

**SPECIAL EDUCATION
&
504 ACCOMMODATIONS**

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Accommodations, FAPE & LRE

In the United States, every child is entitled to a free, appropriate public education. That means that regardless of the type of disability, every student is entitled to receive the same education as a student without a disability.

This education has to be provided in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). This means that every child with special needs is placed in a regular education classroom with peers both with and without disabilities to the maximum extent possible.

Students with disabilities may have an Individualized Education Program (IEP), or a Section 504 Plan (504). These are designed to support the student in accessing the same curriculum as their peers. Both of these plans create protected accommodations for that student based on their specific needs.

Accommodations may include from things like "copy of class notes", "safe place to compose themselves", "access to speech-to-text and text-to-speech technology". It's important to know what accommodations a student you're working with may have, to help them advocate for themselves in their education. However, these accommodations are confidential information and as such, that information should come directly from the students' Case Manager.

Reasonable Modifications:

Under a regulatory provision implementing Title II of the ADA, public entities are required to make reasonable modifications in policies, practices, or procedures when the modifications are necessary to avoid discrimination on the basis of disability, unless the public entity can demonstrate that making the modifications would fundamentally alter the nature of the service, program, or activity

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Who Qualifies for a 504?

Section 504 covers qualified students with disabilities who attend schools receiving Federal financial assistance. To be protected under Section 504, a student must be determined to:

- (1) have a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities; or
- (2) have a record of such an impairment; or
- (3) be regarded as having such an impairment. Section 504 requires that school districts provide a free appropriate public education (FAPE) to qualified students in their jurisdictions who have a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities.

Who is responsible for the 504 plan?

The Classroom teacher is responsible for implementing or honoring the plan, providing the defined accommodations, and making sure that the student is receiving all services at school as outlined in the plan. This includes making sure that team members are following the plan, and staying in contact with the parent regarding the plan.

A 504 plan is no different in terms of an IEP, or even a Behavior Plan. The teacher may not be involved in writing the plan, but in the view of the law, the classroom teacher is the primary service provider for that student. The teacher is responsible for ensuring any agreed upon plan is followed, during the course of their year with that student.

Classroom Management

While you may be in the classroom to support a specific student or group of students, there are opportunities to support the classroom as a whole during whole group instruction.

This is also a great time to build connections with students and show the students that you typically work with that others are also held to the standards while encouraging their independence slowly and gradually.

Using these 3 techniques will help support all student learning in the classroom setting.

Active Monitoring

- Walk around the classroom in a constant measured interval throughout the room.
- Avoid obscuring the teacher during instruction or demonstration.

Visual Cueing

- If a student is distracted or slightly off task try lightly tapping the desk to get their attention while walking through the room.
- Alternately, placing a cue card on their desk while you continue walking is effective.
- Making eye contact while slightly shaking the head or smiling are also effective visual reinforcements for desired and non-desired behaviors.

Verbal Cueing

- If students are working independently and off task or the noise level is too high, you can use a verbal cue like, "Let's get back to work." or "Quietly please." or similar in a small group.
 - The classroom teacher may have an attention grabber that is used in a whole group setting such as, "1, 2, 3, eyes on me." Where the adult says, "1, 2, 3" and the students respond with "eyes on me."
-

ADHD Awareness

ADHD is a neuropsychiatric disorder that is characterized by patterns of hyperactivity and/or inattention.

ADHD is the same as ADD. ADD was the name for the disorder in the early years of diagnosis, however the name was refined as the condition was better understood.

ADHD is not an episode of forgetfulness, increased energy or impulsiveness that is sometimes used colloquially as a joke.

ADHD is not a reflection of a student's intelligence or their academic or creative abilities.

01 **Predominately Inattentive**

The first main type of ADHD, ADHD-Predominately Inattentive is characterized by a predominance of inattention, being unable to remain focused or complete a task.

02 **Hyperactive/Compulsive**

The second main type of ADHD, ADHD-Hyperactive/Compulsive is characterized by a predominance of hyperactivity, being unable to sit still or being excessively fidgety or impulsive.

03 **Combined Type**

The third main type of ADHD, ADHD-Combined Type is the presence of both inattentiveness and hyperactivity. There isn't a clear dominance of one or the other type.



ADHD Support Strategies

You may see behaviors like: making careless mistakes, appearing to not pay attention when spoken directly to, not following through, trouble organizing papers and time, easily distracted, forgetfulness, fidgeting and squirming, trouble playing quietly, interrupting, etc.

It is never appropriate to ask a student about medication or any therapies they may be receiving.

- Allow extra processing time
- Verbally reinforce appropriate behavior
- Selectively ignore inappropriate behavior
- Replace distractions with appropriate calming items like a stress ball, sensory fidgets, etc.
- Use visual schedules
- Be alert for and sensitive to signs of self-esteem issues.
- Prepare student(s) for the lesson by providing an overview beforehand.
- Learn the signs of overstimulation and teach the student to recognize when they need a break.
- Taking a break to take a walk can help to improve focus.
- Chunking assignments
- Redirection as needed
- Check for understanding
- Provide follow-up directions as needed

ODD or Defiance

How to tell the difference and what you can do to support defiant students.

Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD) is not the same as being strong-willed or emotional, nor is it typical defiant behavior that arrives at certain stages in a child's development.

A diagnosis of ODD means that the child has met the diagnostic criteria that includes often and easily losing their temper, often angry and resentful, often arguing with authority, deliberately annoys or upsets others, blames others for their mistakes or misbehavior, spiteful or vindictive and has been diagnosed by qualified professional.

Do not take ODD behaviors personally!

It's easy to take behavior personally, but if you practice removing your feelings from the situation, you'll be able to more easily engage in the de-escalation process.

- **Reframe** – Often exhibiting defiant and argumentative behaviors is a way to create a safe space by avoiding unwanted experiences.
- **Reinforce** – Reinforce positive behaviors you want to see more of by specifically praising those behaviors as they happen.
- **Relationships** – Give yourself multiple opportunities a day to build a relationship step by step. Start small with saying "Hi," every time you see the student.
- **Restructure** – By presenting the student with two choices that are both acceptable to you, you allow them the freedom to choose, however retain control of the outcome.



Supporting Anxious Students

It's important to remember that a student with a clinical diagnosis of anxiety or depression is not experiencing the same things that you may feel when you're nervous for an interview or upcoming appointment or when you're feeling sad. They are completely different.

Clinical anxiety and depression affect every aspect of their lives including basic hygiene, nutrition, physical activity, energy levels, focus, academic performance and social interactions to name a few.

Students may be receiving support outside of the classroom in the form of counseling, medication or other appropriate therapies. It's important that you do not attempt to provide counseling advice, medical advice or make recommendations for treatments or therapies. If you have concerns that a student may not be in a place where they can keep themselves safe, immediately reach out to their Case Manager, School Counselor or School Psychologist.

Where is the list of “Impairments”?

There is none.

An impairment in and of itself is not a disability.
The impairment must *substantially* limit one or more major life activities in order to be considered a disability under Section 504.

Can a medical diagnosis be considered an “Evaluation”?

No.

