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Specially Designed Instruction: Operationalizing the Delivery of Special Education Services

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ABSTRACT

Since the introduction of response-to-intervention as a process for identifying specific learning disabilities and the widespread adoption of multi-tiered systems of support as a framework for instructional delivery, the role of the special educator has become blurred. Specifically, special educators have struggled to identify their role across tiers of instruction. Often working in the direction of general educators, moving from less intensive to more intensive instructional supports, special educators can inadvertently fail to address instructional and behavioral needs indicated by a student's present levels of academic achievement and functional performance. The purpose of this article is to operationalize the construct of *specially designed instruction*, which begins rather than ends with the identification of specialized intervention supports, and provide a framework for planning to ensure the delivery of meaningful instruction for students with learning disabilities across settings and circumstances.

Within the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA Regulations, 34 C.F.R. § 300, 2006), special education is defined as the delivery of *specially designed instruction* (SDI). As such, special education teachers are required to provide SDI for the students they serve under the IDEA. Unfortunately, defining and operationalizing SDI are not often at the forefront of discussions of special education. Preservice and practicing teachers are more likely to be familiar with response-to-intervention (RTI) than SDI (Rodgers et al., 2021). Particularly for teachers of students with specific learning disabilities (SLD), the 2004 inclusion of response-to-intervention as a process of SLD identification resulted in a dramatic shift in the focus of instruction. Rather than focusing on SDI – instruction that occurs *after* special education identification – special educators have become immersed in a world of tiers of instruction – instruction that occurs prior to identification (Mitchell et al., 2012; Zumeta et al., 2014). Special education publications dramatically reflected this shift in focus; a search of the ERIC database from 2004–2022 yielded 9,812 articles with the keyword *response-to-intervention*, in contrast to 186 hits for the term *specially designed instruction*.

Despite the elusive nature of SDI for practicing special educators, SDI is defined in the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. § 1400 (2004) as

adapting, as appropriate to the needs of an eligible child under this part, the content, methodology or delivery of instruction (i) to address the unique needs of the child that result from the child's disability; and (ii) ensure access of the child to the general curriculum, so that the child can meet the educational standards within the jurisdiction of the public agency that apply to all children." [34 CFR Sec. 300.39(b)(3)]

Thankfully, a large and robust body of research has determined a myriad of practices embody the principles delineated within the federal definition of SDI. Many evidence-based practices exist that

demonstrate how the *content* or *methodology of instruction* can be adapted to meet the needs of students with disabilities, as well as practices that ensure and facilitate access to the general education curriculum. The confusion for special educators has not been: What is an evidence-based practice for the delivery of special education? Instead, it has been: Where, when, and how is special education (i.e., SDI) delivered? The purpose of this article is to operationalize the concept of SDI and provide a framework for planning to ensure the delivery of meaningful instruction for students with learning disabilities across settings and circumstances.

Specialty designed instruction

Since the mid-2000s, teachers and parents have expressed confusion when attempting to sort out differences across (a) the time-limited nature of RTI interventions for the purpose of identifying students with specific learning disabilities, (b) school-wide models of MTSS with tiers of instruction and support, and (c) the delivery of specially-designed instruction as required by an individualized education program (Braun et al., 2020; Nagro et al., 2019). For teachers of students with learning disabilities, confusion across concepts can be compounded by the instructional setting. Most students with learning disabilities receive the majority of their instruction within general education classrooms (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). As a result, special educators who support students in these settings may focus on delivering accommodations for accessing Tier 1 instruction rather than direct teaching at sufficient levels of instructional intensity. Specifically, special educators who provide support via co-teaching or consultation models may have difficulty determining how to provide ongoing, intensive instruction within this setting. A recent systematic review of the literature on SDI highlighted this issue:

If [special educators interpret] SDI to mean accommodations and modifications, for example, they may not see a clear instructional role for themselves, something that would decrease motivation to plan with their co-teacher, and thus would result in special educators playing a supportive role in the classroom. (Rodgers et al., 2021, p. 105)

Thus, the challenge for special educators who serve students with learning disabilities is to identify ways to provide appropriate levels of SDI, including the most intensive levels, to the students they serve regardless of the instructional setting.

