

# Office of Teaching and Learning

# Bringing the Special Education Playbook to Life: Writing IEPs that Support the Best Practices

# Introduction

The instructional best practices outlined in the <u>Special Education Playbook for System Leaders</u> (Playbook) are important for all students needing additional academic support, particularly those with mild to moderate disabilities with Individualized Educational Programs (IEPs).

The instructional best practices outlined in the playbook are most appropriate for students with mild to moderate disabilities such as specific learning disabilities. This encompasses roughly 95% of students with disabilities in most school systems and includes students taking the standard LEAP assessments. While the instructional best practices highlighted in the Playbook are especially aligned with the needs of students with mild to moderate disabilities and while these practices may also offer principles that can be thoughtfully adapted to benefit all students, students with significant cognitive disabilities, including mild or moderate intellectual disabilities or students taking LEAP Connect will need more specialized supports.

Many school systems in the state have begun to embrace these best practices and see their value. However, in many school systems, students without disabilities are more likely to access best practice interventions than students with disabilities because student's IEPs were written for (and continue to be written for) old and outdated services and supports that have not raised outcomes, as opposed to new practices that have succeeded.

This guide includes examples for writing best-practice IEPs in Louisiana and demonstrates how IEPs can support and supercharge best practice special education efforts, rather than unintentionally undermine them.

# **How IDEA Regulations Support the Best Practices and Writing IEPs in Alignment**

This IEP Guide is in alignment with and in support of the Special Education Playbook for System Leaders as well as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 2004) regulations and U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) clarifications included in the Playbook.

Specifically, several key principles of IDEA, including Specially Designed Instruction (SDI) and Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) help to ensure students with disabilities have access to high quality teaching and learning using the general education curriculum.

According to the IDEA law, Specially Designed Instruction "means adapting... the content, methodology, or delivery of instruction to address the unique needs of a student with disabilities so the student can access the general curriculum<sup>1</sup>." In other words, specially designed instruction is providing what students with disabilities need to access the general education curriculum. It is special, because it is exactly what they need.

However, nothing in the law suggests that if what a student needed most was provided to other students, including students without disabilities, that it is no longer specially designed instruction. In fact, OSEP addressed this issue in writing specifically because so many schools were uncertain. They stated:

"The fact that some services may also be considered "best teaching practices" or "part of the district's [or school system's] regular education program" does not preclude those services from meeting the definition of "special education" or "related services" and being included in the child's IEP. The LEA must provide a child with a disability specially designed instruction that addresses the unique needs of the child that result from the child's disability, and ensures access by the child to the general curriculum, even if that type of instruction is being provided to other children, with or without disabilities, in the child's classroom, grade, or building<sup>2</sup>."

Therefore, if a reading specialist, math interventionist, or general education teacher is the most qualified, trained or skilled in adapting instruction for students with disabilities in a specific content area, they can provide SDI for students with disabilities, so long as it adapts to and meets the child's unique needs resulting from their disability.

When IEP teams decide to use general educators to provide SDI for students with disabilities, not only should the general education teachers be included as a crucial member of the student's IEP team, the services they're providing should be clearly articulated on the IEP itself, including as Special Education Instruction in the services table and in the comments/notes section describing the services.

# How the IEP Can Supercharge Special Education Playbook Best Practices

**Playbook Best Practice: Content Strong Educators** 

IEP Section: Personnel Responsible for Implementing the Goal

Regular education teachers (and general education interventionists, title I teachers, specialists, etc.) can and should provide academic intervention for students with mild to moderate disabilities if they are the most skilled teacher in the student's area of need. In these cases, the special education teacher will serve in a consultative role working with the general education teacher to monitor student progress, ensure accommodations are consistently used, and recommend support adjustments as necessary.

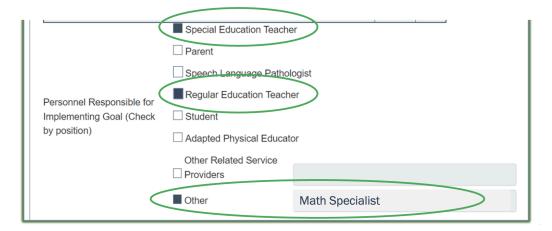
In this case, both the general education teacher or interventionist and the special education teacher's services should be clearly indicated in the student's IEP.