A physician's medical diagnosis may be considered among other sources in evaluating a student with an impairment or believed to have an impairment which substantially limits a major life activity.

Other sources to be considered, along with the medical diagnosis, include aptitude and achievement tests, teacher recommendations, physical condition, social and cultural background, and adaptive behavior.

Section 504 regulations require school districts to draw upon a variety of sources in interpreting evaluation data and making placement decisions.

Does a diagnosis automatically qualify a student for a 504?

No.

A medical diagnosis of an illness does not automatically mean a student can receive services under Section 504. The illness must cause a **substantial** limitation on the student's ability to learn or another major life activity. For example, a student who has a physical or mental impairment would not be considered a student in need of services under Section 504 if the impairment does not in any way limit the student's ability to learn or other major life activity, or only results in some minor limitation in that regard.

Who makes the call?

The Section 504 regulatory provision at 34 C.F.R.104.35 (c) (3) requires that school districts ensure that the determination that a student is eligible for 504 services and/or related aids be made by a group of persons, ***including persons knowledgeable about the meaning of the evaluation data and knowledgeable about the placement options***. If a parent disagrees with the determination, he or she may request a due process hearing.

Who is responsible when a complaint is made?

Specifically, the complaint will be filed against the teacher who failed to honor the plan, on a larger scale, a 504 complaint, successfully filed, will open up further complaints against the teacher, 504 coordinators (both school and district), the Principal and the Superintendent. On a larger scale, a successfully filed complaint will open the door for a discrimination lawsuit filed against the parties involved, as well as the school and school district.

Office for Civil Rights (OCR)

In Texas, if you have a question or want to file a complaint about Section 504, contact the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) Dallas Regional Office.

Phone: (214) 661-9600

Toll Free: (800) 421-3481

WHAT'S DIFFERENCE BETWEEN
SPED AND 504?

CHILD FIND: OVERVIEW

- **Child Find is a federal mandate under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). It requires local education agencies (LEAs), which include public school districts and charter schools, to identify, locate, and evaluate all children with disabilities residing within their jurisdictions who need special education and related services.**



TEA SPECIAL EDUCATION GUIDANCE

- <https://tea.texas.gov/academics/special-student-populations/special-education/tea-special-education-guidance>
- **Upcoming Professional Development Announcements** - <https://register.tealearn.com/>
- **Literacy and Math for ALL Asynchronous Courses through tealearn.com:**
 - [Register for Literacy for ALL](#)
 - [Register for Math for ALL](#)
- **TEA Special Education Resources**
- **Guidance Documents**
 - [Intensive Program of Instruction \(IPI\) & Accelerated Instruction \(AI\) for Students Served through Special Education](#) (June 2022) [Sensory Impairments and Specific Learning Disabilities](#) (April 2022)
- **Question and Answer Documents**
 - [HB 785 FAQ](#) (Updated 11/20/21)
- **TEA Video Trainings**
- **TEA Guidance Sites**

Asynchronous Literacy and Math for ALL Training

Literacy for ALL asynchronous courses available through tealearn.com

Many students in grades 4-12 lack proficiency in foundational reading skills. This is the reason many older students cannot comprehend text. This session addresses the needs of those students. This asynchronous training will address the science of teaching reading and include an overview of what skills need to be mastered to become a proficient reader, how the brain learns to read and, the characteristics of dyslexia and dysgraphia. It will also address how a student's learning abilities associated with reading can impact a student's ability to read and what instruction and accommodations can remove the barriers of learning.

Registration is FREE!

[Register for Literacy for ALL](#)

Math for ALL Asynchronous Courses through tealearn.com

Through hands-on activities, participants will explore how learning abilities associated with disabilities, including dyslexia and disorders related to dyslexia, impact the learning of whole number addition and subtraction. In this session, participants will build knowledge and understanding of how instructional supports, including the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) Guidelines along with assistive technology, can be used to accommodate and reduce the impact of a disability.

Registration is FREE!

[Register for Math for ALL](#)

TEA Special Education Resources

Guidance Documents

[Intensive Program of Instruction \(IPI\) & Accelerated Instruction \(AI\) for Students](#)

[Served through Special Education](#) (June 2022)

[Sensory Impairments and Specific Learning Disabilities](#) (April 2022)

[Technical Assistance: Child Find and Evaluation \(Revised June 2020\)](#)(PDF)

[Technical Assistance: Section 504](#)(PDF)

[Technical Assistance: Individualized Education Program \(IEP\) Development](#)(PDF)

[Dyslexia, Dysgraphia, and Dyscalculia in the IEP Guidance Document](#)(PDF)

[Delayed Evaluations and Compensatory Services \(October 2021\)](#)

[Required Postings to LEA Websites](#)

[Special Education Operating Procedures \(March 2022\)](#)

[Special Education Operating Procedures \(March 2022\) FAQs](#)

Question and Answer Documents

[HB 785 FAQ](#) (Updated 11/20/21)

[HB 165 FAQ January 2020](#)(PDF)

[Multi-Tiered Systems of Support \(MTSS\) Questions and Answers](#)(PDF)

[TEA Multi-Tiered Systems of Support \(MTSS\) Questions and Answers](#)(PowerPoint)

[Senate Bill 712 Summary and Frequently asked Questions](#)(PDF)

[Senate Bill 89 Frequently Asked Questions September 2021](#) (PDF)

TEA Video Trainings

Special Education TEA Guidance: Goals, Accommodations, and Modifications October 2020 - [\(Link to training video\)](#) | [\(Link to PDF slide deck\)](#)

Special Education ARD Guidance and Contingency Plans During Remote Learning July 2020 - [\(Link to training video\)](#) | [\(Link to PDF slide deck\)](#)

Special Education Progress Monitoring During Remote Learning July 2020 - [\(Link to training video\)](#) | [\(Link to PDF slide deck\)](#)

TEA Guidance Sites

[State Guidance](#)

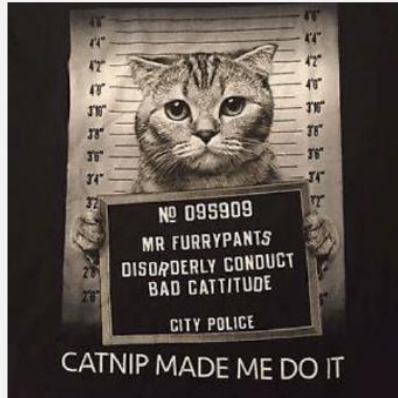
[A-Z Index](#)

[TEA Webinars](#)

[TEA Presentations](#)

[Statewide Technical Assistance Networks](#) – These networks have a multitude of professional development and resources for schools and families!

I WAS SENT TO JJAEP FOR ... BUT I AM A
STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATION
NEEDS



Borrowed from the Juvenile
Law Newsletter, Volume 35
Number 1 2021 Special Legislative
Issue:
***Texas-Juvenile-Justice-System-
from-Arrest-to-Appeal.pdf***
[https://juvenilelaw.org/resources/n
ewsletters/](https://juvenilelaw.org/resources/newsletters/)

<https://juvenilelaw.org/resources/newsletters/>
Special-education-related Commissioner's Rules are found in the TAC, Title 19,
Chapter 89.

