



GREENBUSH

THE EDUCATION SERVICE CENTER

Specialized Learning Services

What's So Special about Special Education?

NOTES

What's So Special About Special Education?

Learning Intention:

We are learning how IDEA's requirements for FAPE translate into specially designed instruction that supports access and meaningful progress.

Success Criteria

- Describe what SDI is and is not.
- Evaluate case examples for components of SDI.
- Identify "Look fors" for SDI in Core instruction.
- Discuss a continuum of service options
- Explain how instructional decisions drive reasonably calculated special education services.

Agenda - In 3 Questions

- What does the law require?
- What makes special education "special"?
- What does legally defensible practice look like?

Connection Before Content

- Turn to a person sitting next to you.
- Give a 16 second elevator speech to each other about what you know about Special Education.

WHAT DOES THE LAW REQUIRE?

Federal Laws

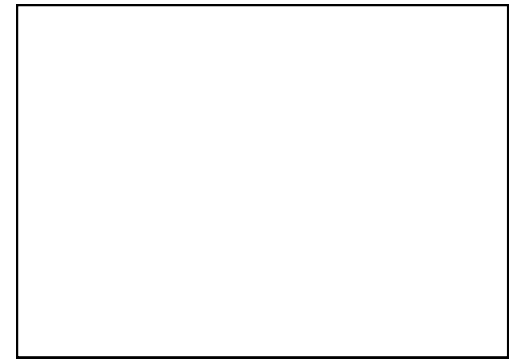
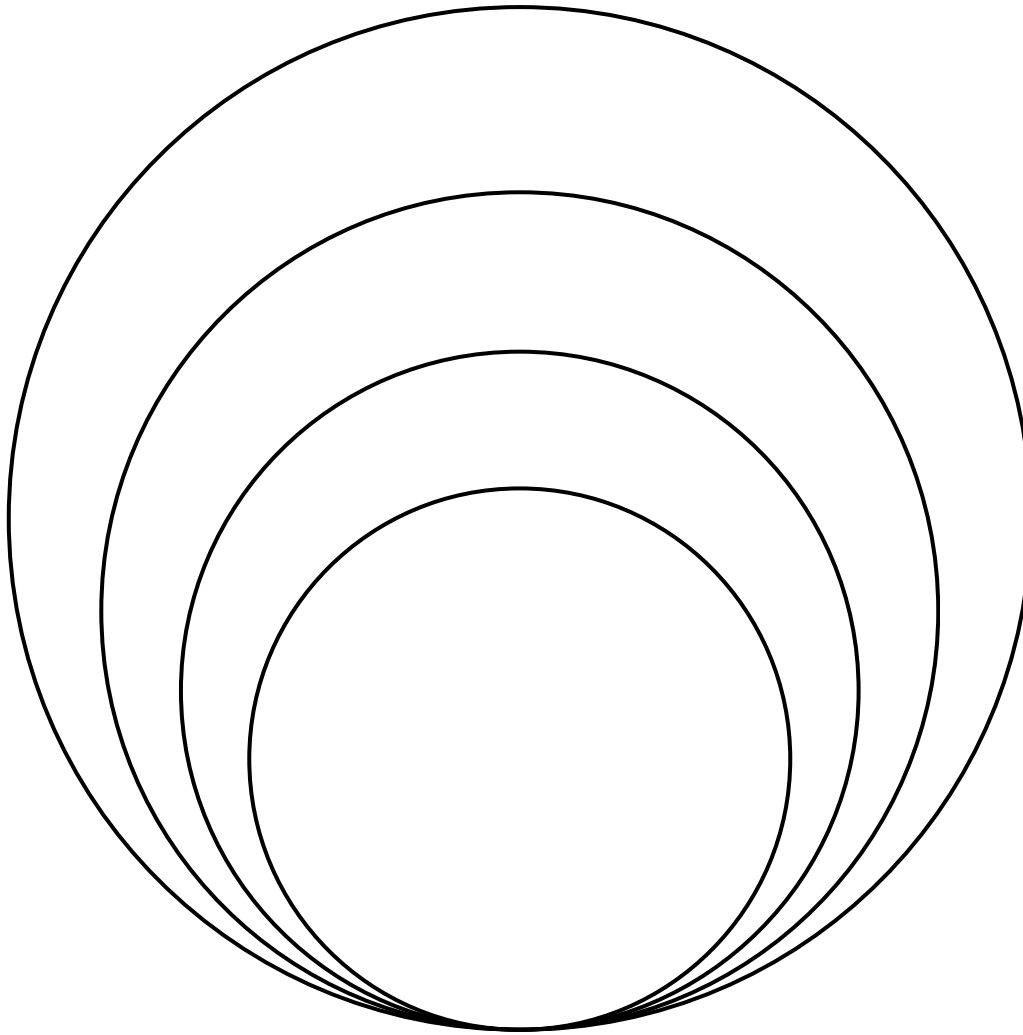
- Every Student Succeeds Act
- Americans with Disabilities Act
- Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act
- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act: (6 Pillars): Ensures that children with disabilities are provided with equality of educational opportunity, full participation, and independent living
 - **FAPE:** Free Appropriate Public Education provided at no cost
 - **Appropriate Evaluation:** Comprehensive, non-discriminatory, with permission
 - **Individualized Education Program (IEP):** Outlines Present levels, goals, & services
 - **Least Restrictive Environment (LRE):** Consideration for how students will be educated with non-disabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate
 - **Parent/Student Participation:** Right to be active participants in all decisions regarding evaluation, placement, and programming.
 - **Procedural Safeguards:** Access to information & mechanism for dispute resolution

