

SDI Content Adaptations: What You Need to Know

Summary

What is specially designed instruction (SDI)? 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.

What are [SDI content adaptations](#)? Adaptations to the academic and functional instructional content being taught to the child with a disability

- To address the unique needs of the child that result from the disability; and
- To ensure access to and progress in the general curriculum.

How do I know what content adaptations are needed? To identify appropriate SDI content adaptations, individualized education program (IEP) Teams should refer to the following:

1. The evaluation report, which describes the areas of need for special education.
2. The IEP [present levels of academic achievement and functional performance \(PLAAPF\) statement](#), which describes how the disability affects, or impacts, the child's involvement and progress in the general education curriculum or, for preschool students, how the disability affects the child's participation in appropriate activities.
3. The [IEP measurable annual goals](#), which focus on the specific knowledge, skills, or strategies the child needs to master to be able to access and make progress in the general curriculum, to the maximum extent appropriate.

What questions should the IEP Team consider?

- 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 impact of the disability that is not already part of the general curriculum instruction?
- What knowledge, skills, or 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?
- How can we leverage the student's strengths and current knowledge as we identify needed adaptations to the instructional content?

Common SDI Content Adaptations: Considering the Disability's Impact on Educational Performance

[IDEA, Sec. 300.8\(a\)\(1\)](#) clarifies that a child with a disability means a child evaluated as meeting the criteria for one of the disabilities listed below and who, by reason thereof, needs special education and related services. In defining the disability categories, [IDEA Sec. 300.8\(c\)](#) identifies functional and academic areas commonly associated with each disability category. While the child's disability category identified during the eligibility determination process does not determine specific SDI content adaptations, it can assist the IEP Team in identifying potential areas of SDI content adaptation. For example, an IEP Team will need to consider a written communication content adaptation for a child who meets the criteria for a child with visual impairment that results in blindness. In this case, the reading and writing instructional that content delivered as part of the general curriculum may be adapted to include Braille instruction to meet the unique needs of the child. Below is a summary of instructional content areas by IDEA disability category that IEP Teams may consider when determining whether SDI content adaptations are needed to address the impact of the disability.

Autism

1. Verbal and nonverbal communication
2. Social behaviors or interaction
3. Responding to sensory experiences
4. Responding to changes in routine or environment

Deaf-Blind

1. Communication
2. Travel training

Deafness

1. Communication, such as sign language
2. Reading, writing, and mathematics (impacted by impaired processing of linguistic information through hearing)

Emotional disturbance

1. Interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers
2. Appropriate behavior
3. Emotional regulation

Hearing impairment

1. Communication
2. Reading and writing (impacted by impaired processing of linguistic information through hearing)

Intellectual disability

1. Adaptive behaviors

2. Reading, writing, and mathematics
3. Travel training

Multiple disabilities (concomitant impairments such as intellectual disability-blindness or intellectual disability-orthopedic impairment)

1. Mobility
2. Travel training
3. Academic learning
4. Communication

Orthopedic impairment

1. Physical education
2. Mobility

Other Health Impairment

1. Limited strength or stamina
2. Vitality
3. Alertness, including a heightened alertness, to environmental stimuli

Specific Learning Disability

1. Basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using spoken or written language
2. Ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations

Speech or Language Impairment

1. Communication, such as stuttering and articulation
2. Language, including receptive and expressive language

Traumatic Brain Injury (acquired injury to the brain caused by an external physical force)

1. Basic psychological processes in understanding or in using spoken or written language
2. Memory, attention, reasoning, abstract thinking, judgment, and problem-solving
3. Appropriate behavior
4. Speech and language
5. Sensory, perceptual, and motor abilities
6. Physical education
7. Psychosocial behavior

Visual impairment (including blindness)

1. Mobility training
2. Reading, writing, and mathematics (impacted by impaired processing of visual information)
3. Written modes of communication, such as Braille

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 standards-based grade-level 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 educators in identifying appropriate instructional content adaptations to address impacts of the disability on academic performance.

Elementary Reading and Writing Instruction

- Practice Guides (What Works Clearinghouse): [Teaching Elementary School Students to Be Effective Writers](#)
- Practice Guides (What Works Clearinghouse): [Foundational Skills to Support Reading for Understanding in Kindergarten Through 3rd Grade](#)
- Practice Guides (What Works Clearinghouse): [Improving Reading Comprehension in Kindergarten Through 3rd Grade](#)
- National Center on Improving Literacy (NCIL), <https://www.improvingliteracy.org/>
- National Center on Intensive Intervention (NCII): [Intensive Intervention in Reading Course Content](#)

Secondary Reading and Writing Instruction

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

Mathematics Instruction (pre-K through Grade 12)

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

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 content adaptations related to improving a child’s functional performance.

Behavior

- Practice Guides (What Works Clearinghouse): [Teacher-Delivered Behavioral Interventions in Grades K-5](#)
- [Using Functional Behavioral Assessments to Create Supportive Learning Environments](#) (U.S. Department of Education)
- NCII: [Behavior Support for Intensive Intervention Course Content](#)
- Center on PBIS, <https://www.pbis.org/>

Social Skills

- [Employability Skills – Effective Relationships](#) (Interpersonal Skills, Personal Qualities)
- Teaching Social Behaviors: [Brief](#) and [Module](#)

Communication

- [Wyoming Vision Outreach](#)
- [Wyoming Deaf & Hard of Hearing Services](#)
- [Preparing Teachers to Facilitate Communication Skills in Students With Severe Disabilities](#) (CEEDAR Center)
- [Assistive Technology Devices and Services for Children With Disabilities Under the IDEA](#) (Office of Special Education Programs)

Executive Functioning

- Teaching Cognitive and Metacognitive Strategies: [Brief](#) and [Module](#)
- [Employability Skills– Applied Knowledge](#) (Applied Academic Skills, Critical Thinking Skills)

Transition and Employment Skills

- [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), <https://transitionta.org/>