

BUILDING AND SUSTAINING INCLUSIVE EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES

ALIGNED WITH THE ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION
ACT OF 1965 (ESEA) AND PART B OF THE INDIVIDUALS WITH
DISABILITIES EDUCATION ACT (IDEA)



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INTRODUCTION

Our nation has demonstrated a steadfast commitment to providing every child with an equal opportunity to an education. Two Federal laws that address the education for children with disabilities are the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA)¹ and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), signed into law in 1965 and 1975,² respectively. Together, the ESEA and the IDEA provide the system and structure to ensure that children with disabilities³ have access to learning environments that meet their individual needs. The U.S. Department of Education (Department) is issuing this guidance to provide State educational agencies (SEAs), local educational agencies (LEAs), schools, educators,⁴ and members of the public with a better understanding of the ESEA and the IDEA requirements^{5,6,7} and guiding principles to support the implementation of inclusive educational practices for students with disabilities.

The ESEA was signed into law in 1965 by President Lyndon Baines Johnson, who believed that “full educational opportunity” should be “our first national goal.” The ESEA has focused on advancing equity and upholding critical protections for America’s students from disadvantaged backgrounds through its requirements, programs, and funding. Similarly, when President Gerald Ford signed into law the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, the predecessor statute to the IDEA, he did so in response to systemic exclusion of students with disabilities from public schools, which only educated one in five students with disabilities at that time.⁸ Since 1975, the IDEA has pioneered educational opportunity for children with disabilities through its mandate of a free appropriate public education (FAPE) provided in the least restrictive environment (LRE)—two primary requirements that continue to drive the education of children with disabilities today.

Disability is a natural part of the human experience. Almost 45 million adults in the U.S. have a disability,⁹ and nearly 7.9 million students ages 3 through 21¹⁰ received special education and related services under the IDEA in the 2023-2024 school year, representing over 15 percent of all children enrolled in public schools. The IDEA requires that every FAPE-eligible child with a disability receive an individualized education program (IEP) that includes information on how the child’s disability affects the child’s involvement and progress in the general education curriculum (i.e., the same curriculum as for nondisabled students) and includes goals that meet the child’s needs to enable the child to be involved in and make progress in the general education curriculum.¹¹ At the same time, the ESEA requires that States and LEAs apply the same challenging State academic standards to all public schools and public school students, including students with disabilities, in the State (except for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities for whom the State may define alternate academic achievement standards aligned with the State’s content standards).¹²

The IDEA and the ESEA have the same goal of improving academic achievement through high expectations and high-quality education programs. The ESEA works to achieve that goal by focusing on challenging State academic standards and accountability systems that are designed to measure student performance, providing supports for educators and resources for a well-rounded education, and emphasizing evidence-based instruction; and the IDEA complements those efforts by focusing on how to best support students with disabilities, individually and within ESEA-created systems.¹³ When Congress

reauthorized the IDEA in 2004, it found that the education of students with disabilities can be made more effective by coordinating the IDEA with other LEA, State, and Federal school improvement efforts, including improvement efforts under the ESEA.¹⁴ Recognizing that “the vast majority of students with disabilities can access the general education curriculum and perform at the same level as their non-disabled peers if given the appropriate accommodations,”¹⁵ this coordination ensures that students with disabilities benefit from such efforts and that special education is viewed as a service rather than a physical location.¹⁶ This coordination is particularly necessary given these data:

- In the 2022-2023 school year, the majority of students with disabilities spent 80% or more of their day in the general education class.^{17,18} However, the achievement gap between students with and without disabilities is significant, ongoing, and long standing.¹⁹ Despite increases in children and youth with disabilities being physically present in general education classrooms, students with disabilities experience less time learning content in the grade-level standards, less instructional time, and less content coverage than their nondisabled peers;²⁰
- Students with disabilities graduate high school at lower rates and drop out of school at higher rates than their peers without disabilities;²¹ and
- Students with disabilities graduate from college at lower rates than those without disabilities, and those with disabilities who did graduate were less likely to be employed full-time than their peers without disabilities.²²

In November 2023, the Department and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services jointly issued *Policy Statement on Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Early Childhood Programs*,²³ a resource that reaffirms that all young children with disabilities should have access to high-quality inclusive early childhood programs that provide individualized and appropriate support so they can fully participate alongside their peers without disabilities and achieve their full potential. From a child’s earliest educational experience to their access to postsecondary opportunities, inclusive educational practices can positively shape the outcomes of students with and without disabilities.^{24,25,26}

With this guidance, the Department furthers its mission of promoting student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access for students of all ages.²⁷ The Department believes that the implementation of inclusive educational practices is critical to meeting this goal. Therefore, this guidance:

- (1) describes selected requirements in the ESEA and the IDEA that align with inclusive educational practices; and
- (2) provides guiding principles to support the implementation of inclusive educational practices.

All children deserve to feel a sense of belonging in their learning environment. Designing systems and processes at the State and local levels that support the implementation of inclusive educational practices is critical to achieving this vision.

DESCRIPTION OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES

In this guidance, we will discuss how the following requirements in the IDEA and the ESEA align with inclusive educational practices:

- Students with disabilities must be placed in general education classes to the maximum extent appropriate, consistent with the LRE requirements described below;²⁸
- The same challenging State academic standards must apply to all public schools and all public school students in the State (except for the small percentage of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities for whom the State may define alternate academic achievement standards aligned with the State's content standards);²⁹
- Plans developed by the State, LEA, or school under Title I, Part A of the ESEA are coordinated with programs carried out under the IDEA;³⁰
- The IEP for a student with a disability must be designed to meet the child's needs that result from the disability to enable the child to be involved in and make progress in the general education curriculum,³¹ i.e., a curriculum aligned with the State's grade-level academic content standards for the grade in which the child is enrolled;³²
- Students with disabilities must be provided appropriate special education and related services, supplementary aids, and supports in the general education classroom, whenever appropriate based on the student's IEP;³³
- The IEP must also include the special education and related services, supplementary aids, and supports, and program modifications or supports for school personnel, that will be provided to enable the child to advance appropriately toward attaining the student's annual goals, and be educated and participate with other children with and without disabilities in the general education class and in extracurricular and other nonacademic activities;³⁴
- The IEP Team must include, among other participants, the parents³⁵ of the student with a disability;³⁶ and
- The personnel necessary to carry out the IDEA Part B must be appropriately and adequately prepared and trained, including having the content knowledge and skills to serve children with disabilities.³⁷

For the purposes of this document, the term "inclusive educational practices" refers to practices that:³⁸

- Provide high-quality teaching and learning environments, including those that are accessible, inclusive and flexible, that support student development and allow all students to be successful;
- Intentionally promote student participation and belonging in all learning and social activities, facilitated by differentiated instruction, interventions and individualized accommodations;
- Use high-quality, evidence-based Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) that are developmentally appropriate, are culturally and linguistically responsive, and foster students'—

- acquisition and use of knowledge and skills;
 - use of appropriate behaviors to meet their needs;
 - positive social emotional skills, including friendships with peers; and
 - sense of belonging;
- Recognize families as collaborative partners, experts, and engaged decision-makers in their students' lives and value and treat students with disabilities and their families with respect;
 - Support high-quality personnel preparation and professional development for all personnel who work with children with disabilities in order to ensure that such personnel have the skills and knowledge necessary to improve the academic achievement and functional performance of children with disabilities. This includes the use of evidence-based instructional practices, to the maximum extent possible;
 - Include whole-school approaches, such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL), MTSS, and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), to proactively support student needs; and
 - Provide systemic supports, such as appropriate staffing levels and technical assistance, to support the implementation of inclusive educational practices.

ESEA AND IDEA REQUIREMENTS THAT ALIGN WITH INCLUSIVE EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES

Creating Educational Systems to Support Inclusive Educational Practices that are Intentionally Designed and Implemented

The ESEA and the IDEA take two different, but complementary, approaches to creating State and local systems that support improving outcomes for children with disabilities. Title I, Part A of the ESEA focuses on establishing statewide goals and accountability and assessment systems that provide comparable public information for every public school in the State. The IDEA centers on ensuring that FAPE is made available to each eligible child with a disability. Together, the ESEA and the IDEA create State and local systems and policies that are the foundation for supporting individual student needs.

The purpose of Title I of the ESEA is to provide all children significant opportunity to receive a fair, equitable, and high-quality education, and to close achievement gaps. In this way, Title I helps to promote educational excellence and equity so that all students master the knowledge and skills that they need to be successful in college and the workforce. Under Title I, a State adopts challenging academic content standards that define what the State expects all students to know and be able to do; develops and administers assessments aligned to those standards; and adopts academic achievement standards aligned to the academic content standards to define levels of student achievement on the assessments. The ESEA requires a State to develop and implement challenging academic content and achievement standards in at least mathematics, reading/language arts, and science, and to apply the same academic standards to all public schools and students in public schools in the State.³⁹

Under the ESEA, each State must have a statewide accountability system⁴⁰ that includes multiple indicators of school performance and quality to annually evaluate the performance of all public schools in the State. The accountability system is used to identify schools that are in need of comprehensive support and improvement (CSI), targeted support and improvement (TSI) due to consistently underperforming groups of students, and additional targeted support and improvement (ATSI). States have discretion to design their accountability systems, including what measures are included and how the indicators are combined to evaluate schools. TSI and ATSI identification is based on whether a school has low-performing groups of students, including students with disabilities.

