



SPECIAL EDUCATION RESOURCES

Considering Discontinuation of IEP Services from a Speech-Language Pathologist

The purpose of this resource is to provide direction to local education agencies (LEAs) and Individualized Education Program (IEP) team participants when considering discontinuation of IEP services from a speech-language pathologist (SLP). Discontinuation (also commonly referred to as dismissal) of specially designed instruction or related services provided by an SLP may be applicable to students identified with a speech or language impairment (SLI) or any other disability category. This document is a compilation of discontinuation information including updated guidance from the Department of Public Instruction (DPI), additional DPI bulletins that reference discontinuation, and the *Speech and Language Impairments Assessment and Decision Making: Technical Assistance Guide* (2003).

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Defining Discontinuation

For the purposes of this guidance, discontinuation means removing a service from the student's IEP because the service is no longer needed by the student.

Compliance Considerations

The Wisconsin DPI offers the following compliance guidelines to IEP teams considering discontinuation of IEP services from a Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP):

- Specially designed instruction (SDI) or related services from an SLP can be discontinued at an IEP meeting without initiating a reevaluation as long as the student will continue to receive specially designed instruction to address other disability-related needs. A reevaluation is not required when the IEP team considers the discontinuation of any IEP service as long as the student continues to require specially designed instruction to address one or more continuing disability-related needs. If the student is identified as having a speech or language impairment, the IEP team may wait until the student's next reevaluation to decide if the student continues to meet speech or language impairment criteria ([Wisconsin DPI, 2024](#)). A reevaluation is always required before removing the Speech or Language Impairment (SLI) or any other disability category label. [34 CFR § 300.305\(e\)](#)
- If discontinuing services from an SLP means the student will no longer receive any specially designed instruction, the IEP team must conduct a reevaluation to determine if the student continues to be eligible for special education under IDEA, prior to discontinuing services. When considering discontinuation of ALL special education services for a student, a [comprehensive special education reevaluation](#) is always required.
- An SLP is a required IEP team participant whenever the IEP team considers whether a student meets or continues to meet criteria for a speech or language impairment **and** whenever the IEP team considers whether the student needs or no longer needs IEP services to be delivered by an SLP. [PI 11.36 \(5\)\(e\)](#)

When Should IEP Teams Consider Discontinuation of IEP Services From an SLP?

For students who were previously found eligible for special education and meeting the SLI disability category criteria, Section IX of the [DPI Speech or Language Impairment Criteria Form](#) indicates that discontinuation of special education services from an SLP should be considered when either of the following scenarios occur:

1. The student's disability no longer adversely affects their educational performance in academics or functional skill areas including social, emotional, or vocational development.
2. The student's disability *has* an adverse effect on educational performance in academics or functional skills areas, but the student no longer requires specially designed instruction because their needs can be met with reasonable accommodations and modifications alone.

Adverse educational impact includes effects on a student's access, engagement or progress in age or grade-level general education curriculum, instruction, environment, or other school activities including:

- Involvement and advancement in the general education [Wisconsin Academic Standards](#), including the [Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards](#) (academic impact), and [social emotional learning competencies](#) (a functional impact);
- Education and participation with other students without disabilities (social or behavioral impact). Participation in extracurricular and other non-academic activities (vocational or functional impact).

For further guidance and resources to implement when determining whether an adverse impact is present, see the Documenting Adverse Impact section of the [Speech or Language Impairment Criteria Question and Answer Document](#).

Creating a Long-Term Vision of Communication Skills

Developing a long-term vision for a student's communication development provides a sense of purpose and direction. The following considerations may help IEP team participants to create a long-term vision of communication skills:

- Discontinuation of the provision of IEP services by a speech-language pathologist (SLP) is a positive outcome for students (IDEA, 2019) and reflects the success of the student, the student's teachers, and the IEP process.

