



*Specially Designed Instruction*

# Guidance Document



*Specially Designed*  
**INSTRUCTION**  
*The Heart of Special Education*

*August 2025*





**West Virginia Board of Education  
2025-2026**

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**Specially designed instruction (SDI)** is the unique and tailored instructional programming that makes the general education curriculum accessible for students with disabilities. Envision SDI as a bridge, connecting students with disabilities and the curriculum. Effective SDI supports students to overcome learning barriers, including behaviors that may prevent them from successfully accessing the general education curriculum. This guidance document equips educators and leaders with relevant information regarding the development and implementation of effective SDI. The information included in this guidance document reflects the best practices endorsed by the West Virginia Department of Education.


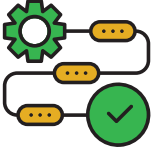

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## **SECTION 1: What is Specially Designed Instruction?**

Per the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and West Virginia Board of Education (WVBE) Policy 2419, special education services are defined as SDI: “the adaptation of content, methodology, or delivery of instruction to address the unique needs of a student with a disability and to ensure access to the general curriculum so that the student can meet the educational standards that apply to each student within the jurisdiction of the public agency.” (34 CFR §300.39(b)(3) and COMAR 13A.05.01.03 B (71 and 72), [WVDE, 2017](#)). All students with disabilities must be provided with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) that is appropriate for their needs and is “reasonably calculated to enable a child to make progress,” and “every child should have the chance to meet challenging objectives” (Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District RE-1, 2017).

The IEP documents all accommodations, supports, and services required for students to achieve annual IEP goals; as well as access and make progress in the general education curriculum for the grade in which they are enrolled. The IEP also documents and communicates how SDI will be implemented and monitored.

## ELEMENTS OF SDI

SDI Element	What it Means	Questions to Consider
 <b>Content</b>	<b>What</b> is taught to allow the student to access general education programming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are adaptations needed for the content as a result of the disability?</li> <li>• Do the data indicate that the student needs specialized instruction in a specific academic or functional area?</li> <li>• What are the content and skills needs outlined in the IEP goals?</li> <li>• How can we leverage the student's strengths and current knowledge as we identify needed adaptations to the instructional content that will be provided?</li> </ul>
 <b>Methodology</b>	<b>How</b> the instruction is delivered or the practices and approach the teacher uses to teach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is there a method that has proven to be more effective for this student when acquiring knowledge and skills?</li> <li>• Are there methods that have been ineffective for this student when acquiring knowledge and skills?</li> </ul>
 <b>Delivery of Instruction</b>	By <b>whom, where,</b> and <b>when</b> the instruction will be delivered	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What instructional delivery adaptations are needed?</li> <li>• Does the delivery (including the group size) provide sufficient opportunities for the student to practice and receive explicit feedback?</li> <li>• Do the data indicate an adaptation to the provider's specialized knowledge and skills?</li> </ul>

*Source: Progress Center at American Institutes for Research*

### SDI Elements

SDI includes the adaptation of the content (the “what”), methodology (the “how”), and/or the delivery of instruction (by “whom, where, and when”) so that a student with a disability can access the general education curriculum. By adapting content, teachers consider “what” to teach. This may include presenting students with song lyrics, a poem, or video that creates context prior to reading a classic novel. SDI includes strategies such as repetition, or pre-teaching vocabulary so that students who have difficulty with recall or memory due to a learning disability are able to access instruction. Adaptations in methodology include the use of metacognitive strategies to support comprehension, and delivery of instruction considers who, where, and when additional opportunities to practice skills are provided.













The graphic above, developed by the PROGRESS Center, provides a concrete example of the elements of SDI. Therefore, these elements must be considered on an individual student basis, and based upon the annual goals, quarterly objectives/benchmarks, accommodations, and supports documented in the IEP.

## Myth Busting

There are many misunderstandings and questions regarding SDI. How can educators and leaders avoid confusion and misinformation? Review the chart below to examine and debunk some of the most common myths around SDI development and implementation.

Myths	Facts
Special educators and related service providers are the only instructional staff able to provide SDI.	While special educators are responsible for designing and monitoring SDI, <b>any teacher, or instructional staff member, may implement SDI.</b> In fact, implementing SDI across many staff and settings is best practice and promotes generalization of skills and independence.
Students receiving SDI do not have to meet the same learning standards as their non-disabled peers.	<b>SDI does not modify or lower learning standards or academic expectations.</b> The purpose of SDI is to provide the appropriate accommodations, supports, and services through the IEP, and to provide access to the general education curriculum.
Students without disabilities are disrupted by the provision of SDI in the general education classroom.	<b>Other students in the general education classroom often benefit</b> from the content adaptation, methodology, and instructional delivery associated with SDI.
In a multitiered system of support, SDI would be considered tier 3, because that is special education.	In MTSS, <b>SDI should be delivered, as needed, in any tier of instruction</b> that the student with disability receives.
Students with significant disabilities do better when SDI is provided in separate classrooms.	<b>Both school achievement and quality post-school outcomes are positively correlated with the amount of time students with disabilities spend in a general education classroom</b> – regardless of the severity of their disabilities.
Curriculum modifications can only be delivered in a special education environment.	The decision to modify curriculum is unique to each student's IEP and individualized learning needs. Curriculum modifications may be delivered in both the general and special education environments, depending upon a student's IEP. <b>All students in West Virginia are provided access to standards-based grade-level instruction.</b> A student with a disability may seek an alternate diploma and receive instruction in the general education classroom with their peers. In this case, modification of the curriculum would be an appropriate element of the student's SDI.