Each school identified for CSI, TSI, or ATSI is required to develop and implement a support and improvement plan consistent with the requirements in the ESEA.⁴¹ Under the ESEA, States must approve, monitor, and periodically review support and improvement plans for CSI schools.⁴² The ESEA also requires that LEAs approve and monitor implementation of TSI and ATSI plans.⁴³

States reserve a portion of their Title I allocation to provide school improvement funds under ESEA section 1003 to LEAs with one or more schools identified as CSI, TSI, or ATSI.⁴⁴ Any LEA with one or more identified schools is eligible to apply to receive school improvement funds. Activities supported with the ESEA section 1003 funds must be consistent with a school's comprehensive or targeted support and improvement plan.

The IDEA allows SEAs to use a portion of their IDEA Part B funds reserved for State-level activities to provide technical assistance to schools and LEAs along with direct services.⁴⁵ Activities funded under this IDEA provision may include direct services described in section 1003A(c)(3) of the ESEA to students with disabilities in schools or LEAs implementing CSI activities or TSI activities under section 1111(d) of the ESEA. Activities that may be funded under this IDEA provision also include providing professional development to special and general education teachers who teach students with disabilities, based on scientifically based research to improve educational instruction to improve academic achievement aligned with the challenging academic standards described in the ESEA. In 2024, 40 SEAs reserved a combined total of more than \$82 million of their State-level IDEA Part B funds for these purposes.

Like the ESEA, the IDEA also has provisions for improving results and outcomes for students. The IDEA requires the Department to make annual determinations for States on their level of implementation of the IDEA, and SEAs similarly must make annual determinations for LEAs on their level of implementation of the IDEA.⁴⁶ In making annual determinations for States, the Department considers the totality of information available about a State, including the State's State performance plan and the associated annual performance report, information from monitoring, and other publicly available information, to determine if a State meets the requirements and purposes of the IDEA, or if the State needs assistance, intervention, or substantial intervention in implementing IDEA requirements.⁴⁷ In making this determination, the Department has used both results and compliance data, and the results data has included information related to the participation of children with disabilities on statewide assessments; the participation and performance of children with disabilities on the most recently administered National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP); and data on the percentages of children with disabilities who dropped out and children with disabilities who graduated with a regular high school diploma.⁴⁸

Additionally, as a condition of receiving IDEA Part B funds, the SEA must provide an assurance that it has in effect policies and procedures to ensure the State has a general supervision system. This system has multiple components, including monitoring LEAs with a primary focus on:

- (1) improving educational results for children with disabilities; and
- (2) ensuring that LEAs meet the requirements under IDEA Part B, with a particular emphasis on those requirements that are most closely related to improving educational results for children with disabilities.⁴⁹

The IDEA regulations also require SEAs to conduct specific monitoring and technical assistance to ensure compliance with IDEA's LRE requirements.⁵⁰ Specifically, under 34 C.F.R. § 300.120, SEAs must carry out monitoring activities to ensure that the LRE requirements in 34 C.F.R. § 300.114 are implemented by LEAs.⁵¹ SEAs are further required to review an LEA's justification for its actions and assist in planning and implementing any necessary corrective actions if there is evidence that an LEA makes placements that are inconsistent with IDEA's LRE requirements in 34 C.F.R. § 300.114. Similarly, under 34 C.F.R. § 300.119, SEAs must carry out technical assistance and training activities to ensure that educators and administrators in all LEAs are fully informed about their responsibilities for implementing the LRE requirements in 34 C.F.R. § 300.114 and provided with technical assistance and training necessary to assist them in this effort.

While the ESEA and the IDEA use different approaches to develop systems at the State level to improve outcomes for students, together, they ensure that students with disabilities have access to the services needed to achieve goals that, while individualized to each student, are aligned with State standards.

OPERATIONALIZING THE ESEA AND IDEA: TWO STATE EXAMPLES

Louisiana: Special Education Playbook for System Leaders

In 2023, the Louisiana Department of Education issued the [Special Education Playbook for System Leaders](#). The playbook emphasizes three instructional best practices that are aligned with the principles of the ESEA and the IDEA:

- Provide and ensure access to high-quality core instruction;
- Provide additional instructional time each day for students with academic needs; and
- Develop content-strong educators.

Mississippi: Access For All Guide 2.0 & Inclusive Leadership Guide

In 2021, the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) issued the [Access for All Guide 2.0](#) to aid in improving quality classroom instruction for all students who receive instruction in general education settings, including students in early childhood programs, general education students, gifted learners, English learners, and students with disabilities. MDE's [Inclusive Leadership Guide](#) provides principals with strategies, resources, and best practices to support implementation of inclusive practices.

Teaching and Learning: Leveraging Systems to Support Inclusive Educational Practices

In this section, we describe the ESEA and the IDEA requirements related to teaching and learning and how, in meeting those requirements, SEAs and LEAs may develop and implement inclusive educational practices.

Using State and Local Report Cards to Drive Decision Making Regarding and Implementation of Inclusive Educational Practices

Under Title I of the ESEA, each SEA is required to publish State and local report cards that provide information on State, LEA, and school performance and progress. State and local report cards help ensure LEAs, schools, families, educators, and communities have critical data and a common framework for gauging educational progress and success⁵² and can be a powerful tool to drive inclusive educational practices, program improvement, and educational outcomes for children with disabilities. Specifically, by disaggregating data by student group, State and local report cards can be used to identify disparities that exist between children with and without disabilities in areas related to academic achievement. With this information, areas for improvement and success at the State, LEA, and school levels can be identified

and addressed. Additionally, State and local report cards provide data that can support local decision-making regarding the selection and implementation of evidence-based interventions and instructional practices, inform professional development, and support more informed resource allocation focused on inclusive educational practices.⁵³

State and local report cards are an important resource for parents and other interested parties, as they can use them to understand a school's challenges and successes. Information from report cards can be used to have targeted conversations about a student's school and can empower parents to be active partners in their child's education. It is important for SEAs and LEAs to consider how parents and other members of the public will use the data and present information in a manner that is appropriate for the target audience.⁵⁴ For example, parents and the public should have a clear picture of the academic achievement of students with disabilities. The information from report cards should guide discussions about how to focus an LEA's and school's resources on improving the educational program and increasing student opportunities and outcomes, including through the use of inclusive educational practices. This data-focused conversation can increase parental engagement in their child's education.

State and local report cards can be a powerful tool to drive inclusive educational practices, program improvement, and educational outcomes for children with disabilities.

State and local report cards require public reporting on a wide variety of student and school performance metrics, accountability determinations, per-pupil expenditures, and educator qualifications, and may include any other information that the SEA or LEA deems relevant.⁵⁵ State and local report cards are required to disaggregate data to show how subgroups of students, including children with disabilities, are performing.⁵⁶ Examples of elements required for each State and local report card include:⁵⁷

- Student achievement data (i.e., the number and percentage of students with disabilities at each level of achievement on the State mathematics, reading/language arts, and science assessments);
- Comparisons of achievement in the LEA to the State as a whole;
- Comparisons of achievement in the school to the LEA and the State as a whole;
- Percentages of students assessed and not assessed in each subject (i.e., participation rates);
- Performance on the State's other academic indicator for elementary and secondary schools that are not high schools (e.g., academic growth on the State assessments or another measure defined by the State);
- High school graduation rates;
- Performance on the School Quality or Student Success indicator(s) used in the State accountability system (examples of types of measures used by States include chronic

absenteeism, performance on State science or social studies assessments, and college and career readiness);

- The number and percentage of students assessed using an alternate assessment aligned with alternate academic achievement standards (AA-AAAS) for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities, by grade and subject;
- Postsecondary enrollment rates for each high school (if available); and
- School climate data (i.e., suspensions, expulsions) as reported through the Civil Rights Data Collection;
- Chronic absenteeism, as reported through the *EDFacts* initiative; and
- Progress toward State-designed long-term goals, including measurements of interim progress.

Using Title I Schoolwide and Targeted Assistance Programs to Support Inclusive Educational Practices

The purpose of Title I of the ESEA is to provide all children significant opportunity to receive a fair, equitable, and high-quality education, and to close educational achievement gaps.⁵⁸ There are two types of Title I programs: schoolwide and targeted assistance programs. In a schoolwide program, which is by far the most common approach, a school uses Title I funds to support comprehensive schoolwide reforms to upgrade the entire educational program of the school.⁵⁹ In contrast, in a targeted assistance program, a school uses Title I funds for specific students (i.e., students who are failing, or at risk of failing, to meet the State's academic achievement standards).⁶⁰ Students with disabilities may benefit from both schoolwide and targeted assistance programs under Title I.

