Navigating Individualized Education Programs (IEPs):
Your Roadmap to Equitable Access

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This toolkit was adapted from and can accompany the IEPs From A to Z: Understanding Individualized Education Programs course developed by Understood and available on Canvas Network. The self-paced course is open and free for you to take, so you can go deeper into the topics presented in this toolkit.

Understood   Who we are

We're dedicated to growing and shaping a world where everyone who learns and thinks differently feels supported at home, at school, and at work; a world where people with all types of disabilities have the opportunity to enjoy meaningful careers; a world where more communities embrace differences. Because differences make the world worth exploring. Differences define who we are. *Differences are our greatest strength.*

How to navigate this toolkit

This toolkit is organized around answering five essential questions to help you better understand IEPs:

1. **What is an IEP?**

2. **What is my role in the IEP process?**

3. **How do I support students with IEPs in my classroom?**

4. **What special considerations should I be aware of for my English language learners and my students of color with IEPs?**

5. **How are IEPs different during distance learning?**

You'll be able to answer these questions by reading articles and/or viewing videos about each question. All content on the following pages was adapted from Understood.org and vetted by experts in the field of learning and thinking differences.

Embedded throughout the course are additional links that provide you with opportunities to deepen your learning. There will also be options throughout the toolkit for you to check your understanding, to process important topics, and to reflect on your learning. These icons will help you navigate these experiences:

Key terms: Learn definitions of important terminology and vocabulary specific to this content.

Explore: See additional Understood articles, resources, and videos that will enhance your understanding of the topic.

Reflect: Take notes about your understanding of key concepts.

Practice: Apply what you learned by completing a brief assignment or taking a quiz.

Citation: Learn more from the Understood article or resource.

Introduction

Consider this: Twenty percent of students have learning and thinking differences — that's 1 in 5 students in your classroom. For many of the students who learn and think differently, an Individualized Education Program (IEP) serves as a roadmap for teachers to support their learning.

As a general education teacher, you're responsible for understanding that IEP and implementing the accommodations in your classroom. You're a key member of the IEP team. But if you aren't familiar with IEPs, that can be daunting — especially knowing that among students with identified learning disabilities, 70 percent spend at least 80 percent of their school day in the general education setting.

In 2017–2018, around 7 million students ages 3 to 21 received special education services under IDEA. That's 14 percent of all public school students. The most common way students qualify is with a specific learning disability.

This toolkit aims to demystify IEPs: the laws, definitions, and processes for teachers. It provides teachers like you with practical and actionable tools to clarify your role and to ensure that students with learning and thinking differences thrive in the classroom.

What is an IEP?

In this section, you'll be able to:

- **Understand what an IEP is and what it looks like.**

- **Learn about the laws related to IEPs, the benefits of IEPs, and the students that IEPs serve.**

- **Distinguish between IEP and 504 plans.**

Key terms

Individualized Education Program (IEP): A plan that details the supports and services (such as speech therapy or multisensory reading instruction) that a school will provide to meet the individual needs of a student with a disability who qualifies for special education.

special education: Specially designed instruction, provided at no cost to parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability.

present level of performance: A description of a student's abilities, skills, challenges, and strengths at the time the IEP is written.

annual goals: These build on the student's present level of performance. The IEP team believes the student should be able to achieve the goals in one calendar year.

related services: Speech therapy, occupational therapy, social work services, and other services that a student may receive.

supplementary aids and services: Supports that help a student access learning at school. May include accommodations, modifications, and assistive technology.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA): The federal law that guarantees all children with disabilities access to a free appropriate public education.

504 plan: A blueprint for how the school will provide support and remove barriers for a student with a disability.

There's a lot to know about IEPs and how they support kids who learn and think differently. Understanding IEP basics can help you get started.
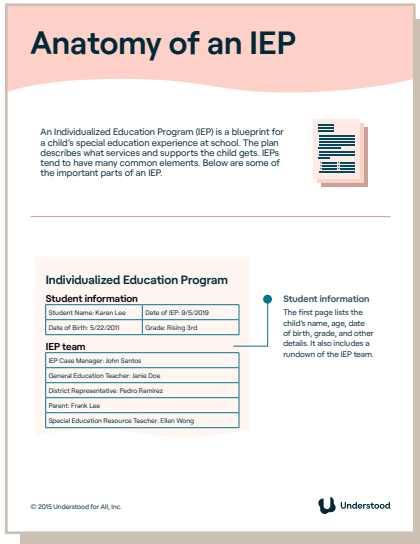
See the Anatomy of an IEP below or click to download it here.

IEP is an acronym that stands for Individualized Education Program. An IEP is more than just a written legal document (or "plan"). Some people may refer to it as an Individualized Education Plan. It's specially designed instruction, provided at no cost to parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability.

Special education is specially designed instruction, provided at no cost to parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability. It can include specialized activities in PE, music, and arts education and specialized instruction in the classroom, home, or other settings.

Each program is designed to meet a student's unique needs. The term IEP is also used to refer to the written plan that spells out the specific types of help kids will get. Both the program and the written plan describing it are covered by special education law, or the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Now that you know what an IEP is, you may be wondering what is in the plan and what it looks like.

Anatomy of an IEP

An Individualized Education Program (IEP) is a blueprint for a child's special education experience at school. The plan describes what services and supports the child gets. IEPs tend to have many common elements. Below are some of the important parts of an IEP.

Individualized Education Program

Student information

Student Name: Karen Lee	Date of IEP: 9/5/2019
Date of Birth: 5/22/2011	Grade: Rising 3rd

IEP team

IEP Case Manager: John Santos
General Education Teacher: Janie Doe
District Representative: Pedro Ramirez
Parent: Frank Lee
Special Education Resource Teacher: Ellen Wong

Student information

The first page lists the child's name, age, date of birth, grade, and other details. It also includes a rundown of the IEP team.

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Anatomy of an IEP

Present level of educational performance

Academic performance
Karen is a kind, helpful third grader who is always willing to work hard, even on tasks that are difficult for her. She has a strong love of learning and will seek out books relevant to her interests of the outdoors and animals. She is also quite articulate in classroom discussion. However, while Karen is presently meeting grade-level expectations in math, she continues to show significant difficulty in the area of reading fluency and comprehension compared to her classroom peers. Karen is able to decode single letters, vowel combinations, and digraphs (like "ch" or "sh") in short, consonant-vowel-consonant (CVC) words, where she is 80% accurate, on average. She has difficulty applying these skills when reading multi-syllable words, where she is 35% accurate, on average, or when reading words in actual passages of text. Recent measures show that Karen is able to read third-grade passages at a rate of 40 words per minute, with 85% accuracy and less than 65% text comprehension. Students in third grade are expected to read 100-140 words per minute, and answer comprehension questions with 90-100% accuracy. Karen is able to read late first-grade passages at 90 words per minute, with 95% accuracy, and comprehension at 90% accuracy on average. This is Karen's independent reading level. Karen's reading difficulties affect her participation in the general education curriculum by making it impossible for her to read grade-level text independently and learn grade-level content effectively.

● **Present level of educational performance (PLOP, PLAAFP, or PLP)**

This describes the child's current abilities, skills, challenges, and strengths. It may also discuss social skills and behavior.

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Anatomy of an IEP

Annual goals

Goal 1

Karen will increase her reading fluency from 90 words per minute in late first-grade passages to 90 words per minute in late second-grade passages.

Objectives:

1. Given phonological awareness instruction, Karen will read unfamiliar 2- and 3-syllable words with at least 85% accuracy over two consecutive trials as measured on reading post-tests administered by the special education resource teacher.

2. Given instruction in a sight-word reading program, Karen will read 180 high-frequency words with 85% accuracy over two consecutive trials as measured by the special education resource teacher.

Goal 2

Karen will increase her reading comprehension from 90% accuracy at the late first-grade level to 90% accuracy at the late second-grade level.

Objectives:

1. Given pre-teaching of new vocabulary, picture supports, and up to three adult prompts, Karen will correctly answer comprehension questions about events in a late second-grade text with 90% accuracy over two consecutive trials as measured by the special education resource teacher.

2. Given pre-teaching of new vocabulary and up to three adult prompts, Karen will correctly answer comprehension questions about short, late second-grade passages.

Progress reporting

Progress toward annual goals will be measured through classwork, observation, tests and quizzes, and written reports. Karen's parents will receive a quarterly written report on her progress.

Annual goals

These should consist of academic and functional skills that the child can reasonably accomplish during the school year. Each is broken down into shorter-term objectives.

Progress reporting

The IEP states how the IEP team will keep track of the child's progress toward annual goals.

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Anatomy of an IEP

Services

Service: Reading Instruction	Frequency: Once daily for 60 minutes per session
Location: ABC Elementary School	Instructional Setting: Special Education Small Group
Duration: 9/15/2019 – 6/1/2020	

Supplementary aids and services

The student will be provided with the following accommodations/modifications:

Accommodation/Modification: Textbooks on CD/tape	
Frequency: Daily	Location: ABC Elementary School and at home
Instructional Setting: All classes and at home	
Duration: 9/15/2019 – 6/1/2020	

Services

Here, the IEP details:

1. What special education services the child will get and for how long
2. Any services outside the school year (like summer services)
3. Any "transition planning" to get the child ready for life after high school

Supplementary aids and services

The IEP specifies what accommodations the child will get in school — like a seat at the front of the class. It also details any modifications. These are changes to what's expected of the child — like less homework. This section will also include information about any assistive technology the child needs.

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Anatomy of an IEP

Participation

Although Karen has been responsive to adaptations and modifications in her regular education classroom, she continues to progress slowly on her IEP reading goals. Small group pull-out instruction for an hour a day allows for intensive, individualized instruction in Karen's identified area of need, while allowing her to spend most of the day in her general education classroom.

Participation

This section explains how and to what extent the child will be included in general education classes and other activities, including state tests.

Parent/Guardian Consent

Indicate your response by checking the appropriate space and sign below.