Operationalizing SDI

Under the IDEA Regulations, 34 C.F.R. § 300 (2006), students with disabilities are guaranteed a free, appropriate public education (FAPE). The delineation of what constitutes FAPE is specified within each student's individualized education program (IEP). As such, instructional alignment with IEP goals reflects the legal obligation of special educators; that is, students should be receiving instruction that is reasonably calculated to result in progress toward their IEP goals. Given this legal obligation, the operationalization of SDI begins with mapping a student's present levels of academic achievement and functional performance (PLAAFP) and associated goals to specific instructional activities and supports. Further, SDI is not dictated by a school's instructional model (e.g., MTSS, full inclusion) or current curriculum or staffing (Lee, 2022). In other words, special educators are not legally bound to work within a school's pre-established MTSS tiers when planning for SDI.

Empirical studies on instruction for students with disabilities have demonstrated that efficacious support can be provided at different levels of instructional intensity; such practices are referred to as evidence-based practices (Cook & Cook, 2013; Zirkel, 2008). Evidence-based practices in special education can be categorized by the level of support provided for students: (a) access, (b) intensified instruction, and (c) intensive intervention (see, Figure 1).

Specifically, some evidence-based practices reflect *access* support. For students with specific learning disabilities, one aim of instruction is to provide access to the general education curriculum. One way to provide access support is through the strategic implementation of accommodations, a support

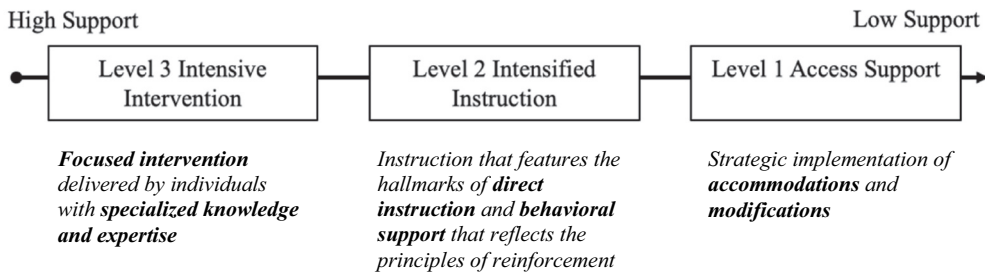


Figure 1. Evidence-based practices by level of support provided for students with disabilities. Note: Student support needs will vary throughout the day by subject, skill, and setting.

that allows a student to bypass an instructional need (Christensen et al., 2011; Zirkel, 2020). Modifications, a change in instructional expectations, also reflect access support in that modifications allow students to complete grade-level work at a reduced load or below-grade level material with the aim of building toward grade-level standards.

The next level of support reflects the *intensification of instruction*. This level of support typically reflects the hallmarks of direct instruction (i.e., instruction is explicit and systematic; there are frequent opportunities to respond; immediate, corrective feedback is provided; Hughes et al., 2017; Rosenshine, 1995) and includes features of instructional delivery associated with principles of reinforcement (Alberto & Troutman, 2009; Brophy, 2006). The intensification of instruction occurs when teachers (general or special educators) or related-service personnel design and deliver instruction that reflects those features. Specific practices that reflect the intensification of instruction include peer-assisted learning strategies (PALS; D. Fuchs et al., 2011), self-regulated skill development (SRSD; McKeown et al., 2021), and check-in check-out (CICO; Drevon et al., 2019).

Finally, *intensive intervention* offers the highest level of support for students with disabilities. At this level, remedial support is directly related to a student's primary areas of need, as reflected by data collected to determine PLAAFP. Although special educators may successfully collaborate with general education staff to deliver SDI for *access* and *intensification*, due to the specialized nature of *intensive intervention*, this level of support is provided directly by a special educator or other specialized, related-service personnel (e.g., speech-language pathologist, occupational therapist, counselor; Vaughn et al., 2010).