PLACEMENT OF A SPED STUDENT TO A JJAEP

The local school district must invite the administrator of the JJAEP or the administrator's designee to an admission, review, and dismissal (ARD) committee meeting convened to discuss the expulsion of a student with a disability

Special-education-related Commissioner's Rules are found in the TAC, Title 19, Chapter 89.

TAC §89.1052 The school district must provide written notice of the meeting at least five school days before the meeting or a shorter timeframe agreed to by the student's parents. A copy of the student's current individualized education program (IEP) must be provided to the JJAEP representative with the notice. If the JJAEP representative is unable to attend the ARD committee meeting, the representative must be given the opportunity to participate in the meeting through alternative means including conference telephone calls. The JJAEP representative may participate in the meeting to the extent that the meeting relates to the student's placement in the JJAEP and implementation of the student's current IEP in the JJAEP.

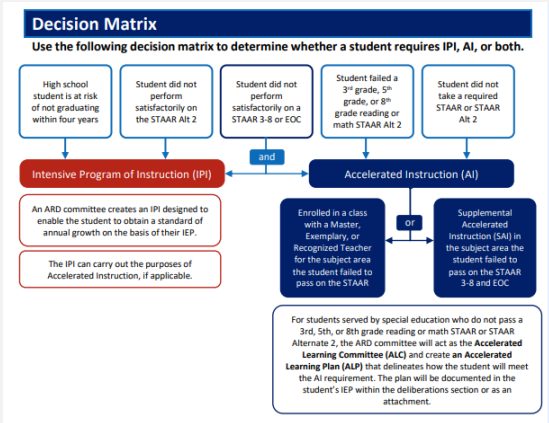
IF YOUR PROGRAM CANNOT
PROVIDE APPROPRIATE SERVICES,
WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

**You must provide
written notice to the
campus.**

For a student with a disability who was expelled and placed in the JJAEP, an ARD committee meeting must be convened to reconsider placement of the student in the JJAEP if the JJAEP provides written notice to the school district of specific concerns that the student's educational or behavioral needs cannot be met in the JJAEP. The school district must invite the JJAEP administrator or the administrator's designee to the meeting and must provide written notice of the meeting or a shorter timeframe agreed to by the student's parents. If the JJAEP representative is unable to attend the ARD committee meeting, the representative must be given the opportunity to participate in the meeting through alternative means including conference telephone calls. The JJAEP representative may participate in the meeting to the extent that the meeting relates to the student's continued placement in the JJAEP.

HB 4545: ACCELERATED INSTRUCTION AND INTENSIVE PROGRAMS OF INSTRUCTION (I)

Intensive Program of Instruction (IPI) & Accelerated Instruction (AI)
for Students Served through Special Education



HR 45

Intensive Program of Instruction (IPI)

Accelerated Instruction (AI)

An **Intensive Program of Instruction (IPI)** per TEC §28.0213 is a program of instruction for **any student**, grades 3-12, who did not perform satisfactorily on STAAR 3-8, EOC assessments or STAAR Alternate 2, as well as high school students who are at risk of not graduating within four years.

An IPI is intended to enable a student to attain a standard of annual growth on the basis of that student's IEP, and if applicable, carry out the purposes of AI.

The statute requiring an IPI broadly outlines the requirements but does not provide discrete steps for creating an IPI, thus providing an opportunity for an ARD committee to design an IPI that interacts meaningfully with an IEP.

An **Individualized Education Program (IEP)** is an educational plan written for **students with disabilities**, ages 3-21, who are eligible for special education services.

The IEP ensures the fulfillment of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act's (IDEA) purpose that "...all children with disabilities have available to them a free and appropriate public education that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living;" [34 CFR 300.1\(a\)](#).

Accelerated Instruction (AI) requirements apply to any student who did not perform satisfactorily on STAAR 3-8, EOC assessments, or STAAR Alternate 2 grades 3, 5, and 8 in reading and/or math, as well students who missed taking the STAAR.

For a student who requires AI and who also receives special education services, the goal of AI is to enable a student who did not perform satisfactorily on a state assessment to perform at the appropriate grade level by the conclusion of the school year.

AI is not intended to meet a student's specially designed instruction requirements in their IEP.

What can parents do if they do not agree with the ALC's decisions for AI?

If a parent disagrees with the decisions made by the ARD committee, serving as the ALC, the parent or guardian may follow the school district's grievance policy.

HB4545 (3)

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AI is not intended to meet a student's specially designed instruction requirements in their IEP.

- Describe the AI the student will be given to **address areas of need for each assessment** where the student did not perform satisfactorily.
- Design AI that **addresses specific grade-level TEKS** as identified on the results of the state assessment.
- Consider the manner and the period of time that SAI is to be delivered that is useful for the student beyond the 30-hour minimum requirement.
- **Keep appropriate documentation** such as SAI attendance or tutoring logs, minutes, ALC notices, parent communication, and evidence of student progress.
- **Prioritize the health and safety of students receiving homebound services**, which may require pausing AI until the student returns to campus, can sustain prolonged participation in instruction, or can participate in AI remotely.

Requirements of Supplemental Accelerated Instruction (SAI)

- SAI is **supplemental to regular instruction** and is provided during, before, or after school at least once weekly, unless a school week is three or fewer instructional days, or fully during the summer immediately after the assessment.
- SAI **does not remove the student from enrichment and foundation curriculum** adopted under [TEC §28.002](#), recess, or Physical Education (PE.)
- SAI is provided for a **minimum of 30 hours per subject area** delivered in a 1 to 1 ratio, or in a small group with **no more than 3 students**, unless the parent or guardian of each student in the group authorizes a larger group.
- SAI must include targeted instruction in the essential knowledge and skills for the grade level and subject area of the test the student did not pass.
- SAI must be designed to assist students in achieving satisfactory performance.
- SAI must utilize effective instruction materials designed for supplemental instruction.
- Instruction must be provided by a person with training in the applicable instructional materials and under the oversight of the school district or charter school.
- To the extent possible, SAI is **provided by one person** for the entirety of the student's supplemental instruction period.
- SAI **requires progress monitoring** throughout the year to ensure the student is progressing according with the accelerated learning plan.
- Transportation is required to be provided by the school in cases where SAI requires the student to participate outside of regular school hours.
- Where a superintendent or their designee is required to participate, the ARD committee serving as the **ALC must identify the reason the student did not perform satisfactorily** and determine whether the education plan developed must be modified, and any additional resources required for that student.

They have come a long way in their explanation of HB 4545

DOCUMENTING SPECIAL EDUCATION DISCIPLINE AND RESTRAINTS (I)

HB785 amends Texas Education Code Section 29.005 to **require annual review of a behavior improvement plan or behavioral intervention plan (BIP)** included in a student's IEP.

The circumstances to be considered include:

- Changes of placement
- An increase or persistence in disciplinary actions taken for similar behaviors
- A pattern of unexcused absences
- An unauthorized departure from the school
- The safety of the student or others

Documenting special education discipline and restraints

House Bill 785 amends several state laws regarding procedures for discipline, restraint, or time out in the case of a student receiving special education services. Special education staff at districts following federal law and best practices may find that they are already routinely implementing some of the steps that the bill has now added to state law. Nonetheless, the bill's requirements provide a good reason to review local protocols.