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- The goal of speech-language services in public schools is to address and improve a student's communication so that it supports academic achievement and functional performance (ASHA, n.d.a).
- The student outcome for performance shall focus on bringing skills, with accommodations and supports provided as necessary, to within the expected range for the student's age and grade when compared with Wisconsin Academic Standards and Wisconsin Social and Emotional Learning Competencies (Prath, 2022).
- Teams should reject the idea of perfection and recognize that the pursuit of perfection is not a realistic goal. Instead, they can ask, is the student able to function adequately in their educational setting? (ASHA, 2003).
- Teams must apply Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) requirements with a focus on maximizing inclusion. Fostering an inclusive educational environment should be the primary objective when it comes to students with disabilities. It is crucial to prioritize integration within regular education classrooms alongside peers without disabilities. However, there may be circumstances where the unique needs of certain students require removal from these classrooms (IDEA, 2019).

Best Practice for Discontinuation of Services Provided by a Speech-Language Pathologist

According to the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA), the first step in the “dismissal” process should occur when the student is first determined to be eligible for special education and an IEP is developed that includes services from a speech-language pathologist (SLP) aligned with the student's disability-related needs and goals (ASHA, n.d.a.).

- Initial IEP meetings should include discussion to ensure that all IEP team participants have a shared understanding of the expected outcomes of the student's special education and related services. In doing so, the IEP team should take into consideration state and local standards and expectations, the student's prior and current educational performance, the student's age, culture, language background and dialect as well as the student's social, emotional, or vocational development (Prath, 2022).
- Annual IEP review meetings (and interim meetings, as appropriate) should include a discussion of current goals, objectives, and IEP goal progress in comparison to the ultimate communication goal to be achieved. In this way, families are part of consistent discussions regarding current progress in comparison to the expected end goal of services from a SLP (IDEA, 2019).

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- IEP team discussions must include a consideration of various service delivery options (e.g., setting, dosage, format, provider) in the least restrictive environment and based on the student's need(s) to ensure a free and appropriate public education (FAPE). (IDEA Part B, 2004; ASHA, n.d.b.).
- When a student has achieved the desired outcome of performing at the expected level, thus no longer requiring special education support from an SLP, IEP teams should discuss discontinuation of speech and language services (Wisconsin DPI, 2021b).

Scaffolding Discontinuation Discussions Using the Basic Skills and Learning Strategies Approach

The basic skills and learning strategies approaches align with the best practices for discontinuation outlined by ASHA guidelines. If an IEP team concludes that the student's communication needs are remediated or that compensatory strategies are successfully established, discussion regarding discontinuation is warranted.

The purpose of the **basic skills approach** is to provide remediation by alleviating disability-related needs in basic skills. It focuses on basic skill acquisition (Paul, 2018). The goal of this approach is to give the student essential skills to lessen the effects of a student's disability so they can access, engage, and make progress in age or grade level curriculum, instruction, environments, and other activities.

The purpose of the **learning strategies approach** is to equip the student with procedures to facilitate their learning, including compensatory tools. It includes metacognitive approaches, where the student must think about their own thinking and practice their own problem-solving skills (Paul, 2018). This also includes improving the student's independent use of supports and accommodations, so the student no longer requires specially designed instruction or related services.

Presenting these approaches can provide the SLP a platform to facilitate conversation surrounding discontinuation. For example, once the SLP has helped the student acquire basic skills or taught them the compensatory strategies needed, the adverse effect of the student's disability on their educational performance, including academic or functional impacts, may be eliminated along with their need for specially designed instruction or related services from an SLP.

Indicators of Readiness for Discontinuation

According to the [American Speech-Language-Hearing Association's \(ASHA\) Ad Hoc Committee on Admission/Discharge Criteria in Speech-Language Pathology \(2004\)](#), there are several signs that a student might be ready to discontinue services from a speech-language pathologist. **A student does not need to meet all of the guidelines to be considered for discontinuation.** These guidelines are only examples and there may be other reasons not outlined below that provide a rationale for discontinuation. Any one of these guidelines could initiate an IEP team discussion about discontinuing services:

- The student's communication skills are within age or grade level standards and expectations, considering the student's age and cultural background.