The challenge and legal obligation for special educators are to create individualized education programs that first and foremost reflect the primary need(s) of the student with the disability and secondarily address access and intensification needs (Yell et al., 2020).

How to design and deliver SDI

To better understand how to design and deliver SDI, we provide a planning guide that begins with a student's IEP goals based upon PLAAFP and moves through instructional planning and progress monitoring. Then, to further illustrate the process, we provide a fictional case of a student with a specific learning disability and a comorbid condition of ADHD to demonstrate how a special educator would use the planning guide to operationalize SDI for the student.

SDI planning sheet

Planning for the delivery of SDI begins by aligning IEP goals to specific instructional supports. Rather than moving from access (Level 1) to more intensive levels of support (Levels 2 and 3), a more direct approach is for special educators to begin by identifying the targeted support (i.e., intensive intervention; Level 3) required. Level 1 and 2 supports can then be designed to align with the intensive

Specially Designed Instruction Planning Sheet	
Focus Area	_____
Related IEP Goal(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> Given [conditions], [the learner] will [observable behavior] with [mastery criteria] in _ out of _ trials by [date]. <input type="checkbox"/> Given [conditions], [the learner] will [observable behavior] with [mastery criteria] in _ out of _ trials by [date].
Primary Support (Level 3): Intensive Intervention	
What:	
Who:	
Where:	
When:	
Secondary Support (Level 2): Intensified Instruction	
What:	
Who:	
Where:	
When:	
Access Support (Level 1): Accommodations and Modifications	
What:	
Who:	
Where:	
When:	
Progress Monitoring	
What and When:	
Reporting to Families*:	____ Monthly ____ Quarterly ____ Every marking period
*The frequency of reporting requirements will be specified on the IEP.	

Figure 2. Specially designed instruction planning sheet.

intervention(s) designated at Level 3. Not all PLAAFP will require support at each level, but each level should be considered.

What constitutes an individual student’s FAPE is delineated in the IEP. Failure to provide FAPE reflects a substantive violation of the law (Yell et al., 2020). Examples of substantive violations include the failure of an IEP to (a) address *all* needs reflected in PLAAFP statements within the IEP goals or the services section and (b) include measurable, annual goals (Yell et al., 2020). Further, failure to measure and report progress toward annual goals constitutes another substantive violation. The SDI Planning sheet can help special educators guard against these substantive violations and plan for instruction specially designed to enable students to progress toward their annual goals (see, [Figure 2](#); SDI Planning Sheet).

Step 1: develop IEP goals for each area of need identified on the PLAAFP statement

IEP goals are the foundation of special education delivery. Notwithstanding the legal obligation to link PLAAFP to measurable goals and statements of services (34 C.F.R. § 300.320), well-written goals illuminate the type of instructional or behavioral SDI a student needs. Strong IEP goals are specific, objective, and measurable (Hedin & DeSpain, 2018). Failure to create corresponding goals for needs identified in PLAAFP statements constitutes a denial of FAPE (Bateman, 2017; Yell et al., 2020).

Thus, the first step in the SDI planning process is to create goals for each area of need identified by a student's PLAAFP statements. Data from PLAAFP statements will primarily come from valid and reliable assessments (e.g., standardized assessments, curriculum-based measurements) but also include information from observations, parent interviews, or evaluation of student work (Spiel et al., 2014). For students with learning disabilities, assessments will consist of academic assessments such as reading, writing, comprehension, and mathematics. As attentional, emotional, and behavioral issues co-occur with learning disabilities (Newton et al., 2017), behavioral assessments may also be used to develop PLAAFP statements. Although PLAAFP statements may indicate areas of strength, they are required to identify students' academic and functional needs. By law, any area of need identified in a PLAAFP statement requires a corresponding IEP goal (U.S. Department of Education, Code of Federal Regulation). Baseline data collected to determine present levels of performance serve as the starting point for annual goals; progress toward goals will be determined using these data.