Title I schoolwide programs are designed to proactively respond to school-based areas of need. The ESEA requires a school to conduct a comprehensive needs assessment, create a comprehensive schoolwide plan, and annually evaluate the schoolwide plan's effectiveness, as described below.⁶¹ These requirements reinforce the importance of collaboration between general and special educators, parents, and community members to develop and implement a schoolwide plan that addresses the academic and behavioral needs of all children, including students with disabilities.

- **Conducting a comprehensive needs assessment.** To ensure that a school's comprehensive plan best serves the needs of those children who are failing, or are at-risk of failing, to meet the challenging State academic standards, the school must conduct a comprehensive needs assessment,⁶² which should include analyzing student achievement data disaggregated by student groups,⁶³ including students with disabilities. Through this analysis, the academic and behavioral needs of students with disabilities can be identified. When conducting a needs assessment, a school must consult with a broad range of stakeholders, including parents, school staff, and others in the community, and examine relevant academic achievement data to understand students' most pressing needs and their root causes.⁶⁴ Where necessary, a school should engage in interviews, focus groups, or surveys, as well as review data on students,

educators, and schools, to gain a better understanding of the root causes of the identified needs.⁶⁵

- **Developing a comprehensive schoolwide plan** that describes how the school will improve academic achievement throughout the school, but particularly for the lowest-achieving students, by addressing the needs identified in the comprehensive needs assessment.⁶⁶ The schoolwide plan must include a description of how the strategies the school will be implementing will provide opportunities and address the learning needs of all students in the school, particularly the needs of the students at risk of not meeting the challenging State academic standards.⁶⁷ The plan must also contain descriptions of how the methods and instructional strategies that the school intends to use will strengthen the academic program in the school, increase the amount and quality of learning time, and help provide an enriched and accelerated curriculum, which may include programs and activities necessary to provide a well-rounded education.^{68,69} As part of this process, schools should examine whether students with disabilities are failing, or are at-risk of failing, to meet the challenging State academic standards. In developing the schoolwide plan, school leaders should collaborate with school-based and LEA special education staff. Schools may consider utilizing UDL,⁷⁰ MTSS,⁷¹ and PBIS⁷² in their plan. Further, just like effective team teaching involves general and special education teachers, proactive and ongoing collaboration and planning between general and special education teachers and leaders is critical in implementing strategies to address the educational needs of students with disabilities through a schoolwide plan. To ensure that the plan results in progress toward addressing the needs of the school, the plan should include benchmarks for the evaluation of program results. This plan may be integrated into an existing improvement plan.⁷³
- **Annually evaluate the schoolwide plan** using data from the State's assessments and other student performance data to determine if the schoolwide program has been effective in increasing student achievement, particularly for those students who had been furthest from achieving State standards. Schools must regularly revise the plan, as necessary, based on student needs and the results of regular monitoring of the implementation of the plan to ensure continuous improvement.^{74,75}

Consolidating Federal, State, and Local Funds in a Schoolwide Program

In implementing a schoolwide plan, the ESEA allows LEAs and schools to consolidate funds from Title I and other Federal education programs with State and local funds.⁷⁶ By consolidating funds in a schoolwide program, a school can more effectively design and implement a comprehensive plan to upgrade the entire educational program in the school as informed by the school's comprehensive needs assessment. When a school consolidates funds in a schoolwide program, those funds lose their individual identity, and the school may use the funds to support any activity of the schoolwide program without regard to which program contributed the specific funds used for a particular activity. The school and LEA must ensure that the schoolwide program, taken as a whole, continues to meet the intent and purpose of each program included in the consolidation.⁷⁷ Each SEA must also ensure that it will modify or eliminate State fiscal and accounting barriers so that these funds can be more easily consolidated.⁷⁸

A schoolwide program school may also consolidate funds received under Part B of the IDEA. The IDEA provides a formula for LEAs that wish to consolidate a portion of their IDEA Part B funds in any fiscal year to carry out a Title I schoolwide program.⁷⁹ First, the LEA determines the amount of funds it received under the IDEA Part B section 611 (ages 3-21) and Section 619 (ages 3-5) programs for that fiscal year. Second, the LEA must divide that total amount of its IDEA Part B (Section 611 and section 619) subgrants by the number of children with disabilities in the jurisdiction of the LEA. Third, the LEA then multiplies this figure by the number of children with disabilities who will be participating in the schoolwide program. The resulting amount is the maximum amount of IDEA Part B funds that the LEA may consolidate to carry out a schoolwide program.

LEAs that consolidate IDEA Part B funds in a schoolwide program are subject to the following conditions under IDEA:

- IDEA Part B funds must still be counted as Federal funds for purposes of the IDEA's excess cost and LEA maintenance of effort calculations.
- Regardless of how the IDEA Part B funds are expended, children with disabilities in a schoolwide program school must receive services in accordance with a properly developed IEP and be afforded all the rights and services guaranteed to children with disabilities and their parents under the IDEA.

Examples of Use of Funds in a Schoolwide Program to Support Inclusive Educational Practices (Based on the Needs Assessment)

Inclusive educational practices help to remove barriers to learning, utilize evidence-based interventions and instruction that support students' academic and social emotional learning, value and promote students with disabilities learning alongside their peers without disabilities, and create a learning environment where each student feels a sense of belonging. Inclusive educational practices often serve as the foundation for cultivating the rightful presence of all students by recognizing their inherent value. The following activities could be funded in a schoolwide program to support inclusive educational practices, based on the school comprehensive needs assessment, that could benefit all students and students with disabilities specifically when implementing IEPs.

- Increased learning time.
- Instructional coaches to provide high-quality, school-based professional development.
- Evidence-based strategies to accelerate the acquisition of content knowledge for children with disabilities.
- MTSS to allow for early identification of children with learning or behavioral needs and to provide a tiered response based on those needs.
- Counseling, school-based mental health programs, mentoring services, and other strategies to improve children's nonacademic skills.
- School climate interventions (e.g., anti-bullying strategies and PBIS).

- Equipment, materials, and training needed to compile and analyze student achievement data to monitor progress, alert the school to struggling students, and drive decision making.
- Devices and software for students to access digital learning materials and collaborate with peers, and related training for educators (including accessible devices and software needed by students with disabilities).
- Activities that have been shown to be effective at increasing family and community engagement in the school, including family literacy programs.
- Career and technical education programs to prepare students for postsecondary education and the workforce.
- Activities designed to increase access to and prepare students for success in high-quality advanced coursework to earn postsecondary credit while in high school (e.g., Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, early college high schools, and dual or concurrent enrollment programs).

In order to operate a Title I schoolwide program, the school must have at least 40 percent of students from low-income backgrounds or have received a waiver from the State. Otherwise, the Title I school must operate a Title I targeted assistance program, in which the school provides services to students with the greatest need for assistance — i.e., those students identified by the school as failing, or most at risk of failing, to meet the challenging State academic standards. (ESEA section 1111(b)(1)(A)).⁸⁰ In a school operating a targeted assistance program, Title I funds may be used, among other uses, to provide professional development to teachers, principals, other school leaders, paraprofessionals, and, if appropriate, specialized instructional support personnel (SISPs), and other school personnel who work with eligible children in a Title I targeted assistance program or in the general education program.⁸¹

IEP Development and Implementation that Aligns with Inclusive Educational Practices

Under the IDEA, FAPE is provided through an appropriately developed IEP based on the individual needs of the child.⁸² The IEP must include a child's present levels of academic achievement and functional performance, including the impact of a child's disability on their involvement and progress in the general education curriculum.⁸³ In addition, the IEP must include a statement of measurable annual goals, including academic and functional goals designed to meet the child's needs that result from the child's disability to enable the child to be involved in and make progress in the general education curriculum.⁸⁴ The IEP must also include the special education and related services, supplementary aids and services, and program modifications or supports for school personnel that will be provided to enable the child to, among other things, be involved in and make progress in the general education curriculum.⁸⁵

While the term "general education curriculum" is not defined in the IDEA, the Department's regulations implementing Part B of the IDEA state that the general education curriculum is "the same curriculum as for nondisabled children."⁸⁶ The Department previously explained its interpretation of "the same curriculum as for nondisabled children" to be a curriculum aligned with the State's grade-level academic

content standards for the grade in which the child is enrolled.⁸⁷ Therefore, the Department's longstanding position is that "in order to make FAPE available to each eligible child with a disability, the special education and related services, supplementary aids and services, and other supports in the child's IEP must be designed to enable the child to advance appropriately toward attaining his or her annual IEP goals and to be involved in, and make progress in, the general education curriculum based on the State's academic content standards for the grade in which the child is enrolled."⁸⁸

As the Supreme Court stated in *Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District Re-1*, "advancement from grade to grade is appropriately ambitious for most children in the regular classroom;" however, the Court also noted that while these "goals may differ...every child should have the chance to meet challenging objectives."⁸⁹ Thus, in order to make FAPE available to each eligible child with a disability, the child's IEP must be designed to enable the child to be involved in, and make progress in, the general education curriculum.⁹⁰

The definition of "special education" includes specially designed instruction, which adapts, as appropriate to the needs of an eligible child, the content, methodology, or delivery of instruction to address the unique needs of the child that result from the child's disability and to ensure access of the child to the general curriculum, so that the child can meet the educational standards that apply to all children within the jurisdiction of the LEA.⁹¹

Supplementary aids and services are defined to include aids, services, and other supports that are provided in general education classes, other education-related settings, and in extracurricular and non-academic settings, to enable children with disabilities to be educated with non-disabled children to the maximum extent appropriate in accordance with 34 C.F.R. §§ 300.114 through 300.116.⁹² Supplementary aids and services may include supports to address environmental needs (e.g., preferential seating, minimizing distracting classroom displays), pacing of instruction (e.g., extended time, providing breaks),

INCLUSIVE EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES IN ACTION: CONTENTS OF THE IEP

Sometimes referred to as the "blueprint" for a child's special education experience, an IEP describes a child's current abilities, skills, strengths, and challenges; sets annual academic and functional goals that are State standards-based, ambitious but achievable; and establishes the special education and related services, supplementary aids and services, program modifications, and support for school personnel, the child needs to make progress in the general education curriculum.

