

Education of Students with Physical Disabilities

I. In the field of special education, physical disabilities refer to a wide variety of conditions that may **interfere** with a child's ability to perform everyday activities. Such conditions include problems with muscles, such as muscular dystrophy; problems involving the central nervous system, such as cerebral palsy; problems with the structure of the skeleton, such as spina bifida or missing limbs; and health problems, such as cystic fibrosis and heart disorders. These conditions are diagnosed by medical specialists, often working with teams of experts in education and physical therapy. For some children, physical disabilities are simply structural or health problems that do not require special educational facilities or services. For other children, however, the physical disabilities may interfere with their ability to walk, write, speak, or take care of their personal needs. Still others may be able to do all of these things but may not be able to accomplish one or more of them easily, or they may need more time or special assistance for certain school activities.

II. Some special residential schools for students with physical disabilities were developed in Europe and the United States in the 19th century, but most of these schools had closed by the 1970s. At that time, many children with physical disabilities in the United States attended classes at special education centers in their community school system. These schools were specially designed to **eliminate** stairs, narrow doorways, and other barriers to students in wheelchairs, and to provide a concentration of specialists in one building. Today, however, a higher number of conventional school buildings are designed to be "barrier-free." Many students with physical disabilities attend their regular neighborhood schools where they receive the same social and academic benefits as students without disabilities. Specialists travel to those schools to provide whatever special services and equipment the students may need.

III. Most adaptive aids for students with physical disabilities are custom-designed to fit their physical size, abilities, and needs. The aids many children use are not very noticeable or unusual, such as pencils with specially designed handles for children with **impaired** motor skills. Other children, however, may need elaborate aids to perform any activity. These include aids to allow for greater mobility, such as electric or manually operated wheelchairs, braces, or crutches; seats specially designed to facilitate movement and posture; adaptive aids for turning pages, reaching, and eating; and communication aids. Aids to assist in communication include materials and equipment ranging from simple books of pictures to **sophisticated** computer-based devices. The children use this equipment to interact with others in ways that take advantage of their individual abilities. For example, a child might use switches that are controlled by breaths of air, eye blinks, or small muscle movements to manipulate a computer display.

IV. While many students with physical disabilities have the same ability to learn as other students, some of them also have learning **disorders**, mental retardation, or other conditions that require special services. In these cases, specialists work together with the child's family to design a program for the child's unique situation. Often, education for children with such multiple disabilities **emphasizes** the development of language and communication, and personal, social, and vocational skills, rather than academic learning.

Task 1: Scan the text and invent a title for each paragraph.

Task 2: Guess the meanings of the words in bold from the context.