The four components of an IEP goal are condition, learner, behavior, and criteria. Hedin and DeSpain (2108) provided the following template for writing IEP goals: "Given [condition], [the learner] will [observable behavior] with [mastery criteria] in – of – trials [retention criteria] by [date]." The condition will specify the materials used (e.g., a level-specific reading passage, level-specific word lists, level-specific math problems, writing prompt, self-monitoring sheet) and directions provided if needed (e.g., "Read until I say stop," "Say the sound," "Solve the problems," [Request to begin work]). Strong outcome behaviors are observable and measurable. That is, the goal will specify how the student will demonstrate the behavior (e.g., "read aloud," "solve," "state," "demonstrate by . . ."). Finally, the criteria for performance often reflect quantitative measures of performance (e.g., "words read correctly," "percentage of problems solved correctly," "words read correct per minute," "percentage of time on task").

TASK. After reviewing the PLAAFP statement for an area of need, use the Hedin and DeSpain (2018) template to create objective and measurable IEP goal(s). Write the related goal(s) on the top of the SDI Planning Sheet.

Step 2: determine the level 3 intervention needed to address the student's primary needs

Level 3 intervention is the delivery of ongoing, intensive support that addresses a student's unique needs (Fuchs et al., 2017). Students qualify for special education services because their needs cannot be met by general education programming. Intensive interventions are qualitatively different from general education and do not merely reflect an enhancement of general education programming. Intensive interventions are typically characterized as targeted, explicit, and systematic; often, the intervention is provided frequently (e.g., two to five times per week; Vaughn et al., 2010). Targeted instruction means the intervention directly addresses needed skills, whereas explicit instruction means that instruction is unambiguous, includes corrective feedback, and reflects a mastery-oriented approach. Systematic instruction is based on a scope and sequence reflecting a task analysis of the skills needed for performance.

Another feature of intensive intervention is that it is not time-limited. A handful of phonics sessions, several meetings with the guidance counselor, the provision of a graphic organizer, or a couple of weeks of self-monitoring training would be insufficient to meet the student's significant learning or behavioral needs. In contrast, as the intervention is directly tied to an *annual* IEP goal, the horizon for the intervention is also annual. Finally, the knowledge and expertise of the interventionist

also play a factor in determining intervention intensity, as a lack of teacher knowledge or skill can limit the efficacy of instruction (Charalambous et al., 2020; Hudson et al., 2021; Vaughn et al., 2010).

Given these features of intensive intervention, the essential questions to be answered for Step 2 are:

- (1) What is the intensive intervention that needs to be delivered?
- (2) Who will deliver the intensive intervention?
- (3) Where will delivery occur?
- (4) When will the intervention be delivered?

To select the intensive intervention, first map the area of need to a program or plan. For example, a third-grade student with reading skills commensurate with a first grader will require systematic instruction in decoding and encoding. Similarly, a fifth-grade student with difficulty with foundational mathematics skills will require remedial instruction that addresses number sense and number processes (e.g., place value, addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, negative numbers, fractions). Finally, a student with planning and organizational needs will require ongoing support for behavior change.

An intervention can meet more than one IEP goal. For example, a student with a reading disability may have fluency, comprehension, and spelling goals met by one comprehensive reading intervention. Services can be provided by special educators or related service personnel (e.g., speech-language pathologists, psychologists, social workers, school nurses, guidance counselors).

TASK. Identify the intensive intervention and develop a plan for where, when, and how the intervention will be provided.

Step 3: determine appropriate levels 2 and 1 supports

As students with learning disabilities spend most of their time in general education settings, they will also benefit from supports that intensify general education instruction (Level 2) and include accommodations or modifications to the general education curriculum (Level 1). As with the identification of Level 3 supports, SDI necessitates alignment between PLAAFP and instruction for support Levels 1 and 2.

Whereas Level 3 support consists of targeted, remedial instruction, Level 2 support, the *intensification of instruction*, reflects the application of principles related to the science of learning (e.g., explicit instruction, retrieval practice, strategy instruction; Dunlosky et al., 2013; Hughes et al., 2017) to facilitate student acquisition of general-curriculum-related material. As noted previously, many Level 2 evidence-based practices in special education reflect these principles (e.g., PALS, SRSD), but special educators can also apply the principles when not using a specified program or framework. Implementation can be conducted via co-teaching or in the development of materials general educators will use during instruction (i.e., the consultation model). Planning for these elements will be specified on the SDI Planning Sheet.

