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To: Directors of Special Education and Pupil Services

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Subject: Update To: What is Specially Designed Instruction (SDI) and Who Can Provide it?

Providing a high-quality public education equitably to all students is key to student success. Educational equity means every student has access to the resources and educational rigor they need at the right moment in their education across race, gender, ethnicity, language, ability, sexual orientation, family background, and family income. This is our goal for each and every student and applies equally to students who receive special education services through an individual education program (IEP). Special education services are integrated within a school's equitable multilevel system of support (MLSS). The purpose of this guidance is to clarify the department's definition of specially designed instruction (SDI), one type of special education service.

What is Specially Designed Instruction (SDI)

When an IEP team finds a student eligible to receive special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), they develop an IEP for the student. Among other things, the IEP describes the services that will be provided to address all the student's disability-related needs (DRNs) so the student can access, engage, and make progress in age or grade level general education curriculum, activities, and environments; and make progress toward their IEP goals. [34 CFR §300.320 \(a\)\(4\)](#).

SDI is a type of intensive intervention provided within an equitable MLSS to every student with an IEP. Other IEP services include [supplementary aids and services](#), [related services](#), and program modifications or supports for school staff. The provision of SDI is key to ensuring students receive a free appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment. For more information about documenting and implementing IEP services see [DPI Information Update Bulletin 10.07](#), [DPI Sample Form I-4](#), and [Forms Guidance](#). For more information about FAPE, see [DPI Information Update Bulletin 18.02](#).

The term [specially designed instruction](#) (SDI) is embedded within the IDEA's definition of [special education](#) and is mirrored in state special education statute. It is defined and set apart from other special education services by the following:

- SDI is instruction in which the content, methodology, or delivery of the instruction is individually adapted to address the student's disability-related needs so the student can access, engage, and make progress in the general education curriculum and meet the standards and expectations that apply to all students of the same age or grade. This is true irrespective of where the instruction is provided.
- SDI is instruction tailored to an individual student. SDI is provided to explicitly and systematically address a student's [area\(s\)](#) of disability-related need and is always linked to one or more IEP goals. SDI may be provided to address any academic or functional skill need determined by the IEP team.
- SDI may include instruction in physical education, speech and language therapy, travel training, vocational instruction, and instruction in other [areas](#).
- SDI is a service, not a place. SDI may be provided in any learning environment including school, home, community, or other setting.
- SDI must be provided at no cost to the student or student's [parent\(s\)](#).
- The student's IEP team decides and documents necessary SDI services based on current information from most recent special education evaluation or reevaluation, a review of IEP goal progress, and other information shared with the team.
- The IEP statement of SDI must include a clear description of the type, amount, frequency, location, and duration of the SDI service(s).
- The IEP must also describe how student progress toward each annual goal will be monitored to guide decisions about the effectiveness of the SDI service(s).
- All students with IEPs must receive SDI. When a student no longer requires SDI, they no longer meet eligibility requirements under IDEA, but may continue to be eligible for accommodations and support under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.

[34 CFR §300.39](#), [§300.320 \(a\)](#), [§300.8 \(a\)\(2\)\(i\)](#); [Wis. Stat §115.76 \(15\)](#), [Wis. Stat. §115.787\(2\)](#)

Summary and Examples: What is and What is not SDI

The following table summarizes and provides some examples and non-examples to help illustrate how SDI is set apart from other special education and general education supports.

