

SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES

Individual Education Plans

Students with delayed skills or other disabilities might be eligible for special services that provide Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) in public schools, free of charge to families. An IEP (Individualized Education Plan) is a written plan for students with identified disabilities which sets the conditions for the specific accommodations, materials, and instructional approaches needed in order for the students to learn effectively. A Federal Law called IDEA (the Individuals with Educational Disabilities Act) mandates that all students with identified disabilities have an IEP. The IEP is a team-driven process that prioritizes services and supports for the student in order to best meet his or her educational needs. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 2004) makes teachers of students with special needs responsible for planning, implementing, and monitoring educational plans to help the students succeed in school. The IEP describes the goals set for the students for the school year, and any special support the students need to help them reach those goals. The IDEA requires states to provide public education for students with disabilities ages 3 to 21, no matter how severe the disabilities.

The least restrictive setting for students with IEPs is a regular education classroom. Students with IEPs usually join regular education classes for special subject areas, such as science, social studies, art, music, library, gym, and health. It is critical for regular classroom teachers to read students' IEPs and be familiar with the services and monitoring that are required in the plan.

The next least restrictive setting is a resource or learning support classroom. In this setting, groups of students with similar needs are brought together for small-group instruction. A certified special education teacher is the instructor and other school personnel (aides or support teachers) assist with teaching.

Students who need intense intervention, may be taught in a self-contained classroom. These classrooms have fewer students per teacher, allowing for more individualized attention. Teachers in the self-contained have specific training in helping students with specific special educational needs. The IEP should be reviewed annually to update the goals and ensure the levels of service meet the student's needs. During the school year, progress monitoring will be done often to make sure the student is achieving goals set in the IEP. IEPs can be changed at any time on an as-needed basis. Classroom teachers are responsible for providing the accommodations of the IEP in order to help the student reach the academic, social, emotional, and transition goals of the IEP. This should be reflected in the teacher's weekly lesson plans, as well as documentation of any time the student refuses to access provided accommodations.