The IEP development process provides the IEP Team (consistent with IEP Team definition in section 614(d)(1)(B) and (D) of the IDEA and 34 C.F.R. § 300.321) an opportunity to collaborate and develop a vision for the child's education that reinforces high expectations for academic, social, behavioral, and developmental outcomes. The child's IEP must be developed, reviewed, and revised in accordance with the requirements outlined in the IDEA and the implementing regulations in 34 C.F.R. §§ 300.320 through 300.328.

For additional information and resources, visit [Contents of the IEP — Center for Parent Information and Resources \(parentcenterhub.org\)](https://parentcenterhub.org)

engagement with instruction and assignments (e.g., accessing assistive technology, instructional material provided in alternate formats such as digital text or braille, breaking longer assignments into smaller parts, providing directions clearly, and checking for understanding).⁹³

Program modifications or supports for school personnel provided on behalf of the child may also be necessary to support the child's involvement and progress in the general education curriculum, appropriate advancement toward attaining the annual goals specified in the IEP, and participation in extracurricular and other nonacademic activities.⁹⁴ Program supports could include professional learning for school personnel, training or support for families, special equipment or materials, or consultation with other school-based professionals such as those with expertise in behavioral interventions and/or related service providers. Program modifications could also include adapting a homework assignment or adjusting a reading passage to reflect the child's reading comprehension level, while supports for school personnel may include training on additional positive behavioral supports and universal design for learning and access to consultation with related service providers and others with specialized expertise.⁹⁵ In many situations, LEAs utilize paraprofessionals to provide support for students with disabilities. This is allowable under the IDEA and its implementing regulations provided that, among other requirements, paraprofessionals are appropriately trained and supervised (consistent with State requirements). The IDEA states that paraprofessionals can assist in providing special education and related services to children with disabilities;⁹⁶ however, States have the flexibility to determine whether to use paraprofessionals and assistants, and, if so, to determine the scope of their responsibilities.⁹⁷ Program modifications or supports for school personnel provided on behalf of the child may also be necessary to support the child's involvement and progress in the general education curriculum, appropriate advancement toward attaining the annual goals specified in the IEP, and participation in extracurricular and other nonacademic activities.⁹⁸ Program supports could include professional learning for school personnel, training or support for families, special equipment or materials, or consultation with other school-based professionals such as those with expertise in behavioral interventions and/or related service providers. Program modifications could also include adapting a homework assignment or adjusting a reading passage to reflect the child's reading comprehension level, while supports for school personnel may include training on additional positive behavioral supports and universal design for learning and access to consultation with related service providers and others with specialized expertise.⁹⁹ In many situations, LEAs utilize paraprofessionals to provide support for students with disabilities. This is allowable under the IDEA and its implementing regulations provided that, among other requirements, paraprofessionals are appropriately trained and supervised (consistent with State requirements). The IDEA states that paraprofessionals can assist in providing special education and related services to children with disabilities;¹⁰⁰ however, States have the flexibility to determine whether to use paraprofessionals and assistants, and, if so, to determine the scope of their responsibilities.¹⁰¹

INCLUSIVE EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES IN ACTION: SPECIALLY DESIGNED INSTRUCTION

What is specially designed instruction?

“Specially designed instruction” is defined under the regulations implementing IDEA as adapting, as appropriate to the needs of a student with a disability, the content, methodology, or delivery of instruction:

- To address the unique needs of the child that result from the student’s disability; and
- To ensure access of the student to the general curriculum, so that the student can meet the educational standards within the jurisdiction of the LEA that apply to all students.

34 C.F.R. § 300.39(b)(3).

As a component of special education, specially designed instruction must be provided at no cost to the parent. 34 C.F.R. § 300.39(a)(1).

Who can provide specially designed instruction?

Ultimately the answer needs to be based on the individual needs of a student, but IDEA does not limit who can provide specially designed instruction. For example, a math teacher could provide specially designed instruction for a child with a disability based on the child’s IEP by:

- Allowing students to think aloud and talk through the problem-solving process;
- Sharing a written list of steps needed to solve a math concept; or
- Creating visual flow charts for the problem-solving process.

Can general education instruction and services provided to all students through a Title I schoolwide plan or MTSS interventions be considered specially designed instruction?

Yes, the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) has previously stated in [a policy letter](#) that if special education is also considered a “best teaching practice” or “part of the district’s regular education program” it 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.

See [OSEP Letter to Chambers, May 9, 2012](#), and [OSEP Letter to McAndrews and Ramirez, September 5, 2024](#).

Improving Outcomes through General and Special Education Collaboration

It is commonly recognized that collaboration between special and general education teachers¹⁰² benefits students with disabilities, often resulting in improved academic and social outcomes.¹⁰³ With nearly 70 percent of children with disabilities spending more than 80 percent of their school day in the general education classroom,¹⁰⁴ the value of meaningful collaboration and shared responsibility between general and special educators cannot be overstated. As explained in this section, the IDEA and the ESEA support the importance of this collaboration through requirements related to recognizing general education teachers as members of a child's IEP Team and supporting them through professional development opportunities, respectively.¹⁰⁵

Under the IDEA, the IEP Team is charged with developing and implementing a child's IEP, which includes developing the goals for the child.¹⁰⁶ The IDEA requires that the IEP Team include:

- The child's parent;
- A special education teacher or special education provider of the child;
- the child's general education teacher if applicable;
- A representative of the LEA who is qualified to provide, or supervise the provision of, specially designed instruction to meet the unique needs of children with disabilities, and who is knowledgeable about the general education curriculum and about the availability of the LEA's resources;
- An individual who can interpret the instructional implications of evaluation results;
- Other individuals with knowledge or special expertise regarding the child (at the discretion of the parent or agency); and
- The child, if appropriate.¹⁰⁷

IEP Team members bring a variety of insight, knowledge and areas of expertise and serve as the team responsible for developing and planning for the child's educational experience. The IEP Team collaboratively designs an IEP that must allow the child to be involved in, and make progress in, the general education curriculum. As reflected above, the IEP Team must include at least one general education teacher, if applicable, as a full and equal team member. As a member of the IEP Team, a general education teacher must participate, to the extent appropriate, in the development, review, and revision of the child's IEP, including determining positive behavioral interventions and supports and other strategies; supplementary aids and services; and modifications the child may need.¹⁰⁸

Additionally, a child's IEP must be accessible to each general education teacher and any other service provider who is responsible for its implementation, and each of these teachers and providers must be informed of their specific responsibilities related to implementing the child's IEP and the accommodations, modifications, and supports that must be provided in accordance with the child's IEP.¹⁰⁹

To support teachers, principals, and other school leaders in educating students with disabilities, an LEA may braid its IDEA funds in conjunction with ESEA Title II, Part A funds to provide professional development for a variety of school personnel who are involved in the education of students with disabilities.¹¹⁰ An LEA must ensure that all personnel necessary to carry out the IDEA Part B are appropriately and adequately prepared, consistent with the requirements in the IDEA and its implementing regulations as well as the requirements of Title II of the ESEA when an LEA applies for a subgrant.¹¹¹ All such professional development must meet the definition under ESEA section 8101¹¹² and:

- (1) be in accordance with the purposes of Title II of the ESEA; and
- (2) address the learning needs of all students, including students with disabilities, English learners, and gifted and talented students.¹¹³

The collaboration between special and general education teachers, alongside the support of well-prepared school leaders, is central to providing meaningful educational experiences for children with disabilities. Schools, LEAs, and States can further support this collaboration by examining their practices of selecting, scheduling, and providing professional development, to emphasize the importance of collaboration, the impact of collaboration on IEP goal development, and the selection of evidence-based instruction, intervention, and services to address student needs, as informed by data. By engaging as active, informed members of the IEP Team, general education teachers contribute valuable insight that shapes inclusive educational practices, while specialized professional development ensures that all educators are equipped to address the diverse needs of students. The IDEA and the ESEA promote a robust support system that empowers educators to implement individualized instruction, positive behavioral interventions and supports, and evidence-based practices. Together, this shared responsibility and commitment to professional growth help create learning environments where students with disabilities can thrive academically, socially, and emotionally, while making measurable progress toward their goals.