Note: Discontinuation decisions should not be based on a student's IQ scores being commensurate with language scores. The practice of comparing IQ scores and language scores as a factor for determining the need for speech-language intervention (i.e. Cognitive Referencing) is not supported by ASHA or DPI, as research suggests that language skills may surpass cognitive skills (ASHA, 2003).

- The student's IEP goals have been met.
- The student and family are satisfied with the student's current communication.
- The student's communication differences no longer adversely affect them academically, socially, or functionally. This includes instances where the student has developed alternate modes of communication, such as using an augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) device. This also includes instances where the student has developed sufficient compensatory skills or strategies to communicate effectively in their environment.
- In circumstances when the student is not making sufficient progress towards meeting age or grade level standards and expectations, the IEP team should meet to explore why progress is insufficient and decide if and how the IEP should be revised to address continuing or different disability-related needs. Revisions to the IEP might include changes such as new goals, additional or different types of services, or changes in location or duration of services. For example, the IEP team may determine that the student's needs in communication can best be met by services other than speech and language therapy provided by an SLP. See [Information Update Bulletin 18-02 \(Question 5\)](#) and [Questions and Answers \(Q&A\) on U. S. Supreme Court Case Decision Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District Re-1](#).

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It's not always easy to determine when to discontinue services when a student is still not demonstrating skills that are similar to their non-disabled peers. The following section contains guiding questions that may be helpful when considering discontinuation of IEP services from a Speech-Language Pathologist.

Guiding Questions for Team Discussion When Considering Discontinuation

It may be beneficial for IEP teams to review the purpose of IEP services from a speech-language pathologist when considering discontinuation. The overarching goal of services from a speech-language pathologist in the public schools is to address and improve the student's communication to support academic achievement and functional performance ([ASHA, n.d](#)). This also includes a student communicating successfully with accommodations and supports provided as necessary.

After reviewing the purpose of services from a speech-language pathologist and the indicators of readiness for discontinuation, IEP teams can review the following guiding questions to deepen discussion regarding discontinuation of services ([ASHA, 2003, Watson & Constantino, 2022](#)). These guiding questions are only examples and IEP teams may have other valid reasons and data not outlined below that provide a rationale for discontinuation.

Level of Communication

- Are the student's communication skills or strategies comparable to those of others without disabilities of the same chronological age, gender, ethnicity, or cultural and linguistic background?
- Is the team attempting to help the student understand their own behavior and communication style as well as neurotypical behavior or are they trying to replace the student's neurodivergent communication style with a neurotypical communication style? IEP teams should help the student understand themselves and their communication style as it relates to others. IEP services may not be needed if the behavior and communication style is not causing difficulty in education.
- How else can generalization be supported? Does generalization of skills require specially designed instruction or other services from an SLP? For example, given appropriate accommodations and support, the student demonstrated functional communication skills, or compensatory strategies have been learned. The student may still need support from educational personnel to generalize these skills or strategies across educational settings, but they no longer require specially designed instruction or other

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services from an SLP. That is, other educators may be able to provide the support required for generalization of a communication skill.

- Does the student have a functional and effective communication system?

Meeting IEP Goals

- Has the student met IEP goals and objectives (if any) implemented or supported by the SLP?
- Are there other needs and goals that require services from an SLP?
- Are the services from a SLP related to a functional, meaningful goal?

Consider Student and Family Perspective and Requests

- What are the thoughts and emotions of the student and their family regarding the student's current level of communication skills and strategies for continuing or discontinuing services?
- What may be the impact of continuing or discontinuing services?
- What social goals does the student have?
- What values might the family hold about how the student should interact?

Educational Impact

- Is there an adverse effect on the student's educational performance, including academic and functional skill performance, rooted in the student's communication skills? What specific communication need is adversely impacting the student's educational performance and interfering with the student's access to or progress toward IEP goals as a result of receiving the special education service?
- Does the student require services from an SLP to have a reasonable opportunity to benefit from special education?

Specially Designed Instruction or Related Services Only an SLP Can Provide

- Is it essential for the student to have direct, speech and language services provided by a licensed SLP in order for the student to make progress toward achieving IEP goals?

