

Successfully Implementing SDI and knowing our students

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Special Education Teacher

First I want to thank all of you for being here today. My name is Angela Beverly, Special Education Teacher, a VCU LEND Long Academic Trainee. This is my leadership project. For this project, I interviewed both parents and educators to see what they knew about special education and how we can use what our parents want us to know to better service them. I sent out a google form for the teachers, and phone audio called my parents. I used the information, to create a training we may use to present to our teachers!

Today we are going to discuss how to successfully implement SDI for our Special Education students and what knowing our students.

I had Dr. Draper send out a survey to ask questions about what we know as educators, about special education. We all are not SPED teachers, and we all have not taught collaboratively. There were no right or wrong answers, just gathering information to see what we know, and what could be beneficial for us moving forward to better service our students.



Our co-teaching team
has a clear
understanding of SDI.

For those not familiar, SDI means Specifically Designed Instruction. We will discuss more what that is. Now Before we get started I want to ask some questions about SDI, to answer just raise the appropriate amount of fingers that matches the response. If you are not co-teaching, still answer based on yourself

**Strongly
Disagree**



**Partly
Disagree**



**Neutral or
Unknown**



**Partly
Agree**



**Strongly
Agree**



Our co-teaching team
has adequate time to
plan for SDI.

**Strongly
Disagree**



**Partly
Disagree**



**Neutral or
Unknown**



**Partly
Agree**



**Strongly
Agree**



Our co-teaching team
adapts content as
necessary, while still
maintaining high
expectations.

After answering the questions, how do you feel about SDI and implementing it? This is an alternative for those to participate without completing the survey.

Special Education Survey

By participating in this survey, you are giving permission for your input to be used in a Leadership Project for the following individual:

Angela D. Beverly, Special Education Teacher, Qualified Mental Health Professional- A/C

This survey will be used to collect data and presented to the participating Cohort for the VCU LEND: Disability Leadership program. Below are a few questions, that probe your understanding of Special Education.

PLEASE BE AS HONEST AS POSSIBLE. There is no need to google the information or seek help. The more we know about what you **DON'T** know, the better our understanding of what our teachers and students may need.

Your personal information and responses will be kept confidential and used only for the purposes of this research study. Any data collected will be securely stored and shared only in a way that protects your identity. No identifying information will be included in any reports or publications. If you have any questions about privacy or data security, please feel free to ask.

Thank you so much for participating in this survey. If you have any questions, you may email Angela Beverly at abeveryly2@rvaschools.net

This is what the survey looked like, and again thank you for those who did take the time to complete it to help us understand what we all need as a team to help those improve their knowledge in special education services. For those of you who haven't seen the survey, here are the list of questions that were asked

What district do you currently teach in?

What position do you hold in your school/district?

What do you already know about Special Education?

What do you look for when reading an IEP?

Do you know the difference between an IEP and a 504?

How prepared would you feel to service students with a diagnosis in Special Education?

Do you know what Specially Designed Instruction is, and how it's measured?

Do you know the difference in the 14 Special Education labels/categories?

What do you feel you need more information on, or what practices need to be modeled to succeed in providing specially designed instruction to our students with disabilities. (Please answer both components of the question)

I started by asking everyone participating, what district do they teach in and what position do they hold in their current district. I know we are all in Richmond Public schools but in the event the survey can provide us more feedback on a larger scale, those questions are included.

What do you already know about Special Education? (some of us have had a little more experience and resources than others so its always good to start by asking, what do you know.. Just like when we are teaching our students we start with a pre-test to see what they know before jumping in to new material)

What do you look for when reading an IEP? Some people treat IEPs like big packets of paper and skip pages but knowing what to look for helps us better understand our students

Do you know the difference between an IEP and a 504? I know I originally didnt, but I finished school I gained experience as both a general education collab inclusion teacher and as a special education teacher and attended professional development.

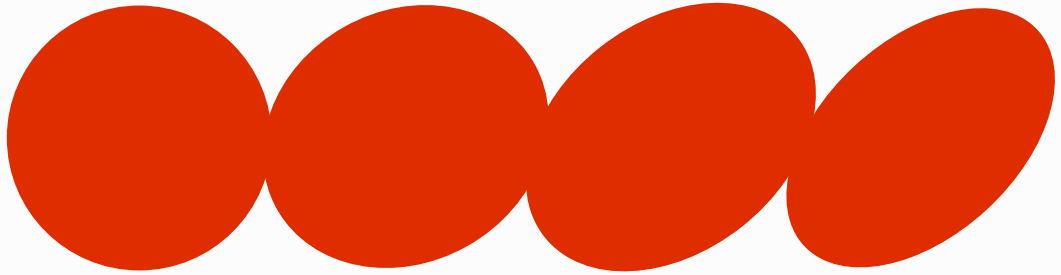
How prepared would you feel to service students with a diagnosis in Special Education? This is no wrong answer, its just asking how comfortable are you

Do you know what Specially Designed Instruction is, and how it's measured?

Do you know the difference in the 14 Special Education labels/categories?

