National Organization for Rare Disorders (NORD) [www.rarediseases.org](http://www.rarediseases.org)

*Research and Practice for Individuals with Severe Disabilities*  
<http://journals.sagepub.com/home/rps/>

TASH (national) <https://tash.org/about/resource-library/>

For more information, contact:

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