Current Terminology

Intellectual Disability: Most used in the world
Mental Retardation: Widely used in the U.S.
Cognitive Impairment: Used in Michigan
**Any term can take a negative connotation so periodically the label changes to remove stigma. Always use People First Language which is meant to emphasize the importance of the person over the disability.

What is a Cognitive Impairment?

A disability characterized by significant limitations both in intellectual functioning and in adaptive behavior as expressed in conceptual, social, and practical adaptive skills originated before age 18. CI is a continuum and there are three different levels- mild, moderate, severe.
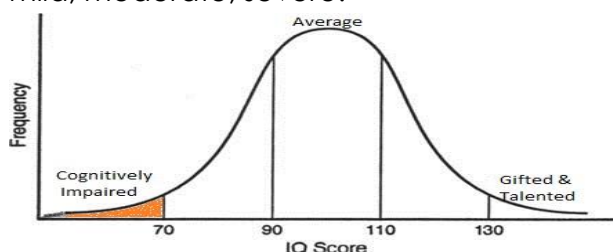
How does a Cognitive Impairment Affect a Student's...

Development: Physical development depends on severity of impairment and if other disabilities are present, like cerebral palsy. There is impairment in learning efficiency. Specific cognitive deficits often exist in memory, attention, or language. Early intervention makes a difference in long term outcomes.

Learning: Students with CI learn however they may need more time and opportunities. Generalization is very difficult. Special attention should be given to functional academic skills. Functional academics refer to reading and mathematics skills that are used frequently in everyday life (e.g., reading signs or instructions, counting change, or taking measurements).

Performance: Most students with CI take an alternate assessment, instead of statewide tests based on general education content standards. In Michigan this test is called, MI Access. The learning objectives for students with CI are Extended Grade Level Content Expectations.

Social Interactions: The social benefits of being with peers are paramount. As a teacher focus on social competence but help students understand every decision/option they make has consequences to help them choose appropriate behaviors. The goal is to have students with CI be contributing members of society.

Tips to help a student with CI access, participate, and succeed with inclusion:

- Structure the instructional program for success by breaking down objectives into small learning steps (via task analysis) and using a rich schedule of positive reinforcements.
- Generalize skills or academics to other appropriate settings- provide real world experiences.
- Maintain the performance of new behaviors/skills over time.
- Utilize special education staff.

References for further information:

Grade Level Content Expectations for students with CI:
http://www.michigan.gov/mde/0,1607,7-140-22709_28463-162769--,00.html

Council for Exceptional Children explains CI:
http://www.cec.sped.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Mental_Retardation&Template=/TaggedPage/TaggedPageDisplay.cfm&TPLID=37&ContentID=5630

National Association of Special Education Teachers offers topic categories to explore related to CI:
http://www.naset.org/mentalretardation2.0.html