## What SDI Is, and Is Not

SDI IS	SDI Is Not
 The adaptation of content, methodology, and/or delivery of instruction, uniquely tailored to a student's learning needs and clearly documented in the IEP to ensure effective implementation and progress monitoring.	 The same instruction that all other students in the classroom receive, or the use of high-yield strategies during instruction.
 Intentional, planned, meaningful, and delivered consistently, as documented in the IEP.	 Implemented inconsistently, based upon staffing or adult schedules, or "skipped" due to a change in schedule.
 Directly addressing challenging yet attainable, standards-aligned IEP goals.	 Random activities designed to keep students busy.
 Integrated and embedded into all classroom instruction.	 Facilitated separately from naturally occurring classroom and instructional routines.
 Implemented across all school settings, by multiple staff members.	 Isolated to one classroom, setting, or educator.
 What the teacher does to adapt content, methodology, or delivery of instruction.	 What the student does during instruction.

Content from this table was informed by resources from the following Departments of Education: Maryland, Indiana, and Texas.

## Where Is SDI Documented in the IEP?

There is not one section of the IEP called SDI. SDI is documented in multiple sections of the IEP. The IEP document **IS** the student's plan for SDI. Together, the following IEP sections document and explain SDI.

IEP Section	SDI Connection
Consideration of Factors for IEP Development/ Annual Review	If any considerations are selected, such as assistive technology, communication, behavior, etc., there must be evidence of this need being addressed in the annual goals, services, and/or accommodations sections of the IEP. The student must have the consideration addressed effectively in order for SDI to be implemented. An example of this would be if an IEP team selected assistive technology (AT), a description of the type of AT and how it is to be used during instruction and progressed monitored would be documented in the IEP.
Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance (PLAAFP)	The PLAAFP describes current levels of academic performance, which serves as the baseline for the annual goals. This information is required to develop annual goal mastery criteria that is challenging yet attainable. In addition to academic data, PLAAFP data also informs IEP teams of current performance on adaptive and functional skills. Prompting levels should also be noted in the PLAAFP and intentionally faded to promote student independence as part of SDI.
Annual Goals	Annual IEP goals are developed using accurate baseline data and mastery criteria based upon historic rates of growth. Academic IEP goals are aligned to grade-level curricular standards and designed to challenge the student to grow and make progress towards meeting their grade-level standards. IEP goals are the infrastructure for effective SDI.
Objectives	IEP objectives break down the annual goal into achievable benchmarks. This allows an IEP team to monitor progress quarterly and determine if the student is on track to meet their annual goal(s).
Services	The services section of the IEP defines the type of service, environment, frequency, start date, and duration. IEP services provide detailed information that must be adhered to in order to implement the student's individualized SDI.
Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)	The LRE determination is a critical decision made by the IEP team, that documents how much time students with disabilities will receive their educational programming in the general education classroom, with their peers. The team must review the IEP including considerations, PLAAFP and historical rates of growth, annual goals, services, as well as family input, to decide the best fit on the LRE continuum for the individual student. SDI occurs when the team ensures that the services and supports are delivered to the student in the LRE as described in the IEP.
Accommodations	Accommodations do not change grade level standards or academic expectations. As part of SDI, they are intentionally selected to meet the needs of the learning barriers to mitigate the educational impact of a student's disability. IEP accommodations provide access to the general education curriculum and are a critical element of SDI. For example, a student impacted by muscle coordination (cerebral palsy) may use a voice output device to speak their answers to comprehension questions rather than handwriting their answers. This accommodation does not change the grade-level text or questions; it provides the student with an alternative way to respond.

## Difference Between SDI, Accommodations, and Modifications ([WVDE PDF](#))

The Council for Exceptional Children's (CEC) High Leverage Practice #13 is "Adapt curriculum tasks and materials for specific learning goals." The two ways that educators adapt curriculum tasks and materials are by providing accommodations and/or modifications. Accommodations and modifications are both strategies used in education to support students with diverse learning needs, but they have distinct purposes and implementation methods. **SDI is the combination of individualized IEP goals, accommodations and/or modifications, and services as documented on the IEP.** Understanding the differences between these key concepts is critical for special education delivery.

### *Specially Designed Instruction*

Per the IDEA, special education is the specially designed instruction that includes "the adaptation of content, methodology, or delivery of instruction to address the unique needs of a student with a disability and to ensure access to the general curriculum so that the student can meet the educational standards that apply to each student within the jurisdiction of the public agency." (34 CFR §300.39(b)(3) and COMAR 13A.05.01.03 B (71 and 72)). In other words, it is the total sum of the IEP, including challenging yet attainable IEP goals, intentional accommodations that mitigate learning needs and provide access to the general education curriculum, and tailored services delivered to the student as defined in the LRE section of the IEP.

### *Accommodations*

Accommodations are designed to provide equal access to the same curriculum and educational content for students with disabilities or specific learning needs.

- **Purpose:** They help "level the playing field," ensuring that students can participate and demonstrate their knowledge without altering the fundamental content or expectations.
- **Examples:** Extended time for tests, preferential seating, providing audio materials for students with reading difficulties, or allowing the use of assistive technology.

### *Modifications*

Modifications involve altering the curriculum or educational content to suit a student's individual needs, usually due to significant learning challenges or disabilities.

- **Purpose:** The primary goal is to adjust the requirements and expectations, enabling the student to engage with modified content that aligns with their abilities and strengths.
- **Examples:** Simplifying reading materials, reducing the number of multiple-choice options for test items, lowering the complexity of tasks, or altering grading criteria to accommodate a student's learning pace.



## Guiding Questions for SDI

The guiding questions below provide educators and leaders with an opportunity to reflect to ensure that SDI is truly tailored to meet a student's needs. Use these guiding questions to support the instructional planning process when developing SDI.