Note: If a student with a disability has communication needs, those needs do not always need to be addressed by a SLP. Many communication needs can be addressed in other

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ways. This may include needs being met by the student's regular education teacher or other special education providers (e.g., social skills or social communication).

- Can the student effectively access and participate in the educational environment without the need for ongoing services from an SLP?
- Is there an overlap or duplication of services? Does the student's general and special education programming provide for necessary instruction in language and communication skills?
- Has service delivery been modified over time as a result of student progress?

Note: Consider setting (i.e., location), dosage (i.e., frequency), format (i.e., type of session: individual, group, consult) and provider (e.g., SLP, teacher, support personnel).

Regression of Skills and Strategies (Sylvan, 2018)

- Is there evidence to suggest the student will continue to develop communication skills without intervention or with support from other special education services or special education providers?
- Is there a likelihood that the student will not make reasonable progress or could regress if the student does not receive services from a SLP?

No Longer Making Progress

- Consider DPI guidance from the [Speech or Language Impairment Criteria Question and Answer Document](#) which notes, "When the student is not making progress toward annual IEP goals, the IEP team should reconvene to discuss why the student is not making progress. IEP teams should review the student's disability-related needs, IEP goals, and IEP services, including the frequency, duration, amount, and location of services. The IEP team may also identify additional instructional strategies that can be used to support the student's access and engagement such that the student is more likely to show progress on IEP goals and in the general curriculum." Following the review, the IEP team may revise the IEP, as appropriate.
- Were cultural and linguistic needs and concerns considered and addressed appropriately?
- Were relevant and accurate criteria used to evaluate the effectiveness of instruction and other intervention?
- Was input and collaboration with other professionals considered?

Lack of Interest and Student Disengagement

When students demonstrate through their behavior, low motivation or engagement to participate in services from a Speech-Language Pathologist, or when asked about how they feel about speech-language services and state that they do not like participating, the Department of Education of the Commonwealth of Virginia (2018) suggests IEP teams consider addressing the root cause of the disinterest or lack of motivation. Possible outcomes of the root cause analysis may include:

- a student's disability-related need being supported by other IEP team participants
- a joint effort to support motivation (e.g., working with a school counselor, school psychologist, or school social worker) to determine why the student is not motivated, and what can be done
- a change in intervention, goals, or service delivery model to make the services more meaningful, culturally relevant, or engaging for the student

If these interventions do not result in the student being willing to participate in services with the SLP, ASHA (2004) affirms the right for clients and families to discontinue treatment if they choose to do so. Additionally, consideration should be given to the student's autonomy and preferences for communication ([ASHA, 2003](#)). Some students may feel that they do not want to be "fixed" and that their communication is functional. In situations such as this, the IEP team should reconvene to discuss student and family concerns. An IEP team meeting must be held prior to any changes in placement. A parent may withdraw consent for special education and related services at any time. The withdrawal must be for all special education and related services. In other words, a parent cannot decide to revoke consent for some services, but keep others ([Special Education in Plain Language](#) p. 14).

Supplementary Aids & Services and Program Modifications or Supports for School Personnel

The following common IEP accommodations and supports related to disability-related needs in the area of communication may provide IEP teams with strategies and options when considering discontinuation of services from an SLP. The considerations below may be documented in the IEP and supported by other educators beyond a Speech-Language Pathologist, including accommodations documented as supplementary aids and services, which may be supported through the general education teacher or a paraprofessional in the regular education

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environment. In addition, the following may be strategies that an SLP trains or provides consultation to other educators on how to implement and documented in the Program Modifications and Supports for School Personnel section of the IEP.