_____x_____   I **give** permission to implement this IEP.

_____   I **do not give** permission to implement this IEP.

_____
Signature

Consent

Many IEPs have a signature line where a parent or guardian officially agrees to the plan. Keep in mind that an IEP isn't all-or-nothing. Families can attach an addendum, agreeing to only parts of the IEP.

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5 things you should look for in an IEP

Now that you know what an IEP is, let's explore what's most important to know about these plans.

1. Present level of performance

Sometimes, present level of performance is shortened to PLOP or PLP. It may also be called PLAAFP (present level of academic achievement and functional performance) or PLEP (present level of educational performance).

Present level of performance describes a student's current abilities, skills, challenges, and strengths at the time the IEP is written. It covers both academic performance and everyday functional skills.

Academic performance refers to how a student is doing based on grade-level standards. Functional performance means activities of daily living that aren't just academic. This includes behavior, communication, social skills, eating, dressing, and mobility. A disability can impact both academic and functional skills.

How it applies to your classroom:

The present level of performance answers two questions:

- Where do the student's skills and knowledge currently stand?

- How does the student's disability impact involvement and progress in the general education curriculum?

This information helps you best support the student's learning in your classroom. If the student's challenges are in the subject you teach, knowing the present level of performance will help you adjust your instruction to meet those needs. Keep in mind that some challenges — like reading — may impact many subjects.

2. Annual goals

All IEPs have annual goals. These goals build on the student's present level of performance. The IEP team believes the student should be able to achieve the goals in one calendar year. Depending on when an IEP is written, the goals may span more than one academic year. For instance, an IEP written in May will have an annual review next May.

How it applies to your classroom:

Each goal describes the skill or subject area the student is focusing on and the targeted result. It's like a map describing where the student is going this year, the route for getting there, and the stops along the way.

If you teach the content area of one of these goals, like language arts or math, you may be responsible for tracking and reporting on progress. The same is true if you're helping the student with functional skills. Special education law requires that student progress toward IEP goals be reported as often as progress is reported for students without IEPs.

3. Special education and related services

Every IEP has a section that describes the services a student receives. This includes specially designed instruction (special education) and related services, like speech therapy, occupational therapy, and social work services.

An IEP also states how often and where the services take place. It lists the school staff responsible for each service. There is also information about any services outside the regular school year, as well as transition planning for after high school.

How it applies to your classroom:

Sometimes, special education and related services take place in the general education classroom. That means you and other school staff will need to plan and work together to provide instruction for the student. The IEP may list "consultation services" to account for this planning time.

It's also helpful to know how often a student may be pulled out of your classroom for services. You can then work with the service provider on scheduling to help the student get as much instructional time in your classroom as possible.

4. Supplementary aids, services, modifications, and/or supports

The IEP will have a section on supplementary aids and services. It may list accommodations, modifications, and assistive technology, along with when and where they'll be used. These supports will help the student access learning in your classroom, as well as throughout all school activities.

How it applies to your classroom:

This is one of the most important parts of the IEP for you as a general education teacher. Chances are you'll need to manage the student's accommodations in the classroom. You may need specific training to do what the IEP requires, so don't hesitate to ask for it.

You'll also find information about how the student will take part in state tests. Most students who learn and think differently will take the same tests as the rest of your students. But they may use accommodations like extra time, a scribe, or a quiet setting for those tests.

Sometimes, the IEP team may determine that a certain test isn't appropriate for the student. The IEP will explain why and give information about other ways to assess the student.

5. Notes and considerations — including special factors

An IEP generally includes a catch-all section for notes. It will have comments and concerns that the family raised at the IEP meeting. Often, this part of the IEP also lets you know whether the student has other barriers that get in the way of learning. For example, the student may have behavior challenges or be an English language learner (ELL).

How it applies to your classroom:

Knowing a family's concerns, as well as what they see as their child's strengths, can help you build a relationship with both students and families. Plus, it can give insight into ways to engage the student.

It can also help you know what other obstacles are in the way of learning. For example, if your student is an ELL, you might need to learn more about how to support that student and connect with the family.

A student whose disability involves behavior challenges that impact learning might also have a behavior intervention plan. If the plan isn't attached to the IEP, ask the IEP case manager to see it. You may be responsible for putting parts of the plan into practice in your classroom.

Explore

- The Difference Between IEPs and 504 Plans

Citation

- How to Read an IEP: 5 Things Teachers Should Look For

☑ Practice writing your own IEP

Use the five most important concepts of an IEP from the information above and apply it to something that you're trying to learn or a personal area of need.

For example, is there a new hobby you're trying to learn? Are you trying to learn a new language or to ride a skateboard? Or is there a skill you want to be better at, such as improving your organizational habits? Think about a personal area you'd like to improve and write an IEP for yourself. Record your responses below.

What are your **present levels** with your hobby or skill that you want to improve?
Write 1–2 paragraphs describing your current abilities, skills, challenges, and strengths in that area.

What **annual goal(s)** do you have for the hobby you want to learn or the skill you want to improve? **Write 1–3 annual goals in the space below.**

Will you receive any **special instruction** for how you learn your new hobby or improve a skill? You may be taking a class, reading a book, or watching YouTube videos on the topic. How many times per week will you be receiving this instruction? Where will this take place? **Create a table or describe the service, frequency, location, and duration of your specialized services for learning your hobby or skill improvement.**

What **tools or supports** will you have available as you're learning your new hobby or improving your skill? Will you have a list of reminders or pictures of steps to complete? Will you have any special tools or supports? **Make a list below of any supplementary aids you will need to learn your new hobby or improve your skill.**

Make any notes below about **special considerations** you or others may have about learning your hobby or improving your skill. Also, share any concerns you may have. **Write 2–5 sentences below.**

The laws behind IEPs

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA): What you need to know

As the nation's special education law, IDEA provides rights and protections to children with disabilities and to their parents or legal guardians.

The purpose of IDEA

IDEA was first passed in 1975. (At that time, it was called the Education for All Handicapped Children Act.) The primary purposes of IDEA are:

To provide a free appropriate public education (FAPE) to children with disabilities. IDEA requires schools to find and evaluate students suspected of having disabilities, at no cost to families. This is called Child Find. Once kids are found to have a qualifying disability, schools must provide them with special education and related services (like speech therapy and counseling) to meet their unique needs. The goal is to help students make progress in school. Read more about what is and isn't covered under FAPE.

Under IDEA, parents also have a say in the decisions the school makes about their child. IDEA covers kids from birth through high school graduation or age 21 (whichever comes first). It provides early intervention services up to age 3, and special education for older kids in public school, which includes charter schools. **(Find out how IDEA affects students in private school.)**

Services under IDEA: Who's eligible

Not every child is eligible for special education under IDEA, and just having a diagnosis doesn't guarantee eligibility. The first step in qualifying is that a student must have a disability that falls under one of the 13 categories IDEA covers. They are:

- **Autism**

- **Deaf-blindness**

- **Deafness**

- **Emotional disturbance**

- **Hearing impairment**

- **Intellectual disability**

- **Multiple disabilities**

- **Orthopedic impairment**

- **Other health impairment (includes ADHD)**

- **Specific learning disability (includes dyslexia, dyscalculia, dysgraphia, and other learning differences)**

- **Speech or language impairment**

- **Traumatic brain injury**

- **Visual impairment, including blindness**

However, having one of these disabilities doesn't automatically qualify a child under IDEA. To be eligible, a student must:

- Have a disability *and*, as a result of that disability…

- Need special education to make progress in school

If, for instance, a student has ADHD and is doing well in school, the student might not be covered by IDEA.

Explore

- [IDEA Fact Sheet](#)

- [IDEA, Section 504, and ADA: Which Laws Do What](#)

- [Special Education: State vs. Federal Law](#)

Citation

- [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA): What You Need to Know](#)

The benefits of IEPs

There are many benefits to getting an IEP. The process begins with a full evaluation that shows a student's strengths and challenges. The results let families and schools create a program of services and supports tailored to meet the student's needs.

With an IEP, students get individualized instruction that focuses on improving specific skills. But there are other types of help that can also be included in an IEP.

Students might get accommodations, like extended time on tests, or related services, like speech-language therapy. Assistive technology (AT) is another type of support that can be part of an IEP.

Having an IEP gives students, families, and schools certain legal protections. It lets families be involved in decisions that impact their student's education. It also gives students rights when it comes to school discipline.

Having an IEP provides benefits to teachers as well. It provides current and historical information about your students' strengths and challenges, as well as notes as to what type of instruction and accommodations have been effective in the past.

Ongoing progress monitoring provides a way to assess whether the services and supports are effective in providing students access to the general education curriculum. An IEP also gives teachers access to a team of professionals who are all working toward helping students achieve their IEP goals, and who are able to support each other in doing so.

All of these factors can boost students' self-esteem and teacher self-efficacy, help students build skills, and help them thrive at school.

Explore

- 4 Benefits of Inclusive Classrooms

Citation

- What Is an IEP?

The students served by IEPs

Meet Jade. She's a student with a disability, and she has an IEP. She wants to share about her experiences in the classroom. Watch Jade's story here.

According to IDEA, there are 13 disability categories in which students can qualify for an IEP. One step of the IEP process, which you'll learn more about in the next section, is an **evaluation** to determine if a student meets the eligibility criteria in one or more of these areas.

Learning more about the disability areas that students qualify in is an important step in understanding how to best support your students with IEPs. Also, understanding each student's perspective as a learner and having empathy will help you understand why IEPs matter.

The disability category with the highest prevalence is called "specific learning disabilities." This includes things like dyslexia and dyscalculia. ADHD is also common and falls under the category "other health impairment." These two categories account for **1 in 5 students in your class** who may have a diagnosed or undiagnosed learning and thinking difference.

Learn more about common learning and thinking differences below or by viewing these one-page fact sheets on ADHD, language disorder, dyslexia, written expression disorder, and dyscalculia.

There's a lot of misunderstanding about learning and thinking differences like dyslexia and ADHD. **Here are some of the most common myths — and facts to debunk them.**

Myth #1: Learning and thinking differences aren't real.

Fact: Learning and thinking differences like dyslexia and ADHD are very real. They're not made-up challenges. They're caused by differences in how the brain develops and functions, and they often run in families.