- Is the instruction different from the typical general education practices of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) or Differentiated Instruction (DI)?
- Are the students' learning needs beyond the classroom differentiated instructional levels?
- Is it explicit instruction rather than a tool or accommodation?
- Does it address the student's unique learning needs as indicated in the IEP?
- Does the instruction enable access to and progress toward grade-level standards?
- Is the instruction directly related to an IEP goal, and is data being collected for progress monitoring?
- Is it growing a skill that will be transferable or generalizable?
- Is it designed to build independence?

These guiding questions are from the following source: [\*MSDE Success For All Students in the General Education Classroom \(2024\)\*](#).

## Summary

- SDI is intentional, planned, and reflects how the educators adapt the content, methodology, or delivery of instruction in the general education classroom.
- SDI is unique to each student and is documented on the IEP through challenging, individualized IEP goals, accommodations, and services.
- Accommodations provide support within the existing curriculum without changing the core content (changes how a student learns) and are critical for SDI.
- Modifications involve altering the curriculum expectations to better fit the student's abilities and needs (changes what a student is expected to learn).
- Both accommodations and modifications are essential components of specially designed instruction, tailored to meet the diverse requirements of students and help them achieve academic success.

## SECTION 2: Roles in Planning and Delivering SDI

SDI is a shared responsibility that requires intentional planning, collaboration between the special educator and general educator, as well as support from instructional support staff (paraeducators, aides, autism mentors, Early Childhood Classroom Assistant Teachers - ECCATs), special subject teachers, related service providers, and school leaders. SDI requires understanding of **the curriculum and content, and the student's IEP**.

### Who Can Deliver SDI?

SDI is planned and often delivered by the special educator; however, SDI may be delivered by any instructional staff member including the special educator, general educator, paraprofessionals, aides, autism mentors, ECCATs, and related service providers.

### What Are the Special Educator Roles and Responsibilities?

Special educators are experts in their students' unique learning needs and IEPs, and they are the team members responsible for coordinating the implementation of SDI. Special educator responsibilities include:

- Adapting either the content, methodology, and/or delivery of instruction in the general education environment through the implementation of the IEP. This requires collaborating with the general education teacher(s) to understand upcoming lessons to make necessary adaptations.
- Providing consultation and case management services and continuously monitoring/supporting general educators to implement SDI across multiple classrooms.
- Developing data collection systems to proactively progress monitor SDI implementation and student progress towards IEP goals.
- Reporting progress to families and teams.

### What Are the General Educator Roles and Responsibilities?

General educators are experts in the curriculum and grade-level standards. As part of the IEP team, general educators play an active role in SDI implementation. General educator responsibilities include:

- Collaboration with the special educator to adapt either the content, methodology, and/or delivery of the classroom instruction.
- Delivering SDI and implementing accommodations as documented on the IEP.
- Collecting academic and behavioral data, as necessary.

## Co-Teaching and SDI

Co-teaching is one of many service delivery options within an inclusive school model. With co-teaching, two certified professionals, a general and special educator, share responsibility for planning, delivering, and progress monitoring instruction. Together, this team makes instructional decisions and delivers SDI in the same classroom. Instruction occurs in the general education classroom, and the grade-level curriculum is always available. The general educator is the expert in curriculum, while the special educator is the expert on IEPs and strategies. The goal is to draw upon the strengths of each teacher, create an environment where they learn from one another other, and as a result, improve student outcomes. Review this chart to see the differences between the general and special educators' areas of expertise.

General Educator	Special Educator
Curriculum expert responsible for teaching ALL students in the classroom	Expert in student IEPs, unique learning needs and barriers, and accommodations (modifications, if appropriate), supports and services that must be delivered to meet IEP goals
Content Specialist	Strategy Specialist
Understanding of typical developmental trajectories	Knowledge of specially designed instruction
Whole group classroom management strategies	Learning process knowledge
Instructional pacing	Special education compliance expertise

Chart modified from the [Texas DOE Guidelines for Co-Teaching](#) (2021)

Remember, co-teaching requires shared accountability for planning, delivery, and monitoring student success. Co-teachers share responsibility for outcomes for ALL students in their classroom. SDI cannot take place if both teachers are not actively engaged and collaborating.

### Co-Teaching is not:

- ☒ Special educators acting as a substitute for general educators when they are absent.
- ☒ Teachers splitting subjects and only teaching during those they are responsible for (for example, I teach reading and social studies, you teach math and science).
- ☒ Teachers divvying up a lesson, with each leading part (for example, I will lead the lesson introduction and warm-up while you teach the mini lesson).
- ☒ One person teaching while the other does planning work such as - making materials, running errands, grading assignments, or writing IEPs.
- ☒ One person teaching a lesson while the other sits, stands, and/or watches without intentionality, function or specific teaching responsibilities.
- ☒ One person's ideas determine what or how something should be taught as the other person's ideas are ignored.
- ☒ One person acting as a tutor or hovering over one or two students or pulling students to a small table to finish missed assignments or homework.

This list is modified from the [West Virginia Co-Teaching Facts Sheet](#) (n.d) and [Guidelines for Co-Teaching in Texas](#) (2021).

## How Are Instructional Support Staff Involved in SDI?

Instructional support staff include paraprofessionals, aides, autism mentors, and ECCATs. All instructional support staff provide critical support in delivering and monitoring SDI. The role of instructional support staff is to support SDI under the direct guidance and supervision of a special education teacher or credentialed related service personnel. The conditions listed below must be in place for instructional support staff to successfully deliver SDI:

- The special education teacher designs and delivers SDI in the setting documented on the IEP.
- The general education teacher delivers core instruction and SDI in the general education classroom.
- Instructional support staff are provided with ongoing training and materials to support SDI (e.g., reinforcement/review of skills or concepts, data collection).
- Special education teachers and related service providers consistently communicate with the instructional support staff to support their SDI implementation and monitoring. The types of SDI instructional support staff may provide include:
  - Facilitate the use of assistive technology.
  - Facilitate and support functional communication systems.
  - Implement positive behavior support strategies, and/or facilitate token systems across settings.
  - Lead a review of concepts taught by the special or general educator(s).
  - Practice learned skills across settings to promote independence.
  - Monitor student academic progress and/or behavior.

