# Guidance for Leading Inclusive Special Education Programs:

## Creating Compliant Systems for Student Success

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# Guidance for Leading Inclusive Special Education Programs

All students deserve equitable access to high quality instruction. Yet, school systems often face unique and complex challenges in improving outcomes for students with disabilities. Addressing these challenges is multifaceted and requires strong leaders who can effectively coordinate programming within and across departments and schools to increase equitable access to inclusive learning opportunities for students with disabilities.

To support the increased effectiveness of special education programming through effective and inclusive system-wide planning, the department will release seven guidance documents to school systems in 2022. The guidance will cover the highest impact areas of special education programming to most effectively improve outcomes for students with disabilities. Each guidance document will be accompanied by an hour long webinar to support implementation.

In partnership with and alongside school and school system leaders, special education leaders are encouraged to review the guidance documents and attend webinars. Please note: release dates and topics are subject to change.

| TOPICS FOR 2021-2022 GUIDANCE FOR LEADING INCLUSIVE SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS | |
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| **Month** | **Topic** |
| January | **Leveraging Data to Align Budgets and Spending to Priorities** |
| February | Creating Compliant Systems for Student Success <br> **Webinar: February 22 at 1 pm** |
| March | Cultivating a Student-Centered Vision of Teaching and Learning Aligned to Louisiana's Academic Priorities |
| April | Student Well-Being and Trauma Informed Supports |
| May | Positive Behavior Intervention and Functional Behavior Assessment |
| June | Identifying, Engaging, and Managing Key Stakeholders |
| June | Inclusive and Accessible Learning |

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**Creating Compliant Systems for Student Success**

*How can school systems develop and maintain compliant systems that improve student outcomes?*

## Purpose

Oftentimes school systems create structures to achieve compliance that fail to drive student outcomes. While these systems may support compliance, they often fail to meet the individualized needs of students with disabilities and improve system-wide efficiency. The result? School leaders and teachers are burdened by processes that divide their attention and reduce their otherwise effective practices in meeting the immediate needs of students.

To facilitate effective and inclusive special education programs, leaders must be willing to rethink special education by examining systems "that limit opportunities for children with disabilities; practices that put the needs of 'the system' over the individual needs of a child; (and) policies that, no matter how well-intentioned, do not have the impact of improving outcomes for students." To do this effectively, system leaders should feel empowered to go back to the basics by gaining a deep understanding of the compliance laws and then begin an examination of the compliance systems at work in their schools. This examination should continue with

- coordination among colleagues across key departments to assess the school systems current compliance systems to determine whether or not they are grounded in law,
- creation of new systems, when necessary, that are effective and efficient in meeting the individualized needs of students with disabilities, and
- Conduct regular effectiveness reviews and revision, when appropriate, to ensure compliance systems that drive student outcomes while meeting the compliance expectations set out in policy.

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### Spotlight: Sabine Parish School District

"Because of the trust we've built with teachers, in the first six weeks of school, we know which students will need more support." - Bridget Corley, Director of Early Education

In Sabine, the Director of Early Education, Pupil Appraisal, and Pre-K Disabilities Coordinator collaborate to create a student centered system which supports accurate and early identification. It first begins with the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ), administered by teachers within the first 30 days of school to identify individualized needs so that supports can be provided in the general education classroom early in the school year. Pupil Appraisal and the Pre-K Coordinator work with teachers to identify progress in areas of concern and determine if an SBLC meeting is needed. The system is streamlined and cohesive to ensure teachers have support in providing effective interventions to students through the SBLC to ensure that all students are prepared for kindergarten. After reviewing data cross departmentally, the screener has shown to be accurate in identifying key areas for interventions to support improved outcomes for students.