Myth #2: Learning and thinking differences aren't common.

Fact: Millions of people learn and think differently. These challenges aren't always easy to spot, though, for lots of reasons. People may hide their difficulties. Or their challenges may go unnoticed by families, teachers, and employers. Chances are you know someone who learns and thinks differently.

Myth #3: People who learn and think differently aren't smart.

Fact: Having learning differences doesn't mean people aren't smart. They can be gifted, too. But they may struggle in school or at work because of their differences. And that can lead others to wrongly assume that people with ADHD, dyslexia, or other differences aren't intelligent.

Myth #4: People who learn and think differently are "just being lazy."

Fact: Learning and thinking differences don't just "go away" through sheer willpower. People who learn and think differently are often trying as hard as they can to work around their challenges. They need the right kind of support to thrive.

Myth #5: Kids grow out of learning and thinking differently.

Fact: Kids don't outgrow these differences, so it's not just a matter of catching up. They're lifelong challenges. The sooner kids get the support they need, the sooner they start to make progress.

Myth #6: People who learn and think differently can't do well in school or at work.

Fact: With the right support, kids who learn and think differently can make great progress and thrive in school. Thriving means something different for everyone. It could mean calmly sitting through a class. Or it could mean getting A's. The same goes for jobs and careers. Look in any field and you can find examples of people who learn and think differently and are thriving.

Explore

- [What Are Learning and Thinking Differences?](#)

- [13 Disability Categories](#)

- [Learning Disabilities by the Numbers](#)

- ["Why We Cry in IEP Meetings,"](#) from Understood's *In It* podcast

Citation

- [6 Common Myths About Learning and Thinking Differences](#)

Reflect: The students IEPs serve

- Visit Understood's simulation: [Through Your Child's Eyes](#).

- Explore the **simulations**. These simulations will provide you with insight about what it might feel like to be a student with a disability impacting reading, math, writing, attention, or organization.

- Explore **children's stories** about having issues with these specific areas.

> **How did these activities and personal stories make you feel? How will these stories impact your teaching for students who learn and think differently?**
>
> Record your response below.

☑ Practice applying your knowledge by taking this IEP basics quiz

Check your understanding by answering the questions below.

1. **IEP stands for**

   a) Individualized Education Program and/or Individualized Education Plan

   b) Introduction to Education Plans

   c) Inclusive Education Program or Inclusive Education Plan

   d) Invitation to Educational Program

2. **IDEA...**

   a) is a law that was first passed in 1975.

   b) provides a free appropriate public education to students with disabilities.

   c) gives families a voice in their child's education.

   d) is all of the above.

3. **What is *not* a benefit of an IEP?**

   a) Allows for classwork to be easier for students.

   b) Gives students certain legal protections.

   c) Provides students with accommodations.

   d) Allows for individualized instruction so that students can improve certain skills.

4. **To qualify for an IEP, students must:**

   a) have a disability that falls under one of the 13 categories under IDEA.

   b) have passing grades.

   c) have repeated absences from school.

   d) pay for the services in the program.

Answers can be found in the Appendix.

What is my role in the IEP process?

In this section, you'll be able to:

- **Understand the IEP process.**

- **Learn about what to expect during IEP meetings.**

- **Describe how to write strong IEP goals.**

- **Distinguish between accommodations and modifications.**

⚑ Key terms

free appropriate public education (FAPE): Special education and related services that are provided at public expense. Services are supervised by the school and must meet state standards. There is no charge to the parent.

least restrictive environment (LRE): IDEA says that students who receive special education should be educated in the least restrictive environment "to the maximum extent that is appropriate." Put more simply, they should spend as much time as possible in general education classes.

SMART goals: The IEP will have annual goals that lay out what the student will be working toward over the school year. To help get the most out of the IEP, those goals shouldn't be vague or general. Instead, they should be SMART: **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**ttainable, **R**esults-oriented, and **T**ime-bound.

accommodation: An accommodation changes *how* students access and learn the same material as their peers — without lowering the academic expectations.

modification: A modification changes *what* students are taught or expected to learn.

Overview of the IEP process

You've learned the basics of [what an IEP is](), and how it can support students who learn and think differently. Here are the four most important steps of the IEP process that teachers need to know.

1. Determining IEP eligibility

Both teachers or families may request special education testing. Most schools have a [process in place to provide interventions to students who are struggling](). If the student isn't responding to interventions, the school may make a recommendation for a special education evaluation. However, a parent's request for testing needs to be considered at the time the request is made, regardless of whether the student is participating in the intervention process.

When the results of the evaluation are ready, the school has to determine if your child is eligible for an IEP. To do this, they have to answer two questions:

1. Does the student have one or more of the [13 conditions]() that are covered under the [special education law IDEA]()?

2. Does the student need services and accommodations to succeed at school?

[The IEP team]() decides if the student qualifies for an IEP at a special "eligibility meeting." Teachers — both general education and special education — are part of this meeting, as are the student's parents or guardians. School professionals like a speech-language therapist or an occupational therapist may be there as well. If the school finds the student to be eligible, together you'll start creating the IEP.

2. Creating the plan

The IEP developed during the meeting is considered a draft IEP.

Every IEP meeting should cover these key aspects:

- **Present level of performance (PLOP):** The team leader will write a statement about the student's current levels of academic and functional performance (social, behavioral, and motor skills, for example) and goals. This is based on data (like test scores) and observations from you and other team members.

- **Annual goals:** The team reviews what progress the student has made toward meeting annual goals. Then together you develop new or revised goals for the coming year. It's important for annual goals to be specific, measurable, and tailored to the student.

- **Individualized supports and services:** The team discusses how well the student's accommodations, modifications, and specialized instruction are working. Then you and the team update the supports and services to match the student's PLOP and new annual goals.

3. Attending IEP meetings

You may also be asked to join annual IEP meetings. An annual meeting will happen every year to review progress and make adjustments to the plan. Although annual meetings are legally required, families and teachers can convene an IEP meeting at any time to address concerns, share progress, and make any necessary adjustments.

Typically, students are re-evaluated every three years to ensure that they meet eligibility. The evaluation also serves to show the progress the student has made since the previous evaluation.

4. Implementing the plan

Teachers then ensure that the student receives all necessary accommodations and services that were agreed upon in the meeting. Collaboration with colleagues is critical. Teachers also need to ensure that they have a system for tracking accommodations and monitoring progress. You'll learn more about implementing IEPs in the next section.

⌖ Explore

- Learn what to expect at an eligibility meeting from a family's perspective.

- Read more about special education evaluations.

⚑ Citation

- Understanding the IEP Process

📝 Reflect: The IEP process

✏️ Map out, draw, or list out the four important steps of the IEP process.

What to expect during an IEP meeting

Imagine this scenario: You open your school email or check your mailbox and find a notice for an IEP meeting. You know some of the students in your general education classroom have IEPs (Individualized Education Programs). You also know you're responsible for implementing accommodations and other supports in the classroom. But you may not be sure about your role as a general education teacher in the IEP meeting.

What's required of you?

You're not alone in having questions about IEP meetings. If you're not a special education teacher, you may not have a lot of training around the IEP process.

Here are some of the basics: An IEP lays out the special education instruction and unique supports and services a student with disabilities will receive to make progress in school. The written document that outlines the program is a legal document.

Creating an IEP is a collaborative process between a student's family and the school. It's aimed at meeting the unique needs of the student. The program can be changed if it's not providing the support the student needs to make progress.

When it comes time for an IEP meeting, there are four things you need to know about your role.

1. General education plays a big part in special education.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is the federal law that governs special education. It's vast, so you're not expected to know all the ins and outs of it. But there are a couple of key concepts to understand.

> **Free appropriate public education:** IDEA guarantees every student a free appropriate public education (or FAPE). For most students, FAPE is provided through the general education curriculum. That may look different for students with disabilities. Some may need special education and related services (like speech therapy, occupational therapy, or counseling) to make reasonable progress. The IEP outlines that specific student's program.

Least restrictive environment: IDEA says that students who receive special education should be educated in the least restrictive environment (or LRE) "to the maximum extent that is appropriate." Put more simply, they should spend as much time as possible in general education classes.

Research shows that students who learn and think differently spend the majority of the school day in general education classrooms. With that in mind, speak up for the resources, training, and support you need to make LRE work for you and your students.

Special classes, separate schools, or removal from general education classes shouldn't be the IEP team's first consideration. The team should only consider these placements when a student's disability is so severe that FAPE can't be provided in the general education classroom — even with supports and services.

2. You are a required member of the IEP team.

Each person on the team plays a different role. IDEA requires that at least one general education teacher be part of the team. As a general education teacher, you know the curriculum for your grade level (and subject). You also know the academic and behavioral expectations of your class.

At an IEP meeting, you bring that perspective to the table. It means you can answer parents' and guardians' questions about what their child will be learning in your class. It also means you have important information. You can help the team decide what type of support, services, and instruction students may need to help them meet grade-level standards.

Depending on where you are in the school year, you may have already had the chance to build a positive, trusting relationship with the student's family. That allows you to serve the important role of bridging communication between families and other staff they may not know yet.

3. You will provide information on progress.

At the IEP meeting, every teacher and related service provider will give an update on progress. If a student already has an IEP, be sure to review the current IEP goals so you'll be ready to talk about progress. Gather relevant work samples and other data for the meeting, too. You might bring the following documents to the meeting:

- Recent work samples, assessments, and current grades

- Information on which accommodations the student chooses to use in your class (even if they're not in the current IEP) and how often they're used

- Progress monitoring data from response to intervention (RTI) or other instructional interventions data

- Notes and data on any behavioral issues and the interventions you've used to help

Be ready to speak about the student's growth and strengths as well as challenges. Speaking personally about students' personalities, interests, and hobbies shows you've taken the time to get to know them. It lets families know that you understand the value of getting to know their child.

Teacher-to-teacher tip:

"Before an IEP meeting, I sometimes interview my students to ask what accommodations have worked best for them. If the student isn't attending the IEP meeting, I bring that information to share with the team. If a student does attend the meeting, I support them in self-advocating for the accommodations that have worked for them in class."

