

SDI Delivery 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 Delivery



- ✓ Adapting delivery is one element that an IEP Team may consider when developing SDI.
- ✓ There is not a comprehensive list of potential SDI delivery adaptations. Delivery adaptations vary based on content area, student age, and [impact of disability](#).
- ✓ Unless data suggest otherwise, delivery of SDI should be in the general education environment to promote access to peers with and without disabilities in the least restrictive environment.
- ✓ Delivery adaptations change elements of the delivery approach, including where and when the instruction will occur or who will deliver the instruction, to address the unique needs of the child that result from the disability

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

Understanding the unique needs of the child as well as the evidence-based practices for addressing those needs can assist IEP Teams in identifying, evaluating, and documenting SDI delivery adaptations for students with disabilities. Teams may ask:



IEP Team

- Does the child receive sufficient opportunities to practice and receive explicit feedback?
- Do the data indicate a needed adaptation to the provider's specialized knowledge and skills?
- Do the data suggest that the student requires that the instruction is delivered at a specific time(s) or using a specific grouping model?

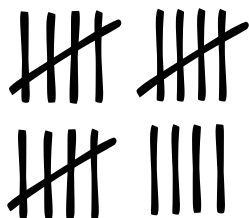


What are examples of evidence-based SDI delivery adaptations for students with disabilities?



Distributed Practice Opportunities. Unlike mass practice opportunities which are conducted in a single session, distributed practice opportunities are conducted across the day or week to promote mastery and generalization. Distributed practice opportunities have been found to be efficient and effective in promoting skill acquisition for students with autism and intellectual disabilities, language development for students with and without disabilities, and acquisition of functional skills (e.g., executive functioning skills, mobility, fine motor) and basic academic skills (e.g., math facts, sight words). Below are examples of evidence for promoting behavior and math skill acquisition through distributed practice.

- Provide students frequent and varying opportunities to respond to and engage in activities [[Teacher-Delivered Behavioral Interventions in Grades K-5](#), What Works Clearinghouse (WWC)]
- Dedicate time each day to teaching math, and integrate math instruction throughout the school day ([Teaching Math to Young Children](#), WWC)

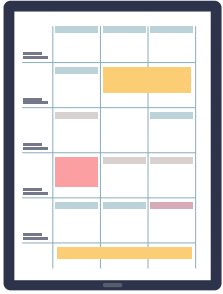


Frequent Practice Opportunities (e.g., daily or weekly). Research shows that struggling students require 10–30 more practice opportunities to acquire academic and functional knowledge and skills. Adaptations may be presented in terms of number of practice opportunities per class, day, or week or number of minutes of exposure to the instruction. Below are examples from [IES Practice Guides](#).

- Provide intensive instruction on a daily basis that promotes the development of the various components of reading proficiency to students who show minimal progress after reasonable time in tier 2 small group instruction ([Assisting Students Struggling with Reading: Response to Intervention \(RtI\) and Multi-Tier Intervention in the Primary Grades](#), WWC)
- Provide daily time for students to write ([Teaching Elementary School Students to Be Effective Writers](#), WWC)
- Dedicate time each day to teaching math, and integrate math instruction throughout the school day ([Teaching Math to Young Children](#), WWC)

Unsure how many opportunities the student has to respond and receive feedback? Consider using the [MTSS Center's Assessment of Use of Opportunities to Respond](#) to collect data.





Adaptations to Delivery Time. Depending on the impact of the disability, some students may need adaptations to when the instruction is delivered during the school day. For example, a student with a disability that impacts their fatigue level or attention may require an adaptation to when during the day the SDI is delivered (e.g., morning versus afternoon). In addition, students may be working on skills that need to be taught during specific periods of the school day (e.g., lunch, recess, transition periods).



Adaptations to Grouping. Depending on the child's needs, the child may require adaptations to the grouping configuration used for instructional delivery. For example, a student may require instruction that is delivered 1:1 or in a small group.



Adaptations to the personnel delivering SDI. For some students, the data may suggest that the student requires that the instruction be delivered by personnel with specialized training or skills. Note that this is not related to identifying a specific person. Best practice suggests documenting the knowledge and skills the instructional delivery provider must have to deliver the SDI the student needs.

What are some frequently asked questions related to SDI delivery adaptations?



Who can provide specially designed instruction?

IDEA does not limit who can provide SDI. In some cases, some students may require that the SDI be delivered by an individual with specific training or expertise (e.g., an individual with specialized training in a specific methodology or content area).

Can a related service provider provide SDI?

Special education includes...“Speech-language pathology services, or any other related service, if the service is considered special education rather than a related service under State standards” [[IDEA, Sec. 300.39\(a\)\(2\)\(i\)](#)]. In some cases, a related service provider may have the required knowledge and skills to design and deliver specially designed instruction to address the unique needs of a student that result from the disability. Check with your state law for additional guidance.

Where can the SDI be delivered?

SDI is not specific to a location. According to IDEA Sec. 300.39(1), special education means SDI to meet the needs of the child with a disability, including instruction conducted in the classroom, in the home, in hospitals and institutions, and in other settings; and instruction in physical education. Delivery adaptations related to location of instruction should only be included in the IEP if student data indicate the child needs the instructional adaptation to progress towards measurable annual goals and in the general curriculum.





Can general education instruction and services provided to all students through a Title I schoolwide plan or MTSS interventions be considered SDI?

Yes, the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) has previously stated in a policy letter that if special education is also considered a “best teaching practice” or “part of the district’s regular education program” it does not preclude those services from meeting the definition of “special education” or “related services” and being included in the child’s IEP. The LEA must provide a child with a disability SDI that addresses the unique needs of the child that result from the child’s disability and ensures access by the child to the general curriculum, even if that type of instruction is being provided to other children, with or without disabilities, in the child’s classroom, grade, or building. See [OSEP Letter to Chambers, May 9, 2012](#), and [OSEP Letter to McAndrews and Ramirez, September 5, 2024](#).

Are adaptations to the SDI delivery location the same as placement decisions?

No, documented delivery adaptations are specific to the delivery of special education services. In most cases, students with disabilities who require adaptations to the location of SDI delivery will continue to participate in the general curriculum at least 80% of the school day. IEP Teams should review the proposed SDI adaptations and other required services when making decisions about

- The extent, if any, to which the child will not participate with nondisabled children in the regular class and in the activities [[IDEA Sec. 300.320\(a\)\(5\)](#)] and;
- The projected date for the beginning of the services and modifications..., and the anticipated frequency, location, and duration of those services and modifications. [[IDEA Sec. 300.320\(a\)\(7\)](#)]

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](#)