SDI IS:	SDI IS Not:
<p>Explicit, focused, and systematic instruction in any of the six areas of academic or functional <u>skill</u> specified in an IEP goal such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reading, math, or other academic instruction and teacher-guided practice ● Language and communication skill building including sign-language and braille instruction ● Instruction in targeted social and emotional learning skills such as perspective-taking ● Instruction in skills needed for independence and self-determination such as how to use social narratives, visual schedules, and self-regulation strategies ● Generalization training in natural environments ● Instruction in using accommodations or other supplementary aids and services such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Teaching a student cues and reminders that will be used by teachers ○ Teaching a student how to effectively and independently use assistive technology <p>Specially designed instruction is more than accommodations used to support student access and engagement in instruction.</p>	<p>Any support that is not explicit, focused, and systematic instruction in a skill(s) specified in an IEP goal. SDI is not:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Universally designed general education instruction that is not intentionally tailored to a student’s IEP goals. ● Supplementary aids or services provided to allow access and engagement without accompanying goal-based instruction such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Behavior support strategies embedded within academic instruction ○ Cues and reminders to keep the student engaged during whole group instruction ○ Assistive technology such as graphic organizers, visuals, fidgets, or other equipment or devices that help the student independently engage in classroom activities ○ “As needed help” during study hall

SDI Is:	SDI IS Not:
<p>Instruction using content*, methodology*, or delivery* that is individually adapted to a student's DRNs and linked to IEP goal(s) such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A universal or core curricular program or intervention with supplemental or different teaching methods or activities such as individualized scaffolding, different chunking of content, alternate algorithms, pre-teaching or reteaching content using materials and methods matched to student need, etc. <p>*Content-<i>what</i> the student will learn, linked to standards</p> <p>*Methodology- instructional design of content; teaching methods and learning strategies; <i>how</i></p> <p>*Delivery- instructional context or conditions; <i>where/when</i></p>	<p>Instruction without substantive changes to content, methodology or delivery tailored to an individual student such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A universal curricular program or standard protocol general education intervention implemented without any substantive instructional adaptations for the individual student ● A "one size fits all" curricular program based on a student's label (e.g., there is no such thing as a curriculum used only for students with intellectual disabilities, autism, etc.)
<p>Instruction in skills needed to access, engage, and make progress in general education and meet age and grade-level standards and expectations</p>	<p>Instruction based on lowered expectations or teaching only below age or grade-level skills</p>
<p>A service provided to a student</p>	<p>A place a student goes</p>

<p>Required (not just beneficial) instruction with set amount, frequency, and duration provided in a specified location as documented on a student’s IEP such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Daily, 15-minute mini-lessons on specific math (or other area) content and learning strategies provided before the introduction of a new math concept during general education instruction 	<p>SDI is not:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Intermittent, “on the fly” or “as needed” instruction ● Every interaction with a special education teacher or every minute spent in a special education room is not SDI for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ A student playing a computer game while the special education teacher works with others ○ A special education teacher supporting a student during general education instruction without providing scheduled instruction directly tied to an IEP goal(s)
<p>SDI is considered effective when the student makes sufficient progress per IEP goal statement</p>	<p>SDI is not considered effective when the student does not make sufficient IEP goal progress</p>

Who Can Provide Specially Designed Instruction (SDI)

Local Education Agencies (LEAs) are responsible for assigning staff to implement the special education services described on a student’s IEP. All staff involved in implementing any part of a student’s IEP must be appropriately trained and licensed. In Wisconsin, while any staff may provide supplementary aids and services, only licensed special education teachers, speech-language pathologists, and [reading teachers](#) may provide SDI.

Under current state rules and policy, licensed staff, including general education teachers, may provide SDI under certain circumstances. A general education teacher may only provide a student’s SDI when involved in a co-teaching situation in which the special education teacher and general education teacher share equal responsibility for planning, delivering, and evaluating instruction. The special education teacher and general education teacher serve as co-teachers and co-plan, and co-implement instruction in a general education classroom. For the purpose of this document, co-teaching is when a general education teacher and special education teacher serve as co-teachers of a regular education classroom collectively supporting students with and without disabilities. An example is when a special education teacher is assigned to provide special education services in a general education classroom and provides regularly scheduled SDI to one or more students with IEPs, such as when reading or math instruction is scheduled for all students. While in such circumstances the teachers are colleagues and co-plan any SDI that will be provided by the general educator, the special education teacher is ultimately responsible for

the provision of the SDI and the monitoring of student IEP goal progress, as outlined in the student's IEP. For more information see the Wisconsin DPI [Co-Teaching Practice Profile](#).