What do you feel you need more information on, or what practices need to be modeled to succeed in providing specially designed instruction to our students with disabilities. (Please answer both components of the question)

What is SDI



So let's go over SDI, does anyone know what SDI is or what it stands for?

Specially Designed Instruction

adapting the **content, methodology, or delivery** of instruction to address the unique needs of a student with a disability, ensuring access to the general curriculum.

CONTENT

METHODOLOGY

DELIVERY

Thank you for our volunteers. Specially Designed Instruction, or SDI, is the heart of special education. It's not just giving a student extra help or time — it's about intentionally adapting how we teach so students with disabilities can access and progress in the general curriculum. This instruction is *individualized* (which is the key word) based on a student's disability and learning needs. It's tailored to help them build the skills they need to meet their IEP goals. Whether that means adjusting the way we teach, the materials we use, or even how we deliver the lesson.

You see three words on the side of the screen, can someone tell me what they are (wait for hand raises) Yes, these are the things needed to be adapted.

1. Methodology

What it means: This is how we teach — the strategies or approaches used.

Why it's adapted: Some students may need explicit instruction, hands-on learning, or multisensory techniques because traditional methods don't meet their learning needs.

2. Delivery

What it means: This refers to where, when, and by whom instruction is provided — such as in a small group, one-on-one, or in a pull-out setting.

Why it's adapted: The general education setting may not provide the level of support or structure needed, so we adjust the environment or service model.

3. Content

What it means: This is what we teach — the skills or knowledge aligned with standards and IEP goals.

Why it's adapted: Some students may need the content broken down into smaller steps or presented in a different way to ensure they fully understand it.

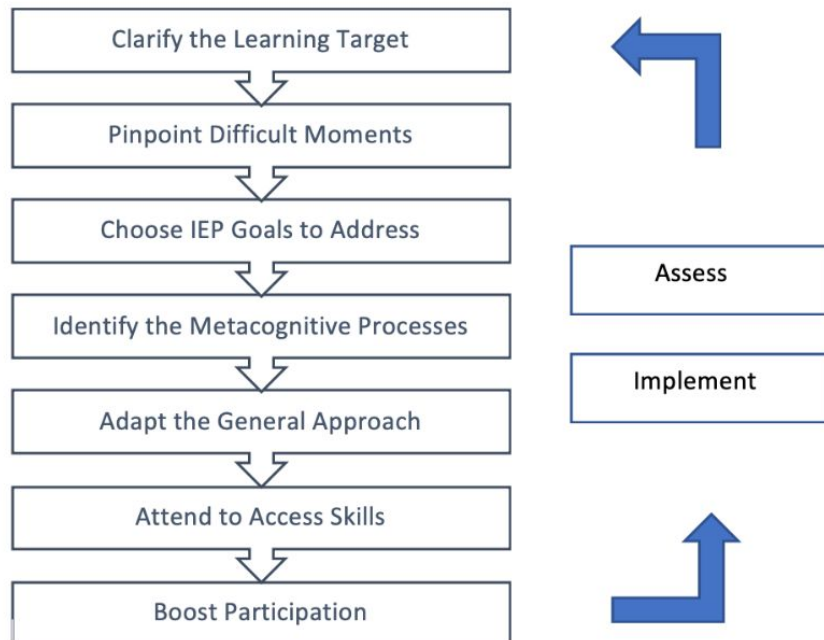


How do we think disabilities affect our students?

Look at the handout about what different factors affect our students. Disabilities affect students in very real, often invisible ways. It's not just about what a child *knows*, but how their brain processes, stores, and uses information.

For example, if a student struggles with **working memory**, they might understand a math problem in class, but forget the steps once they sit down to do homework. If another student has slow **processing speed**, they may need more time to respond, not because they don't understand, but because their brain works differently.

Our job is to recognize these challenges, provide strategies and support, and always look for the strengths our students bring — because every student can learn when we give them what they need to thrive



CTA, Virginia Department of Education, 2024

Now, we're going to discuss planning SDI:

Planning for SDI starts with knowing your student. Review the IEP thoroughly. Look closely at the Present Levels of Performance—this tells you where the student is functioning academically and behaviorally.

Then, review the IEP goals. Ask yourself: What specifically does this student need to learn? And what's preventing them from learning it the same way as their peers? That gap is where SDI lives.

Next, think about your content and standards. What is your lesson objective? Now, how can we modify or adapt the instruction, content, or materials to match the student's needs and align with their goals?

TURN AND TALK: CASE STUDIES

DAE

Now, if you have a case study handout, find a partner who does not have the same handout as you and talk with your partner. Read the scenario, assess the students strengths and weaknesses and determine what SDI might they need. Take into consideration their IDEA label, is it SLD, is it AUT?

How can we learn our students by looking at their IEP or 504 plan?

After talking about planning, can we plan for our students if we are not familiar with their learning styles? This is where these documents, and their learning plans can help us plan for what they need. Does anyone know what section of the IEP should we look to learn more.