Finally, there are times when students benefit from Level 1 supports, accommodations or modifications, to the general education curriculum (Fuchs et al., 2005). For example, a below grade-level reader would benefit from accommodations such as a text-reader for accessing content-area textbooks or extended time to read and respond to the material. Modifications (i.e., changes to the content to be learned or students' performance) can also be appropriate. For example, a student with math difficulty may have a reduced assignment load or be assigned a different level of mathematics problems to be solved. As with the other levels of SDI, the goal is to provide access and facilitate student progress toward general curriculum standards. Accommodations and modifications can support these aims.

TASK. Designate which Level 2 and 1 supports will be provided that align with the IEP goals.

Step 4: develop plan for progress monitoring

The final step for all support levels is collecting ongoing data to evaluate the efficacy of the SDI. As failure to measure and report progress toward annual goals constitutes another substantive violation (Yell et al., 2020), ongoing progress monitoring of SDI implementation ensures special educators have the data necessary for reporting and instructional decision-making.

Progress monitoring data can be collected in relation to each level of support. Many intensive interventions will have integrated assessment systems (e.g., weekly, daily, or unit checkouts) that reflect mastery measurements, but global measures such as curriculum-based measurements (e.g., DIBELS; University of Oregon, Center on Teaching and Learning, 2018, AIMSweb plus; NCS Pearson, 2017, FastBridge; Christ et al., 2018) that align with specific IEP goals can also be used to demonstrate progress toward IEP goals. Similarly, student growth related to intensified general curriculum instruction, Level 2 support, can also yield valuable data. As Level 2 supports are related to Level 3 intervention, additional outcome measures (e.g., oral passage reading, comprehension assessment, math probes) may not be warranted, but data on student engagement can provide some insight into the efficacy of the support. Finally, measuring the effectiveness of accommodations is particularly important. Researchers have found that many accommodations do not offer a differential benefit for students, and over-recommendation of accommodations is commonplace (Ketterlin-Geller et al., 2007). On-going evaluation of accommodation use facilitates the appropriate application of accommodations, ensures accountability of consistent implementation, and provides another source of data to demonstrate progress toward IEP goals.

TASK. Identify what, when, and how ongoing progress monitoring data will be collected and if different data will be collected related to differing levels of support.

Case-based example of SDI planning: reading disability and ADHD

Background and PLAAFP

Max is a fourth-grade student who receives special education services for a specific learning disability in reading and a comorbid condition of ADHD. Max has a strong memory for topics of interest and is eager and willing to participate in class. He is a flexible thinker who demonstrates quick wit when engaging with teachers and peers. Max is consistently polite with teachers, staff, and administration, often responding with “Oh, sorry” when he is redirected for being off-task.

Max’s primary areas of need for reading, as indicated by data collected to determine his PLAAFP, were decoding, spelling, comprehension, and writing. Data from a decoding diagnostic demonstrated that Max had difficulty decoding single and multisyllabic words at a second-grade level and spelling words with common second-grade phonics patterns (e.g., one and two-syllable words with short and long vowels, vowel teams, r-controlled vowels, etc.; see, Figure 3). In addition, Max earned standard scores of 78 and 75, which is below the 10th percentile, on the Word Identification and Word Attack subtests of the Woodcock-Johnson Reading Mastery Test (Schrank et al., 2014). For oral reading fluency (ORF), Max read 36 words correctly per minute when provided second-grade level passages, which is at the 25th percentile for second-grade readers (Hasbrouck & Tindal, 2017). In addition, Max’s handwriting is difficult to read, and he frequently uses capital letters rather than lowercase letters. In terms of his comprehension, Max struggles to make connections and summarize classroom texts – tasks that require inferencing skills (McNamara & Magliano, 2009; Oakhill & Cain, 2012). Finally, Max performed significantly below grade-level expectations in his writing. On a writing rubric, Max was below proficient in his use of punctuation, capitalization, and grammar (e.g., complete sentences, subject-verb agreement, pronoun and article use, syntax).