Paraprofessionals may continue to support the provision of SDI under the direction and supervision of a special education teacher or speech and language pathologist. See [DPI Bulletin 10.05](#) or [The Use of Paraprofessionals to Support Speech-Language Pathologists](#) for additional guidance around the use of paraprofessionals in special education.

Frequently Asked Questions about Specially Designed Instruction:

- 1) What is meant by “individually adapted” content, methodology, or delivery of SDI? How is “individually adapted” content, methodology, or delivery of SDI different from differentiated general education instruction?**

SDI and differentiated general education instruction may look similar to an outside observer, but there are some key differences:

- SDI is specifically planned by the IEP team to address an individual student's unique disability related need(s) directly linked to an IEP goal.
- The provision of specially designed instruction to address a student's unique disability-related needs is a right guaranteed by the IDEA.
- Differentiated general education instruction also involves adaptations to content, design or delivery of instruction. Like SDI, such adaptations are planned in advance using formative assessment and other student data. These variations are then integrated within universal instruction. For example, a teacher may develop more than one type of small group activity to support and accommodate varied student skill levels and preferences.
- Differentiated general education can be very helpful for supporting student access, engagement and progress, but the differentiation is not designed by the IEP team to address a student's IEP goal nor intended to meet the instructional demands of SDI.

- 2) Can SDI be embedded within universal core instruction in a content area different from the one in the student's goal? For example, could a teacher provide SDI in social skills at the same time the student is participating in a general education math class?**

SDI is not implicit nor impromptu instruction, nor reminders and encouragement to use previously taught skills. Of course, social skills should be reinforced within all classes and school activities, **and** accommodations and other supplementary aids and services to support the student's access, engagement and progress **should** be provided during any class as specified in an IEP. However, supporting or prompting pro-active social skills isn't SDI unless explicit, deliberately planned instruction is being provided in a particular social skill.

3) Can paraprofessionals provide SDI?

No. Appropriately licensed educators must provide specially designed instruction (e.g.: introduce new content, methodologies, and delivery of instruction). Paraprofessionals may support (e.g., reinforce, practice) specially designed instruction that was previously introduced by the appropriately licensed educator when under the direct supervision of a licensed educator. Support from paraprofessionals is not SDI and may be documented as supplementary aids and services. Ongoing communication (training, modeling, feedback) to the paraprofessional from the appropriately licensed educator is essential to ensure the student is making continued progress on both IEP goals and within the general education curriculum. See Wisconsin DPI [Bulletin 10.05: Frequently Asked Questions about Special Education Paraprofessionals](#).

4) How do we document SDI that may be provided by appropriately licensed educators in a co-teaching situation?

Documentation of SDI includes the type, amount, frequency, duration, and location of service, not who provides it. IEP teams must determine and document the time needed to provide the student with the systematic explicit instruction tailored to the student's unique learning needs and directly tied to an IEP goal. SDI is not determined by the amount of time the student is in a class, rather the amount of time needed to provide the SDI. The program summary is meant to document the type, frequency, duration, amount, and location of special education services the student needs in various settings, not the student's or teacher's daily schedule. See [Wisconsin DPI Bulletin 10.07 Describing Special Education, Related Services, Supplementary Aids and Services, and Program Modifications and Supports](#).

Additional Resources

[Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, College and Career Ready IEPs](#)

[Wisconsin Policies and Procedures, Sample Special Education Forms, and Notices](#)

[Wisconsin DPI: National Organizations to Support Implementation of Evidence Based Practices for Students with IEPs](#)

[Wisconsin DPI Multi-level Systems of Support Licensure Guidance](#)

[High Leverage Practices for Students with Disabilities](#)