



IEP Tip Sheet

What is Special Education? A Focus on Specially Designed Instruction

This tip sheet introduces and briefly defines special education with a focus on specially designed instruction (SDI), and provides tips for implementation. To learn more, review the additional resources and check with state law for supplemental requirements. This is one of four tip sheets in a collection of the statement of services and aids in the individualized education program (IEP; Sec. 300.320(a)(4)). The overview tip sheet provides a summary of the complete statement.

What Does IDEA Say?

According to [IDEA Sec. 300.39](#),

“(1) Special education means specially designed instruction, at no cost to the parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability, including—

- (i) Instruction conducted in the classroom, in the home, in hospitals and institutions, and in other settings; and
- (ii) Instruction in physical education.

(2) Special education includes each of the following, if the services otherwise meet the requirements of paragraph (a)(1) of this section—

- (i) Speech-language pathology services, or any other related service, if the service is considered special education rather than a related service under State standards;
- (ii) Travel training; and
- (iii) Vocational education.”

What is specially designed instruction (SDI) according to IDEA?

According to [IDEA Sec. 300.39\(b\)\(3\)](#),

“(3) Specially designed instruction means adapting, as appropriate to the needs of an eligible child under this part, the content, methodology, or delivery of instruction—

- (i) To address the unique needs of the child that result from the child’s disability; and
- (ii) To ensure access of the child to the general curriculum, so that the child can meet the educational standards within the jurisdiction of the public agency that apply to all children.”

Elements of SDI

SDI Element

What it Means

Questions to Consider



Content

What is taught to allow the student to access general education programming

- Are adaptations needed for the content as a result of the disability?
- Do the data indicate that the student needs specialized instruction in a specific academic or functional area?
- What are the content and skills needs outlined in the IEP goals?
- How can we leverage the student’s strengths and current knowledge as we identify needed adaptations to the instructional content that will be provided?



Methodology

How the instruction is delivered or the practices and approach the teacher uses to teach

- Is there a method that has proven to be more effective for this student when acquiring knowledge and skills?
- Are there methods that have been ineffective for this student when acquiring knowledge and skills?



Delivery of Instruction

By **whom, where,** and **when** the instruction will be delivered

- What instructional delivery adaptations are needed?
- Does the delivery (including the group size) provide sufficient opportunities for the student to practice and receive explicit feedback?
- Do the data indicate an adaptation to the provider's specialized knowledge and skills?





Who delivers?

SDI is typically delivered by the special educator or related service provider but may be delivered by another educator or provider based on the needs of the child.

Why?

Ensure child's access to the general curriculum so that the child can meet the educational standards.

Where?

SDI is a service, not a place. SDI can be provided in any location, as long as the location is consistent with the student's IEP and the student's least restrictive environment.

Tips for Design and Implementation

- ✓ Determine SDI on an individual basis and justify based on the student's needs identified in the present levels of academic achievement and functional performance statement.
- ✓ Clearly outline the SDI content, methodology, and delivery adaptations in the student's IEP.
- ✓ Engage the student, the student's family, special and general educators, and other service providers in discussions about instructional approaches that have and have not been successful.
- ✓ Use data throughout the development and implementation of SDI to ensure that it addresses the special education needs outlined in the evaluation report and the evolving needs of the student.
- ✓ Ensure that team members understand the difference between SDI, accommodations, modifications, intervention programs, and instruction provided to all students.

Where Can You Learn More?



The What and Why of the Statement of Services and Aids (PROGRESS Center). The course explains the IDEA requirements for the statement of services and aids and the critical role of the statement in the development of a high-quality IEP.



Leveraging Data-Based Individualization (DBI) to Design and Deliver Specially Designed Instruction (SDI) (PROGRESS Center and National Center on Intensive Intervention). This webinar recording shares how practitioners can use DBI to develop and implement SDI for students with disabilities.



PROGRESS Center Website. The PROGRESS Center website includes additional information about developing high-quality IEPs and additional tip sheets in this series.



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