— Lauren Jewett, Understood Teacher Fellow

4. You can ask questions, raise concerns, and suggest solutions.

You'll hear a lot of jargon and acronyms in discussions about special education. If you're not sure what another team member is talking about, it's OK to ask for clarification. You probably won't be the only person at the table who needs an explanation. Asking for simple clarifications can often be a way to advocate for the student and family.

Know, too, that it's important to discuss any challenges you're having in working with the student. It can be scary to talk about difficulties. But in the end, it benefits the student. Tell the team what you've tried already and ask them to help brainstorm other solutions. Let families know you want their ideas and feedback, too. They know the student in a way the rest of the team doesn't and may have unique answers.

It's important to understand which specific goals and objectives you'll be responsible for supporting. If you're not sure how to implement an accommodation, behavior plan, or anything else in the IEP, be sure to let the team know. Tell them you'll need time to consult with the special education teacher or specialist. Speak up about what training or other support you'll need. That way it can be written into the IEP.

By law, IEP teams must meet at least once a year to review the student's goals and progress. But any member of the team — including you — can ask for a meeting at any time if things aren't going as expected. Don't hesitate to talk to the special education teacher about having a meeting if you think it's necessary.

Explore

- [IEP Meeting Overview](#)

- [The Difference Between IEP Meetings and Parent-Teacher Conferences](#)

- [Questions to Ask Before and After Your Child's IEP Meeting](#)

- [Video: 8 Insider Tips for Navigating IEP Meetings](#)

- [Who Is on the IEP Team](#)

- [IEP Personal Stories](#)

Citation

- [For Teachers: What to Expect During an IEP Meeting](#)

Reflect: Your role in the IEP process

Name one thing that is clearer to you now regarding your role in IEP meetings. What questions do you have about your role in an IEP meeting?

Creating goals

Special education teachers and general education teachers often collaborate to write IEP goals for students.

An IEP will have annual goals that lay out what your student will be working toward over the school year. To help get the most out of the IEP, those goals shouldn't be vague or general. Instead, they should be SMART: **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**ttainable, **R**esults-oriented, and **T**ime-bound.

This chart shows you how to recognize a SMART IEP goal.

SMART stands for	What that means	Example of a non-SMART IEP goal	Example of a SMART IEP goal
Specific	The goal is specific in naming the skill or subject area and the targeted result. Details matter!	Adam will be a better reader.	Adam will be able to read a passage orally in a grade-level book at 110–130 words per minute with random errors.
Measurable	The goal is stated in a way that your child's progress can be measured. That can be done using standardized tests, curriculum-based measurements, or screening.	With the aid of a calculator, Emma will be able to solve math problems.	With the aid of a calculator, Emma will be able to solve math problems that involve the computation of fractions and decimals, with 75 percent accuracy.

SMART stands for	What that means	Example of a non-SMART IEP goal	Example of a SMART IEP goal
Attainable	The goal represents progress that is realistic for the student.	Jackson will write at grade level, with no errors in spelling or punctuation.	Jackson will write a paragraph with at least 5 sentences each greater than 8 words, with no more than 2 errors in spelling and punctuation.
Results-oriented	The goal clearly lays out what your student will do to accomplish it.	During small group activities, Dana will be attentive to others.	During small group activities, Dana will look attentively toward the speaker of the group 90 percent of the time, in 4 out of 5 opportunities.
Time-bound	The goal includes a time frame in which your student will achieve it, with the right supports and services. It also states when and how often progress will be measured.	Jeremy will be able to orally explain class vocabulary words, with 90 percent accuracy, on 8 out of 10 tries.	By May 15, Jeremy will be able to orally explain class vocabulary words, with 90 percent accuracy, on 8 out of 10 tries. His progress will be measured through a monthly language assessment.

Explore

- See sample IEP goals for reading.
- SMART IEPs can be strengths-based, too.
- Look at annual goals from a family's perspective.

Citation

- [How to Tell If Your Child's IEP Goals Are SMART](#)

☑ Practice: Write SMART goals for your subject area

Now, you get the chance to practice writing SMART IEP goals as described above. Using the case study below and the SMART framework, write 1–3 SMART IEP goals for Xavier for your subject area.

Case Study:

Xavier is a student with a specific learning disability in reading comprehension. He has an IEP with goals in most subject areas. His present level of performance indicates that his comprehension, decoding, and fluency skills are approximately two years behind grade level. Even in subjects other than language arts, he struggles due to his challenges with reading. Xavier is an amazing athlete and artist, and he shows academic strengths with math calculation.

SMART stands for	Example of a SMART goal
Specific	
Measurable	
Attainable	
Results-oriented	
Time-bound	

Accommodations and modifications for the classroom

In a busy classroom, it can be daunting to meet the varied learning needs of all your students. Knowing you're also responsible for implementing instructional accommodations and modifications in students' IEPs and 504 plans can make it feel even more challenging. But with the right information, you can provide these important supports to help all students thrive.

Here are key concepts to keep in mind and steps you can take to implement accommodations and modifications for your students.

Accommodations and modifications: Key concepts

These important ideas can help you implement accommodations and modifications effectively.

Accommodations and modifications are not the same thing. An accommodation changes *how* students access and learn the same material as their peers — without lowering the academic expectations. A modification changes *what* students are taught or expected to learn.

Fair does not mean equal. Students and some teachers may worry that having extra supports in place for some students gives them an unfair advantage. But it's important to remember that *all* students have individual strengths and needs. Accommodations and modifications are designed to level the playing field. Focusing on equity can help give everyone a chance to thrive in the classroom.

Collaboration is critical. Partnering with special education staff and related service providers can help you understand the purpose of the accommodations and modifications. It also gives you the chance to work through challenges you're having in implementing these supports. Some accommodations may be easy to use in the classroom. Others might require more time to learn to use — for both you and your students. Don't be afraid to ask your colleagues for help if you're not sure how to implement an accommodation, modify a lesson, or use a specific type of assistive technology.

Students and their families are key partners. Ongoing communication and trusting relationships can help you learn more about how students are doing with the supports they're receiving. At first, some students might not feel confident coming to you to talk if they

have concerns about using their accommodations. You can check in with parents to ask: Do the students feel comfortable using the accommodations? Do they find the accommodations easy to access? How could you work together to make the supports even more helpful?

Planning with Universal Design for Learning (UDL) can eliminate extra work. Applying UDL principles in your lessons can meet the needs of the whole range of students in your classroom. By proactively anticipating barriers to learning, you can build in supports that help all students access the material. And by making these supports available to all students, you're recognizing that students who have IEPs and 504 plans aren't the only ones who have challenges.

Students may not need to use an accommodation for every lesson. Most students who learn and think differently spend the majority of their school day in the general education classroom. But these students vary in the amount of support they need. Some need accommodations in just one or two classes or subjects. Others might need them across the board.

If students are successful during a lesson, they may choose not to use their accommodations for that lesson. If your students' work is up to the same standards as their peers' work, you don't need to insist that they use accommodations. You just need to provide these supports as an option.

> **Watch this video about the differences between accommodations and modifications.**

Accommodations vs. modifications

	Accommodations	Modifications
Classroom instruction	Accommodations can help kids learn the same material as their peers. This allows them to meet the same expectations. A student with dyslexia, for example, might listen to an audio version of a book. But it's still the same book that the rest of the class is reading. Likewise, a student who has trouble focusing might get seated next to the teacher, but still has to do all the regular class assignments.	Kids who are far behind their peers may need changes to the curriculum they're learning. These are called modifications. For example, a student could be assigned shorter or easier reading assignments, or homework that's different from the rest of the class. Kids who receive modifications are *not* expected to learn the same material as their classmates.
Classroom tests	Accommodations for testing can be different from those used for teaching. For example, using spellcheck might help a student with writing difficulties take notes during class. However, it wouldn't be appropriate during a weekly spelling test. At the same time, this student might benefit from having extra time to complete the spelling test or using a keyboard if the physical act of writing is difficult.	Modifications in testing often mean that a student covers less material — or material that is less complex. For example, a spelling test may require the class to study 20 words. However, a student with modifications might only have to study 10 of them. Or there might be two different lists of spelling words. With a modification, *what* the student is tested on is different.

	Accommodations	**Modifications**
Standardized testing	Statewide tests allow some accommodations like extra time or taking a test on a computer. It's best if these are the same accommodations a child uses to take class tests.	Some students take what's called an **alternate assessment**. This state test includes modifications to the regular test. Questions might be fewer or not cover the same material as the standard exams. Also, the results are interpreted differently. Before parents agree to an alternate assessment, it's important that they know what the impact will be on their child's academic and work future.
PE, music, and art class	Accommodations for "special" classes like PE, music, and art can be helpful for some kids. These are similar to accommodations in the classroom. Kids might get extra time to learn to play an instrument. Or they may be allowed to complete an art project in a different format.	Sometimes, an assignment in a class like PE, music, or art is unreasonable for a child. When this happens, a modification may be made. For example, the PE teacher might reduce the number of laps a student needs to run. The music teacher might not require a child to learn how to read music.

Explore

- Look at some common accommodations and modifications.

- Explore accommodations for meeting different needs.

Citation

- How to Use Accommodations and Modifications in the Classroom

☑ Practice: Apply your knowledge by taking this IEP process quiz

Check your understanding by answering the questions below.

1. **My role in the IEP process does not include:**
   a) Conducting an evaluation to see if my student has a disability.
   b) Helping the IEP team determine special education eligibility.
   c) Assisting with the creation of IEPs.
   d) Implementing IEPs in my classroom.

2. **General education teachers are required to play a role during the IEP meeting.**
   a) True
   b) False

3. **General education teachers contribute to IEP meetings because:**
   a) They know the curriculum for the student's subject and grade level.
   b) They know the behavioral and academic expectations in the classroom and grade level.
   c) They can answer a parent's questions about what their child will be learning.
   d) They can help decide what type of supports, services, and instruction students may need to help meet grade level standards.
   e) All of the above.