For many students with mild to moderate disabilities, both the special education and regular education teacher should be selected in the Personnel Responsible for Implementing Goal section of the IEP.

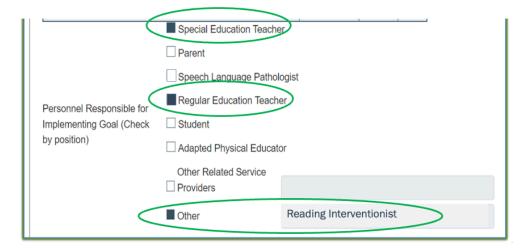
<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> 34 CFR § 300.39(b)(3)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> ED Letter to Chambers, p. 2

#### Example 1:



#### Example 2:



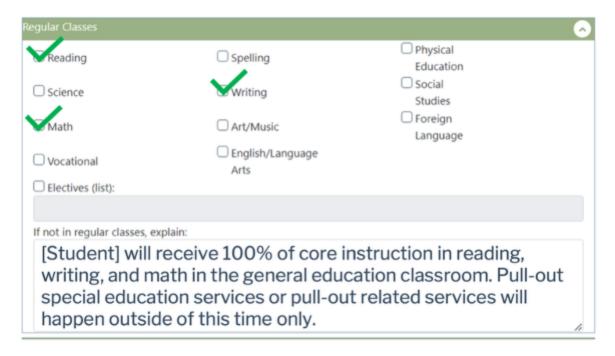
# **Playbook Best Practice: Protecting Core Instruction**

#### **IEP Section: Regular Classes**

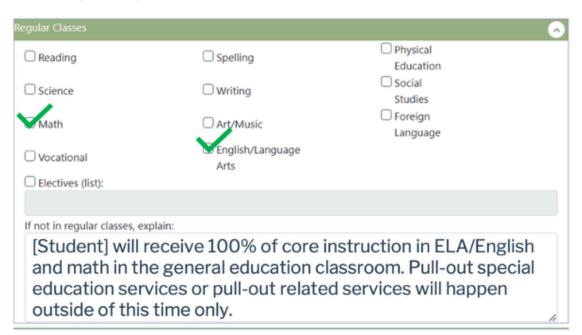
Nearly all students with mild to moderate disabilities should receive 100% of grade level core instruction in the general education classroom for ELA/English and math, with accommodations as prescribed in the student's IEP. Additional supports and services needed by the child should be provided outside of these core instruction periods.

Therefore, all three boxes for reading, writing, and math in the Program/Services section should be checked under Regular Classes. If students need to be pulled out of a general education classroom for special education and related services or extra-time intervention, use this section to specify what other class they will miss or note that such services will happen outside of core ELA/English and math so that they do not miss this grade level instruction.

#### **Elementary Example:**



#### **Secondary Example:**

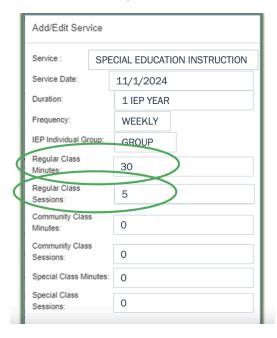


# **Playbook Best Practice: Targeted Direct Instruction Intervention**

#### **IEP Section: Services/Placement Table**

Students with mild to moderate disabilities who are struggling academically need additional time, on top of core instruction, to re-learn previous years' material, fill in knowledge gaps, and clarify misconceptions. This extra time support should consist primarily of targeted direct instruction that is connected to a high-quality curriculum and focused on the student's specific area of need, rather than time spent on independent work, computer programs, or homework help.

**Example 1:** This high school student will receive additional support in math provided by a general education math specialist.



# **IEPs Must Support the Best Practices**

#### **IEP Section: Comment Boxes**

The comment boxes should be used to write a more detailed description of the services and supports needed and can help ensure the IEP supercharges best practices for students with disabilities. Notes in the comments box should include details on:

- The student's specific area(s) of need
- What the services/supports will look like
- Who will be responsible for delivering it
- The role of the special education teacher
- The role of the general education teacher
- When the services will and will not take place

The notes in a student's IEP should clearly state the precise area of need the student is receiving support for, and should not include generic descriptions like *special education instruction*, *special education minutes*, or *special education resource room*.