EXAMPLES OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES UNDER TITLE II, PART A OF THE ESEA THAT CAN SUPPORT INCLUSIVE EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES

- Developing or improving evaluation and support systems for teachers, principals, or other school leaders, including systems based on student achievement and multiple measures of educator performance. (section 2103(b)(3)(A)).
- Recruiting, hiring, and retaining effective teachers, especially in schools that serve a high-percentage of students from low-income backgrounds with high percentages of out-of-field, inexperienced, and ineffective teachers and high percentages of students who do not meet the challenging State academic standards to improve within-district equity in the distribution of teachers. (section 2103(b)(3)(B)).
- Recruiting individuals from other fields to become teachers, principals, or other school leaders. (section 2103(b)(3)(C)).
- Reducing class size to a level that is evidence-based to improve student achievement, through the recruiting and hiring of additional effective teachers. (section 2103(b)(3)(D)).
- Providing high-quality, personalized professional development (that meets the definition in section 8101(42)) for teachers, principals, and other school leaders – i.e., that it is sustained (not stand-alone, 1-day, or short-term workshops), intensive, collaborative, job-embedded, data-driven, and classroom-focused. (section 2103(b)(3)(E)).
- Developing programs and activities to enhance the ability of teachers to teach children with disabilities. (section 2103(b)(3)(F)).
- Providing programs and activities to increase—
 - The knowledge base of teachers, principals, or other school leaders on instruction in the early grades and on strategies to measure whether young children are progressing. (section 2103(b)(3)(G)(i)).
 - The ability of principals or other school leaders to support teachers, teacher leaders, early childhood educators, and other professionals to meet the needs of students through age 8, which may include providing joint professional learning and planning activities for school staff and educators in preschool programs that address the transition to elementary school. (section 2103(b)(3)(G)(ii)).
- Providing training, technical assistance, and capacity-building to help teachers, principals, or other school leaders implement formative assessments and classroom-based assessments and use data from such assessments to improve instruction and student academic achievement. (section 2103(b)(3)(H)).
- In-service training for school personnel on supporting students affected by trauma and mental illness, the use of referral mechanisms, forming partnerships between school-based mental health programs and public or private mental health organizations, and addressing school conditions for student learning, such as safety, peer interaction, drug and alcohol abuse, and chronic absenteeism. (section 2103(b)(3)(I)).
- Developing feedback mechanisms to improve school working conditions. (section 2103(b)(3)(N)).
- Integrating rigorous academic content, career and technical education, and work-based learning in professional development. (section 2103(b)(3)(O)).
- Other evidence-based activities as determined by the State and LEA to meet the purpose of Title II, Part A. (section 2103(b)(3)(P)).

Improving Learning Environments through Inclusive Educational Practices

Learning environments are more than simply physical locations, as they also include the school climate and supports and resources provided to students.¹¹⁴ The IDEA, the ESEA, and inclusive educational practices can work together to improve learning environments by providing a climate that is respectful and trusting; support meaningful access, engagement, participation; foster learning and social emotional development; and create a sense of belonging, for all students, including students with disabilities.

As described above, the cornerstone of the IDEA¹¹⁵ is the entitlement of each eligible child with a disability to FAPE in the LRE, anchored by the development and full implementation of an IEP. The LRE requirements, which have existed since the passage of the Education for all Handicapped Children Act (EHA) in 1975 and remain a fundamental element of our nation's law and policy for educating children with disabilities (EHA was renamed IDEA in 1990), reflect the IDEA's strong preference for educating children with disabilities in general education classes with the appropriate aids and supports.¹¹⁶ Specifically, the IDEA requires that students with disabilities are educated, to the maximum extent appropriate, with students who are not disabled and that removal from the general educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of a child's disability is such that education in general education classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily.¹¹⁷ While some may refer to LRE as a "place", the IDEA's LRE requirements consider more than the physical location in which a student receives their education.

OSEP has clarified that the IDEA's LRE provisions require that IEP Teams "thoroughly consider the full range of supplementary aids and services, in light of the student's abilities and needs, that could be provided to facilitate the student's placement in the regular education environment" to the maximum extent appropriate and ensure that they are documented in the child's IEP.¹¹⁸ The IDEA also requires IEP Teams to consider the program modifications or supports for school personnel that will be provided to enable the child to be educated with students with and without disabilities, and include in the IEP an explanation of the extent, if any, to which the child will not participate with students without disabilities in the general education class.¹¹⁹ Further, a student with a disability may not be removed from education in age-appropriate general education classrooms solely because of needed modifications in the general education curriculum.¹²⁰ Therefore, the full range of supplementary aids and services that could be provided to facilitate the child with a disability's placement in the general education environment must be considered¹²¹ before IEP Teams consider placement of the child outside the general education environment.

In order to provide FAPE, a group of persons knowledgeable about the child, the meaning of the evaluation data, and the placement options, including the parents, determine a placement decision for a child with a disability.¹²² The IDEA requires that placement decisions be determined on an individual, case-by-case basis, depending on each child's unique needs and circumstances and based on the child's IEP¹²³ and that the starting point for considering placement in the LRE for a child with a disability is placement in the general education classroom of the school the child would attend if not disabled.¹²⁴ Each LEA must make available a continuum of alternative placements, or a range of placement options, to meet the needs of children with disabilities for special education and related services.¹²⁵ The options

on this continuum — which include general education classes, special classes, special schools, home instruction or instruction in hospitals and institutions, and which must make provision for supplementary services to be provided in conjunction with general education class placement — must be made available to the extent necessary to implement each child's IEP.¹²⁶ Additionally, OSEP reaffirms that “placement decisions must not be made solely on factors such as category of disability, severity of disability, availability of special education and related services, configuration of the service delivery system, availability of space, or administrative convenience.”¹²⁷ In addition, OSEP has long held that school districts cannot claim lack of adequate personnel or resources as a reason to relieve them of their obligation to make FAPE available in the LRE.¹²⁸

The IDEA's LRE requirements have broad application and are not limited to a child's classroom instructional setting. The LRE requirement in 34 C.F.R. § 300.117 requires each LEA to ensure that children with disabilities participate to the maximum extent appropriate with nondisabled children in nonacademic and extracurricular activities, including meals and recess, and that they have the necessary supplementary aids and services, as determined by the IEP Team, for participation in nonacademic settings.¹²⁹ The Department has explained that application of the LRE requirements to the “regular education environment encompasses regular classrooms and other settings in schools such as lunchrooms and playgrounds in which children without disabilities participate.”¹³⁰

Under the ESEA Title IV-A program, funds may be used to support inclusive educational practices in all learning environments. The purpose of Title IV-A is to increase the capacity of States, LEAs, schools, and local communities to provide all students, including those with disabilities, with access to a well-rounded education, a safe and healthy learning environment, and effective use of technology.¹³¹

Title IV-A provides SEAs, LEAs, and schools the flexibility to tailor investments based on the needs of their unique student populations. Where possible, the Department encourages coordination and integration of Title IV-A funded activities with activities authorized under other sections of the ESEA, as well as other federal programs, such as the IDEA, to improve outcomes for students. The Department notes that ensuring all students, including students with disabilities, have access to a holistic well-rounded education is central to the shared work across programs in the ESEA.^{132, 133} Title IV-A funds may be used for a range of activities to meet the needs of all students, including students with disabilities, and support their safety, health, learning, and success, including implementing a MTSS framework,¹³⁴ UDL, PBIS, family and community engagement, and to support preventative strategies that reduce bullying and exclusionary discipline.