4. **IEP goals should be S.M.A.R.T.**
   SMART stands for
   a) Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Results-oriented, Time-bound
   b) Strong, Measurement, Action, Review, Tangible
   c) Standard, Multiple, Assets-based, Regression, Tentative
   d) Single, Measure, Attain, Review, Teach

5. **An accommodation changes _____students access and learn the same material as their peers.**
   A modification changes _____students are taught and expected to learn.

Answers can be found in the Appendix.

How do I support students with IEPs in my classroom?

In this section, you'll be able to:

- Understand how to effectively implement IEPs in your classroom.

- Learn about different ways to track accommodations, modifications, and IEP goals.

- Determine the importance of collaboration with your colleagues.

- Hear about the importance of student self-advocacy.

🏳 Key terms

progress reporting: How a school reports on student progress on annual goals. This is specified in the IEP. Progress reporting needs to be provided as often as a school reports on progress in general education for all students.

self-advocacy: A skill that enables kids to understand their strengths and weaknesses, know what they need to succeed, and communicate that to other people.

Ready, set, implement!

Once you know the basic concepts, there are practical steps you can take to implement accommodations and modifications for your students.

1. [Read your students' IEPs.](#)

2. Each student's plan should make it clear which accommodations or modifications are needed and in what context. As you read, highlight any questions you have about how to implement each accommodation or modification and what it should look like in the classroom. Write down the accommodations and modifications.

3. Learn to use the materials yourself. Familiarize yourself with the accommodation if you don't know enough about it. After all, it's hard to help a student learn to use a support if you aren't sure how to use it yourself. Draw on the power of collaboration. The technologist or occupational therapist should provide you and the student with training on how and when to use specific tools.

4. Plan how to set up your classroom to use these tools most effectively. If a student's accommodation or assistive device means they need to be close to a power outlet, how can you arrange classroom seating so the student doesn't have to sit away from peers? Other questions to consider:

   • Do you need a dedicated space to store equipment when it's not in use?

   • Where can you place physical accommodations, like slant boards or fidgets, so students can access them discreetly and without disrupting your lesson?

5. Give students time to practice using new accommodations. Introduce the use of a new tool or support when students are working with content they know well. That way they're not trying a new way to approach work *and* trying to learn new information at the same time.

6. Anticipate and address any questions other students might ask. Some students may be very aware that a classmate is getting extra support, while other students may not even notice. Whether students raise questions or not, it's important to establish

a classroom culture that prioritizes inclusion and belonging. Begin by setting a standard in your classroom that everyone has different strengths and challenges, and that it's OK to ask for and receive what you need to thrive.

If the question of "fair" comes up, point out that some disabilities aren't visible. Remind your students that everyone learns and processes information differently. With this information, your class can come to understand that students receive accommodations so they can learn the way they need to.

Explore

- Watch this video about how some parents organize an IEP binder with important documents about their student. Think of a system to organize your important IEP documents.

- See this IEP binder checklist of some of the important documents in a student's IEP.

Citation

- How to Use Accommodations and Modifications in the Classroom

Tracking accommodations and modifications

IEP/504 plan accommodations and modifications tracker

Student: _____ Teacher: _____
Week of: _____ Class/subject: _____

Accommodation/modification	Description from IEP or 504 plan

Use of accommodations and modifications
Collect information about when, where, and how a student used accommodations or modifications. You can also make a note about what you needed to do to provide that support.

Date	Accommodation/ modification	Teacher or student initiated?	Used?	Notes
		☐ Teacher ☐ Student	☐ Yes ☐ No	
		☐ Teacher ☐ Student	☐ Yes ☐ No	
		☐ Teacher ☐ Student	☐ Yes ☐ No	

Add more on page 2

Page 1 of 3 | © 2020 Understood for All, Inc.

Understood

One of the essentials in your toolkit for supporting students with accommodations and modifications is a tracker.
Take notes about when students use their accommodations independently, when you need to suggest using the supports, when students choose not to use them, and the outcomes.
This is quick and easy to do with a customizable tracker.

Download the tracker here.

IEP/504 plan accommodations and modifications tracker

Student: _____   Teacher: _____

Week of: _____   Class/subject: _____

Accommodation/modification	Description from IEP or 504 plan

Use of accommodations and modifications

Collect information about when, where, and how a student used accommodations or modifications. You can also make a note about what you needed to do to provide that support.

Date	Accommodation/modification	Teacher or student initiated?	Used?	Notes
		☐ Teacher ☐ Student	☐ Yes ☐ No	
		☐ Teacher ☐ Student	☐ Yes ☐ No	
		☐ Teacher ☐ Student	☐ Yes ☐ No	

Add more on page 2

Understood

IEP/504 plan accommodations and modifications tracker

Date	Accommodation/modification	Teacher or student initiated?	Used?	Notes
		☐ Teacher ☐ Student	☐ Yes ☐ No	
		☐ Teacher ☐ Student	☐ Yes ☐ No	
		☐ Teacher ☐ Student	☐ Yes ☐ No	
		☐ Teacher ☐ Student	☐ Yes ☐ No	
		☐ Teacher ☐ Student	☐ Yes ☐ No	
		☐ Teacher ☐ Student	☐ Yes ☐ No	
		☐ Teacher ☐ Student	☐ Yes ☐ No	
		☐ Teacher ☐ Student	☐ Yes ☐ No	

Understood

IEP/504 plan accommodations and modifications tracker

Student: Sara Clark

Week of: February 3

Teacher: Mr. Robinson

Class/subject: Math

Accommodation/modification	Description from IEP or 504 plan
Frequent breaks	Frequent motor, sensory, or calming breaks, as needed during classroom instruction
Work/test in different setting	Access to a resource room for assignment completion, as needed during classroom instruction or testing
Preferential seating	Preferential seating, as needed during classroom instruction
Frequent checks for understanding	Frequent checks for understanding during independent work sessions
Resource room study hall	Access to adult-supported resource room study hall

Use of accommodations and modifications

Collect information about when, where, and how a student used accommodations or modifications. You can also make a note about what you needed to do to provide that support.

Date	Accommodation/modification	Teacher or student initiated?	Used?	Notes
2/3/2020	Frequent breaks	■ Teacher ☐ Student	☐ Yes ■ No	Teacher suggested a break when Sara had difficulty focusing on independent work.
2/3/2020	Preferential seating	☐ Teacher ■ Student	■ Yes ☐ No	Sara moved to a different desk; said she was distracted by her friends.
		☐ Teacher ☐ Student	☐ Yes ☐ No	
		☐ Teacher ☐ Student	☐ Yes ☐ No	

Understood

How to use the tracker

You can use this tool in many ways.

- You can use it to **remind yourself** which supports each student needs. This can be helpful as you plan lessons and as you teach.

- The tracker can also help you **keep a record** of how often students use supports. This information can be valuable to the IEP team if they want to learn whether supports are working or need to be changed. The team may also want to know if students can use the supports without prompting.

- A third way you can use the tracker is to **gain feedback from an instructional coach or mentor**. If you want to improve how you use accommodations and modifications, your coach can be a third-party observer and use the tracker to give you feedback about how you use the supports.

- **Evaluate the use of the accommodation or modification.** Reflecting on notes from your tracker can help you find patterns. You may realize that a student won't use an accommodation if they have to self-advocate for it. You may also learn that a student doesn't need the support in a certain subject area. Or you may find that you can provide the most commonly used accommodations and modifications to your whole class with some tweaks to the classroom environment.

- **Suggest adjustments as necessary.** Both IEPs and 504 plans are legally binding documents. As a result, you can't make the decision to change or discontinue accommodations and modifications. But you can ask the student support team to revisit them if the data you've collected shows that something else might be more effective. Talk with the IEP case manager or 504 coordinator about setting up a meeting to discuss whether to make changes.

Giving all students what they need

Providing accommodations and modifications for students who learn and think differently can be challenging — but it's entirely doable. With careful planning, collaboration with the student support team, and a way to track your efforts, you can make your classroom a place where all students have what they need to learn.

Explore

- Here are nine reasons why students may refuse their accommodations.

Citation

- How to Use Accommodations and Modifications in the Classroom

Reflect: What challenge(s) do you anticipate when it comes to implementing IEPs in your classroom?

Tracking IEP goals and progress monitoring

The point of having an IEP is to help your student reach state grade-level standards. To do that, the IEP team will set annual goals and measure improvement against those goals.

Who measures student progress with annual IEP goals?

Usually, it is a collaborative effort between the student's special education teacher and the student's general education content teacher.

Progress monitoring can be done weekly or only every few months. Whatever framework your school uses, it needs to be systematic and consistent. The school should use the results to shape each student's curriculum.

The process looks a little different at various grade levels. But the goal is always to identify student needs early and to measure progress often.

Early elementary: Kindergarten through second grade

Schools usually focus on reading readiness and achievement in the early years. Most schools test often and thoroughly at this age. They may use tools called DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills), AIMSweb, MAP, or other tools.

These tests identify key skills of early literacy. Such skills include:

- Letter naming (knowing that the letter *A* is called by the name "A")
- Letter/sound correspondence (knowing that the letter *A* can sound like the short ă sound, like in *mat*, and the long ā sound, like in *mate*)
- Sight word reading (the ability to quickly read common words without sounding them out)
- Reading comprehension (understanding what's read)
- Fluent oral reading (reading at a good pace, with a smooth feel)

Schools now test math skills in a similar way in the early elementary years. The focus is on memorizing basic addition, subtraction, and multiplication facts and understanding basic math concepts.

Middle elementary: Third through fifth grade

Progress monitoring at this age is often less intense, but it's a critical time to stay on top of it. In third grade, children transition from "learning to read" to "reading to learn." This means they begin to apply higher-level skills. This is when many kids begin to struggle.

Most statewide testing begins in these grades. Many schools rely heavily on state test scores to identify struggling students.

Reading tests shift to higher-level skills in reading comprehension and vocabulary. Some schools continue to emphasize oral reading fluency, with a focus on speed. You may work with reports showing how many words per minute a student is reading. If the rate is too slow, the student can get extra support to increase reading speed.