Max’s PLAAFP data related to his ADHD demonstrated difficulty with attention and organization. According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders; Fifth Edition (DSM-5), Max’s behaviors were clinically significant and consistent with an inattentive and hyperactive-impulsive

Specialty-Designed Instruction (SDI) Planning Sheet				
Focus Area: Reading				
Related IEP Goal(s)				
<input type="checkbox"/> DECODING: Given a list of 50 single and multisyllabic words at a 2 nd -grade level, Max will read 48 out of 50 words correctly in three out of four trials by the end of the school year.				
<input type="checkbox"/> FLUENCY: Given an unfamiliar 2 nd -grade passage, Max will orally read the passage an average of 100 words read correct per minute by the end of the school year.				
<input type="checkbox"/> SPELLING: Given a list of 20 spelling words that reflect 2 nd -grade phonics patterns (e.g., one- and two-syllable words with long and short vowel sounds, vowel teams, r-controlled vowels, consonant-LE endings, inflected endings), Max will spell the words with 90% accuracy on two out of three trials by the end of the school year.				
<input type="checkbox"/> WRITING: When given three kernel sentences and three question words (e.g., Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?) with the answers, Max will write a complete expanded sentence that includes correct punctuation and grammar with a score of 12 or higher on a 15-point sentence writing rubric by the end of the school year.				
<input type="checkbox"/> COMPREHENSION: When given a 2 nd -grade level expository passage to read, Max will be able to answer 4 out of 5 questions correctly on two out of three trials by the end of the school year.				
Primary Support (Level 3): Intensive Intervention				
What: Structured Literacy Intervention				
<input type="checkbox"/> Decoding, Spelling, Fluency, Handwriting, Written Expression, and Comprehension				
Who: Special Educator				
Where: Resource Room				
When: Daily, 9:00 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.				
Secondary Support (Level 2): Intensified Instruction				
What: PALS 2-6 Reading (fluency work); Small-group support for re-teaching and reinforcement of content covered in the 4th-grade reading curriculum; Self-monitoring; Guided notes + Online quiz (e.g., Quizlet) for content-area classes.				
Who: Co-teachers (Special and General Educators)				
Where: General Education Classroom				
When: English Language Arts Block and Content Area Class Times				
<input type="checkbox"/> PALS = twice per week [General Educator + Paraprofessional]				
<input type="checkbox"/> Small-group support and Self-Monitoring Instruction/Support = daily [Special Educator]				
<input type="checkbox"/> Guided notes + Online Quiz = as needed per unit [Special Educator]				
Access Support (Level 1): Accommodations and Modifications				
What: Text-to-speech assistive technology; Reduced writing assignments; High-interest/Low-vocabulary books				
Who: General Educator				
Where: General Education Classroom				
When: Text-to-speech for grade-level material (daily); Reduced writing (as needed); Alternative texts (as needed)				
Progress Monitoring				
What and When:				
Decoding Checkout = Weekly	CBM ORF = Weekly	Spelling Checkout = Weekly	Sentence Rubric = Bi-weekly	Comprehension Checkout = Bi-weekly
Reporting to Families*: ___ Monthly ___ Quarterly ___ Every marking period				
*The frequency of reporting requirements will be specified on the IEP.				

Figure 3. SDI sheet for Max’s reading goals.

ADHD diagnosis. Classroom observational data collected by the school psychologist showed that Max required multiple prompts to attend to the speaker, focus on the assigned task, or stop playing with materials not pertaining to the task. Max was easily distracted. Behavior data collected by Max’s previous special education teacher indicated that Max turned in 2 out of 4 assignments on time and would stay on task for six consecutive minutes for 2 out of 5 opportunities.