The bill amends Texas Education Code Section 29.005 to require annual review of a behavior improvement plan or behavioral intervention plan (BIP) included in a student's IEP. If a student's IEP includes a BIP, it must be reviewed by the ARDC annually or more frequently as appropriate. The review must consider changes in circumstances that may impact the student's behavior, as well as the safety of the student and others.

The circumstances to be considered include:

- > Changes of placement
- > An increase or persistence in disciplinary actions taken for similar behaviors
- > A pattern of unexcused absences
- > An unauthorized departure from the school
- > The safety of the student or others

This bill also amends Texas Education Code Section 37.0021, the law behind existing TEA rules for the use of restraint and time out by a district employee, volunteer, or independent contractor in the case of a student with a disability receiving special education. The bill requires written parental notice each time restraint is used with a student receiving special education.

Existing TEA rules require a good-faith effort to provide verbal notice on the day that restraint is used and notice in writing within one school day. This bill requires the notice to include whether the student's BIP should be revised and information on how to request a BIP.

For a student with a BIP, this bill requires documentation of each use of time out prompted by a behavior specified in the student's plan, including a description of the behavior that prompted the time out.

In addition, this bill amends Texas Education Code Section 37.004, regarding disciplinary placement of a student with a disability who receives special education services. Under the new law, if a district takes disciplinary action that constitutes a change of placement for a student with a disability (a removal of 10 or more days), the district shall, no later than 10 school days after the change in placement is made: Seek consent from the parent to conduct a functional behavioral assessment (FBA) if the student has never had an FBA or the existing FBA is more than one year old.

Review any previous FBAs and/or BIPs.

Develop a BIP or revise the existing one, as necessary.

For more information, contact your school district attorney or TASB Legal Services at legal@tasb.org or 800.580.5345.

Sarah Orman is lead attorney for TASB Legal Services.

DOCUMENTING SPECIAL EDUCATION DISCIPLINE AND RESTRAINTS (2)

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**TRENDING TOPIC:
TRAUMA-INFORMED AND CULTURALLY
RESPONSIVE SUPPORT**

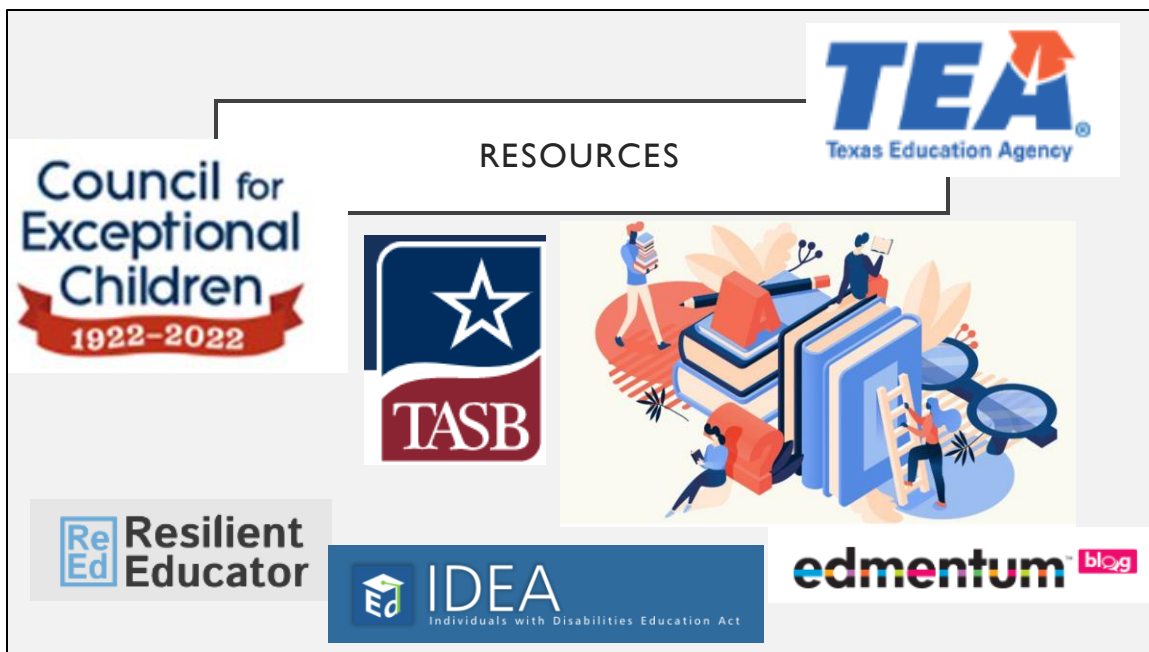
- As special education systems look to the future, technology will be a crucial component of learning, as will understanding how trauma, disciplinary measures and community diversity influence students' lives. Careful reporting, preparation, and relationship-building techniques will be critical to ensuring every student receives the support they need, regardless of ability or background.

Trauma-Informed and Culturally Responsive Support

Today's students are coping with traumas that impact learning. Natural disasters, socio-economic shifts and the loss of loved ones can all impact how students perform in school. According to the [National Child Traumatic Stress Network](#), educators will need to rely increasingly on trauma-screening resources to identify their students' individual needs and intervene as soon as possible.

Providing trauma-informed support will also entail changes to how educators approach discipline in special education. The [Education Commission of the States](#) reports that exclusionary and punitive school discipline policies, such as suspensions and expulsions, increase the likelihood of student absences, repeated grades and school dropouts. Historically underserved student groups, such as students with disabilities, disproportionately experience these types of disciplinary actions compared to their peers.

Several states have begun to issue legislative measures to encourage educators to consider alternative types of discipline. Educators have a host of alternative disciplinary approaches available to them, such as increased counseling support, restorative practices, positive behavioral interventions and [culturally responsive teaching techniques](#).



<https://exceptionalchildren.org/journal/big-ideas-special-education-specially-designed-instruction-high-leverage-practices-explicit>

<https://blog.edmentum.com/five-current-trending-issues-special-education>

Five Current Trending Issues in Special Education

Friday, April 12, 2019

Technology, Trauma-Informed Teaching, Homelessness, Twice-Exceptional Students, Parental Support

<https://www.allisonacademy.com/students/learning/learning-disabilities/importance-of-special-education/>

Why is special education an important element of the basic education program?

Differentiated education is a modified form of the basic education program, meaning that the same material is covered yet in a different way. Through differentiation, material is broken down in line with the students' needs depending on the difficulties the child needs to overcome in order to effectively learn.

<https://www.dmgroupk12.com/blog/10-best-practices-for-improving-special->

education

10 Best Practices for Improving Special Education

Nathan Levenson

3. Ensure all students can read

<https://www.theedadvocate.org/current-trends-in-special-education/>

University of Florida:

<https://teach.ufl.edu/resource-library/inclusivity-in-the-classroom/#/>

Inclusivity in the Classroom

Inclusive teaching refers to a variety of teaching approaches that strive to address the needs of all students. Inclusive teaching provides a learning experience that allows students from all backgrounds, learning styles and abilities to be successful. Inclusive teaching strategies contribute to an inclusive learning environment in which all students feel equally valued. Inclusivity in the classroom implies that the classroom environment is one in which all students feel that their contributions and perspectives are equally valued and respected (Cal Poly).