Most screening and monitoring continue to focus on reading. However, math testing has also become popular in recent years. Progress monitoring in math continues to focus on speed in all the basic facts. It may also start to test for understanding fractions and using math reasoning skills.

Many states stop screening and monitoring by mid-elementary school.

Middle school and high school

Most high schools and middle schools measure student success with classroom tests, projects, and homework. Report cards are the primary way of reporting student progress.

Explore

- See how families are staying on top of their child's IEP.

- Look at this IEP goal tracker for families.

Citation

- How Schools Monitor Student Progress

Collaboration

To help students with IEPs thrive in your classroom, you'll need to work with others at your school and alongside each student's family. You'll find that collaboration takes place among five main groups:

- General education teachers and special education teachers

- Case managers

- Families

- Support staff

- Administration/campus leadership

Click on and read the articles or blogs below to learn more about collaboration practices.

- Teacher to Teacher: How We Can Break Down Barriers Between General and Special Education

- Teacher to Teacher: How I Help Students See Support Staff as Teachers

- 8 Tips to Build Positive Relationships With Your Students' Families

- IEP Case Managers: A Guide for Parents

📝 Reflect: Why is it important to build strong collaborative practices with other educators and families?

✏️

Encouraging student self-advocacy

Watch this [video](#) OR [read](#) Savannah's story about her self-advocacy journey.

Part of being an effective advocate is teaching students the skills they need to speak up for themselves.

What is self-advocacy?

Self-advocacy is a skill that enables students to understand their strengths and weaknesses, know what they need to succeed, and communicate that to other people.

Self-advocacy can be broken down into a few key elements:

- Understanding specific needs. (This is part of [self-awareness](#).)

- Knowing what help or support will address those needs, like tutoring or classroom accommodations.

- Communicating those needs to teachers and others.

Let's say your student struggles with writing. Your class requires taking a lot of notes for homework. Without some kind of writing support, this is going to be difficult for your student.

Here's an example of self-advocacy in action:

Your student *understands* that taking notes is going to be a challenge and *knows* that technology can help with note-taking. So your student *communicates* to you that writing is a challenge and asks to use a note-taking app.

Explore [self-advocacy sentence starters](#) students can use for different types of challenges.

The benefits of self-advocacy

Self-advocacy helps students learn by creating solutions for challenges in school. In the note-taking example above, the student would do better in class by using technology.

Of course, a parent or teacher could also advocate. But when students self-advocate, there are extra benefits. Students who exercise self-advocacy can:

- Find solutions to challenges parents may not be aware of

- Build self-confidence in their ability to learn

- Create a sense of ownership over their learning

- Develop independence and self-empowerment

These extra benefits can make a big difference in the long run. Instead of feeling powerless and dependent on others, students with self-advocacy skills are prepared to take on life's challenges. (Read one mother's story of how she learned it was time to empower her son to speak for himself.)

The benefits of self-advocacy go beyond academics. Students who can effectively self-advocate can communicate in social situations and even explain to friends why they sometimes need extra help.

Tools to help students self-advocate

Have a discussion with your student about what they need in your class. Use the resources below to serve as reminders for you and your student. Encourage your student to let you know when they need something new or different.

- This IEP/504 snapshot helps kids keep track of their accommodations.

- A self-awareness worksheet can help students outline their own strengths and weaknesses.

- Kids can use this 3×3 card to describe strengths, challenges, and strategies.

⊘ Explore

- [10 Ways to Help Shy Kids Speak Up for What They Need](#)

- [Personal Story: "Am I Cheating?" Why I Felt Ashamed to Use My Dyslexia Accommodations](#)

▭ Citation

- [How to Build Self-Advocacy in Your Kids](#) (For families)

▤ Reflect: Your system for implementing IEPs

Goal: Put it all together and create your own system for implementing IEPs.

In this section, you've learned how you can effectively implement IEPs in your classroom. You've also been provided with tools and resources that can be beneficial for ensuring that student IEPs are met in your classroom. Now, it's time to put all of this together and create a system and plan for you.

Summarize your plan:
- A summary of your approach
- How you plan to:
    - Track accommodations/modifications
    - Track IEP goals
    - Encourage student self-advocacy
    - Collaborate with your students' families and other educators
- Descriptions or links to any tools/resources you will use

What special considerations should I be aware of for my English language learners and my students of color with IEPs?

In this section, you'll be able to:

- **Understand special considerations for English language learners and students of color in the IEP process.**

- **Debunk myths and misconceptions about English language learners and special education.**

Key terms

English language learners (ELLs)/emerging bilinguals (EBs): Students who are learning English.

English as a Second Language (ESL) services: A program of techniques, methodology, and special curriculum designed to teach ELL students English language skills, which may include listening, speaking, reading, writing, study skills, content vocabulary, and cultural orientation. ESL instruction is usually in English with little use of native language. *(Definition from the U.S. Department of Education)*

significant disproportionality: When a school district identifies students from any racial or ethnic group for special education at markedly higher rates than other students.

Special considerations for English language learners in the IEP process

Read the considerations and strategies below about working with families of English language learners, written by Juliana Urtubey, an [Understood Teacher Fellow](#).

As teachers, we know that some of our most powerful allies are students' families. This is especially true of English language learners (ELLs) who learn and think differently. Establishing a strong partnership is a win for students, families, and teachers alike. We can all benefit from the rich cultural and linguistic experiences these families bring to the school community.

Sometimes barriers can get in the way of family engagement. That can leave families' expertise and contributions unrecognized and untapped by schools.

So how can you tap into this rich resource, especially when it comes to conversations about special education? Here are some things to keep in mind about culture, language, and immigration — plus some strategies to help you get started.

In Understood's resources, we use the term "English language learners" (or "ELLs") to talk about students who are learning English. You may use this term or others in your school. Many educators are beginning to use "emerging bilinguals" (EBs) to acknowledge students' bilingual skills.

Factor 1: Expectations of schools

How a family participates in a child's education, including special education services, can depend on what the family understands their role in their child's education to be. It can also have to do with how the family feels at the school.

For example, in many Latin American countries, public education calls for a family's participation in terms of providing school uniforms and materials. Families are also expected to prepare children for school by teaching social, behavioral, and emotional life skills. Often, public schools

in Latin America do not invite families to teach academics, partner with the teacher, or provide information on the child's learning like they do in the United States, according to research.

As educators, it's our job to communicate to all families that we want to draw on their valuable assets. Those assets can greatly contribute to their child's development and learning, especially if a child is struggling in school.

Take, for instance, first-generation immigrants who may not have had access to education past primary school or who may not yet speak fluent or academic English. Those family members may assume they can't contribute to their child's academic development. Here again, schools can help them understand the important contributions they are already making and can continue making as experts of their children.

Strategies

- Start with these general strategies for partnering with families of English language (both in and outside of special education settings).

- If your school is holding parent-teacher conferences, send home a letter explaining what conferences are. That way, you can clarify the purpose of the conferences (as some families may think that they or their child did something wrong). Encourage families to prepare questions to ask at the conferences. This can be particularly helpful if they're concerned about their child's progress.

- Consider activities that allow families to participate regardless of language, like painting a mural or helping in the school garden.

- Find ways for families to share their perspective on what matters most to them about their child's education. You might use this questionnaire (available in English and Spanish).

- For Spanish-speaking families, share a resource in Spanish about the importance of family involvement in U.S. schooling.

- Engage students in creating an artifact (like a drawing or a letter) for their family members using their home language or cultural depictions, telling what they want to share about school.

Factor 2: Cultural perspectives about disability

Different cultures may have different perceptions, definitions, and expectations about disabilities. Those cultural associations or stigmas can impact how families view their child's disability.

Some families may blame themselves for their child's disability. Others may believe a curse is to blame for the disability, rather than a medical cause. Of course, be careful not to make assumptions about families' preferences or perspectives based on their culture or language.

As one example of a cultural view, people in any Latin American countries use the term "disabilities" to mean a visible or medical disability. Learning disabilities that are not immediately obvious may not be considered disabilities.

Also, many Latinx families think of kindness, good behavior, a strong work ethic, and collective responsibility to family as "being educated." So the idea that a child may have a learning disability may conflict with the family's perception that their child is an active and able part of their community. They may disagree with or feel discouraged by the news of their child's disability.

On the other hand, some of the Native American families I've collaborated with have viewed disabilities more holistically. They have shared that their communities tend to focus on supporting the strengths of people with disabilities.

Clearly, different cultures respond differently to the concept of "disabilities." But no matter the culture, families may also have questions about whether a disability is something the child will "grow out of" or whether the struggle is actually related to learning English. It's important to be prepared for these questions with updated information about the child's evaluation and about instruction and progress in English.

Talk with families to frame the term "disability" by focusing on the child's strengths and needs. Here are three important messages to communicate:

- A child's learning or thinking difference is not a deficit.

- The child has many strengths from which to build.

- There are specific supports the child can receive to build on those strengths.

Most families want to make sure their child has access to the supports they need to learn and thrive. When we frame special education supports this way, the conversation shifts from focusing on deficits to finding opportunities for better learning experiences.

Strategies

- To learn more about cultural perspectives on disability, talk with colleagues, like ESL teachers, family liaisons, or interpreters. Other families with experience in special education can also provide insights.

- Share with the family your insights about the student's strengths and interests, as well as examples of personal interactions with the student. This will help families understand that you care and that you see the child's strengths — not just the disability.

- Allow the family to share information about the child's strengths at home and in the community, especially non-academic strengths. Include the family members' strengths, too.

- Ensure that families understand the services that their child is receiving or is eligible to receive.

Factor 3: Language

Families of English language learners have a legal right to access school documents and meetings in their home language. That includes special education paperwork and communication. Both oral and written translation of special education information requires expertise in the services and terminology.

Ideally, the translation and interpretation will also take cultural factors and nuances into account, especially given the different cultural perspectives on disability. It also should be provided in a format that is accessible and user-friendly.

After the information is translated, it's critical that families understand the terms — and the implications of those terms. For example, a translator may use the Spanish term "problema de aprendizaje," which translates to "learning problem." This term may not convey to families that this "problem" is a disability that needs to be addressed by special services.