## Summary

- SDI implementation is a team effort. SDI is designed, facilitated and/or coordinated by the special educator, but may also be delivered by the general educator, related service providers, and instructional support staff.
- Instructional support staff may deliver SDI under the supervision of a certified special educator or related service provider.
- Co-teaching is a service delivery model that provides natural access to the grade-level curriculum and opportunities for SDI to be seamlessly embedded into instruction.
- Data collection is critical for SDI progress monitoring, and all educators, related service providers, and instructional support staff can engage in data collection.



## SECTION 3: SDI Strategies

SDI requires that teachers adapt the content, methodology, and/or delivery of instruction based upon the unique learning needs of students. Effective SDI integrates the use of accommodations documented in the IEP into a cognitive or meta-cognitive strategy that provides students with skills they can use across subjects, settings, and for the rest of their lives. SDI incorporates evidence-based instructional strategies that accelerate student progress and connect them to their general education curriculum.

It is critical that educators select strategies that match the learning needs of students and explicitly teach students the SDI strategies. Though the selection of SDI strategies is individualized, remember that other students may incidentally benefit from one or many of these strategies. This **incidental benefit does not negate the SDI an individual student receives**.

There are multiple evidence-based instructional strategies to support SDI delivery. The strategies listed below are not an exhaustive list, and not all strategies work the same way for all students. The list below provides educators with the description of each strategy, the learning barriers the strategy addresses, and which disability categories may be most impacted by the use of the strategy. In addition, links to supportive research and helpful implementation resources are included.

### Strategy #1: Read, Ask, Put (RAP)

**Description:** RAP is a 3-step cognitive strategy that supports students who struggle to retain important information when reading. Students are explicitly taught the following steps: (1) Read the paragraph; (2) Ask yourself what the main idea is and find two key details to support the main idea; (3) put/paraphrase the main idea and two key details using your own words. Educators may scaffold this strategy by using a graphic organizer. The goal is that students will memorize and use this strategy independently when reading. RAP can be used across subjects and classrooms from elementary through high school.

#### Learning Barriers Addressed

- Working memory
- Reading comprehension
- Attention and focus
- Executive functioning

#### Potential Disability Categories Supported

- Specific Learning Disability
- Other Health Impairment
- Autism
- Emotional Disability

#### Supporting Research and Implementation Resources:

1. Intervention Central- This resource developed by Jim Knight (2014) describes how to use the RAP strategy and provides educators with a sample graphic organizer. [Read Ask Paraphrase RAP Worksheet4](#)
2. Mentari, R, & f (2021). IOSR Journal of Research & Method in Education (IOSR-JRME) e-ISSN: 2320-7388, p- ISSN: 2320-737x Volume 11, Issue 1 Ser. V (Jan. – Feb. 2021), PP 11-16 [www.iosrjournals.org](http://www.iosrjournals.org) - [article link](#)
3. Hua,Y, Woods-Groves, S., Ford, J., and Nobles, K. (2014). *Paraphrasing Strategy on Expository Reading Comprehension of Young Adults with Intellectual Disability*. Education and Training in Autism and Developmental Disabilities, 2014, 49(3), 429–439 ©Division on Autism and Developmental Disabilities - [article link](#)

## Strategy #2: Concrete – Representational – Abstract (CRA)

**Description:** The CRA strategy is a manipulative-based instructional sequence that supports students who require scaffolding to learn an abstract concept. Educators first introduce a new math concept or skill using a concrete object (C). Students engage with concrete items to make meaning of concepts. Next, students strengthen their understanding of the new concept through representation, such as drawing (R). Lastly, students connect their concrete and representational understandings with the abstract concept (A). Educators and students can transition between CRA at any time, to ensure abstract concepts are understood by all students. Also, students can be taught to apply the CRA strategy on their own. CRA is frequently implemented as a mathematics strategy in elementary school but can be applied across subjects as SDI for any student with concepts that require scaffolds and supports to make meaning of an abstract idea.

### Learning Barriers Addressed

- Difficulties processing verbal or written language
- Difficulties processing early mathematic concepts (numeracy, the four operations)
- Working memory
- Attention and focus
- Executive functioning
- Learning and retaining new information
- Processing time

### Potential Disability Categories Supported

- Specific Learning Disability
- Other Health Impairment
- Speech Language Impairment
- Autism
- Emotional Disability
- Intellectual Disability
- Developmental Delay

### Supporting Research and Implementation Resources:

1. Third Space Learning: This resource provides instructions for implementing the CRA strategy, as well as classroom examples. [Concrete Representational Abstract: What It Is And How To Use It](#)
2. Bone E., Bouck E., Witmer S. (2021). Evidence-based systematic review of literature on algebra instruction and interventions for students with learning disabilities. *Learning Disabilities: A Contemporary Journal*, 19(1), 1-22. - [article link](#)

## Strategy #3: Question, Answer, Relationship (QAR)

**Description:** QAR is a comprehension strategy that teaches students how to ask, and answer, questions about the texts they are reading, and can be used across subjects, including mathematics. This cognitive strategy helps students to locate facts within the text, strengthen their ability to infer, and connect text to their own experiences. Students are taught how to generate questions using a graphic organizer and these types of questions:

- Right There Questions
- Think and Search Questions
- Author and You
- On My Own

### Learning Barriers Addressed

- Difficulties with reading comprehension
- Working memory
- Attention and focus
- Executive functioning
- Learning and retaining new information

### Potential Disability Categories Supported

- Specific Learning Disability
- Other Health Impairment
- Speech Language Impairment
- Autism
- Emotional Disability

### Supporting Research and Implementation Resources:

1. Reading Rockets – This resource provides a description of the QAR strategy, instructions for implementing, and resources such as videos showing teachers demonstrating the QAR strategy - [Question-Answer Relationship \(QAR\) | Reading Rockets](#)
2. Au, Kathryn H & Raphael, Taffy E. (2005). QAR: *Enhancing comprehension and test taking across grades and content areas*. *The Reading Teacher*, 59 (3) 206-221. [article link](#)



## Strategy #4: PLEASE Paragraph Writing Strategy

**Description:** The **PLEASE** paragraph writing strategy is used to teach writing skills by focusing on prewriting planning, composition, and revision skills. This metacognitive strategy uses a first-letter mnemonic to prompt students for each step.