**Strategies: Make it Personal, Include Various Perspectives, Know Your Students
Respect Diverse People, Respect Diverse Talents**

<https://sites.ed.gov/idea/about-idea/>

About IDEA

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a law that makes available a free appropriate public education to eligible children with disabilities throughout the nation and ensures special education and related services to those children.

The IDEA governs how states and public agencies provide early intervention, special education, and related services to more than 7.5 million (as of school year 2018-19) eligible infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities.

<https://onlinedegree.fgcu.edu/programs/med-special-education/trends-in-special-education/>

Florida Gulf coast University

1. Inclusive Classrooms

2. Student Collaboration - While younger students need significant guidance by instructors and other professionals, as children age, they are more capable of communicating their needs. This presents an opportunity for them to be instrumental in setting goals, creating solutions and measuring outcomes. Not only can student-led planning lead to a truly personalized approach, it gives them real-world practice for when they are adults advocating for their own needs.

2. Student Collaboration

4. Acknowledgment of 2E Children

5. Technology

6. Parental Involvement

<https://resilienteducator.com/classroom-resources/technology-trends-special-education/>

Top 5 technology trends in special education

- Virtual reality and Augmented reality**
- Artificial intelligence for early screening**
- Computer science accessibility for all**
- Greater personalization**
- Making “Open” more open**

All these new trends in education will make it easier for special needs kids to get academic assistance. These technology trends are not only more effective for spotting learning disorders in kids, they’re also essential for inclusivity.

Frank Hamilton

<https://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/2435/Special-Education-CURRENT-TRENDS.html>

Special Education Current Trends

The adage "there are two sides to every story" applies to special education. In the early years of special education, there was one clearly defined goal—an appropriate education for students with disabilities. Parents, professionals, and students with disabilities rallied together to attain this right. Having secured this goal, the allies splintered into numerous advocacy groups, each fighting for different issues in special education. Issues such as school reform, full inclusion, standards assessment, and disability classification can be viewed not only from at least two perspectives, but from many variations or degrees of each.

Read more: [Special Education - Current Trends - Students, School, Disabilities, and Student - StateUniversity.com](https://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/2435/Special-Education-CURRENT-TRENDS.html#ixzz7YrYxBZfp) <https://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/2435/Special-Education-CURRENT-TRENDS.html#ixzz7YrYxBZfp>

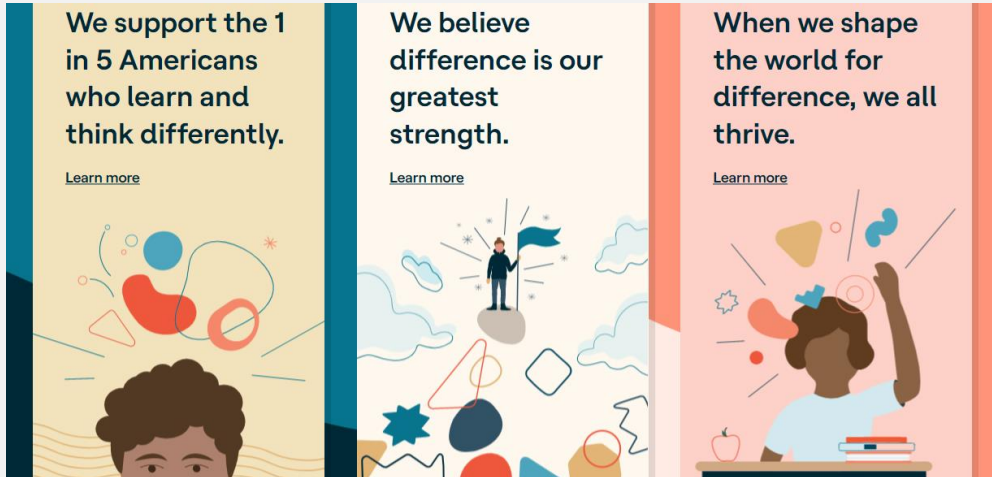
<https://thehill.com/changing-america/opinion/588227-two-key-predictions-around-special-education-for-2022/>

Prediction #1: A record-breaking number of special education evaluations will be completed for students without disabilities or learning and thinking differences.

Every family is entitled to request an evaluation for their child. Nonetheless, if a crisis involving special education resource exhaustion is to be averted, it will make good sense for schools to remind parents that inadequate instruction is a disqualifying consideration for special education eligibility under [the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act \(IDEA\)](#). Rather, parents can request supports based on [response to intervention \(RTI\)](#) and [multitiered systems of supports \(MTSS\)](#) in general education. Schools should create or expand such programs to meet the anticipated increase in demand. While RTI/MTSS approaches to supporting students and working on challenges should never be used to circumvent a family's right to request an evaluation, these approaches could provide families a

Prediction #2: If schools don't prioritize teachers' mental health, the achievement gap will widen dramatically for students with learning and thinking differences. Schools with valuable information as they assess the impact of pandemic-related disruptions on learning.

UNDERSTOOD.ORG



Understood.org

We are Understood.

We are the lifelong guide for those who learn and think differently. In the past year, we've helped more than 20 million people discover their potentials, take control of their lives, and stay on positive paths.

A related article:

Experts at [Understood](https://www.understood.org/), a prominent organization in the neurodiversity community whose mission is to help those who learn and think differently discover their potential, have made two key predictions around Special Education in America for 2022. Not surprisingly, these predictions speak directly to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on public schools, their teachers and students and on student outcomes. <https://thehill.com/changing-america/opinion/588227-two-key-predictions-around-special-education-for-2022/>

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Lastly, families should ask schools to review pre-pandemic records and work samples to look for patterns in performance. Such an analysis could shed light on whether current challenges may have existed or may have begun to emerge prior to the pandemic. These patterns would suggest whether an evaluation is warranted.

Prediction #2: If schools don't prioritize teachers' mental health, the achievement gap will widen dramatically for students with learning and thinking differences. Schools with valuable information as they assess the impact of pandemic-related disruptions on learning.

CASE FILE WITH MARIE
**PARENTS' CONSENT TO
ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL
NULLIFIES IMPACT OF
FLAWED MDR**

Parents' consent to alternative school nullifies impact of flawed MDR

Although a Georgia district erred in concluding that a high schooler's aggressive and threatening behaviors were unrelated to his ADHD and other disabilities, it did not violate the IDEA when it placed him in an alternative school as a result. An administrative law judge held that the parents' tacit agreement to the new placement required the ALJ to deny their request for relief. The district's failure to conduct an appropriate manifestation determination review for the student with a disability will not necessarily result in remedial action. Still, districts should train all relevant staff on how to conduct an MDR that satisfies the IDEA's procedural requirements. *Butts County Sch. Dist.*, 122 LRP 5861 (SEA GA 01/18/22).

POLL QUESTION:

WHEN DOES THE LPAC NEED TO MEET?

EVERY SPRING
EVERY OTHER YEAR
WHENEVER THEY WANT

WHAT QUESTIONS DO YOU HAVE?