OVERVIEW OF ALLOWABLE TITLE IV-A PROGRAM ACTIVITIES¹³⁵

Well-Rounded Educational Opportunities (ESEA section 4107)	Safe and Healthy Students (ESEA section 4108)	Effective Use of Technology (ESEA section 4109)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting college and career counseling, including providing information on opportunities for financial aid through the early Free Application for Federal Student Aid • Improving access to foreign language instruction, arts, and music education • Providing programming to improve instruction and student engagement in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), including computer science, and increasing access to these subjects for underrepresented groups • Promoting access to accelerated learning opportunities including Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) programs, dual or concurrent enrollment programs and early college high schools • Strengthening instruction in traditional American history, civics, economics, geography, government education, and environmental education • Programs that promote volunteerism and community involvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoting community and parent involvement in schools • Providing school-based mental health services and counseling • Promoting supportive school climates to reduce the use of exclusionary discipline and promoting supportive school discipline • Implementing schoolwide PBIS • Establishing or improving dropout prevention • Supporting re-entry programs and transition services for justice-involved youth • Implementing programs that support a healthy, active lifestyle (nutritional and physical education) and evidence-based drug and violence prevention • Implementing systems and practices to prevent bullying and harassment • Developing relationship building skills to help improve safety through the recognition and prevention of coercion, violence, or abuse • Providing mentoring and school counseling to all students • Establishing community partnerships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting high-quality professional development for educators, school leaders, and administrators to personalize learning and improve academic achievement • Building technological capacity and infrastructure and providing tools, devices, content, and resources for personalized learning • Carrying out innovative blended learning projects • Providing students in rural, remote, and underserved areas with the resources to benefit from high-quality digital learning opportunities • Delivering specialized or rigorous academic courses and curricula using technology, including digital learning technologies and assistive technology • Providing students in rural, remote, and underserved areas with resources to take advantage of high-quality digital learning experiences, digital resources, and access to online courses taught by effective educators

Well-Rounded Educational Opportunities (ESEA section 4107)	Safe and Healthy Students (ESEA section 4108)	Effective Use of Technology (ESEA section 4109)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programs that promote integration across multiple disciplines, such as art and mathematics • Other activities and programs to support student access to, and success in, a variety of well-rounded educational experiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing integrated systems of student and family supports • Providing high-quality training for school personnel, including SISP, related to suicide prevention, effective and trauma-informed practices in classroom management, crisis management and conflict resolution, human trafficking, school-based violence prevention, drug abuse prevention, and bullying and harassment prevention • Child sexual abuse awareness and prevention • Pay for success initiatives 	

**Note: This table provides examples of allowable activities and is not an exhaustive list. Please consult the ESEA for more information: <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/COMPS-748/pdf/COMPS-748.pdf>.*

In summary, learning environments go beyond just physical spaces and include the school climate and a variety of supports and resources, provided to students. While each student's placement in the appropriate environment with supportive resources must be individualized based on the student's needs and determined collaboratively by the IEP Team and the placement team, it is critical that all learning environments include an array of academic and social emotional supports. Implementing inclusive educational practices creates opportunities for all students to be successfully educated in the general education classroom. Funding from both the IDEA and the ESEA can potentially be used, subject to all applicable programmatic and fiscal requirements, to support the implementation of inclusive educational practices within schools.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR IMPLEMENTING INCLUSIVE EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES

Research has demonstrated that when children with disabilities are meaningfully included within general education, they can achieve greater academic results and social outcomes, thus leading to improved postsecondary outcomes, including graduating with a high school diploma and enrolling in postsecondary education or a training program.¹³⁶ Inclusive educational practices are generally most effective when they are individualized to meet the needs of each child with a disability and State and local educational systems are designed to create and sustain learning environments that prioritize creating a sense of belonging for each learner. The following guiding principles provide considerations for implementing inclusive educational practices at the State, LEA, and school levels.

Inclusive Educational Practices Foster Belonging, Create Opportunity, and Transform Education and Lives

Inclusive educational practices start with the expectation that students with disabilities are capable of participating, engaging, and excelling in academics and social relationships throughout their education. Historical perceptions of students with disabilities have focused on perceived limitations or challenges, which have led to societal stereotypes, stigma, and limited educational opportunities. Inclusive educational practices, particularly practices that are individualized to meet the needs of each student with a disability, are aligned with the IDEA's and the ESEA's requirements (as described earlier) and provide meaningful opportunities for participation, engagement, and belonging to enable children with and without disabilities to learn together.

Inclusive educational practices rely on learning environments that are intentionally designed to hold high expectations for the success of each student through meaningful access to the general education curriculum and grade-level State academic standards. For children with disabilities, inclusive educational practices can result in short- and long-term benefits to their cognitive and social development.¹³⁷ Further, research has demonstrated that when children with intellectual and developmental disabilities are educated in the least restrictive environment, engage in tasks related to the general education curriculum, have enhanced access to instruction from teachers with content area expertise and age-appropriate accessible instructional materials, and receive peer support, academic skills and skills related to communication social interactions and self-determination are improved.¹³⁸ Additional research has shown that a broader group of children with disabilities had similar improved outcomes, including increased academic achievement, exposure to a more rigorous course of study, attainment of a regular high school diploma, and greater preparation for postsecondary educational and employment opportunities.^{139, 140, 141}

INCLUSIVE EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES IN ACTION: FOSTERING BELONGING

The TIES Center, a previous OSEP-funded technical assistance center, has described ten dimensions of belonging for children with disabilities: being present, invited, welcomed, known, accepted, involved, supported, heard, befriended, and needed.



Together, these dimensions can help create learning environments where children with disabilities are full community members.

For additional information and resources, visit the [TIES Center](#).

Traditionally, inclusive education has focused on the ability of a child with a disability to physically access the general education environment or general education curriculum. While this access has been critical to raising expectations and supporting improved outcomes for students with disabilities, inclusive educational practices should also foster a sense of belonging. When students feel a strong sense of belonging, such as feeling personally accepted, included, supported in school-based experiences, and when they develop positive relationships with educators and peers, they are more likely to be engaged in school and perform well academically.^{142,143} Importantly, inclusive educational practices can also benefit children without disabilities by having positive effects on academic and social emotional development due to educators using strategies and teaching techniques that meet the needs of diverse learners.¹⁴⁴

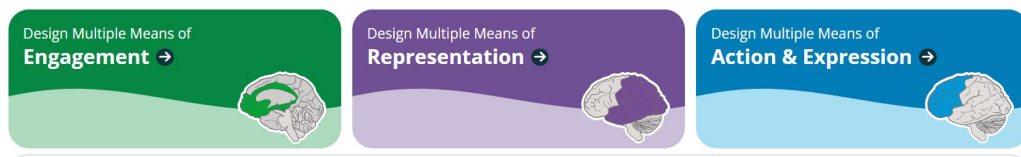
Create a Culture for Inclusive Educational Practices Through Leadership and Shared Vision

Leadership at the State, LEA, and school levels can have a significant impact on the culture and quality of inclusive educational practices. Leaders should establish and communicate a shared vision that reflects an expectation for inclusive educational practices, the values of their community, and the rights afforded under the IDEA. UDL, a framework that guides the design of learning environments to be accessible, inclusive, and flexible to support and respond to the variability of learners,¹⁴⁵ should be a fundamental concept when creating a vision for inclusive educational practices.

INCLUSIVE EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES IN ACTION: UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING

UDL is a framework used worldwide to make learning more inclusive. An OSEP grantee, CAST, describes UDL as a framework to guide the design of learning environments and experiences that are accessible, inclusive, equitable, and challenging for every learner. CAST designed the UDL Guidelines based on three principles of UDL: engagement, representation, and action and expression. For each principle, the guidelines suggest ways to increase access, support the learning process, and support learners' executive functioning.

The UDL guidelines were developed to support educators across contexts – early childhood, primary, secondary, postsecondary, afterschool, workforce – to apply the UDL framework to practice.



To learn more, visit [CAST](#).

State Level

SEAs have a pivotal role in creating, supporting, and sustaining inclusive educational practices. As stewards of IDEA and ESEA funds, SEAs are responsible for oversight, monitoring, and ensuring compliance with the IDEA and the ESEA. Importantly, SEAs also create policies and guidance, provide technical assistance and direct support to LEAs, and create priorities and initiatives impacting the education of students with disabilities.

As States create or expand their efforts to support inclusive educational practices, States may consider:

- Creating a cross-sector State leadership team to implement a shared vision for inclusive educational practices;
- Creating or implementing statewide initiatives that support inclusive educational practices;
- Revising State policies and guidance to better support the implementation of inclusive educational practices;
- Engaging families as essential partners to support the implementation of inclusive educational practices;
- Using data to guide decisions for continuous quality improvement;
- Leveraging funding and resources to support implementation of inclusive educational practices;
- Using accountability systems to support the implementation of inclusive educational practices;

- Building and enhancing the education workforce to support implementation of inclusive educational practices; and/or
- Raising public awareness about the importance of inclusive educational practices.