I know we always think to look at our goals, and accommodations but there is additional section that provides information as well

The Present Level of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance shall be written in language understandable by the general public and summarize the results of assessments that identify the student's interests, preferences, strengths and areas of need. This includes the student's performance and achievement in academic areas such as writing, reading, math, science, and history/social sciences. It also includes the student's performance in functional areas, such as self-determination, social competence, communication, behavior and personal management.

Describe the effect of the student's disability upon the student's involvement and progress in the general curriculum by completing the fields below. For preschool, include how the student's disability affects the participation in appropriate activities. Test scores, if appropriate, should be self-explanatory.

Present Levels of Performance

One of the most powerful tools we have as educators when supporting students with disabilities is the Present Levels of Performance section of the IEP—often called the PLOP. This is where the IEP team paints a full picture of where a student is functioning academically, socially, emotionally, and behaviorally. It's not just about scores, it's about context, strengths, needs, and how the disability affects their learning.

When we truly understand the present levels, we can design meaningful, achievable goals and identify the right SDI and accommodations. For example:

If a student is reading at a first-grade level but in fourth grade, and they struggle with decoding and fluency, we don't just say 'they're behind'—we plan instruction through targets phonics and fluency in ways that build confidence and skills.

If a student becomes overwhelmed in loud, fast-paced group work, that tells us something important about the environment they learn best in—and we can plan for sensory breaks, small group instruction, or clear routines

**INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAM (IEP)
MEASURABLE ANNUAL GOALS, PROGRESS REPORT**

**SERVICES - LEAST RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENT - PLACEMENT
ACCOMMODATIONS/MODIFICATIONS**

Now that we've reviewed how Present Levels give us a deep understanding of our students, the next step is looking at the *goals and accommodations* written into the IEP—and planning how we're going to implement them through Specially Designed Instruction, or SDI

Remember: goals tell us *what* the student is working toward. SDI is *how* we help them get there

IEP goals should be SMART: specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound. When you look at a student's goals, ask yourself: What exact skill is this student expected to improve? What's the baseline level of performance? What is the target, and by when? Is it academic, behavioral, social, or functional?

For example, a goal might be: 'The student will increase reading fluency to 70 words per minute with 95% accuracy by the end of the IEP period.' This gives us clear direction on what to target and how to track progress.

Accommodations are not the same as SDI, but they work alongside it. Accommodations help the student access instruction and assessments without changing the expectation. Look at the IEP and note things like: extended time, small group testing, frequent breaks, read-aloud supports, or graphic organizers. Your job is to make sure those accommodations are happening *consistently*, across environments, not just during testing

Meet Your Student



Daniel is a 5th grade student with an intellectual disability.



Sara is a 3rd grade student with a math disability.



Emily is a fourth grade student with Autism.

Disability:
Cognitive Strengths:
Cognitive Weaknesses:
Educational Impacts:
IEP Goals:

The next activity we are going to do with the hand out is meet our student, Based on the small bit of information you have about your student, what do you think their cognitive strengths and weaknesses are. What do you think impacts their education, and what would be some IEP goals to help them be successful with the general education curriculum.

What do our parents want us to know about their students?

PARENT SURVEY RESULTS

If you were a parent, which I know some of us are, what would you want the school staff to know about your child? What would you think you needed to know as a parent?

After conducting a similiar survey for our parents we concluded:

Most parents understand special education as support for learning differences.
Many feel their child is misunderstood due to behavior or communication challenges.
Parents want teachers to take time to know their child as an individual.
Emotional and behavioral support is just as important as academic support.

What parents want us school staff member to know is
My child has strengths—please notice and celebrate them.
Routines, patience, and kindness help my child thrive.
Please ask me about what works at home—I want to collaborate.
Understanding triggers and preferred communication styles is key.
My child wants to feel included, respected, and capable.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

ANY QUESTIONS?

Successfully implementing Specially Designed Instruction (SDI) begins with truly knowing our students—understanding their strengths, needs, learning styles, and what motivates them. SDI isn't a one-size-fits-all approach; it's about intentionally designing instruction that removes barriers and meets students where they are. This starts with a deep dive into their Present Levels of Performance in the IEP. We look at how their disability impacts their access to the curriculum and use that to shape our instructional decisions. From there, the student's IEP goals become our roadmap. These goals tell us what the student is working on, and SDI is how we get them there—through tailored strategies, materials, pacing, or teaching approaches that go beyond typical instruction.

But to truly make SDI meaningful, we must also listen to the voices of families. When parents share what they want us to know about their child—their personality, their triggers, their strengths, and how they learn best—we're being handed the most valuable tool: insight. This kind of input goes beyond data points; it helps us humanize our instruction and make it more relevant. Parents can also highlight what their child needs emotionally or socially to feel safe, supported, and ready to learn. When we weave parent feedback into how we plan our SDI, we create a more holistic and responsive educational experience.

Ultimately, successful SDI happens when we bring together the IEP, family input, and professional expertise. We adapt, we adjust, and we lead with empathy. Knowing our students deeply—both through formal data and family stories—ensures that our

instruction is not just legally compliant but truly impactful. It allows us to build connections, foster growth, and help our students reach goals they may not have believed were possible.

Are there any questions?

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