IEP Requirements under IDEA

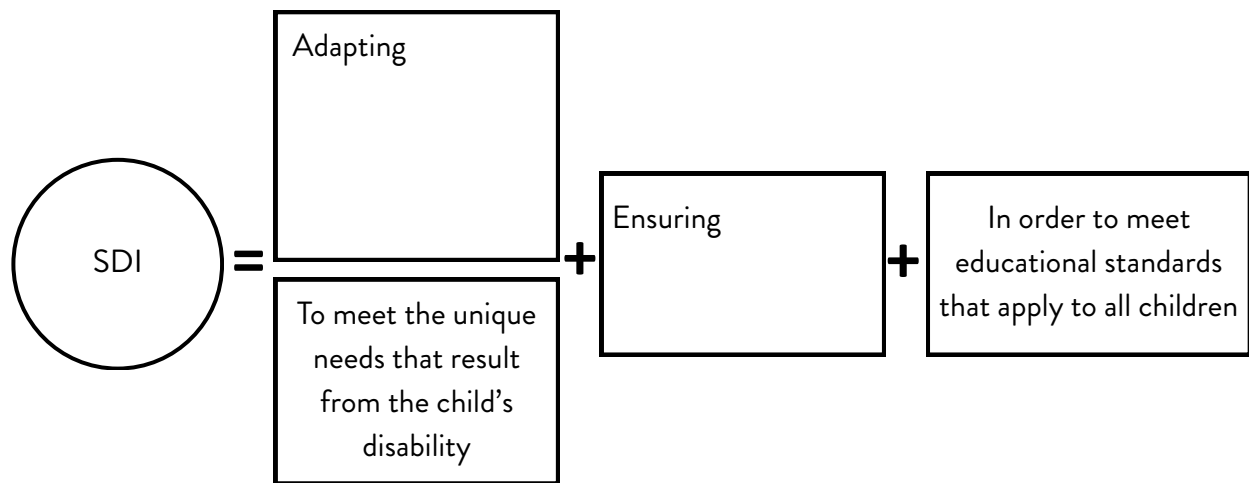
PROCEDURAL	SUBSTANTIVE	IMPLEMENTATION
An IEP team complies with the procedures set forth in IDEA for de minimus benefit.	IEP is reasonably calculated to enable progress in light of child's circumstances.	Services and supports outlined in the IEP are provided per team agreement.
Rowley	Endrew	IDEA

FREE APPROPRIATE PUBLIC EDUCATION REQUIREMENTS

Instruction and Supports for ALL



WHAT MAKES SPECIAL EDUCATION SPECIAL?