**INCLUSIVE EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES IN ACTION:
STATE-LEVEL ACTIONS TO SUPPORT INCLUSIVE PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP**

To support principals, the [Council of Chief State School Officers](#) (CCSSO) and the [Collaboration for Effective Educator Development, Accountability and Reform](#) (CEEDAR), an OSEP-funded technical assistance center, created [Supporting Inclusive Schools for the Success of Each Child: A Guide for States on Principal Leadership](#). As part of this initiative, CCSSO and the National Collaborative on Inclusive Principal Leadership identified nine strategies that SEAs can use to advance inclusive principal leadership:

- Strategy 1:** Set a Vision and Plan for Inclusive Principal Leadership
- Strategy 2:** Cultivate Coherence and Collaboration
- Strategy 3:** Transform Principal Preparation and Licensure
- Strategy 4:** Promote Principal Development on Inclusive Practices
- Strategy 5:** Provide Targeted Supports to Districts and Schools
- Strategy 6:** Connect School Improvement and Principal Development Initiatives
- Strategy 7:** Meaningfully Engage Stakeholders as Partners in the Work
- Strategy 8:** Adopt Processes and Supports for Continuous Improvement
- Strategy 9:** Provide Guidance on Efficient, Effective and Responsive Instruction

Local Level

Leaders at the LEA level can have a direct impact on the use of inclusive educational practices within their schools. LEA leaders have an opportunity to prioritize a vision for inclusive educational practices that is reflected in a shared philosophy with educators, families, and the community, and create a systemic approach to implementing inclusive educational practices. LEAs may consider a variety of strategies to improve inclusive educational practices, including:

- Developing or revising policies and procedures to articulate a shared vision for inclusive educational practices;
- Conducting a self-assessment or reflection to assess and analyze the LEA's implementation of inclusive educational practices;

- Using implementation science to support creating or scaling up inclusive educational practices;¹⁴⁶
- Allocating the necessary resources and committing to organizational structural changes, if needed, to enable inclusive educational practices to occur (e.g., building and sustaining an MTSS, utilizing UDL,¹⁴⁷ PBIS¹⁴⁸ frameworks);
- Providing professional development opportunities for administrators, general and special educators, specialized instructional support personnel (e.g., school counselors, school social workers, school psychologists), paraprofessionals, and other school-based personnel to support the implementation of inclusive educational practices;
- Reviewing and, if needed, reallocating resources to invest in qualified personnel, instructional materials, or professional learning to support inclusive educational practices; and
- Encouraging collaboration between offices within the LEA, such as those focused on instruction and curriculum, teaching and learning, accountability requirements, and children with disabilities.

**INCLUSIVE EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES IN ACTION:
WASHINGTON'S GUIDE TO CONNECTING GENERAL EDUCATION AND IEPs**

The Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, together with the previously OSEP-funded TIES Center, created [*Comprehensive Inclusive Education in Washington*](#), a guide that highlights four steps:

1. Collaborative conversations
2. Creating an inclusive IEP
3. Education day-at-a-glance
4. Ongoing education and support

School Level

Existing research suggests that school administrator leadership is critical to ensuring that schools continue to improve and create cultures where each student can thrive and meet their potential.¹⁴⁹ School administrators should work to build a common understanding among educators and community members about the history and importance of inclusive educational practices, and the significance of fundamental IDEA requirements that provide children with disabilities with FAPE in the LRE, supported through the development and implementation of an IEP. Educators, including special and general education teachers, SISPs, paraprofessionals, and additional school support staff (e.g., school resource officers, custodians, bus drivers, cafeteria workers), all contribute to creating and implementing a shared vision for inclusive education.

School administrators can take a variety of actions that can support successful implementation of inclusive educational practices, such as:

- Creating and communicating a vision for inclusive educational practices;
- Building professional knowledge and capacity, including building collaborative partnerships and shared accountability between special and general educators;
- Creating a master schedule that supports implementation of inclusive educational practices;
- Engaging in data-driven continuous improvement strategies; and
- Prioritizing collaborative conversations with families of students with disabilities.

Meaningfully Design and Systemically Support Implementation of Inclusive Educational Practices

Inclusive educational practices benefit from the intentional design of systems at the State, local and school levels. By establishing policies and practices that set a vision for the implementation of inclusive educational practices, the needs of students with disabilities can be considered as part of the earliest stages of systems design, planning, and implementation.

INCLUSIVE EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES IN ACTION: LEAD IDEA CENTER PROVIDES LEADERSHIP ESSENTIALS

The OSEP-funded [Lead IDEA Center](#) highlights [six IDEA Leadership Essentials](#) that describe the knowledge, skills, and mindsets early intervention and PreK—12 administrators need to effectively implement IDEA in programs and schools, which include a focus on fostering inclusive educational practices.



State Level

At the State level, SEAs can support systems that are designed to implement inclusive educational practices through a variety of mechanisms, including:

- Providing technical assistance and support to LEAs;
- Creating and sustaining initiatives that address recruitment and retention of educators who are committed to implementing inclusive educational practices;
- Providing professional development opportunities;
- Providing information and guidance regarding inclusive educational practices; and
- Exercising monitoring and oversight responsibilities, particularly related to the implementation of IDEA requirements such as LRE and IEP development and implementation.

Additionally, SEAs are positioned to systemically support increased collaboration between general and special educators. Collaborative relationships between general and special educators – which includes SISP and paraprofessionals – can support improved academic, social, behavioral, and developmental outcomes for students with disabilities. For example, States can focus on ensuring that educator preparation programs prepare future special and general education teachers to plan for, support, and address the needs of students with disabilities. For some States, this may include assessing State licensure and certification standards, as well as standards that govern educator preparation programs. For educators and paraprofessionals already in the classroom, SEAs can support relevant, sustained, and job-embedded professional development related to topics such as IEP development and implementation, aligning grade-level standards with instructional strategies, curricular planning, instructional and behavioral strategies for students with disabilities,¹⁵⁰ and applicable legal requirements.¹⁵¹

INCLUSIVE EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES IN ACTION: CEEDAR CENTER

The OSEP-funded CEEDAR Center supports children with disabilities in achieving college- and career-ready standards by building the capacity of State personnel preparation systems to prepare teachers and leaders to implement evidence-based practices within MTSS. CEEDAR focuses on four key areas:

- Reform teacher and leader preparation programs;
- Revise licensure standards to align with reforms;
- Refine personnel evaluation systems; and
- Realign policy structures and professional learning systems.

The [CEEDAR Center](#) provides technical assistance, resources, and tools to support States.

Additionally, the Department encourages collaboration within SEAs to provide support to schools that have been identified under the State's ESEA accountability system as CSI, TSI, or ATSI. According to the Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, more than half of the schools identified for CSI, TSI, or ATSI included in

their school improvement plans activities to improve the curriculum, assessment, or instructional materials for students with disabilities.¹⁵² Further, because most students with disabilities receive much of their education in the general education classroom, collaboration between special education offices and offices overseeing ESEA implementation at the SEA level would likely support the implementation of inclusive educational practices.

Local Level

LEA leaders have a critical role in supporting the high-quality implementation of inclusive educational practices. LEA leaders should create systems of support that embody inclusive educational practices to establish the tone, culture, and expectations for inclusive educational practices within school communities and in collaboration with families and community partners. Specifically, LEA leaders can support the implementation of inclusive educational practices by:¹⁵³

- Providing curriculum, materials, and interventions to schools to support the implementation of inclusive educational practices;
- Providing relevant, sustained, job-embedded, professional development and instructional coaching on inclusive educational practices for general educators, special educators, SISP, paraprofessionals, and school administrators;
- Examining data related to, among other quality indicators, the placement, educational setting, and achievement of students with disabilities, to better support the implementation of inclusive educational practices;
- Providing school-based administrators with professional development and learning opportunities aligned with inclusive principal leadership practices and standards;¹⁵⁴ and
- Targeting technical assistance and support to advance inclusive educational practices and improvement strategies.

INCLUSIVE EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES IN ACTION: HIGH-LEVERAGE PRACTICES FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Developed by OSEP-funded [CEEDAR Center](#) and the [Council for Exceptional Children](#), the [high-leverage practice guide](#) highlights four areas of practice, each containing research-based information to support implementation:

- Collaboration,
- Data-driven planning,
- Instruction in behavior & academics, and
- Intensify & intervene as needed.

School Level

School administrators play an important role in creating and implementing systems that are designed to support inclusive educational practices by:

- Ensuring that inclusive educational practices, materials, and interventions are available and implemented with fidelity;
- Providing relevant, sustained, job-embedded, professional development and instructional coaching on inclusive educational practices for general educators, special educators, SISP, and paraprofessionals;
- Prioritizing collaboration between general and special educators through reserving joint/cohesive planning time and the development of master schedules;
- Considering how paraprofessionals can assist the instruction of students with disabilities to improve the implementation of inclusive educational practices;¹⁵⁵ and
- Examining data related to the placement, educational setting, achievement of students with disabilities, and other quality indicators to better support the implementation of inclusive educational practices.

INCLUSIVE EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES IN ACTION: THE IMPORTANT ROLE OF PARAPROFESSIONALS

Under IDEA regulations, paraprofessionals who are appropriately trained and supervised — in accordance with State law, regulation, or written policy — may assist in the provision of special education and related services for children with disabilities. 34 C.F.R. § 300.156(b)(2)(iii).

To help families better understand the important role of paraprofessionals, the [TIES Center](#), previously funded by OSEP, authored *[Understanding the Role of Paraprofessionals in Your Child's Education in Inclusive Classrooms](#)*. This resource provides many examples of how paraprofessionals can support students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms, including supporting:

- Participation in classroom routines and transitions;
- Engagement in grade-level academics and other skills by pre-teaching/re-teaching content as needed, supporting executive functioning skills, ensuring communication supports are consistently available; and
- Interactions with peers and adults.