Development of SDI planning sheets

Max’s special education teacher created two SDI planning sheets – one for Max’s reading needs (see, Figure 3) and another for his attentional and organizational needs (see, Figure 4). She added relevant

Specially-Designed Instruction (SDI) Planning Sheet				
Focus Area: Attention and Organization				
Related IEP Goal(s)				
<input type="checkbox"/> On-Task: When given an ability-level task, Max will attend to the task for 10 consecutive minutes on 4 out of 5 opportunities by the end of the school year.				
<input type="checkbox"/> Organization: When given an assignment, Max will use a checklist to complete and turn in the assignment on time for 4 out of 5 assignments by the end of the school year.				
Primary Support (Level 3): <i>Intensive Intervention</i>				
What: Differential Reinforcement of Other Behavior (DRO)				
<input type="checkbox"/> High levels of reinforcement received for on-task behavior				
Who: Co-teachers (Special and General Educators)				
Where: General Education Classroom; Resource Room				
When: On-going throughout the school day				
Secondary Support (Level 2): <i>Intensified Instruction</i>				
What: Self-Monitoring Checklist; Daily Report Card				
<input type="checkbox"/> Steps for turning in assignments				
<input type="checkbox"/> Daily feedback				
<input type="checkbox"/> Home-school communication				
Who: Co-teachers (Special and General Educators)				
Where: General Education Classroom; Resource Room				
When: Content Area Class Times				
<input type="checkbox"/> Conference with the special education teacher at the beginning and end of the day				
Access Support (Level 1): <i>Accommodations and Modifications</i>				
What: Extra time for assignments; Extended due dates; Frequent reminders				
Who: General Educator				
Where: General Education Classroom				
When: Extra time for assignment (daily); Extended due dates (as needed); Frequent reminders (daily)				
Progress Monitoring				
What and When:				
DRO data sheet= on-going throughout the day	Daily Report Card = daily			
Reporting to Families*: _____ Daily _____ Monthly _____ Quarterly _____ Every marking period				
*The frequency of reporting requirements will be specified on the IEP.				

Figure 4. SDI sheet for max's attention and organization goals.

IEP goals to the top of the sheet and systematically identified appropriate instructional and behavioral supports beginning with Level 3.

To address Max's needs as identified in his PLAAFP, his special education teacher used her specialized knowledge of reading intervention to plan for his intensive intervention. Max's teacher planned for a structured literacy intervention (Spear-Swerling, 2022) with a focus on remediating specific skills relevant to Max's IEP goals in decoding, spelling, fluency, handwriting, written expression, and comprehension (see, Figure 3). Furthermore, Max's teacher ensured that the intensive intervention was explicit and systematic (e.g., the intervention included frequent opportunities to respond with immediate, corrective feedback; a mastery-oriented approach; Hughes et al., 2017; Rosenshine, 1995). Max's teacher determined that she would provide the structured literacy intervention in the resource room through daily 1.5-hour sessions with other students on her caseload who also required this type of intervention.

Next, Max's special education teacher identified Level 2, intensified instruction, to align with Level 3 services. Max's special education teacher decided that Level 2 support would occur in the general education classroom. Max's special education and general education teacher determined that

intensifying general reading instruction through PALS 2-6 (D. Fuchs et al., 2011) would be beneficial to support his reading fluency and comprehension needs. PALS would be implemented twice per week. The paraprofessional would assist with PALS implementation as the intervention would occur in the mornings when the special educator was not in the general education classroom. The special educator also decided to include small-group instruction to re-teach and reinforce the lecture information provided during whole-class instruction during science and social studies. This small group instruction would occur in the afternoons when the special educator co-teaches in the general education classroom. In addition, the special educator agreed to create guided notes and online quizzes for content-area units that the general educator could use with all students in the class.

Finally, Max's special education teacher identified appropriate access supports with Level 1, accommodations and modifications. She determined that these supports would take place in the general education classroom. She would demonstrate for Max and the general educator how to use text-to-speech technology with grade-level instructional materials for daily support. Additionally, she consulted with the general education teacher on reducing writing assignments and providing alternative high-interest, low vocabulary books as needed to support Max's engagement with the general education curriculum.

