

SDI Delivery 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 delivery adaptations](#)? Adaptations to where and when the instruction will be delivered or adaptations to who will deliver the instruction

- 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 delivery adaptations are needed? To identify appropriate SDI delivery 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 \(PLAAFP\) 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. Evidence of the student's response to different delivery approaches.

What questions should the IEP Team consider?

- 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?
- Do the data suggest that the student requires that the instruction is delivered at a specific time(s) or using a specific grouping model?

Examples of Evidence-based SDI Delivery Adaptations for Students with Disabilities

1. **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 functional skills, mobility, fine motor) and basic academic skills (e.g., math facts, sight words). Below are examples of evidence for behavior and math skill acquisition through distributed practice.
 - *Practice 5:* Provide students frequent and **varying opportunities** to respond to and engage in activities ([Teacher-Delivered Behavioral Interventions in Grades K-5](#), What Works Clearinghouse)
 - *Practice 5:* Dedicate time each day to teaching math, and integrate math instruction **throughout the school day** ([Teaching Math to Young Children](#), What Works Clearinghouse)
2. **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 vs 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).
3. **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](#).
 - a. *Practice 5:* 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](#), What Works Clearinghouse)
 - b. *Practice 1:* Provide **daily time** for students to write ([Teaching Elementary School Students to Be Effective Writers](#), What Works Clearinghouse)
 - c. *Practice 5:* Dedicate time **each day** to teaching math, and integrate math instruction throughout the school day ([Teaching Math to Young Children](#), What Works Clearinghouse)

4. **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.
5. **Adaptations to the personnel delivering SDI** (*not a specific person*) – For some students, the data may suggest that the students require that the instruction be delivered by personnel with specialized training or skills. Under no circumstances, should an individual’s name be listed. Best practice suggests documenting the knowledge and skills an the instructional delivery provider must have to deliver the SDI the student needs.
6. **Other examples of SDI delivery adaptations**
 - a. Use of specific visual aids or images
 - b. Instructional delivery using sign language or an auditory device
 - c. Delivery by or with a peer
 - d. Quiet room

Did You Know?

Like other instructional adaptations, there is not a comprehensive list of potential SDI delivery adaptations. 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. 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.

Frequently Asked Questions About SDI Delivery Adaptations

Where can the SDI be delivered?

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 specially designed instruction?

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 specially designed instruction 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](#).

Who can provide specially designed instruction?

Ultimately the answer needs to be based on the individual needs of a student, but 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, such as by 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 has the required knowledge and skills to design and deliver specially designed instruction to address the unique needs of a student.

Is co-teaching SDI?

No, unless individual student data suggest that the student's needs co-teaching to address the unique needs of the child. Since co-teaching is *how* the local educational agency will implement the services in the IEP rather than a service the student *needs*, it would not be documented in the IEP as special education or SDI.

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. In some cases, the nature or severity of the disability is such that satisfactory progress cannot be achieved in the general education setting, even with supplementary aids and services, and IEP Teams may determine a placement in a more restrictive setting(s) might be necessary to ensure an appropriate education. IEP Teams will review the proposed SDI adaptations and other required services to make placement decisions and provide in the IEP

- An explanation of 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\(a\)\(7\)](#)]

Additional Resources

1. [Instructional Technology: What Teachers Need to Know](#) (PROGRESS Center)
2. [Evidence-Based Instructional Practices Course Collection](#) (PROGRESS Center)
3. [Wyoming Vision Outreach](#)
4. [Wyoming Deaf & Hard of Hearing Services](#)

5. [IES Practice Guides](#)