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**Self Assessment**: Before reading on, take the self-assessment. The self-assessment will support system leaders to identify practices tied to key components of IDEA and ESSA. This will support system leaders in identifying a focus area for implementation of compliant systems that drive student outcomes.
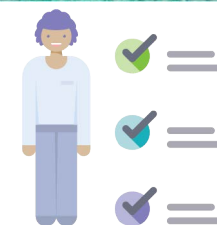
**SELF ASSESSMENT**

**ESSA and IDEA**

Rethinking special education systems to drive student outcomes will first require an examination of a deep understanding of ESSA and IDEA. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), while not new, continue to impact the everyday actions and decisions of educators. ESSA was signed into law in 2015 "to provide all children significant opportunity to receive a fair, equitable, and high-quality education, and to close educational achievement gaps." IDEA, first passed in 1975 as the Education of Handicapped Children Act was created "to ensure that all children with disabilities have available to them a free 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." While there are differences in what ESSA and IDEA address, they both clearly share the common thread of creating structure around educators' responsibility to meet student needs and positively impact student outcomes.

Use the chart and guiding questions below to assess your school systems compliance structures and examine the extent to which these structures are grounded in the tenets of ESSA and IDEA.

Guiding Questions:
- In what ways do the tenets of ESSA and IDEA influence the structure of your programming for students?
- Does your school system have compliance structures in place that are not supported by the tenets of ESSA and IDEA?
- In which area(s) below could your school system ensure student outcomes remain the primary focus?
- As a leader, how do you support and reinforce a mindset among building and district staff that promotes implementation of ESSA and IDEA?

| | **Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)** | **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)** |
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| **Advancing Access for All Students** | ● Upholds critical protections for disadvantaged and high-need students.<br>● Sustains and expands access to high-quality preschool. | ● Requires public school districts to ensure that students with disabilities receive a free appropriate public education (FAPE). |
| | **Example**: Jeremy is a 4-year-old preschooler with autism and is having behavior challenges at school. To effectively address this student's needs and ensure he has continued access to public education in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), the school reconvenes his IEP team meeting. During the IEP meeting, the team decides a Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA) is the most appropriate next step for meeting Jeremy's behavior needs. The team sets a date to reconvene the meeting to discuss the results of the FBA and make a decision as to whether or not a Behavior Intervention Plan will be the best next step for Jeremy. | |
| | **Non-Example**: Jeremy is repeatedly sent to the office due to outbursts in class. Jeremy sits in the office for an extended period of time waiting for someone to speak with him about his behavior. A call is made to Jeremy's mom where a school official says, "Jeremy is having a tough day at school today. We need you to take him home, but we don't have to log it into our system." | |
| **Funding and Accountability** | ● Helps to support and grow local innovations—including evidence-based and place-based interventions developed by local leaders and educators.<br>● Holds schools accountable based on criteria primarily related to state standardized test results and English language learner proficiency.<br>● Sets forth specific steps to follow for schools found to be in need of improvement, including identifying any inequitable distribution of resources. | ● Assists states in implementing a comprehensive system of early intervention services.<br>● Authorizes grants to state agencies, institutions of higher education, and other nonprofit organizations to support special education and related services.<br>● Ensures the rights of children with disabilities and their parents are protected.<br>● Assesses and ensures the effectiveness of efforts to educate children with disabilities. |
| | **Example:** Jaslin is a fourth grader who is not making grade level progress in ELA as anticipated. The school convenes a School Building Level Committee (SBLC) meeting where they review Jaslin's work samples and test scores. The team identifies targeted interventions to provide her for a specified period of time. The committee notes that they will reconvene at the end of that time period to discuss her progress. Jaslin's teacher, Mrs. Pate, is given additional support by the school's reading specialist to implement the interventions for Jaslin. | |
| | **Non-Example:** Mr. Robinson, an elementary principal, compiles a list of students who did not pass the LEAP 2025 last year. He identifies a group of 4th graders who are not making progress on unit assessments and did not pass the 3rd grade LEAP 2025. He flags these students as needing an evaluation and has a meeting with the Special Education Coordinator to determine next steps. | |

| | Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) | Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) |
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| **Academic Instruction** | • Requires states to have challenging academic standards in reading, math, and science to prepare students to succeed in college and career. These standards must apply to all students, regardless of the presence of a disability. | • Clarifies that IEPs must be aligned to grade-level academic standards.<br>• Describes specially designed instruction as: addressing a particular student's IEP goals; accounting for their disability; providing modifications or adaptations to content; and encouraging access to the general education curriculum. |
| | **Example**: Connor qualifies for special education services under the category of moderate intellectual disability. The IEP team discusses Connor's strengths, skills, needs, and challenges and considers what supplementary aids and services would be appropriate in order to determine Connor's most appropriate educational placement in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). The special education teacher, general education teacher, and reading and math instructional coaches work together to implement specially designed instruction, which allows Connor to access grade-level general education curriculum alongside nondisabled peers while still having his specific needs met. | |
| | **Non-Example**: Connor qualifies for special education services under the category of moderate intellectual disability. The IEP team decides to place him in a self-contained special education classroom, since that is where they place all students with moderate cognitive disabilities. The IEP team fails to identify skills and strengths that would facilitate Connor's participation in the general education setting, causing Connor to miss out on accessing grade-level curriculum alongside his nondisabled peers. | |
| **Assessment** | • Ensures annual statewide assessments measure students' progress toward high standards. | • 2017 - Revised the alternate assessment requirements to provide clarification on: (1) guidelines and procedures for conducting alternate assessments that measure the achievement of children with the most significant cognitive disabilities; and (2) the information that must be provided to IEP teams and parents. |
| | **Example**: Chaunte is a 2nd grade student who is eligible for special education services in multiple disability categories, including intellectual disability. Chaunte's IEP team carefully reviewed the [criteria for participating in the alternate assessment](#) before making the determination that she will participate in the regular assessment in 3rd grade. | |
| | **Non-Example**: Chaunte is a 2nd grade student who is eligible for special education services in multiple disability categories, including intellectual disability. Chaunte's IEP team determined that she would participate in the alternate assessment due to her identified intellectual disability and did not consult the criteria for participating in the alternate assessment. | |

| | Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) | Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) |
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| **College and Career Readiness** | • Both ESSA and IDEA promote the development of meaningful pathways to postsecondary opportunities by ensuring all students are college and career ready. | |
| | **Example**: Denise is a 10th grade student with a disability attending a local high school and is classified as having Other Health Impairment (OHI). At the beginning of her 8th grade year, her guidance counselor meets with her and her IEP team to discuss career opportunities, her current interests, and develop her Individual Graduation Plan (IGP).  In the middle of Denise's 9th grade year at her IEP meeting, she expressed interest in becoming a music teacher. Her guidance counselor (also a member of Denise's IEP team) discussed any adjustments to her IGP, the courses she would need to take in order to graduate on time, and extracurricular experiences to help her admittance to the University of her choice. Her IEP team updates her  transition plan geared toward those goals and incorporates that plan into the IEP. | |
| | **Non-Example**: Upon entering high school in 9th grade, Denise was placed into courses to obtain a Jump Start credential. During her IEP meeting this year, Denise expressed an interest in becoming a music teacher. The Special Education Coordinator told Denise that she would not graduate on time if she switched graduation pathways. | |
| **Parent and Family Engagement** | • Stipulates that states must engage in timely and meaningful consultation with stakeholders - including parents and families - in the development and implementation of state plans.<br>• Districts receiving Title I funds must develop a written parent and family engagement policy; a portion of the funds must be used to support specific activities related to parent and family engagement. | • Emphasizes the significant role played by parents and families in supporting the education of children with disabilities. (IDEA states, "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.") |
| | **Example:** Anywhere Parish Public Schools will be receiving Title I funds. In order to determine the best use of these funds, the school system develops a committee of diverse stakeholders including: school system leaders, school leaders, teachers, parents, and students to solicit their ideas around possible use of funds. After gathering a sampling of ideas from the committee, the school system sends out a survey to all parents to support in making a final decision for how the funds will be spent. | |
| | **Non-Example:** Anywhere Parish Public Schools will be receiving Title I funds. The Title Director holds a 30 minute meeting with the Superintendent to make slight adjustments to the previous year's spending plan for the Title I funds. | |

**Next steps**:

1. After completing the self-assessment and reviewing the IDEA and ESSA chart, identify at least one topic to explore in more detail with key stakeholders. Stakeholders may include, but are not limited to: Superintendent, Chief Academic Officer, Chief Financial Officer, Special Education Supervisor, Federal Programs Director, principals, special and general education teachers, and parents.

2. Attend the Creating Compliant Systems for Student Success webinar on February 22 at 1 pm with key school system stakeholders to ask questions and dive deeper into the information presented in this guidance document.