Strategies

- Explain to families that they have a right to access information in their home language. Be clear that you value their language and see it as an asset for their child.

- Learn more about your school's or district's translation services to make sure families have full access to information they need to participate meaningfully in this process. For example, the school district may provide a translation hotline. In addition, community members or other parents can be trained as volunteer interpreters. (Students should not serve as interpreters in these situations.)

- If you are working with an interpreter, sit down before family meetings to talk through any areas of concern. Ask about particular issues, cultural factors, or perspectives you should understand.

- If adequate language support is not being provided to families, raise your concern with colleagues or administrators. Look for additional information and resources from ESL/bilingual colleagues, family liaisons, district departments, or your state ELL department.

Factor 4: Immigration concerns

Some immigrant families may have mixed immigration status, meaning that not all family members are documented U.S. residents or citizens. Family members may feel uneasy about participating in formal school meetings, filling out paperwork, or sharing personal information with the school. Perhaps families are unsure of their rights or those of their children. They could also be concerned about immigration enforcement.

You should approach families with empathy when talking about the complexities that immigrant families face. Take the time to understand a family's concerns that might come up when discussing services available and legal paperwork. Educators like you can put practices into place that help build a culture of caring and safety at your school.

Strategies

- Communicate clearly with families and colleagues that all students in the United States have a right to a free appropriate education, regardless of immigration status. The immigration status of a child or family member has no impact on eligibility for special education services.

- Keep in mind that families may be wary of signing documents (related to the special education process or otherwise), especially if they have experience with detention or deportation. (Read more about my experience with one of my students' families.) By building trust, you should be able to partner with families to obtain services that make a significant difference.

- For similar reasons, families may also be worried about coming to school or about sharing personal information. Schools are still considered "sensitive locations" where immigration enforcement should not take place. Students also have certain legal protections regarding personal information and privacy, regardless of immigration status. If families have questions about these topics, direct them to accurate, updated information from administrators or school district personnel.

- Draw on strategies to work around barriers to communication with families. Know that family members who are working and do not have work visas may be more vulnerable at work. This could mean that they are unable to answer their phones during work hours or take time off of work for school meetings.

Partnerships that promote growth

For English language learners who learn and think differently — and their families — navigating school can be complex. As an educator, you can draw on a student's and family's assets to lay the foundation for genuine, solid partnership. By doing so with an open mind and empathy, you'll begin building a trusting relationship that will benefit your students, often in life-changing ways.

Watch this video from Colorín Colorado about communicating effectively with parents about student needs.

✎ Explore

- [5 Myths About English Language Learners and Special Education](#)

- [6 Strategies for Partnering With Families of English Language Learners](#)

- [Are IEPs Different for English Language Learners?](#)

🔖 Citation

- [English Language Learners in Special Education: 4 Things to Know About Partnering With Families](#)

☑ Practice: Apply your knowledge by taking this English language learners & IEPs quiz

1.   Different cultures may have different perspectives about disability.

a)   True

b)   False

2.   Families of English language learners have a legal right to access school documents and meetings in their home language.

a)   True

b)   False

3.   In the United States, the right to a free appropriate public education (FAPE) depends on the student's immigration status.

a)   True

b)   False

*Answers can be found in the Appendix.

Racial disparities in special education

Note: Understood does not take positions on government policy. Some of our partners may, including the National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD), with whom we worked to answer these common questions.

If a school identifies 15 percent of Black students as having disabilities, but only 5 percent of White students, is that a problem? What if the Black students with disabilities are disciplined more frequently or with tougher consequences? This is known in special education as "significant disproportionality." And Lindsay Jones, CEO of NCLD, says it is indeed a problem.

Here, Jones answers common questions parents and teachers may have.

What is significant disproportionality?

Significant disproportionality is when a school district identifies students from any racial or ethnic group for special education at markedly higher rates than other students. This is a concern not because students are being identified as having disabilities, but because they may be identified as having disabilities when they don't actually have one.

And it's not just about identification for services. In fact, there's a provision in special education law that requires school districts to figure out if students in these groups are treated differently. To do so, they must consider three key questions:

- Are certain groups of students identified for special education or identified with particular types of disabilities at different rates?

- Are students of different racial groups placed in more restrictive class settings, like separate classrooms or schools, at different rates than others?

- Are students of different racial and ethnic groups disciplined more often and/or more harshly than others?

If the answer to any of those questions is "yes," districts are required by IDEA to figure out the cause of the disparity and address the issue.

Why is it a problem?

These disparities can have a negative impact on students for lots of reasons. For instance, students who are misidentified may not be getting the right supports to succeed in school.

Consider these points:

- Research shows that minority students and English language learners are not only disproportionately labeled as needing special education services. They are also more likely to be placed in more restrictive settings.

- During the 2013–2014 school year, Black students made up nearly 16 percent of students in public schools. But they made up 20 percent of students identified with a specific learning disability (SLD) that year.

- That same year, Asian students made up nearly 5 percent of public school students, but only 1.5 percent of students with SLD.

- 1 in 4 Black boys identified with disabilities are suspended each year, while only 1 in 10 White boys identified with disabilities are suspended.

Research shows that inclusion in general education classrooms (as opposed to restrictive settings) can improve academic and social outcomes for students with disabilities — particularly for students with learning disabilities. And students who are suspended miss out on important instruction. That can lead to lower levels of educational success.

> **Watch** as LeDerick Horne, poet and activist with learning disabilities, shares his perspective on racial disproportionality in special education.

How has the federal government approached the issue?

While IDEA requires states to address this issue in their districts, a 2013 government study showed that many states were not doing it well. They were not doing a good enough job of looking at their data and addressing issues. In fact, some states set up their systems in a way that they'd likely never identify any districts as having an issue.

The study recommended that the U.S. Department of Education develop a standard approach for states to review and address these disparities. To try to fix the problem, the federal government wrote regulations in 2016 known as the "Equity in IDEA" regulations. These are sometimes referred to as the "Significant Disproportionality" regulations or rules.

This created a way for all states to review their data and set up a fair system across the country. It also gave districts additional flexibility in how they can use IDEA funds to address problems.

Explore

- You can learn more about significant disproportionality from NCLD.

- Read about rights around discipline.

Citation

- FAQs on Racial Disparities in Special Education and the "Significant Disproportionality" Rule

How are IEPs different during distance learning?

In this section, you'll be able to:

- **Learn about implementing IEPs during school closures.**

- **Hear about one teacher's experience with remote IEP meetings.**

- **Think through how to implement IEPs in a virtual world.**

Remote IEP meetings

Read Lauren Jewett's personal account about participating in remote IEP meetings. Lauren is an [Understood Teacher Fellow](#).

I've been a special education teacher for 11 years. So, I've had plenty of experience preparing for, participating in, and leading IEP meetings. But remote IEP meetings are a first for me.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) allows for alternative methods of participating in meetings when meeting in person isn't possible. Now that my state's schools are closed due to the coronavirus, I've had to move our IEP meetings to online settings.

I usually feel anxious in new situations, so I'm relying on my past IEP experience and systems. My priority is to make sure we hear from every team member and honor the rights of the student and family. Here are some of the ways I'm preparing for and leading remote IEP meetings.

1. I'm considering new realities as I schedule the IEP meeting.

When scheduling a remote IEP meeting, I need to find a time that works for everyone based on the new realities that come with school closures. I can no longer walk down the hallway to

collaborate with colleagues or meet during common prep time. Families have new situations that can make finding time to meet more difficult.

I've been reaching out to families and other team members through phone calls, text messages, and emails to decide on the meeting date. I adjust my methods depending on team members' needs.

When I reach out, I also ask team members to start thinking about new needs, strengths, or concerns related to the school closure.

2. I'm personalizing the platform to best meet the IEP team's needs.

As I plan meetings, I consider how much access to technology team members have and how familiar they are with online platforms. I'm also following my school's policies around student privacy and confidentiality. A day or two before the meeting, I make sure all team members know how to enter the online meeting space.

So far I've used Google Hangouts for our meetings. But there are other options, like Skype and Zoom. (Make sure you set up a password requirement.) I prefer a platform where team members can see and hear each other. I also want to be able to share my screen to present documents. A chat box allows members to submit questions.

I use the captioning service on whatever platform I'm using. For instance, on Google Hangouts, each participant has the option to turn captions on. I make sure all team members know how to use this option in case they want it.

I also assign the role of note-taker to a team member from my school. The notes help capture the complexity of the discussion and fill in gaps in case anyone misses something due to technical glitches.

To ensure equitable language access for family members, you may need to have a translator present at the meeting. Read this article to learn more.

3. I'm ensuring that all team members feel valued.

Whenever I hold any IEP meeting — remote or in-person — I make sure that each team member feels valued. Right now, I'm especially aware of the need to be sensitive in my approach.

Some team members may be caring for their own children, serving as essential workers, or experiencing loss. At the beginning and closing of each meeting, I state my appreciation for the time and perspective each team member is giving.

In a virtual environment, it can be hard to know when to speak and who is speaking. I make sure to give each person time to share their thoughts, ideas, and concerns about the student. I also ask everyone to say their name and role each time they speak.

Finally, I remind all team members that the IEP is a living document that can adapt and change with the student. Because of the current situation, I ask the team to consider specific supports and accommodations needed for distance learning.

Many family members are now in a unique position where they can provide new insights into the strategies they see working or not working at home. These observations can better inform the work we do as teachers.

The transition from in-person collaboration to virtual can be difficult. But as a teacher, I have bonds with my students, their families, and my co-workers. These bonds support me through any challenges that come up during the process.

I try to remember that not much should change when holding a remote IEP meeting other than the meeting space. I continue to keep the meeting student-centered and solutions-oriented. I remember that advocacy, empathy, flexibility, and inclusion of all voices transfer to a virtual space.

Explore

- Special Education and the Coronavirus
- Legal FAQs About School Closings
- Coronavirus Hub

Citation

- Remote IEP Meetings

IEP accommodations during distance learning

The coronavirus pandemic is bringing new challenges to special education and distance learning. One of the biggest challenges is how to implement accommodations for students who have an Individualized Education Program (IEP).