#### **Elementary Example:**

COMMENTS

Given (student's) learning disability in the reading areas of phonemic awareness, fluency, and comprehension, a reading specialist will provide additional small group reading support for 30 minutes 5 times a week outside the student's core instruction in reading and math. The special education teacher will serve an indirect consultative role with (student's) general education teacher and reading specialist for 15 minutes/week to review progress and adjust practices, if necessary.

#### **Secondary Example:**

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(Student) will receive small group support in the areas of operations and measurements from a content-strong special education teacher with training and expertise in middle school math. This support will take place 5 days/week for 45 minutes. This support will be provided in addition to the student's core general education math class. Student will miss \_\_\_\_\_ class in order to access this support.

# **Updating Existing IEPs**

When school systems decide to develop, expand and implement the Playbook's best practices, the most commonly voiced obstacle is, "These might be helpful, but they aren't in the student's IEP so we can't provide them." IEPs can and should be changed, alongside the IEP team, if more effective and more appropriate supports are available. Without updating IEPs to reflect the current best practices, many students will unintentionally be left out from these services and supports.

# **One IEP, Two Timeframes**

Often the transition to new service offerings will start at the start of a new school year. This eases implementation of new approaches but can complicate IEP writing. What services should be written into an IEP that runs from January to December, for example?

Rather than have two IEP meetings, one in December and then another in the spring, it's better to have one IEP cover two explicit timeframes. For example, the IEP could say **to provide current practice services from January to May and then state that come August the supports and services will switch to the new best practices.** This allows for multiple students to shift to new services at once, even if IEP meetings take place over many months. This also eliminates the need to have a second IEP meeting. These details can be explained in the Comments section of the IEP.

COMMENTS

[Student] will continue to receive support via the Study Skills class taught by a special education teacher until the end of the 2024 school year.

For the 2025 school year, beginning in August, 2024 [student] will be enrolled in the in the Math Lab course (course code ####) which is held 5 times weekly for 45 minutes and taught by a general education math teacher. [Student] will not be enrolled in Study Skills for the 2025 school year. The special education teacher will conduct twice monthly progress check ins with the Math Lab teacher to determine program effectiveness and adjustments, if required, based on the student's unique disability needs. This class will be taken in addition to the student's grade level core math class.

# **Amending IEPs**

IEP teams can also opt to amend the IEP rather than redraft the entire IEP and give parents the option to approve these changes without the need for a meeting. Louisiana's IEP Handbook for Students with Exceptionalities outlines that when amending an IEP, the parent of a student with a disability may agree not to convene an IEP Team meeting for the purposes of making the changes, instead may sign an amendment form agreeing to amend or modify the student's current IEP, and receive a revised copy of the IEP with the amendments incorporated once the changes have been made. This waiver is often included in the Letter of Prior Notice of Proposed or Refused Action by the Local Education Agency that is already sent to parents. When the communication is clear, consistent, and thorough, school systems can expect 80%-90% of parents/ guardians to sign the waiver without the need for a meeting.

Date:
To the parents of:
The purpose of this letter is to inform you of the school system's Individualized Education Program (IEP) team's $\square$ proposal $\square$ refusal to:
Change your child's educational placement
Change your child's special education support service
Change your child's special education related service
Change your child's school exit option
Change your child's assessment decision
Other (describe)
The IEP team proposes refuses to take this action because:
New supports are available that will best address [Student's] area(s) of need by providing
them with greater access to staff with deep content expertise and extra time to learn.
The IEP team considered the following options in making this decision:

# **IEP Samples**

1. Elementary with a disability – small group reading support provided by general education reading specialist

	· · · · -		Individual /	Regula	er week.	Comn	aaita.	Special	Class
Service	Date to Begin	Duration	Group	Minutes	Sessions	Minutes	Sessions	Minutes	Sessions
Special Education Instruction	Date to Dog	Paration	o.oup	30	5	minutos	Cocciono	······································	200010110
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Service	Date to Begin	Frequency	Individual / _ Group	Regula Minutes	r Class Sessions	Com Minutes	munity Sessions	Specia Minutes	al Class Sessions
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	<u> </u>					Total	Number of Minutes	in Special Setting	per Week:
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Given (student's) learning specialist will provide ad instruction in reading an general education teach	ditional sma d math. The	ll group r special e	eading su	pport for 3 teacher wi	30 minutes 5 Il serve an ir	5 times a wo	eek outside t sultative role	the student with (stud	's core ent's)

