

What is High Quality, Intentional Specially Designed Instruction?

Specially designed instruction is defined by IDEA as “adapting, as appropriate to the needs of an eligible child, the content, methodology, or delivery of instruction to address the unique needs of the child that result from the child’s disability and 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.” 34 CFR §300.39(b)(3). This means providing students with IEPs with instruction that is designed to efficiently and effectively close the gap between their present levels of performance and the expected outcomes for their age or grade. Specially designed instruction should be *in addition to* and not in place of core instruction, except in very specific circumstances.

While accommodations, scaffolds, and modifications describe what the student needs, the SDI describes “what and how the teacher [Intervention Specialist] teaches.” A student who requires no specially designed instruction would not be eligible for special education services under IDEA.

Can the general education teacher provide specially designed instruction?

The Intervention Specialist is the individual who is best equipped to deliver, track, and progress monitor SDI in specific goal areas. Here are the reasons:

1. The Intervention Specialist is specifically trained in how to design instruction for students with disabilities.
2. The Intervention Specialist’s primary job is to deliver that SDI.

But the IEP template allows us to choose the “regular education teacher...”

On the Ohio IEP, SDI can also describe how the highly qualified content area teacher will adapt his/her methods of core instruction in the classroom to meet the student’s unique needs. This is where the general education teacher may be listed as the provider of SDI.

However, IEP teams should consider the following when planning services and supports for students with disabilities before identifying the regular education teacher as a provider.

1. There is a huge difference between *specially designed instruction*, which is what and how the teacher teaches to meet the child’s needs, and *accommodations*, adjustments that can be made across all settings regardless of content. When the IEP team is considering the general education teacher as the service provider, the team really needs to assess whether they are discussing SDI or accommodations.
2. There is a broad assumption in the law that students with disabilities are receiving “good first instruction.” The IEP does not have to outline what the student gets if all

students are receiving that. For example, there is no need to state that a kindergarten student is receiving systematic instruction in phonics 20 minutes per day when *all* students are receiving systematic instruction in phonics 20 minutes per day from a regular education teacher as part of a high quality kindergarten curriculum. If a fifth grade student requires systematic phonics instruction due to a specific learning disability in reading, this is outside of the fifth grade curriculum and should be designed and delivered by an Intervention Specialist.

3. SDI is time-bound (minutes per day, week, or month) and needs to be tracked and monitored. If the regular education teacher is listed as a service provider, they are responsible for providing the minutes of service, tracking, and progress monitoring.

Bottom line: If the regular education teacher is going to be identified as a service provider in the IEP, there needs to be evidence that the regular education teacher is really changing his/her instruction for the individual student and delivering the SDI in the manner that is called for in the IEP. Otherwise, the SDI should be the primary responsibility of the Intervention Specialist.

So if the regular education teacher is not providing SDI, what is their responsibility in implementing the IEP?

Ensuring access to **grade level curriculum and good first instruction** with accommodations and supports (and modifications, if appropriate and documented) through differentiation.

Does the related service provider provide specially designed instruction?

If the student ONLY receives related services, yes. This is documented under the Specially Designed Instruction boxes on the Ohio IEP (in Section 7), rather than the Related Services boxes. If the student has other goals (such as academic, behavioral, functional), then the related service provider provides related services, not the SDI.

Does the paraprofessional provide specially designed instruction?

No. A paraprofessional provides *support* rather than *services*.

How do I provide SDI in a fully remote environment?

Because most SDI is direct, explicit, and systematic, this lends itself well to teacher-led instruction and guided practice during synchronous small group learning time. It becomes a more complex puzzle when moving core content classes.

Students whose IEPs state that SDI will be provided in a *single classroom environment* will receive remote SDI with the Intervention Specialist in a small group. The IS is responsible for the SDI outlined in the IEP that is directly tied to goals and objectives. The IS is ALSO responsible for core content instruction in one or more subjects; this core content instruction is also specially designed for that student. (If it didn't have to be specially designed, the student should be receiving core instruction in the general education classroom with supplemental aids and services.)