To make accommodations work in an online setting, you'll need some innovative thinking and an understanding of the tools available to you and your students. Take a look at the charts below for some examples of how commonly used accommodations can transfer to a virtual setting.

Accommodations that change the way information is presented to students

Accommodation	Virtual learning alternative	Microsoft Education tools	G Suite for education
Use audio recordings instead of reading text	Audiobooks Text-to-speech	Immersive Reader Office Lens	Immersive Reader (Chrome extension)
Format pages with fewer items per page or line	Larger font Reduced amount of material per page (virtually and in packets)	Immersive Reader	Increased line spacing
Work with text in a larger print size	Built-in accessibility features on smartphones or computers to change font size	Immersive Reader Magnifier accessibility feature	Larger font Zoom in and zoom out accessibility feature
Have a "designated reader" or hear instructions spoken aloud	Record the teacher reading the instructions Text-to-speech	Immersive Reader Narrator Office Lens	Immersive Reader (Chrome extension) Mote extension

Accommodation	Virtual learning alternative	Microsoft Education tools	G Suite for education
Record a lesson, instead of the student taking notes	Speech-to-text Transcript of the lesson Screen recording of the lesson	OneNote Dictation	Voice typing in Google Docs Loom (Chrome extension) Screencastify (Chrome extension)
Get class notes from teacher or another student	Shared files Web captioning Teacher notes before the lesson or a transcript after the lesson	Captions in Microsoft Teams meetings	Captions in Google Meet sessions
Get written instructions	Scheduled assignments to share and review before the lesson Bulleted list of concise instructions in the chat feature for live lessons (or directly on assignments)	Assignments in Microsoft Teams	Assignments in Google Classroom

Accommodation	Virtual learning alternative	Microsoft Education tools	G Suite for education
See an outline of a lesson	Lesson outline sent via email or learning management system (LMS) before the lesson	OneDrive OneNote	Google Docs outline tool
Use visual presentations of verbal material, such as word webs	Collaborative whiteboard tools, like Miro	Whiteboard	Jamboard Bubbl.us Padlet
Minimize auditory and visual stimulation	Study carrels or room dividers (families can pick up from school, if possible) Separate, quiet room (if possible) Slides and materials with fewer visuals, fonts, and colors	White Noise	White Noise (Chrome extension) Noisli

Accommodations that change the way students complete assignments

Accommodation	Virtual learning alternative	Microsoft Education tools	G Suite for Education
Give responses in a preferred form (spoken or written)	Dictation to an adult or a peer Speech-to-text Uploaded audio or video recordings Check in with a family member to see if they can help write responses One-to-one conference with the student	Microsoft Teams meetings Audio in Flipgrid OneNote Dictation in Word	Google Meet sessions Voice typing in Google Docs Upload recordings to Google Drive
Use a calculator or a table of math facts	Online calculator or a built-in computer/ smartphone calculator tool Graphic organizers Assistive technology tools for math	Math Assistant in OneNote Math Solver app	Google Docs equation editor

Accommodation	Virtual learning alternative	Microsoft Education tools	G Suite for Education
Use manipulatives to learn and practice math skills	Send home physical manipulatives Paper/printable manipulatives Virtual manipulatives	n/a	Number Pieces (Chrome extension) Geoboard (Chrome extension)
Use graphic organizers and sentence starters to help structure and generate writing ideas	Graphic organizers to use with assignments. Websites to create graphic organizers: Popplet, MindMup, Creately, Mind Meister, Mindomo, SpiderScribe	n/a	n/a

Accommodations that can help with scheduling, timing, and organization

Accommodation	Virtual learning alternative	Microsoft Education Tools	G Suite for Education
Use sensory tools, like an exercise band that can be looped around a chair's legs	A fidget to use at home A sensory tool to be sent home or picked up by the student	n/a	n/a
Small group learning	One-to-one videoconferences or breakout rooms to allow students to ask questions or complete assignments with teacher support	Microsoft Teams meetings	Google Meet sessions
Take more time to complete a task or a test	Explanations to students and families on how to "chunk" assignments and set due dates accordingly	Assignments in Microsoft Teams	Assignments in Google Classroom Google Keep to-do lists

Accommodation	Virtual learning alternative	Microsoft Education Tools	G Suite for Education
Have extra time to process spoken information and directions	Assignments and directions given ahead of time, with time to check in with the student to answer questions Shared class document for students to add questions during or after a lesson	Microsoft Teams meetings	Google Meet sessions Google Docs
Take frequent breaks	Brain breaks during virtual classes Scheduled time for brain breaks in the middle of independent assignments Embedded brain break videos in digital assignments Assignments broken into smaller tasks or chunks Videos with exercises within lessons	Microsoft Stream or screen share for brain break videos Chat feature to remind students to take a break	Videos embedded in Google Slides Chat feature to remind students to take a break Two Google Forms (or a Google Doc and a Google Form) to break down parts of an assignment

Accommodation	Virtual learning alternative	Microsoft Education Tools	G Suite for Education
Take a test over several days or complete the sections in a different order	Test broken up into smaller tests or create multiple digital forms for each section	Microsoft Forms	Google Forms
Use an alarm to help with time management	Visual timer on Zoom or screen share a visual timer on other platforms Website blockers to increase focus	Cold Turkey Stopwatch	Stopwatch & Timer (Chrome Extension) WasteNoTime (Chrome Extension) Strict Workflow (Chrome Extension) Task Timer (Chrome Extension) Pause (Chrome Extension)
Mark texts with a highlighter	Highlighter function on PDFs and other documents (with explicit instruction on how students can use the highlighter)	Text annotations and highlighting in Office Lens Text highlight in Edge browser	Highlight Tool (Google Docs add-on) Kami for annotation (Chrome extension)

Even students who don't have an IEP need to learn differently during distance learning. Try these accommodations. Then explore how to make online assignments easier for your students to access.

Explore

- Online Assignments: Best Practices for Teachers to Use With Students

Citation

- IEP Accommodations During Distance Learning

IEPs in a virtual world

As an educator, you have so many changes to navigate right now due to the coronavirus. Your school might be closed. You might be adapting to new schedules and different ways of teaching.

Think about all you learned about IEPs in Sections 1–4. How can you apply your learning in a virtual world? Your school most likely has set up systems and protocols for IEPs during school closures. Review these policies and ask questions.

Explore

- Visit Understood's coronavirus hub

- Articles and personal stories that may be helpful with IEP implementation include:

  - 5 Ways Kids Can Struggle With Live Video Lessons

  - 8 Ways Distance Learning Makes It Hard to Focus

  - Leading Remote IEP Meetings

  - Co-Teaching During Distance Learning

  - UDL Best Practices for Distance Learning

  - Connecting With Students: Teachers Share Their Strategies

  - Notes From a First-Time Distance Learning Teacher

  - 5 Reasons Kids Aren't Engaging in Distance Learning

  - Distance Learning: What Teachers Are Going to Keep Doing

  - How I Reached Students Who Disappeared During Distance Learning

  - A Letter to My Students: Let's Celebrate Your Growth

  - Tips for Creating Online Assignments

  - Providing Speech Teletherapy: How I'm Getting Ready

  - How to Plan Online Lessons Using UDL

📝 Reflect: How is your school handling implementation of IEPs remotely? What questions do you still have?

✏️

☑ Practice: Revise your IEP implementation plan to incorporate considerations regarding English language learners and/or potential school closures

- Revisit the IEP implementation plan that you created.

- Now considering factors impacting English language learners and potential school closures, how will your plan change? What resources do you want to make sure you can reference or have available?

- Revise your IEP implementation plan or write a summary of your additions/revisions.

Appendix

What is an IEP?

Key takeaways

- An IEP is a blueprint for a student's special education experience at school. The plan describes what services and supports a child will get.

- IDEA is the guiding law behind IEPs.

- 1 in 5 students learn and think differently in classrooms. They may have difficulties with reading, writing, math, organization, and/or attention. Learning disabilities are the most common disability in most schools.

IEP Basics Quiz Answer Key

1. *a* 2. *d* 3. *a* 4. *a*

What is my role in the IEP process?

Key takeaways

- The steps of the IEP process that are important to understand are 1) determining IEP eligibility, 2) creating plans and writing goals, 3) attending meetings, and 4) implementing the plan in the classroom.

- During an IEP meeting, you can expect to provide information on progress for the student, ask questions, raise concerns, and suggest solutions.

- SMART IEP goals are **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**ttainable, **R**esults-oriented, and **T**ime-bound.

- **Accommodations** change *how* students access and learn the same material as their peers. **Modifications** change *what* students are taught and expected to learn.

IEP process Quiz Answer Key

1. *a* 2. *a* 3. *e* 4. *a* 5. *how, what*

How do I support students with IEPs in my classroom?

Key takeaways

- To successfully implement IEPs in your classroom, it's important to think through a system for tracking accommodations, modifications, and IEP goals.

- Measuring progress on a student's IEP goals is usually a collaborative effort between the student's special education teacher and general education teacher.

- To ensure that students thrive in your classroom, it's important to collaborate with others, including general education teachers, special education teachers, case managers, families, support staff, and administration.

- Helping students develop self-advocacy includes supporting them in discovering their own specific needs, knowing what supports help those needs in the classroom, and learning to communicate those needs to families and teachers.

What special considerations should I be aware of for my English language learners and my students of color with IEPs?

Key takeaways

- When collaborating with families of English language learners about their students' needs, it's important to consider that people from different cultures respond differently to the concept of disability.

- When English language learners or students of color receive special education services they don't need, it raises the concern of overidentification. But the challenge of underidentification is also widespread. That's when schools don't identify students as needing special education services when they *do* need them.

English Language Learners & IEPs Quiz Answer Key

1. *a* 2. *a* 3. *b*

Key takeaways

- Students with disabilities have the right to a free appropriate public education (FAPE) during school closures when students are learning at home.

- Federal law has always allowed IEP teams to meet remotely (by phone or videoconference).

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GATES *foundation*