**Note**: The comments section can call for a specific teacher/class (i.e. Mrs. Smith's reading intervention class) or can note the content expertise needed for teaching the subject such as a "reading specialist" or a "highly skilled teacher of reading" or "teacher with extensive training in teaching reading."

In this case, the reading specialist is the most appropriate teacher for the student and the service will be provided in the regular class setting. The special education teacher will serve an indirect consultative role.

# 2. Elementary Student Struggling in Reading – small group reading support provided by content strong special education teacher

			Individual /	Regula	r Class	Comm	nunity	Special	Class
Service	Date to Begin	Duration	Group	Minutes	Sessions	Minutes	Sessions	Minutes	Sessions
Special Education Instruction								30	5
						Total N	umber of Minutes i	n Special Setting	per Week:
			Individual /	Regula	r Class	Com	munity	Speci	al Class
Service	Date to Begin	Frequency	Group	Minutes	Sessions	Minutes	Sessions	Minutes	Sessions
						Total	Number of Minutes	in Special Settin	g per Week:
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Given (student's) learning will receive extra small goinstruction in reading and teaching reading at the extra small going g	roup readin d math, tau	g suppor ght by a	t for 30 m	inutes 5 ti	mes a week	, scheduled	outside the	student's o	ore

**Note**: The comments section can call for a specific teacher/class (i.e. Mrs. Smith's reading intervention class) or can note the content expertise needed for teaching the subject such as a "reading specialist" or a "highly skilled teacher of reading" or "teacher with extensive training in teaching reading."

In this case, a highly trained special educator with expertise in teaching reading at the elementary level is the most appropriate teacher for the student and the service will be provided in the special class setting.

#### 3. Elementary Student Struggling in Reading - with What I Need (WIN) Block in Schedule

			Individual /	Regula	r Class	Comm	unity	Special	Class
Service	Date to Begin	Duration	Group	Minutes	Sessions	Minutes	Sessions	Minutes	Sessions
Special Education Instruction				30	5				
			Individual /	Damila	. 01			in Special Setting	
Service	Date to Begin Frequency		Group Minutes		r Class Sessions	Minutes	nunity Sessions	Special Class Minutes Sessions	
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**Note**: The comments section can call for a specific teacher/class (i.e. Mrs. Smith's reading intervention class) or can note the content expertise needed for teaching the subject such as a "reading specialist" or a "highly skilled teacher of reading" or "teacher with extensive training in teaching reading."

In this case, a reading interventionist is the most appropriate teacher for the student and the service will be provided in the regular class setting during the WIN block.

# 4. Elementary Student Receiving Speech Therapy Services

			Individual /	Regula	r Class	Comm	unity	Special	Class
Service	Date to Begin	Duration	Group	Minutes	Sessions	Minutes	Sessions	Minutes	Sessions
Speech Therapy								30	2
						Total N	ımber of Minutes i	n Special Setting	per Week:
			Individual /	Regula	r Class	Comr	nunity	Speci	al Class
Service	Date to Begin	Frequency	Group	Minutes	Sessions	Minutes	Sessions	Minutes	Sessions
						Total	l Number of Minutes	in Special Setting	n per Week:
Attends Regular Early Childhood P. Receives majority of hours of sp. Attends Regular Early Childhood P. Receives majority of hours of sp. Receives majority of hours of sp. Receives majority of hours of sp.	pecial education and related secial education and related secial education and related second repair to the second related second education and related second related rel	services in the services in son er week services in the	ne other location regular early ch	n nildhood program	☐ Separa ☐ Separa ☐ Separa Attends ne	pecial Education Pro ate Special Educatio ate School either a regular early /es majority of speci /es majority of speci /es	n Class	idential Facility  nor a special educated services at hor	ation program
COMMENTS									
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# 5. Middle School Student Struggling in Math