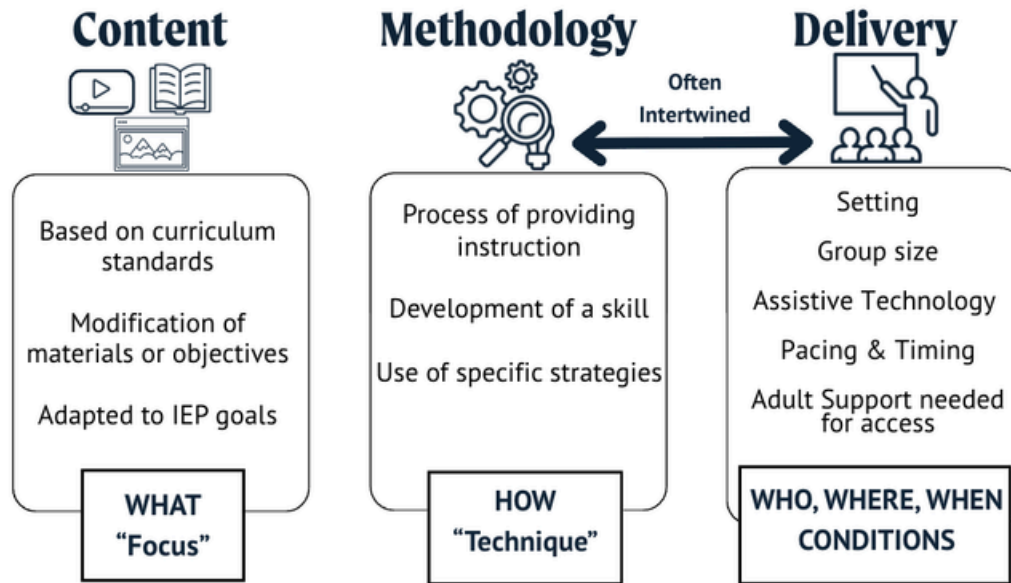
Kansas Special Education Process Handbook

ACCESS	PROGRESS

THIS OR THAT (Access or Progress?)

EXAMPLE	DECIDE	EXPLAIN WHY	CONTINUUM OPTIONS
A student sits in the back of the general education classroom completing different work alone.	Access or Progress		
Student increases written expression from 2 sentences to 8 organized sentences.	Access or Progress		
Student uses self-regulation strategies before asking to leave class.	Access or Progress		
A student receives shortened work for every assignment regardless of need.	Access or Progress		
Student improves reading fluency from 45 to 75 correct words per minute.	Access or Progress		
Student independently uses a communication device to answer questions during class discussion.	Access or Progress		
Student uses text-to-speech to participate in grade-level science reading.	Access or Progress		
A paraeducator sits beside a student during the entire school day.	Access or Progress		
Student uses text-to-speech to participate in grade-level science reading.	Access or Progress		
A paraeducator sits beside a student during the entire school day.	Access or Progress		
Student attends general education field trips with peers using sensory supports.	Access or Progress		

SPECIALLY DESIGNED INSTRUCTION



Adapted from Kansas Special Education Process Handbook [KPH], Chapter 3, p. 50; K.A.R. 91-40-1(kkk); 34 C.F.R. § 300.39(a)(1))

WHAT DOES LEGALLY DEFENSIBLE PRACTICE LOOK LIKE?

Specially Designed Instruction: Is/Is Not

 = IS  = NO

- _____ In addition to core instruction
- _____ Presumed incompetence
- _____ Promoting dependence
- _____ Specific to the student (individualized)
- _____ Lowering expectations and/or removing students from the general education setting
- _____ Promoting independence
- _____ What a student does
- _____ Presumed competence
- _____ In place of core instruction
- _____ Driven by programs or schedules
- _____ Maintaining high expectations and supporting student in general education settings
- _____ What an educator/staff/school personnel does

Guiding Questions for SDI

Adapted from Beninghof, A. M. (2022). The what and why of SDI. In Specially designed instruction: Increasing success for students with disabilities. Routledge.

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1. Is it special? Is it different from general education practices of MTSS, UDL, or DI?
 2. Is it aligned with curriculum standards?
 3. Does it address the child's unique needs?
 4. Is it related to an IEP goal?
 5. Is data being collected for progress monitoring?
 6. Is it instruction rather than a tool or accommodation?
 7. Is it intentional? Designed to bring about progress?
 8. Is it using an evidence-based strategy?
 9. Is it growing a skill that will be transferable or generalizable?
 10. Is it building independence?



Overview of Specially Designed Instruction

SDI Case Study

THIRD
Grade

Name: Eli

Learning Environment: Blended rural classroom with both in-person and asynchronous components

Primary Need: Working memory challenges affecting reading comprehension

IEP Goals:

- Eli will make connections between new content and his background knowledge with 80% accuracy.
- Eli will identify and explain the sequence of events in a grade-level historical text with visual supports.
- Eli will use teacher-provided visual cues to support text comprehension.

SCENARIO 1

Mr. Nguyen, the special education teacher, collaborates with Ms. Rivera to create a support system for Eli using a custom visual timeline tool. This timeline includes icons, simplified vocabulary, and space for student-created sticky notes. During small-group time, Mr. Nguyen meets with Eli and two other students to reread a class article on the Civil Rights Movement.