Speech Sound Production Articulation and Phonology Considerations

- Review Section IX of the [Speech or Language Impairment Criteria](#)
- Consider accommodations or strategies to support academic and functional performance in speech sound production
 - Model accurate, correct, and typical speech production in the classroom
 - Allow longer oral response time
 - Discuss with student if they want reminders or prompts for their speech sounds
 - Reinforce the new way of producing speech sounds to encourage and increase the likelihood of use and generalization
 - Provide practice time for oral presentations
 - Do not penalize the student for speech sound errors
 - Consider if substitutions for oral assignments or presentations is needed to allow the student to accurately demonstrate their learning

Language Considerations

- Review Section IX of the [Speech or Language Impairment Criteria](#)
- Consider accommodations or strategies to support academic and functional performance in language
 - Provide a written copy of the lesson outline or notes
 - Pre-teach vocabulary and concepts before presenting the topic or instruction
 - Provide word banks for class topics
 - Allow longer oral response time
 - Provide graphic organizers
 - Provide visuals to support learning, classroom tasks, expectations, and directions

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- Allow verbal responses to questions to be explained to a partner before being shared with the class for formulation practice
- Allow options for oral presentations or assignments
 - Provide access to a variety of pre-planning or organizational tools
 - Provide student with time to rehearse oral content prior to the presentation
 - Permit student to record an oral presentation so they don't have to present to a live audience
 - Consider options for non-speaking roles in group assignments

Social Communication Considerations

- Consider accommodations or strategies to support academic and functional performance in social communication
 - Educate staff about neurodivergent communication (DeThorne, 2020)
 - Educate peers about neurodivergent communication (DeThorne, 2020)
 - Encourage the student to join a club or organization that includes one of their special interests and to meet like-minded students
 - If a grading rubric includes points given for group work, eliminate that factor for the student if their communication creates barriers to their engagement in such activities

Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) Considerations

- Consider how the student is using their AAC to effectively communicate across settings and situations
 - Have different devices been tried?
 - Is the team waiting for certain skills to be developed before they allow the student to attempt using AAC across learning environments? Is the need for those skills backed by research or best practice? There are no prerequisite skills for using AAC
 - Does the student have access to a robust vocabulary?
- Accommodations or strategies to support academic and functional performance in communication utilizing AAC (Gallagher & Litton, n.d.a.)

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Provide increased wait time to allow the student to use their AAC device

Instruct paraprofessionals and teachers to program content and model use of the AAC device across settings and situations

Strategically ask the student questions that can be answered with the words in their device

Establish classroom routines that follow a predictable format and vocabulary to make it easier for the student with AAC to participate

Fluency Considerations

- Review Section IX of the [Speech or Language Impairment Criteria](#)
- Accommodations or strategies to support academic and functional performance in fluency (Scott, 2017)
 - Have a one-on-one conversation with the student to determine if they want reminders or prompts to consider using strategies
 - Speak with the student in an unhurried way, pause frequently
 - Convey that you are listening to the content of the message, not how it is said (e.g., student should be able to say what they want, when they want, how they want, even if they stutter)
 - Don't make stuttering something to be ashamed of; let the student know it's okay to stutter
 - Reduce pressure to communicate in the classroom
 - Avoid telling the student to slow down
 - Do not allow others to interrupt the student or finish their sentences (e.g., help all students in the class learn to take talking and listening turns)
 - Allow longer oral response time
 - Allow options for oral presentations or assignments
 - Do not penalize for fluency, timing, or use of fillers
 - Discuss when they want to present to reduce anxiety
 - Provide time for the student to rehearse prior to giving a presentation

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- Consider audience size (e.g., small group or private presentations)
- Consider permitting the student to record an oral presentation so they don't have to present to a live audience
- Consider options for non-speaking roles in group assignments
- Discuss with student if they want to talk to the whole class about stuttering. *Note: This may not be an appropriate activity for all students who stutter, as some may not be ready yet to talk openly about their stuttering*
- Consider reading [Stuttering: Straight Talk for Teachers](#)

Voice Considerations

- Review Section IX of the [Speech or Language Impairment Criteria](#)
- Accommodations or strategies to support academic and functional performance in voice
 - Implement vocal hygiene strategies such as access to a water bottle in the classroom
 - Make environmental modifications to assist the student in lowering voice volume or reducing strain such as limiting background noise or decreasing distance between speakers
 - Verbal and visual reminders to use strategies to improve vocal hygiene, volume, pitch, quality, or resonance
 - Modify assignments requiring oral classroom presentations

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