Services / Placement									
STUDENTS TOTAL INSTRUCTIONAL DAY (	Minutesh		udent attends s	obool Dalawa	oer week.				
STODENTS TOTAL INSTRUCTIONAL DAT	winutes).		Individual /		r Class	Comn	nunity	Special	Class
Service	Date to Begin	Duration	Group	Minutes	Sessions	Minutes	Sessions	Minutes	Sessions
Special Education Instruction	<b>_</b>							45	5
						Total N	umber of Minutes	in Special Setting	per Week:
					r Class	Com	Community		ial Class
Service	Date to Begin	Frequency	Group	Minutes	Sessions	Minutes	Sessions	Minutes	Sessions
						Total	Number of Minute	s in Special Settin	g per Week:
PLACEMENT/SERVICE DETERMINATION O	CHECKLIST							•	
Attends Regular Early Childhood Program at I	least 10 hours per	week			Attends S	pecial Education Pro	ogram (not in any re	gular early childhoo	od program)
Receives majority of hours of special educ	ation and related	services in the	regular early cl	hildhood program n	☐ Separa	ate Special Education		sidential Facility	an program,
Attends Regular Early Childhood Program les					Attends no	either a regular early	childhood program	nor a special educ	ation program
Receives majority of hours of special educ	ation and related	services in the				ves majority of spec			
Receives majority of hours of special educ	ation and related	services in son	ne other locatio	n	☐ Recelv locatio		al education and re	lated services at se	rvice provider or other
COMMENTS									
(Student) will receive sma	ll group su	nnort in	the area	s of operation	ons and mo	acuraments	from a con	tont strong	special
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education teacher with tr	aining and	expertise	e in midd	lle school m	ath. This su	ipport will ta	ake place 5	days/week t	for 45
minutes. This support will	he provid	ed in add	lition to t	he student	s core gene	ral educatio	n math clas	s Student	will miss
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class in order to	o access th	ıs suppor	τ.						
L									

# 6. Middle School Student Struggling in Reading

			Individual /	Regula	r Class	Comm	unity	Special	Class
ervice	Date to Begin	Duration	Group	Minutes	Sessions	Minutes	Sessions	Minutes	Sessions
Special Education Instruction								45	5
			<u> </u>			Total N	umber of Minutes	in Special Setting	per Week:
			Individual /	Regula	r Class	Com	nunity	Speci	al Class
ervice	Date to Begin	Frequency	Group	Minutes	Sessions	Minutes	Sessions	Minutes	Sessions
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Receives majority of hours of special edur Receives majority of hours of special edur MMENTS  (Student) will receive sma	all group su			_					_
Receives majority of hours of special edu- Receives majority of hours of special edu-	all group su	ing and e	xpertise i	in teaching	reading at t	the middle s	chool level.	This suppo	rt will take

# 7. High School Student Struggling in Math – Math Lab Intervention Course

			Individual /	Regula	r Class	Comm	unity	Special	Class
Service	Date to Begin	Duration	Group	Minutes	Sessions	Minutes	Sessions	Minutes	Sessions
Special Education Instruction				45	5				
			Individual /	Demula	v Class			in Special Setting	
Service	Date to Begin	Frequency	Group	Regula Minutes	Sessions	Minutes	nunity Sessions	Minutes	al Class Sessions
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						Total	Number of Minute	s in Special Setting	per Week:
PLACEMENT/SERVICE DETERMINATIO	N CHECKLIST								
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Receives majority of hours of special en Receives majority of hours of special en	ducation and related	services in the	regular early ch	nildhood program		ate Special Educationate School	n Class Re	sidential Facility	
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# 8. High School Student Struggling in Math – High Dose Tutoring

			Individual /	Regula	r Class	Comm	unity	Special	Class
ervice	Date to Begin	Duration	Group	Minutes	Sessions	Minutes	Sessions	Minutes	Sessions
Special Education Instruction								45	3
	<u> </u>					Total N	umber of Minutes	in Special Setting	per Week:
			Individual /	Regula	r Class	Com	nunity	Speci	al Class
ervice	Date to Begin	Frequency	Group	Minutes	Sessions	Minutes	Sessions	Minutes	Sessions
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