MARIE.WELSCH@TJJD.TEXAS.GOV

ALAWAN.THOMAS@TJJD.TEXAS.GOV

Thank you for all you do for
Texas Students

Expected Trends in the Future of Special Education Systems

- *Published On: December 27, 2021*

As the world keeps changing at an increasingly rapid pace, so does the face of education. The modern era has ushered in a host of new challenges for educators and learners. With those challenges, today's educators are developing new approaches to serving students.

For children with disabilities and special needs, these changes have meant new and improved models of individualized support, disciplinary and preparatory approaches, and strategies for improving relationships among faculty, students and families. An [advanced education degree focused on special education](#) equips professionals with appropriate tools and strategies to serve special education learners in the modern world. As they develop a deeper understanding of the cognitive and psychosocial needs of students with mild-to-moderate learning disabilities, graduates of this program will know how to implement individualized programs and advocate for the needs of their classes.

The following are five strategies that special education teachers can use in their classrooms:

1. **Technology**

By leveraging technology, educators can enhance classroom instruction with individualized learning approaches. According

to [Resilient Educator](#), new technologies like virtual reality, augmented reality and artificial intelligence will be at the center of [technological advances in special education](#).

Technological advances greatly increase educators' abilities to personalize learning. For example, artificial intelligence tools have proven valuable for early disability screening, and virtual reality applications are particularly useful for allowing children with autism to practice navigating real-world challenges.

2. Trauma-Informed and Culturally Responsive Support

Today's students are coping with traumas that impact learning. Natural disasters, socio-economic shifts and the loss of loved ones can all impact how students perform in school. According to the [National Child Traumatic Stress Network](#), educators will need to rely increasingly on trauma-screening resources to identify their students' individual needs and intervene as soon as possible.

Providing trauma-informed support will also entail changes to how educators approach discipline in special education. The [Education Commission of the States](#) reports that exclusionary and punitive school discipline policies, such as suspensions and expulsions, increase the likelihood of student absences, repeated grades and school dropouts. Historically underserved student groups, such as students with disabilities, disproportionately experience these types of disciplinary actions compared to their peers.

Several states have begun to issue legislative measures to encourage educators to consider alternative types of discipline. Educators have a host of alternative disciplinary approaches available to them, such as increased counseling support, restorative practices, positive behavioral interventions and [culturally responsive teaching techniques](#).

3. Educator Preparation

With these ongoing changes to special education, teachers will need increased support. The [National Center for Learning Disabilities \(NCLD\)](#) suggests schools invest in training and professional development initiatives on disability identification, trauma-informed support and culturally responsive teaching. With the increasing use of technology in the special education classroom, teachers are also likely to need training in the tools and techniques available to them. There is also a trend toward alternative teacher preparation pathways to encourage a more diverse range of expertise and skills in special education. According to the NCLD, by encouraging people from various backgrounds and experiences to enter education, schools can diversify their faculty and more effectively reflect the diversity of their students.

4. Data Collection and Reporting

To best understand the needs of students, it is imperative to have accurate, transparent information. Data collection is vital to understanding population makeup, community needs, income trends and other factors influencing student lives.

According to the NCLD, accurate and timely data reporting ensures educators and policymakers understand the scope and significance of disparities in their districts. When data is regularly collected and reported, students stand the best chance of having their needs met.

5. Familial Support

The [Individuals with Disabilities Act](#) asserts, “Almost 30 years of research and experience has demonstrated that the education of children with disabilities can be made more effective by ... strengthening the role and responsibility of parents and ensuring that

families ... have meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their children at school and at home.”

With increasing evidence of the power of parental involvement in special education, many schools are finding new ways to connect with parents and work together as a team to support students. As a result, future initiatives are likely to rely more on community mindsets that involve the family in supporting student learning inside and outside the special education classroom.

As special education systems look to the future, technology will be a crucial component of learning, as will understanding how trauma, disciplinary measures and community diversity influence students' lives. Careful reporting, preparation, and relationship-building techniques will be critical to ensuring every student receives the support they need, regardless of ability or background.

Learn more about [Mississippi College's online M.Ed. in Special Education program](#).

<https://www.dmgrouppk12.com/blog/10-best-practices-for-improving-special-education>

When implemented well with a systems-thinking approach, these 10 best practices can help superintendents and district leaders improve outcomes cost-effectively for students with special needs and all students who struggle.

Improving special education is challenging. All school districts want to close the achievement gap and improve outcomes for students with special needs and for students who struggle, but school and district practices are not always aligned to meet this objective most effectively.

But there is reason to be hopeful. Best practices exist that, when implemented well with a systems-thinking approach, can help school districts of all sizes and types achieve dramatic gains in achievement and inclusion and expand services for students with disabilities. DMGroup has developed our top 10 best practices for improving special education based on extensive research by the What Works Clearinghouse, the National Reading Panel, John Hattie's *Visible Learning*, numerous major research studies, and our own hands-on work with hundreds of school districts. Surprisingly, the cost of this approach is no more, and in some cases less, than current efforts. One note: these best practices are appropriate for most students with mild to moderate disabilities or no disability at all. Other students need a different approach.

1. Focus on student outcomes, not inputs

In too many districts, if last year's efforts didn't work as well as desired, the response is to add more staff, more paraprofessionals, more co-teaching, and more hours of service. These changes seldom help students and always cost more. Over the past decade, districts constantly increased the number of special educators and paraprofessionals, and yet achievement levels have barely budged.

If the current approach isn't achieving great outcomes, current practices must be reviewed and modified. The districts that have successfully raised achievement for students with special needs and other students who struggle are the districts that keep the focus on results.

2. Effective general education instruction is key

Effective general education instruction is key: higher performance of general education students correlates to higher performance of students with disabilities, as shown by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Students with special needs and students who struggle spend most of their day in the general education classroom; therefore, core instruction provided by the classroom teacher must meet most of their needs. In some districts, a culture has emerged where special education staff take the lead in serving students with disabilities. In many schools, elementary school children who struggle to read are pulled out of the core reading block to be taught by a special education teacher or paraprofessional.

While well-intentioned, these common practices are not what's best for students with special needs and students who struggle—students are best served academically when their general education teacher takes primary responsibility for their learning. Beyond core instruction, even interventions are often best provided by general education staff, which is the hallmark of RTI. Fundamentally, RTI and efforts like it embrace general education as the foundation for all students' success.

3. Ensure all students can read

In many districts, up to half of the referrals to special education are, at their root, due to reading difficulties. Referral rates jump in third through sixth grades when reading problems make it difficult to learn math, science, and social studies. An overwhelming majority of students who have not mastered reading by the end of third grade will continue to struggle throughout high school and beyond. These students tend to have increased rates of behavioral problems in later grades and are less likely to graduate from high school or to enroll in college.

In order to raise achievement for all students who struggle, districts need to faithfully implement [best practices for teaching reading](#) and ensure that students with mild to moderate disabilities are benefiting from these best practices.

4. Provide extra instructional time every day for students who struggle

Students who have difficulty achieving grade-level standards often need more time for instruction in order to catch up and keep up with their peers. At both the elementary and secondary levels, this additional time can be used to pre-teach materials, reteach the day's lesson, address missing foundational skills, and correct misunderstandings.