- Step 1: “**P**” represents PICK. (topic, audience, etc.)
- Step 2: “**L**” represents LIST.
- Step 3: “**E**” represents EVALUATE.
- Step 4: “**A**” stands for ACTIVATE the paragraph with a topic sentence.
- Step 5: “**S**” stands for SUPPLY supporting sentences.
- Step 6: “**E**” represents END with a concluding sentence and EVALUATE their work.

### Learning Barriers Addressed

- Difficulties writing paragraphs or longer texts
- Executive functioning
- Planning and organizing ideas

### Potential Disability Categories Supported

- Specific Learning Disability
- Other Health Impairment
- Speech Language Impairment
- Autism
- Emotional Disability

### Supporting Research and Implementation Resources:

1. PLEASE strategy directions PDF - [Paragraph writing.doc](#)
2. Welch, M. (1992). The PLEASE strategy: A metacognitive learning strategy for improving the paragraph writing of students with mild learning disabilities. *Learning Disability Quarterly*, 15, 119-127. [article link](#)

## Strategy #5: Systematic and Explicit Instruction

**Description:** Systematic instruction refers to strategic lessons that build upon one another, as well as larger concepts and tasks broken into smaller steps (task analysis). Explicit instruction is highly structured and typically follows the “I Do, We Do, You Do” structure, using gradual release. During explicit instruction, teachers demonstrate or model the skill/task for students, in order to demonstrate the correct response. Next, teachers and students engage in the new skill together. The final step is for students to engage in the skill/task independently. Both systematic and explicit instruction scaffold and support students in a safe and predictable way, which promotes success and reduces anxiety for learners. Systematic and Explicit instruction may be used across all ages and classrooms/subjects, and to support learning pro-social behaviors as well.

### Learning Barriers Addressed

- Working memory
- Attention and focus
- Executive functioning
- Learning and retaining new information
- Difficulties in reading or mathematics
- Problem solving

### Potential Disability Categories Supported

- Specific Learning Disability
- Other Health Impairment
- Speech Language Impairment
- Autism
- Emotional Disability

### Supporting Research and Implementation Resources:

1. IRIS Module - [Page 4: Explicit, Systematic Instruction](#)
2. Foxworth, L. L., Hashey, A. I., Dexter, C., Rasnitsyn, S., & Beck, R. (2021). Approaching Explicit Instruction Within a Universal Design for Learning Framework. *TEACHING Exceptional Children*, 54(4), 268-275. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00400599211010190>. [article link](#)

## Strategy #6: Systematic prompts and feedback

**Description:** Systematic prompts and feedback are highly effective instructional strategies that can be used in any classroom, across any subject, with any age group. This strategy is also highly effective when teaching pro-social behaviors. Systematic prompting is NOT the over-use of physical and verbal prompts for a student to finish a task, as over-prompting leads to learned helplessness. Rather, systematic prompting is a teaching strategy used to support students to quickly learn new skills and intentionally applied along two continuums depending upon the student's needs: least-to-most intrusive, or most-to least-intrusive. Most importantly, a plan should always be in place to fade the adult prompts as quickly as possible, so students learn and demonstrate the new skill as independently as possible. The strategy of feedback refers to positive reinforcement and praise which is applied strategically as the student is learning.

Learning Barriers Addressed	Potential Disability Categories Supported
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Listening comprehension</li><li>• Attention and focus</li><li>• Following directions</li><li>• Social interactions</li><li>• Task initiation and completion</li><li>• Frustration</li><li>• Behavior</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Autism</li><li>• Intellectual Disability</li><li>• Developmental Delay</li><li>• Visual Impairment</li><li>• Deafness (including Hard of Hearing)</li></ul>

### Supporting Research and Implementation Resources:

1. AFIRM Module: [Prompting / AFIRM](#)
2. CEC High Leverage Practice #16, Explicit Instruction - [HLP 16 Admin Guide.pdf](#)
3. Riccomini, P. J., Morano, S., & Hughes, C. A. (2017). Big ideas in special education: Specially designed instruction, high leverage practices, explicit instruction, and intensive instruction. TEACHING Exceptional Children, 50(1), 20–27.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0040059917724412>. [article link](#)



## Strategy #7: Self-regulation support for learning and behavior

**Description:** Self-regulation is an important life-skill, and students need self-regulation to monitor, gauge, and assess both their behavior and academic success (Reid et al., 2005). Self-regulation is also impacted by a student's executive functioning skills (i.e., flexible thinking, planning, self-monitoring, self-control, working memory, time management, and organization) contribute largely to self-regulation, thus requiring skills, strategies, and interventions to successfully utilize self-regulation to obtain academic and behavior achievement (Pandey et al., 2018). Self-regulation strategies are taught explicitly and may be applied across all subjects. Self-regulation skills are critical for students with disabilities and teach them to solve problems and increase independence, confidence, and self-reliance. Examples of self-regulation strategies include:

- Self-monitoring
- Self-instruction
- Goal Setting
- Self-Reinforcement
- Multiplying Success

