

SDI Content Adaptations: What Educators Need to Know



According to [IDEA Sec. 300.39\(b\)\(3\)](#), “[s]pecially designed instruction [SDI] 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 [emphasis added].”



Key Considerations for Adapting Content



- ✓ Adapting content is one element that an IEP Team may consider when developing SDI.
- ✓ Content adaptations may vary based on content area, student age, and impact of disability.
- ✓ Content adaptations change what academic and functional content is being taught to address the unique needs of the child that result from the disability.

When identifying needs for content adaptations, what questions should the IEP Team consider?

In defining the disability categories, [IDEA Sec. 300.8\(c\)](#) identifies functional and academic areas of need associated with the eligibility determination for that disability. While the identified disability category doesn't dictate specific SDI content adaptations, it helps the IEP Team consider potential areas for adaptation. Teams might ask:



IEP Team

- How does the disability impact the child’s access to and progress in the general curriculum?
- What does the child need to be taught to address the impacts of the disability?
- What knowledge, skills, and strategies does the child need to be taught to increase the child’s access to and progress in the general curriculum and participate in the school experience?
- What does the evidence suggest are content adaptations for teaching students with similar instructional needs?

Check out the [IDEA Disability Category Tip Sheet Series](#) to find examples of known educational impacts by IDEA disability category that IEP Teams may consider when determining content adaptations.





What are examples of academic content adaptation resources?

“Academic achievement” generally refers to a child’s performance in academic areas. Since academic areas of need vary depending on a child’s circumstance or situation, a definition of academic content areas is not included in the IDEA regulations (71 Fed. Reg. at 46662). It is important to remember that the purpose of SDI and other IEP services is to address the impacts of the disability that are preventing the child from fully accessing and progressing in the general grade-level curriculum and instruction. As a result, identified SDI academic content adaptations should focus on the knowledge, skills, or strategies the child needs to access and progress in the standards-based instruction rather than a specific standard. Below are resources that can assist IEP Teams in identifying appropriate instructional content adaptations that address the unique academic needs that result from the impact of the disability.

Elementary Reading and Writing Instruction



- Practice Guides [What Works Clearinghouse (WWC)]: [Teaching Elementary School Students to Be Effective Writers](#)
- Practice Guides (WWC): [Foundational Skills to Support Reading for Understanding in Kindergarten Through 3rd Grade](#)
- Practice Guides (WWC): [Improving Reading Comprehension in Kindergarten Through 3rd Grade](#)
- National Center on Intensive Intervention (NCII): [Literacy Sample Lessons to Support Intensifying Intervention](#)

Secondary Reading and Writing Instruction



- Practice Guides (WWC): [Providing Reading Interventions for Students in Grades 4–9](#)
- Practice Guides (WWC): [Teaching Secondary Students to Write Effectively](#)
- Practice Guides (WWC): [Improving Adolescent Literacy: Effective Classroom and Intervention Practices](#)

Mathematics Instruction (pre-K through Grade 12)



- Practice Guides (WWC): [Assisting Students Struggling with Mathematics: Intervention in the Elementary Grades](#)
- Practice Guides (WWC): [Teaching Math to Young Children](#)
- Practice Guides (WWC): [Improving Mathematical Problem Solving in Grades 4 Through 8](#)
- Practice Guides (WWC): [Developing Effective Fractions Instruction for Kindergarten Through 8th Grade](#)
- Practice Guides (WWC): [Teaching Strategies for Improving Algebra Knowledge in Middle and High School Students](#)
- NCII: [Mathematics Sample Lessons to Support Intensifying Intervention](#)





What are examples of functional content adaptation resources?

Similar to academic content areas, specific examples of functional areas are not included in IDEA because “the range of functional skills is as varied as the individual needs of children with disabilities” (71 Fed. Reg. at 46661–46662). However, the U.S. Department of Education has shared several examples of common functional content areas that may be addressed by SDI: dressing, eating, toileting, behavior, social skills, communication skills, mobility, and executive functioning. Below are resources to support IEP Teams in identifying functional content adaptations necessary to address the unique needs of the child that result from the impact of the disability.

Behavior and Social Skills



- Practice Guides (WWC): [Teacher-Delivered Behavioral Interventions in Grades K-5](#)
- U.S. Department of Education: [Using Functional Behavioral Assessments \[FBA\] to Create Supportive Learning Environments](#)
- NCII: [Behavior Strategies to Support Intensifying Intervention](#)
- Center on PBIS: [Resource Collection](#)
- U.S. Department of Education: [Employability Skills – Effective Relationships \(Interpersonal Skills, Personal Qualities\)](#)
- PROGRESS Center: Teaching Social Behaviors: [Brief](#) and [Online Learning Course](#)
- IRIS Center: [FBA Elementary](#), [FBA Secondary](#)

Communication



- CEEDAR Center: [Preparing Teachers to Facilitate Communication Skills in Students With Severe Disabilities](#)
- TIES Center: [Communicative Supports Overview](#)
- U.S. Department of Education: [Assistive Technology Devices and Services for Children With Disabilities Under the IDEA](#)
- IRIS Center: [Addressing Communication Needs](#) (page 7 of Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities: Supports in the General Education Classroom Module)

Executive Functioning



- PROGRESS Center: Teaching Cognitive and Metacognitive Strategies: [Brief](#) and [Online Learning Course](#)
- U.S. Department of Education: [Employability Skills– Applied Knowledge \(Applied Academic Skills, Critical Thinking Skills\)](#)
- IRIS Center: Modules focused on [Executive Functions \(Part 1\): Understanding Why Some Students Struggle](#) and [Executive Functions \(Part 2\) Strategies to Improve Students’ Academic Performance](#)





Transition and Vocational Skills



- U.S. Department of Education: [A Transition Guide to Postsecondary Education and Employment for Students and Youth with Disabilities](#)
- U.S. Department of Education: [Employability Skills - Workplace Skills](#) (Resource Management, Information Use, Communication Skills, Systems Thinking, Technology Use)
- National Technical Assistance Center on Transition: The Collaborative (NTACT:C) [Resource Collection](#)

For more information, view the PROGRESS Center's

- [IEP Tip Sheet: Overview of Statement of Services and Aids](#) and the companion tip sheet [What is Special Education? A Focus on Specially Designed Instruction](#)
- [Online Learning Course: The What and Why of the Statement of Services and Aids](#)
- [Evidence-Based Instructional Practices Course Collection](#)