In many schools, struggling students are provided extra adults, but not extra time. Struggling learners may receive additional support from a teaching assistant, paraprofessional, special education teacher, co-teacher, etc. while staying in the same classroom as their peers for the same duration. Some schools have specialized instruction in place, but it is typically not in addition to the regular period. Struggling students, for example, may be assigned to a "replacement" class, a lower-level general education class that covers less content with less rigor. Extra "help time" should not be confused with extra instructional time. It is common for students with special needs to have a resource room period or a support period where a special education teacher provides ad hoc help or test prep across multiple subjects, grades, and courses. This is not the same as a daily dedicated extra period focused explicitly on math skills, for example.

Districts that have successfully closed the achievement gap and significantly raised the achievement of students with and without special needs provide extra instructional time each day in addition to core content instruction time.

5. Ensure that content-strong staff provide interventions and support

As standards have risen and the complexity of the content has increased, staff's having a deep understanding and mastery of what they teach becomes even more important. A teacher who has engaged in extensive study and training in a particular subject is more likely to have a wider repertoire of ways to teach the material. However, in most districts, extra instruction is provided either by paraprofessionals, or by special education teachers, who have expertise in pedagogy but often are generalists without specialized expertise in teaching subjects such as math, English, and reading.

Districts that have made the most significant gains among struggling students have done so by providing these students, whether or not they have IEPs, with teachers skilled in content instruction during extra instructional time.

6. Allow special educators to play to their strengths

Districts that have made strides in improving services for struggling students have focused on ensuring that teachers are able to play to their strengths. For example, some special education teachers may have expertise in specific content areas, while others may be very efficient and skilled in assessing and managing the IEP process.

It is highly beneficial to leverage these areas of expertise:

- **Content-Specific Expertise**

Teachers who have particular strengths in academic content areas (e.g. reading instruction, math instruction) should focus on maximizing their time supporting students in their academic area of specialization.

- **Pedagogical Expertise**

Teachers with pedagogical expertise should coach general education teachers on accommodating the needs of students with disabilities and on using scaffolding, differentiation, Universal

Design for Learning (UDL), chunking, and other teaching strategies.

- **Social-Emotional Expertise**

Special education teachers with a strong background in providing social-emotional or behavior supports to students should focus on delivering these important supports.

- **Case Management Expertise**

Some special education teachers are particularly efficient and effective in managing the IEP process. These teachers should focus on case management responsibilities and thereby allow other special education teachers more time to serve students.

Making these shifts in roles enables teachers to focus on applying their particular strengths to benefit students. Specialization of roles also simplifies professional development for special education teachers; teachers can develop deeper skills in one area rather than having to master many different skills and specialties.

7. Focus paraprofessional support on health, safety, and behavior needs, rather than academic needs

Across the country, the number of paraprofessionals supporting students has been steadily increasing in recent years. Paraprofessionals play a critical role in the lives and education of many students, especially those with severe needs, autism, or behavior issues, and have helped expand inclusion. However, paraprofessionals have also been given a growing role in supporting academic needs.

This seemingly logical, caring effort actually runs counter to many of the best practices. Students with special needs and students who struggle need to be receiving instruction from content-strong teachers, and they need to be receiving extra instructional time rather than having additional support during core instruction. What's more, the presence of

an aide can actually decrease the amount of instruction a student receives from the classroom teacher; it is not uncommon for a classroom teacher to feel that a student with an aide already has 100% of an adult's time, and therefore to focus attention on those students without aides. As a result, students with the greatest needs receive the least attention from a teacher certified in the subject.

It is important that districts focus paraprofessional support on health, safety, and behavior needs, and have certified reading teachers, RTI interventionists, and other trained specialists focused on academic and other specific needs. Fortunately, most districts can shift their staffing to better meet the needs of students in a cost-neutral way.

8. Expand the reach and impact of social, emotional, and behavioral supports

Addressing students' social, emotional, and behavioral needs is critical, and many districts have responded to a growing need for these services by adding counselors, social workers, or paraprofessionals but still feel more is needed. The key is to expand the reach and impact of existing staff, expand staffing by shifting resources, and partner with others to provide free or low-cost services.

Some districts have managed to double the amount of student services delivered by existing staff by streamlining meetings and paperwork. But even if all non-student work were streamlined, many districts still would be understaffed. Fortunately, many districts can improve and expand social, emotional, and behavioral supports within their existing budget by shifting to having fewer lower-skilled paraprofessionals but more staff with the highly specialized skills required, such as certified behaviorists. Finally, some districts further expand social and emotional services by partnering with local nonprofit counseling agencies, teaching hospitals, graduate psychology programs, or even insurance-funded mental health counselors.

9. Provide high-quality in-district programs for students with more severe needs

In the past, many mid-sized and smaller districts decided against providing in-house special education programs; these districts felt they lacked sufficient numbers of students at any given grade level to justify the cost of such services. This needn't be the case. If a district has at least three students with similar needs within the same age range, it may be more cost-effective to establish an in-house program than to place the students in an out-of-district program. Of course, the savings resulting from decreased tuition payments and transportation costs must be invested in providing enhanced in-district services.

The key to providing effective and cost-effective programs is to hire staff with the right skills and training, to adjust staffing levels throughout the year as enrollment shifts, and to provide dedicated leadership for these programs.

10. Know how staff spend their time and provide guidance on the effective use of time

To implement best practices at-scale and in a cost-effective manner, districts must have a detailed understanding of how staff, including special educators, related services providers, and RTI staff, are currently serving students. Then, the district must work collaboratively to establish expectations regarding the service delivery model and to set guidelines on the amount of time to be spent with students.

Given the vast range of tasks that staff perform, it is challenging for districts to develop an in-depth understanding of how staff spend their time. When districts utilize schedule-sharing technology to gain a deep understanding of current practices, both staff and administrators are often surprised at how much time is spent in meetings, how much service is provided 1:1 or 2:1 even though the IEPs call for small groups, and how much instruction is provided by paraprofessionals.

Armed with a detailed understanding of current practices, districts can thoughtfully plan what is the best use of time for each role, grade level, and student need.

Finally, school and district leaders must assist principals and special education and intervention staff to build thoughtful schedules in accordance with best practices. Too often, the master building schedule forces teachers to pull students from core instruction in reading or math, prevents grouping of students with like needs, or demands attendance at too many meetings.

Scheduling is both an art and a science, and effective scheduling is key to ensuring that student needs are best met. There is no reason to believe every teacher or principal is an expert scheduler; even if they are, their schedule is impacted by dozens of other people's schedules, so efficient and effective schedules cannot be built in a vacuum. Coordinated scheduling is essential to ensure that time is being used most effectively.

Implementing these best practices is not easy or quick, but it is worth the effort

While implementing these best practices can have a significant positive impact, to say that implementation is easy would be misleading. It takes time and hard work to effect large-scale shifts in service delivery, staffing, scheduling, and roles and responsibilities. It takes time, much communication, and attentiveness to foster buy-in and ensure fidelity of implementation. It requires participation from leaders across all functions of the district as well as dialogue with key stakeholders such as parents. Clear goals, careful planning, and lots of communication can help to pave the way.

