

WHAT IS SPECIALLY DESIGNED INSTRUCTION?

Although the concept of specially designed instruction is the foundation upon which special education is built, educators who have the responsibility for developing and implementing individualized education plans often misunderstand it. Special education is defined as specially designed instruction provided to meet the unique needs of a student with a disability. Specially designed instruction is designed to ensure access to the general curriculum through modifications so that the student can meet the same academic standards as his/her nondisabled peers and to ensure progress toward meeting IEP goals and objectives.

Specially designed instruction (SDI) means adapting, as appropriate, to the needs of an eligible child under this part, the content, methodology, or delivery of instruction to address the unique needs of a child that results from the child's disability; and to ensure access of the child to the general curriculum, so that he or she can meet the educational standards adopted by the State .

Specially designed instruction means **organized and planned** instructional activities typically provided by an appropriately qualified special education professional **that modify**, as appropriate the **content, methodology, or delivery** of instruction. What makes instruction truly individualized and specially designed for a student with a disability and different from what a general education student receives is how the instruction is linked to the student's IEP goals and objectives. SDI is **planned, organized and meaningful** in that it is an **intentional and systematic** process that specifically addresses the student's needs as expressed in the IEP goals and objectives.

Modified content means that knowledge and skills being taught to the student with a disability are different from what is being taught to typically developing same-aged peers. For example, a student with an IEP may be working on increasing the number of words that he can spell correctly while typically developing peers are being taught to write short stories with complete paragraphs. **All** students are working toward the same standard concerning writing, but the student with the IEP is learning a skill and working toward a standards indicator that is different than his peers. Modified content can also be seen in situations where the student with a disability is receiving instruction in daily living skills that are not components of the general education curriculum for typically developing peers, but rather are reflected in the student's IEP goals and objectives (e.g., self-management skills for behavior control are not part of the general curriculum.)

Modified methodology means that different instructional strategies and approaches are being used to teach content to the student with a disability than are used with typically developing, same-aged peers. One example is a special education teacher employing the Orton-Gillingham Reading Method as a way of teaching basic reading skills and fluency. This and similar reading methodologies that are designed for use with students having neurologically based reading problems are not commonly used in the general education classroom with general education peers.

Modified delivery means that the way in which instruction is delivered is different than what is provided to typically developing peers. Examples include providing intensive instruction individually or in small groups outside of the general education classroom or providing more frequent instructional opportunities than are provided to general education peers.

It should be noted, however, that specially designed instruction is fundamentally different than accommodations. Accommodations are something that teachers provide to support access **to** the general curriculum. Accommodations do not change what is taught, change the strategies used to teach the content or change how instruction is delivered to students. Accommodations may be considered as a means for providing differentiated instruction that is responsive to a variety of learning styles. Because of their basic nature and ease of implementation, an individual does not have to have specialized training to provide accommodations. Moreover, many accommodations are common-sense approaches for responding to the learning needs of students with or without disabilities.

Students who are able to have their learning needs met effectively and sufficiently within the general education environment through the exclusive use of individual accommodations rather than specially designed instruction would not be considered a special education student in this area.

When determining if a given intervention is considered specially designed instruction the following guiding questions should be addressed:

1. Is the special education teacher or related service specialist teaching something that requires specialized training?
2. Is the instruction meaningful and linked to an external indicator (e.g., Massachusetts Curriculum Standards, CORE Curriculum etc.) that provides the underlying curriculum for this instruction?
3. Is the instruction intentional and specifically related to the development of skills needed for the achievement of IEP goals and objectives?
4. is the content, methodology or delivery of instruction different than what is provided to general education peers?

If all of these questions are answered in the affirmative, the intervention is specially designed instruction.*