Learning Barriers Addressed	Potential Disability Categories Supported
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Impulsivity</li><li>• Attention and focus</li><li>• Executive functioning</li><li>• Difficulties in math or reading</li><li>• Comprehension</li><li>• Task initiation and completion</li><li>• Behaviors that interfere with learning</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Specific Learning Disability</li><li>• Other Health Impairment</li><li>• Speech Language Impairment</li><li>• Autism</li><li>• Emotional Disability</li><li>• Intellectual Disability</li><li>• Developmental Delay</li></ul>

### Supporting Research and Implementation Resources:

1. IRIS Module: [Page 2: Self-Regulation](#)
2. Hart, E. J., Doyle, L., Cantero, C., & Garrington, F.O. (2022). Practice Guide: Teaching Self-Regulation Skills to Students with Disabilities (K-12). Washington, DC: US Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs. [article link](#)

## Strategy #8: Contextualized Instruction

**Description:** Contextualized instruction connects the curriculum to real-life experiences that are relevant to the student. Components include making meaningful connections, fostering self-regulated learning and collaboration, authentic assessments, and creative thinking. This strategy addresses the reality that all students come to the classroom with the varying experiences and understandings of the world around them and provides all students an opportunity to make meaning of new information prior to teaching the concept or skill. Integrating the new knowledge with a student's current knowledge and context improves their ability to connect and retain the skills.

### Learning Barriers Addressed

- Difficulties in math and reading
- Comprehension
- Attention and focus
- English language learners

### Potential Disability Categories Supported

- Specific Learning Disability
- Other Health Impairment
- Speech Language Impairment
- Autism
- Emotional Disability
- Intellectual Disability
- Developmental Delay
- Visual Impairment
- Deafness (including Hard of Hearing)

### Supporting Research and Implementation Resources:

1. Contextual Supports – IRIS module [Page 5: Contextual Supports](#)
2. Berns, Robert G.; Erickson, Patricia M. (2001) *Contextual Teaching and Learning: Preparing Students for the New Economy*. The Highlight Zone: Research @ Work No. 5. [article link](#)

## Strategy #9: Error Analysis

**Description:** The error analysis strategy is used to identify patterns of mistakes made by a student when solving math problems. The three types of patterns categories are identified as factual, procedural, and/or conceptual. By understanding patterns in student errors, educators can individualize and target instruction to improve student understanding of mathematics.

### Learning Barriers Addressed

- Difficulties learning mathematics, including computation, factual recall, or conceptual understanding
- Difficulties problem solving

### Potential Disability Categories Supported

- Specific Learning Disability
- Emotional Disability
- Other Health Impaired

### Supporting Research and Implementation Resources:

1. IRIS Center Case Study Unit - [Mathematics: Identifying and Addressing Student Errors](#)
2. Riccomini, Paul & Morano, Stephanie & Hughes, Charles. (2017). Big Ideas in Special Education: Specially Designed Instruction, High-Leverage Practices, Explicit Instruction, and Intensive Instruction. TEACHING Exceptional Children. 50. 004005991772441. 10.1177/0040059917724412. [article link](#)



## Strategy #10: Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS)

**Description:** Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS) is a peer-tutoring program that supplements instruction. Student pairs engage in structured activities where they alternate the role of the tutor. This alternating of roles is a critical element of the strategy, because the student with a disability is in a position to support another peer, not just receive support. PAL sessions last 30 – 35 minutes, should occur three to four times per week, and can be applied in any subject, though it is best known for its potentially positive effects on reading fluency and reading comprehension (IES What Works Clearinghouse, 2012).

### Learning Barriers Addressed

- Difficulties with reading, including fluency and comprehension

### Potential Disability Categories Supported

- Intellectual Disabilities
- Specific Learning Disabilities
- Autism

### Supporting Research and Implementation Resources:

1. The Fuchs Research Group at Vanderbilt University – PALS Information Site - [What is PALS? | The Fuchs Research Group](#)
2. Peer Assisted Learning Strategies article – What Works Clearing house (2012) - [Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies \(PALS\)](#)

## Strategy #11: Chunking

**Description:** Chunking is a cognitive strategy that is used to reduce the cognitive load for the learner. Chunking is easy to implement and can be applied across any academic subject or used to teach replacement behaviors for students with disabilities. The teacher breaks information, or time increments, down into smaller, more understandable/digestible units. Chunking can be coupled with other strategies such as processing, wait time, and should be explicitly taught to students so they learn to implement chunking themselves.

### Learning Barriers Addressed

- Attention and focus
- Executive functioning
- Difficulties in math or reading
- Time management
- Working memory
- Processing
- Impulsivity
- Behaviors that interfere with learning
- English language learners

### Potential Disability Categories Supported

- Specific Learning Disability
- Other Health Impairment
- Speech Language Impairment
- Autism
- Emotional Disability
- Intellectual Disability
- Developmental Delay
- Visual Impairment
- Deafness (including Hard of Hearing)

### Supporting Research and Implementation Resources:

1. How to Use Chunking in the Classroom – [Edutopia article link](#)
2. Thalmann M, Souza AS, Oberauer K. How does chunking help working memory? J Exp Psychol Learn Mem Cogn. 2019 Jan;45(1):37-55. doi: 10.1037/xlm0000578. Epub 2018 Apr 26. PMID: 29698045. [Article link](#)

## Strategy #12: Repetition

**Description:** Repetition provides students with opportunities to practice, master, and generalize new learning and skills. This strategy provides the reinforcement required to strengthen connection and make knowledge readily accessible. As with any muscle, the more we use it, the stronger it becomes. The same principle applies to learning skills across all subjects, the more opportunities students have to practice and use skills, the more fluent and confident they will become.