To ensure Max's progress toward his IEP goals and the appropriate delivery of his SDI, Max's special education teacher developed a comprehensive progress-monitoring plan. To monitor Max's progress on his decoding goals, his special education teacher determined that he would complete a weekly decoding checkout that aligned with the specific targets of his IEP goal and the structured literacy intervention activities. To monitor his progress toward his reading fluency goal, Max's teacher would include weekly ORF CBMs. Max's special education teacher included weekly spelling checkouts corresponding to his spelling IEP goals and the scope and sequence of the structured literacy intervention. Max's special education teacher decided to measure his progress in writing by administering and scoring bi-weekly writing prompts according to the task and rubric described in his IEP goal and SDI decision-making planning sheet. Finally, to address his reading comprehension goal, Max's teacher would administer bi-weekly comprehension passage readings with corresponding questions.

Second, Max's teacher identified two goals related to his attentional and organizational needs. To address Max's on-task behavior needs, Max's teacher decided to use differential reinforcement of other behavior (DRO) as a Level 3 support to increase on-task behavior (Vance et al., 2012). Max's teacher ensured that the DRO plan included high levels of reinforcement required for behavior change. Max's special education and general education teacher decided to implement the DRO protocol across the school day (i.e., within the general education classroom and resource room settings). Because developing a DRO protocol required specialized knowledge, Max's special education teacher created the protocol and trained Max's teachers on how to implement the plan.

Next, Max's special education teacher identified Level 2 support to address his organizational needs. Max's teacher agreed that a self-monitoring checklist (Reid et al., 2005) with steps for turning in assignments (e.g., name on paper, answer all questions, put the assignment in the tray) would be a helpful intensification of instruction to support Max. Max's teachers decided to use a daily report card (DRC; Fabiano et al., 2010; Iznardo et al., 2020) as another Level 2 support to align with Level 3 support. For the DRC, Max's special education teacher operationalized Max's IEP goals and included specific criteria for meeting each goal. Max's teachers agreed that this intervention would allow general and special education teachers to evaluate Max's behavior throughout the day and provide Max with the necessary behavioral support he requires to progress toward his goals. His special education teacher decided to conference with Max at the beginning and end of the school day and use the DRC data to provide Max with feedback about his progress. His special education and general education opted to use the DRC for daily home-to-school communication between Max's caretakers and teachers as an added layer of support.

Finally, his special education teacher identified appropriate Level 1 supports to ensure access to the general curriculum and assist with his attentional and organizational needs. Max's general education

teacher agreed to provide extra time for assignments, frequent reminders to stay on task and turn in work, and extended due dates depending on the assignment.

After determining the levels of support needed to address Max's attentional and organizational needs, his special education teacher created a progress monitoring plan. To monitor his on-task behavior, Max's special education teacher created a data sheet using momentary time sampling to collect daily behavior data. Because Max's DRC aligned with his IEP goals, his special education teacher used the DRC as a permanent product to measure his progress with his organizational goal (Fabiano et al., 2010). She planned to collect Max's DRC daily.

Conclusion

The introduction of RTI as a process for SLD identification resulted in a shift in focus away from instruction that occurs *after* special education identification to instruction that occurs *prior to* special education identification. Despite this shift in focus and adoption of new instructional terminology (i.e., tiers 1, 2, and 3), students with specific learning disabilities are entitled to SDI once identified for special education services. Although research has demonstrated that “an ounce of prevention is better than a pound of . . . treatment” (Catts & Hogan, 2021), once students have been identified for special education services, the charge of the special educator is to ensure the delivery of treatment – SDI. The heart of SDI is the delivery of intensive intervention. Although less intensive supports will be part of a comprehensive approach to a student's instructional program, the IDEA compels the delivery of instruction that directly addresses the student's areas of need as identified within the PLAAFP. Given this, the SDI planning sheet can facilitate the delivery of intensive intervention shifting the focus back to how, when, where, and who will deliver targeted intervention, thereby embracing and upholding the spirit of the IDEA.

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