He models how to use signal words (“first,” “next,” “then,” “finally”) to plot events on the timeline. Eli uses color-coded sticky notes to place key events in sequence, referencing the icon prompts and Mr. Nguyen’s verbal cues. Mr. Nguyen collects data on Eli’s ability to independently place and explain 3 or more events in sequence. Over the quarter, he gradually fades visuals and increases independence, aligning with Eli’s IEP goals.

SCENARIO 2

Ms. Rivera introduces a lesson on historical events using a story map graphic organizer that all students in the class are expected to complete. Mr. Nguyen, the special education teacher, anticipates that Eli might struggle to recall key events from the story due to his memory challenges.

To support him, Mr. Nguyen previews the vocabulary with Eli before the lesson and highlights a few sentences in the text to draw his attention to important details. During independent work time, Eli uses the same graphic organizer as his peers. Mr. Nguyen checks in briefly to ask if Eli understands the instructions and encourages him to reread the highlighted sections.

Eli completes the assignment with some difficulty but no additional teaching or tools are provided. His responses are reviewed as part of the general class grading, with no specific data collected on his comprehension or memory strategies.



Overview of Specially Designed Instruction

SDI Case Study

SIXTH
Grade

Name: Naomi

Learning Environment: General education with co-teaching support in ELA

Primary Need: Reading comprehension, especially identifying main ideas and supporting evidence

IEP Goals:

- Naomi will identify two central ideas from a multi-paragraph text with supporting evidence.
- Naomi will cite at least one detail from the text in her written summaries.
- Naomi will describe how the setting influences character decisions using evidence.

SCENARIO 1

Mrs. Evans introduces annotation strategies to the whole class, using a think-aloud to demonstrate how to underline main ideas and write notes in the margins. Students are given a worksheet with reminders on what to annotate.

Mr. Holt provides Naomi with a paper copy of the article, identical to her peers', and reminds her to underline important sentences. He occasionally checks in with her to redirect her focus or rephrase instructions if she appears confused.

Naomi participates in the class discussion but has difficulty explaining how she identified the main idea. Her responses on the follow-up quiz show minimal improvement. There is no evidence that the strategy is helping her with her IEP goals, and no additional scaffolds are added.

SCENARIO 2

Mr. Holt, the special education teacher, introduces a tool called "Idea Frames." This custom graphic organizer is designed to help Naomi categorize ideas into "Big Idea," "Important Details," and "Supporting Evidence." During shared reading, he models the use of color-coded markers to label sentences.

After co-teaching the initial lesson with Mrs. Evans, he pulls Naomi and three others to a side table. He guides them through a brief nonfiction text, prompting Naomi with sentence stems like:

- "I think this is the main idea because..."
- "This detail supports the big idea by..."

He collects weekly data on Naomi's ability to correctly complete the Idea Frame and tracks her use of sentence stems. Instruction gradually shifts from teacher-led to student-guided work.



Overview of Specially Designed Instruction

SDI Case Study

HIGH
School

Name: Darius

Grade: 9th

Learning Environment: Fully included in general education; receives co-teaching support in Algebra and English

Primary Need: Executive functioning – task initiation and organization

IEP Goals:

- Darius will begin class with required materials 4 out of 5 days per week.
- Darius will break down long-term assignments into manageable steps and meet deadlines with 80% consistency.

Use the Guiding Questions for SDI on page 17 to answer.

SCENARIO 1

Ms. Scott, Darius's case manager, introduces a digital task management app tailored to his needs (e.g., Todoist, myHomework). They meet during study hall every Monday to input assignments from all his classes. She walks him through estimating time, chunking tasks, and using reminder settings.

For large projects, they build backward plans using calendar blocks and weekly checkpoints. Ms. Scott monitors his app log-ins and checks off tasks together in 1:1 check-ins. If a step is missed, she helps problem-solve: "What got in the way? What could we try differently?" She tracks:

- Weekly app usage
- On-time completion
- Task initiation without prompting

This strategy is used only with Darius and is updated monthly based on his progress.

SCENARIO 2

Darius's general education teachers use Google Classroom to post daily assignments and long-term projects. Each week, they provide updates through the platform and send automated email reminders to students. Ms. Scott is aware that Darius often forgets to check the platform and misses due dates. She occasionally emails him directly to remind him about major assignments and encourages him to "stay on top of things." When Darius expresses frustration, she suggests that he write down his assignments in a notebook, but no structured plan or instruction is offered.

While his teachers offer time during advisory to work on missing assignments, Darius continues to struggle with starting tasks and often turns work in late. His IEP goals for organization and task initiation are not directly addressed in this approach.

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