Learning Barriers Addressed	Potential Disability Categories Supported
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Attention and focus</li><li>• Executive functioning</li><li>• Difficulties in math or reading</li><li>• Working memory</li><li>• Processing</li><li>• English language learners</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Specific Learning Disability</li><li>• Other Health Impairment</li><li>• Speech Language Impairment</li><li>• Autism</li><li>• Emotional Disability</li><li>• Intellectual Disability</li><li>• Developmental Delay</li><li>• Visual Impairment</li><li>• Deafness (including Hard of Hearing)</li></ul>

### Supporting Research and Implementation Resources:

1. [\*Unraveling the Importance of Repetition in Literacy Instruction – The Literacy Architects\*](#)
2. 2. Kang, S. H. K. (2016). Spaced Repetition Promotes Efficient and Effective Learning: Policy Implications for Instruction. Policy Insights from the Behavioral and Brain Sciences, 3(1), 12-19. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2372732215624708> (Original work published 2016)



## SECTION 4: Planning SDI

The following section includes tools and templates for educators to use collaboratively to effectively plan specially designed instruction.

### West Virginia Specially Designed Instruction Planning Template

**Purpose:** How can special and general educators work together to provide access to the general education curriculum for **all learners** in their classrooms? The WVDE Specially Designed Instruction Planning Template tool is organized into three sections to facilitate collaborative conversations that consider general education standards in alignment with IEP goals, services, and accommodations. By using this tool, educators will think about how to **collaboratively design and deliver instruction**. When considered together, these elements provide the foundation for SDI to be delivered effectively.

- **Section 1: Collaborative Instructional Design:** First, educators review the upcoming general education curriculum standard(s), lesson plan(s), and learning objective(s). Next, educators examine IEPs to determine which goals, accommodations, and services will be integrated into the lesson. It is critical for educators to know the details of IEPs to effectively match learning barriers with accommodations and SDI strategies with the lesson being taught. This portion of the tool guides educators to intentionally think about the standard and skills that every student should know and be able to do after the lesson.
- **Section 2: Collaborative Instructional Delivery:** After identifying general education outcomes for all students, and identifying IEP specifics, educators strategically plan instructional delivery. Knowledge gleaned from Part 1 will help educators decide how to use their class-period time to effectively teach. Educators will think about the five co-teaching strategies and determine what model will work best for the upcoming lesson.
- **Section 3: SDI Design Checklist:** The third section of the planning template includes a quick and easy to use checklist for educators to use either before, during, or after planning to confirm that the lesson plans reflect true, effective SDI. Questions on this checklist are adapted from the [Success For All Students in the General Education Classroom guide](#) (Maryland State Department of Education, 2024).

Teams must consider pacing and alignment when collaboratively planning. Some students may be significantly below grade-level and require additional time and opportunities for pre-teaching, repetition, and opportunities to practice skills in other settings/classroom environments. Teachers can look across their class period, and the entire school day to find natural routines and pockets of time in which to strategically embed instruction. The more opportunities a student has to practice skills across settings and staff, the better chance they have of generalizing the skills.

In addition, teacher planning time is a critical factor impacting collaboration and co-planning. With that in mind, the WVDE SDI template may be used by co-teachers asynchronously in Microsoft Teams so that general and special educators can review and edit at any time. Another helpful resource is the [TIES Center' 5-15-45 Tool](#). This planning tool is available to download and use, even if teachers have only 5 minutes for a quick touch-base.

- Access the WVDE Template [here](#).

## SECTION 5: Frequently Asked Questions

Below are some frequently asked questions (FAQs) about SDI. Review these questions and answers and share them with other educators and instructional staff to promote an accurate understanding of SDI.

### 1. Why is SDI important, isn't SDI just "good teaching?"

SDI is more than just good teaching. **SDI is the total combination of the goals, supports, and accommodations documented in a student's IEP**, that when implemented, provides the bridge to access the general education curriculum. SDI is strategic, unique, and helps students with disabilities develop skills, overcome learning barriers, and achieve educational, behavioral, and functional success.

### 2. How is SDI different from general education instruction?

General education instruction is designed for all students, while SDI requires adapting the content, methodology, or delivery of instruction, so it is tailored to the needs of students with disabilities as documented in their IEP.

### 3. Is SDI mandated by law?

Yes. Students who have an Individualized Education Program (IEP) meet specific criteria as outlined under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Under IDEA, schools must provide SDI to eligible students as part of their free appropriate public education (FAPE).

### 4. Can SDI be delivered outside of a special education setting?

Yes, SDI can and should be delivered across various settings, including general education classrooms, special education resource rooms, or self-contained classrooms. For example, if a student is taught to use an SDI strategy in reading, this same strategy may be used during social studies, or math, when appropriate. The IEP documents where SDI should take place for students with disabilities. Delivering SDI across settings promotes independence and generalization (the ability to learn and demonstrate the skill in many places).

### 5. Who can deliver SDI?

SDI can be delivered by any educator, typically under the guidance of a special educator or related service provider. SDI is designed by a special educator but may be delivered by special education teachers, general education teachers, additional-adult support providers, ECATS, intervention specialists, or related service providers such as speech-language pathologists or occupational therapists.

### 6. Where can I find SDI in a student's IEP?

There is no one specific location in the IEP that documents SDI. **SDI is the combination of individualized IEP goals, accommodations, and services as documented on the IEP**, delivered to mitigate the impact of a disability and access the general education curriculum.

### 7. Does SDI replace standard teaching methods?

No, SDI complements standard teaching methods by providing additional support that helps students access and engage with the curriculum. SDI is integrated and a part of instruction.

### 8. How is SDI different from accommodations and modifications?

SDI incorporates the use of accommodations and/or modifications during instruction and assessment. In summary, accommodations change how a student accesses learning (e.g., extended time), modifications change what a student is expected to learn, and SDI changes how instruction is delivered.