Taking a close look at current practices and taking a systems-thinking approach to implementing best practices can make a significant difference in student outcomes. It is hard work, and a time-consuming process, but well worth the effort to improve the lives of students with special needs and students who struggle.

Want to dive deeper into these best practices for improving special education and supports for students who struggle? Check out these resources:

- **ARTICLE**

[Improving Special Education: DMGroup's 10 Best Practices for Cost-Effectively Raising Achievement](#)

- **WEBINAR**

[Improving Special Education and Intervention: Emerging Trends](#)

- **SELF-ASSESSMENT**

[Are There Opportunities to Improve Special Education in Your District?](#)

[HTTPS://WWW.FRIENDSHIPCIRCLE.ORG/BLOG/2012/02/01/THE-TOP-10-CHALLENGES-OF-SPECIAL-EDUCATION-TEACHERS/](https://www.friendshipcircle.org/blog/2012/02/01/the-top-10-challenges-of-special-education-teachers/)

[SPECIAL EDUCATION](#)

The Top 10 Challenges of Special Education Teachers

The attrition, or “burn-out,” rate for special education teachers is extremely high compared to most other professions. 50% of special education teachers leave their jobs within 5 years. Half of those who make it past 5 years will leave within 10 years. This equates to a 75% turnover rate every 10 years (Dage, 2006).

The Reasons

Special education is a very challenging field. Here are the top 10 stressors of being a special education teacher (not listed in any particular order).

Have any other challenges to share? Tell us about them in the comments.

1. Lack of appreciation

I recently heard of a study that researched why there is such a high turnover rate for special education, with the researchers believing their findings would indicate the paperwork aspect of special education. However, they were surprised to learn it was a more emotional component. Special education teachers, in most instances, do not get as much appreciation as their general education colleagues.

In a time where ALL teachers are working to validate their jobs – special educators are on overdrive. So – if you know a special education teacher, be sure to let them know you love them!

2. Parent support

Knowing I am writing on a blog whose readers are mostly parents, I was hesitant to include this but knowing it is one of the hardest parts of my job, felt I had to.

I've written before on the importance of [bridging the gap between home and school](#). I know the vital importance of establishing a positive relationship with parents – I quickly feel defeated when that doesn't immediately happen. I am often so discouraged when parents do not return my phone calls, respond to emails, or even read the notes I send home.

I hate sitting in an [IEP Meeting](#) and listening to a parent tell me as long as their 4th grade daughter is pretty and skinny, she'll be okay in this world (Yes, true story!). My heart breaks when a child who was once so motivated to do well no longer cares because their parents do not value education and have expressed as much to their child.

3. Public support

“You have the easiest job in the world!”

“I wish I had summers off!”

“What do you have to complain about?”

Bashing teachers and their jobs has become the new form of media entertainment. It has rained especially hard on special education teachers. Teaching is hard, teaching is important, and teaching is deserving of an actual salary with benefits. Special education is necessary, special education is an actual form of teaching, and special education is special. Please show your support for ALL teachers!

4. Paperwork

Sometimes, I feel I have no time to teach because I am dealing with paperwork and meetings. For any parent who has seen an IEP, they are easily 10-20 pages. I once received an IEP from Texas that was 56 pages long! That takes time and a tremendous amount of consideration.

Additionally we have our lesson planning, report cards, progress reports, signing of [REEDs](#) and addendum's, medicaid billing forms, and so much more. As a special education teacher – you have to just embrace the paperwork.

5. Scheduling

I have to coordinate my schedule with 15 different teachers and their schedules, and that's not including coordinating with the physical education teacher, art teacher, and the music teacher.

I must account for recess and lunch when creating my resource schedule and I have to be considerate of our speech pathologists, occupational therapists, and physical therapists schedules.

It can take me 2 full weeks at the beginning of the school year to get a schedule in place for myself and my students. And then that schedule is frequently interrupted by students being added to my caseload or dismissed from my caseload.

After the schedule is finally set comes classroom parties, assemblies, a switch in computer lab times. Any minor change in a general education teacher's schedule is enough to change my entire day and often my entire week.

6. Training and supervising paraprofessionals

Working with two other adults who are there to help me can be extremely beneficial. I am so thankful for my aides and couldn't do my job without them.

The challenge is that it also adds a considerable amount of work for me as well. On top of my schedule and my student's schedule, I also create a daily schedule for my "paras". Usually this setup also requires that I first teach my aides so my students can be taught.

It gets even more challenging if the aides have a different opinion than I do or challenge a certain aspect of the job. As someone who is much younger than both of my aides, it is hard to feel "in charge." In the end, I must value their advice and opinions so we can all work as a team but also realize that the pressure is on me to make sure things get done correctly because I am the one responsible, not my paraprofessionals.

7. Collaborating with general education teachers

As a special education resource teacher, I have to know the general education curriculum so I can support my students and their needs. I teach

students in five different grade levels and therefore, am responsible for knowing 5 different curriculums.

I have to collaborate with the teachers of all my students to make sure I am supporting what is being taught in the classroom and supplementing my own resources. Finding the time to talk to each teacher is extremely important and extremely challenging. Being organized enough to do so is also a very difficult task.

8. Data collection

Data collection is huge in special education. I need to be able to validate everything I do and make sure it coincides with everything in the student's IEP.

If I say a child is still struggling in a certain area, I need proof to back up my claim. I need the general education teachers on board with me as well because I have to ask them to collect data for the times I am not in the classroom with the student. I have to keep track of and monitor all this data, understand its implications for that child's education, and adjust instruction accordingly.

9. Evidence of student growth

Student growth is now a part of all teachers' evaluations in order to hold teachers more accountable. It is a double-edged sword. Without question, it is critical that teachers are effective in the classroom and students are learning from the instruction provided. On the other side, we know not all assessments are valid indicators of student growth.

For students with special needs, I have learned to celebrate the smallest of accomplishments. Their growth is not going to be as fast or as noticeable as their general education peers. However, it is progress! Sometimes, it is very hard for people to recognize the successes of a student when they are constantly comparing them to the best and brightest of the class. This is only doing a disservice to the student, not the special education teacher.

10. Variability of student's needs

In all classes, you will see students who are at different ability levels, learn in different ways, and understand concepts at different times. Differentiated

instruction and individualized teaching practices are challenging for all teachers. It gets even more difficult in a special education, multi-aged classroom.

Final Thoughts

These challenges are all equally difficult and when combined, as they often are on a daily basis, almost impossible to juggle.

On most days, I feel like I'm part of the juggling act in a circus. But – despite the hardships I've faced in my two years of teaching – I'm determined to beat the odds and not be a statistic.

Special education is my calling and I will retire an old woman loving my job as much as I do now.

WRITTEN ON FEBRUARY 1, 2012 BY:

Melissa

Melissa Ferry is a special education teacher for Mt. Pleasant Public Schools. She earned her bachelor's degree from Michigan State University with an endorsement in learning disabilities. Melissa is continuing her education at Central Michigan University in pursuit of a Master's Degree. Prior to her career as a teacher Melissa volunteered at Friendship Circle for seven years.

[View all 22 of Melissa's posts](#)