Students in *ED single classrooms* require a duplicate framework regarding the delivery of core instruction and SDI delivered in a small group and/or one-on-one setting. Academic goals require instruction while behavior goals do too. Thus, the focus shifts from core content subjects to the 5 competencies of social emotional learning and/or barriers to accessing the general education curriculum. SDI and identified accommodations can be present throughout the entire school day if it is how the IS will adapt his/her methods of core instruction or intervention in the classroom to meet the student's unique needs. However, SDI minutes remain directly tied to goals and objectives. This service is provided by the intervention specialist and supported by the paraprofessional. If the student does not require specially designed instruction for academic content, it is strongly encouraged that the student receive as much core content instruction as possible from general education teachers, especially in a remote environment when behavior issues often become less of a factor.

Students whose IEPs state that SDI will be provided in the *resource room* will receive remote SDI with the Intervention Specialist in a small group for the minutes provided on the IEP.

For students whose IEPs state that SDI will be provided in *general education*, this means that the SDI is delivered in the regular classroom. Since this will all be remote, **coplanning, coserving, and coteaching** will be required. SDI in the general education class could look like:

- Breakout groups during synchronous class time
- Co-presenting synchronous lessons that embed the SDI for all students in the class – this would really be “universal design for learning” at its best
- Follow-up support from the IS outside of class time, either in a synchronous environment or an asynchronous environment
- Utilizing one of the five co-teaching models - <https://www.languagemagazine.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Co-Teaching-Models-for-Remote-Learning-Hammer.pdf>

If the student does not make progress toward mastery of IEP goals and objectives, the IEP team should convene to consider the location of services for the SDI. It may be that in a remote environment, it would provide more meaningful benefit for the student to receive SDI from the Intervention Specialist outside of the general education classroom. Keep in mind that this would constitute a change of placement and would require parent consent.

Does all SDI have to be delivered in a synchronous environment?

The preponderance of research supports the need for direct, explicit, systematic instruction for students with disabilities. This means that when considering the Gradual Release of Responsibility framework, students with disabilities usually need more time with direct instruction and guided practice in order to reach independence. These are *teacher-led* components of Gradual Release. This suggests that IEP service minutes should be met through synchronous instruction or during times when the Intervention Specialist is “on-stage” with students. If the student’s SDI includes repeated practice (which is also a research-supported element of explicit instruction), this could be designed to be completed in an asynchronous environment. However, the IEP team needs to be clear on how these activities will count toward the minutes of SDI. As always, the statements in Section 7 of the IEP should be the guide for designing SDI.

How should I write my IEPs?

The IEP Compliance Audit Rubric outlines very specific elements of Section 7 of the IEP. Please refer to that document for detailed information on what to include. What follows here is guidance on decision-making for SDI intensity, frequency, and duration.

SDI minutes need to reflect what actually makes sense in terms of how long instruction will be given to directly address each goal. We see IEPs are too often written with either too few or too many minutes for a goal. For example, an IEP might prescribe 250 weekly minutes in a resource setting for one math goal in the area of Number Sense. Does this mean that a student will not receive instruction on any other skills in math? Will they be removed from the general ed class for an average of 50 minutes a day for instruction on that one goal? This would mean that the student would get very little access to grade level content and would fall further behind while working on Number Sense. We know this is not usually the intention of the IEP team, but this is often the impact.

When asking how many minutes is appropriate for a single goal, the IEP team would need to take into account:

- The methodology you are using
- Whether or not the goal is also addressed in the general education classroom through core content instruction (example: phonics instruction in kindergarten vs. fifth grade)
- The number of objectives you are addressing to close the gap
- The number of other goals in the IEP
- Whether or not the student is making progress with that dosage of SDI
- The consequences of removing the student from core instruction for that amount of time. Even in a remote environment, time is a limiting factor, and there are only so many minutes in a day.

