SEVERE AND/OR MULTIPLE DISABILITIES

DEFINITION:

Individuals with severe and/or multiple disabilities have two or more disabilities that, in combination, cause severe educational problems.

POSSIBLE SIGNS, SYMPTOMS, AND CHARACTERISTICS:

Students with severe and/or multiple disabilities may exhibit a wide range of behaviors depending on the combination and severity of the disabilities. However, there are some general characteristics that are representative students with severe and/or multiple disabilities.

- Limited speech and/or communication
- Difficulty with basic physical mobility
- Generalization of skills may not occur without intervention
- Maintenance of skills may not occur without intervention and frequent use
- Need for support in major life activities (e.g., domestic, leisure, community, and vocational)

TEACHING TIPS AND SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES:

- Simplify, demonstrate, positively reinforce, and use multisensory approaches.
- Early intervention may lessen or prevent secondary problems such as posture and fitness deficiencies.
- Program for generalization with the use of different people, equipment, environments, and times.
- Generalize to community-based settings by teaching skills that the students can use frequently and apply to settings other than school.
- Check often for skill retention.
- Provide a well-rounded program of fitness and motor activities based on each student’s present level of performance and developmental psychomotor needs.
- Design activities to increase the student’s skill and independence in performing routine activities in life.
Due to the diversity of characteristics possible within this classification, it is difficult to provide specific instructional strategies for students with severe and/or multiple disabilities. Programming should involve the combining of instructional strategies appropriate for each student's unique needs.

Information on this sheet contains only suggested guidelines. Each student must be considered individually, and in many cases, a physician’s written consent should be obtained.