



Fast Fact (April 2010)

Intellectual Disability: Why the term mental retardation was changed to intellectual disability.

The Virginia Board of Education and Department of Education through its special education regulations revision process officially changed the disability category of mental retardation to intellectual disability. The definition of intellectual disability found in the current state regulations is:

"Intellectual disability" means the definition formerly known as "mental retardation" and means significantly sub average general intellectual functioning, existing concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior and manifested during the developmental period that adversely affects a child's educational performance. (8VAC20-81-10)

Individuals with intellectual disabilities have asserted that the term mental retardation does not communicate dignity or respect and, in fact, frequently results in the devaluation of such persons. Intellectual Disability has been increasingly used by professional organizations, journals, agencies and published research as the preferred term for the disability historically referred to as mental retardation. The transition in terminology is used by organizations such as the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, the International Association for the Scientific Study of Intellectual Disabilities, and the President's Committee for People with Intellectual Disabilities.

The term intellectual disability covers the same population of students who were identified previously with mental retardation. This new change in terminology does not affect the continued need for individualized supports and services.

The Virginia Department of Education provides guidance designed to assist eligibility teams in accurately identifying students with intellectual disabilities for the purposes of qualifying for special education and related services. This information can be found on the Virginia Department of Education Web site.

Reference

Schalock, R., & Luckasson, R., & Shogren, K. "The Renaming of Mental Retardation: Understanding the Change to the Term Intellectual Disability" (2007). *Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*, 45, 116-124.

For more information:

Virginia Department of Education Web site: <http://www.doe.virginia.gov> or contact Division of Special Education and Student Services at 804-225-2932, 1-800-422-2083, Text users dial 711 (Virginia Relay)