**9. How is SDI effectiveness measured?**

Effective SDI should result in improved academic, behavioral, or functional outcomes for students. Educators track student progress through assessments, observations, and data collection aligned with IEP goals. Consistent, ongoing data collection and analysis is critical to ensure that SDI is delivering the desired effects for students. Educators should adjust instructional practices if SDI is not yielding the desired results.

**10. What role do families play in SDI?**

Families are a valuable and important part of the IEP process, and the development of effective SDI. Family members know their children best and can share information to help educators design and deliver appropriate and motivating SDI. Families should receive consistent and ongoing progress monitoring information and can help reinforce learning strategies at home.

**11. How often is SDI provided?**

The frequency depends on the student's needs and their IEP plan, ranging from daily interventions to periodic support. Service minutes must be documented and adhered to as written in the IEP. However, the use of explicit instructional strategies can and should be used as frequently as possible, and when appropriate during instruction and assessment. The goal of SDI is to teach students with disabilities to be as independent as possible and internalize strategies, so they learn to use them as part of their life-long learning.

**12. Can SDI be adjusted over time?**

Yes, SDI should be flexible and regularly reviewed to ensure it meets the student's evolving needs and educational progress. Data collection and analysis is important when making decisions about adjusting SDI. If a student is not making progress towards meeting an IEP goal for two marking periods in a row, it is best practice for the IEP team to meet and examine the current SDI and progress monitoring data. The IEP team may update the IEP and adjust the SDI at that time.

**13. What do I do if we don't have common planning time?**

General and special educators can plan asynchronously using the West Virginia SDI planning template, or the TIES Center 5-15-45 planning tool! Both tools are available to use online, and asynchronously, depending upon the amount of planning times teachers have together.

**14. What is my role as a general education teacher in SDI?**

General educators are content experts, and responsible for teaching **all** students in the classroom. The special educator is the expert in the student IEPs, unique learning needs and barriers, and accommodations, supports and services that must be delivered to meet IEP goals. Together, general and special educators collaborate and co-plan to integrate SDI into daily instruction. General educators can deliver SDI, which promotes authentic inclusion and often time, incidental benefit to all learners in the classroom.

**15. Is working with students in small groups considered SDI?**

If the small group lesson is intentional, planned, and incorporates IEP goals, accommodations, and evidence-based strategies, then it meets criteria for SDI. If small group instruction is not planned or focused on an evidence-based strategy that addresses unique learning needs, then it does NOT meet the definition of SDI.

## SECTION 6: Resources

A plethora of resources exist to support educators and leaders to develop and deliver effective SDI. Below are some nationally vetted resources, including webinars and modules that clarify how to develop and deliver SDI. In addition, educators and leaders can access the West Virginia Department of Education SDI Resource Bank for support.

Resource Name and Link	Description
<b>One-pager Supports</b>	
<a href="#"><i>TIES Center Inclusive Practices TIPS Sheet</i> (#9) (2020)</a>	This resource is a quick read that summarizes the CEC's High Leverage Practices (HLPs) and highlights the HLPs most critical to SDI and inclusive practices. Free and available online.
<a href="#"><i>PROGRESS Center. IEP Tip Sheet: What Is Special Education? A Focus on Specially Designed Instruction.</i></a>	This tip sheet introduces and briefly defines special education with a focus on specially designed instruction (SDI) and provides tips for implementation. Free and available online.
<b>Webinars and Modules</b>	
<a href="#"><i>Specially Designed Instruction in Co-Teaching: Continuing the Conversation</i></a>	In this CEC webinar, Dr. Marilyn Friend explores specially designed instruction (SDI) by defining key terms, outlining planning strategies across different timeframes, discussing the role of general educators in co-taught classrooms, and emphasizing fidelity in SDI delivery through assessment, selection, delivery, evaluation, and adjustment. This webinar requires registration on the CEC website. It is free for all CEC members, and costs \$29.00 for non-CEC members.
<a href="#"><i>Demystifying SDI, Version 2</i></a>	This session clarifies the differences between specially designed instruction (SDI), accommodations, universal design for learning (UDL), and high-leverage practices (HLPs). Participants will learn to distinguish SDI from supplementary aids and services, access tools to design and deliver SDI, and understand its alignment with service statements. Presenters include Sara Evans from the PROGRESS Center and Timara Davis from AIR. This webinar requires registration on the CEC website. It is free for all CEC members, and costs \$29.00 for non-CEC members.

## Webinars and Modules

### [Improving IEPs by Creating a Symphony of Services and Aids That Promote Access and Progress](#)

This webinar, presented by the PROGRESS Center, highlights the statement of special education, services, and aids as the foundation of IEPs, likened to a symphony that enables students with disabilities to thrive. The webinar defines the four parts of the statement, explores collaboration among IEP team members, and provides strategies for crafting comprehensive IEPs that empower students. Presenters Sara Evans and Steven Prater model activities and share freely available resources to support educators, especially those new or early in their careers. This webinar requires registration on the CEC website. It is free for all CEC members, and costs \$29.00 for non-CEC members.

### [IRIS Center Module](#) - Supports for Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities in the General Education Classroom

This IRIS module provides educators with the rationale and support to explain the importance of inclusive practices for students with significant disabilities, as well as information on best practices to effectively design and implement SDI.

## CEC High Leverage Practices Suite of Resources

[CEC High Leverage Practices](#) - Developed by the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) and the Collaboration for Effective Educator Development, Accountability, and Reform (CEEDAR), the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC). This set of high-leverage practices (HLPs) is designed to support special educators and teacher candidates learn how to deliver excellent special education services.

Per the CEC website, “HLPs are organized into four domains: Collaboration, Data-Driven Planning, Instruction in Behavior and Academics, and Intensify and Intervene as Needed. Each domain has pillars and embedded practices infused with culturally inclusive pedagogies. “The supports and resources help to focus educators on the most critical instructional practices that have proven to be successful for students with disabilities.



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