Additionally, the [Pennsylvania Department of Education's Bureau of Special Education Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network](#) has developed competency-based trainings to assist paraprofessionals with gaining the skills and knowledge needed to work with students with disabilities in a variety of learning environments. [The Bureau of Special Education Training Series](#) features critical competencies for paraprofessionals who support students with disabilities:

- Foundations of Special Education
- Development and Characteristics of Learners
- Individual Learning Differences
- Instructional Strategies
- Learning Environments and Social Interactions

Build and Enhance Family, Community, and Agency Partnerships to Support Inclusive Educational Practices

Developing meaningful partnerships with families, community-based organizations (CBOs), and other State agencies (e.g., vocational rehabilitation) helps support building and enhancing inclusive educational practices. Research has demonstrated that strong partnerships between schools and families have a positive impact on student achievement, attendance and behavior, social emotional skills, and graduation rates.¹⁵⁶ In this context, “family engagement typically refers to a partnership between families and educators where acceptance, communication, support, collaboration, and bidirectional feedback are common practices to support positive gains in child outcomes.”¹⁵⁷ The school-family

partnership can support inclusive educational practices for students with disabilities through ongoing opportunities for meaningful collaboration. These opportunities should empower a family to feel their perspective and role is valued, appreciated, and necessary, not only as parents and IEP Team members but also as partners in supporting the generalization of skills learned in a school environment in community and home environments.

State Level

SEAs have an important role in creating and fostering strong partnerships among educators, families, State-level agencies, and CBOs to support the implementation of inclusive educational practices. As States create or expand these partnerships, they may consider:

- Convening relevant State agencies (e.g., agencies focused on PK-12 education, higher education, health and human services, children and families) to identify opportunities to incorporate inclusive educational practices into new or existing initiatives and partnerships;
- Issuing State policies and/or guidance to describe how inclusive educational practices should be included in State efforts to support improved educational outcomes for all students, including students with disabilities, such as through collaboration with educator and administrator preparation programs within institutions of higher education, which may include development of teacher apprenticeship or residency programs and expanding dual special and general education certification initiatives;
- Collaborating with agencies that address workforce and training to support increasing the pipeline of educators by emphasizing the critical role of inclusive educational practices (e.g., Registered Teacher Apprenticeship Program);
- Collaborating with agencies that address workforce and training to support job opportunities for individuals with disabilities to support the use of inclusive educational practices (e.g., vocational rehabilitation agencies);

INCLUSIVE EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES IN ACTION: TEACHER APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMS TO INCREASE SPECIAL EDUCATOR PIPELINE

The [Registered Teacher Apprenticeship Program](#) (RTAP) supports a diverse and effective pipeline of teachers who meet local needs through on-site job training with an experienced mentor while completing coursework. RTAPs can help strengthen the professional workforce through partnerships with educator preparation programs and local school districts.

The OSEP-funded [CEEDAR Center](#) provides a database of resources and apprenticeship programs leading to special education licensure.

[ApprenticeshipUSA](#), an initiative by the U.S. Department of Labor, includes resources and information, including [program profiles](#) that feature inclusive educational practices such as the use of positive behavioral interventions and supports.

- Engaging families as essential partners to support the implementation of inclusive educational practices through the State’s advisory panel¹⁵⁸ and OSEP-funded parent information and resource centers¹⁵⁹;
- Providing professional learning opportunities for LEAs, CBOs, and family engagement entities to support greater implementation of inclusive educational practices; and
- Creating or enhancing partnerships with other State agencies to support the implementation of inclusive educational practices, such as the State’s Medicaid Office, Office of Head Start and Early Head Start, Vocational Rehabilitation Agency, Assistive Technology Act State program, the State’s Developmental Disabilities Council, and the State’s Protection and Advocacy Agencies, among others.

INCLUSIVE EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES IN ACTION: WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) is working collaboratively with the [National Center on Inclusion Toward Rightful Presence](#), an OSEP-funded technical assistance center, to better implement inclusive educational practices that support the rightful presence for students with extensive support, or dynamic learning, needs in 11 schools across two LEAs.

To support this initiative, DPI created a cross-sector leadership team with membership from the DPI office of special education, career and technical education office, office supporting English language arts and math instruction, local institutions of higher education, the statewide family engagement office, and the principals and district staff from the two LEAs with demonstration sites.

Using the [SWIFT Fidelity of Implementation Tool](#), LEAs and schools are implementing a multi-year professional learning sequence for general and special educators to align instructional planning for students with disabilities in the general education curriculum.

For more information on the intensive model demonstration site partnerships, visit: <https://swiftschools.org/towardrightfulpresence/>.

Local and School Levels

LEAs and schools should foster meaningful collaboration and authentic engagement with families of students with disabilities through culturally responsive planning and implementation. Systemic family engagement, achieved through “the establishment of systems and structures that promote and embed engagement principles into a district’s core priorities, policies, and practices,” can strengthen the impact on student outcomes.¹⁶⁰ By leveraging the support of families and communities, schools can align improvement efforts with priorities that represent the whole child. This family and community support can improve schools and outcomes for children with disabilities.

Additionally, LEAs and schools should include instruction in self-advocacy from a developmentally appropriate early age as a key inclusive educational practice. Generally considered one aspect of self-determination, self-advocacy typically refers to an individual effectively communicating, conveying, negotiating or asserting their own interests and/or desires.¹⁶¹ Self-advocacy can positively impact communication and leadership skills, independence, perseverance, and self-knowledge.¹⁶² Engaging students with disabilities as active participants and partners through building self-advocacy skills can support students within their educational environment as well as help prepare them in the transition to postsecondary opportunities. LEAs and schools can support building students' self-advocacy skills through explicit teaching and providing opportunities for practice, such as through student-led IEP Team meetings.¹⁶³

Lastly, LEAs and schools can support the use of inclusive educational practices through a variety of partnerships with CBOs and institutions, such as partnerships with family-oriented organizations, collaboration with institutions of higher education to address professional workforce needs; partnerships with the State's assistive technology (AT) programs to increase understanding of, and access to, AT;¹⁶⁴ and partnerships with vocational rehabilitation services to support postsecondary outcomes. Additionally, LEAs and schools can develop innovative partnerships with local employers to support inclusive hiring practices and employment opportunities.

**INCLUSIVE EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES IN ACTION:
PARENT INFORMATION CENTERS & EDUCATION
PROFESSIONALS COLLABORATING TO
SUPPORT STUDENTS**

The [Center for Parent Information and Resources](#) (CPIR), an OSEP-funded technical assistance center, supports the national network of parent centers available in each State. In addition to providing direct support to over one million parents in 2022-23, the parent centers also collaborate with education professionals to support students with disabilities through trainings and individual assistance.

The OSEP-funded [IRIS Center Family Engagement module](#) provides professional development for educators to support meaningful collaboration with families of students with disabilities.

**INCLUSIVE EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES IN ACTION:
THE RIGHTFUL PRESENCE IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE AND RESOURCE MAP**

The [National Center on Inclusion Toward Rightful Presence](#), an OSEP-funded technical assistance center, has created the [Rightful Presence Implementation Guide](#), a technical assistance tool for K-12 educational leaders working to create a culture of rightful presence for students, families, and educators, with emphasis on students with significant cognitive disabilities. Six key levers for change are discussed: belonging, justice-oriented leadership, systems, equity educators, innovative teaching and learning, and growth.

The guide provides a learning module for each lever with multimedia overview of the concept, application examples, steps to get started, and evidence-based resources to support independent implementation.

Leverage Funding and Resources to Support Inclusive Educational Practices

Numerous Federal investments and technical assistance centers across the Department, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and the U.S. Department of Labor are available to support States, LEAs, and schools as they work to implement inclusive educational practices.

The following programs may be used to support some of the inclusive educational practices discussed in this document, subject to all applicable programmatic and fiscal requirements:

- [IDEA Part B](#) authorizes federal funding to States for the education of children with disabilities, and requires, as a condition for receiving such funds, that the State provide an assurance that it has policies and procedures in effect to ensure that FAPE is made available to all eligible children with disabilities residing in the State ages three through 21 in the State's mandated age range. After reserving IDEA Part B funds for State administration and other State-level activities, States must distribute the remaining IDEA Part B funds to all eligible LEAs in the State. The SEA may use IDEA Part B funds reserved for other State-level activities for support and direct services, including personnel preparation and professional development. LEAs may use IDEA Part B funds only to pay the excess costs of providing special education and related services to children with disabilities.
- [IDEA Part D National Activities to Improve Education of Children with Disabilities](#) authorizes competitive grants to improve the education of children with disabilities in the areas of:
 - (1) State personnel development;
 - (2) personnel preparation, technical assistance, model demonstration projects, and dissemination of information; and
 - (3) support to improve results for children.

- [Title I, Part A of the ESEA](#), Improving Basic Programs Operated by Local Educational Agencies, is designed to provide all children significant opportunity to receive a fair, equitable, and high-quality education, and to close educational achievement gaps. The Department provides formula funds to SEAs, which in turn provide formula-based subgrants to LEAs (which make funds available to schools).
- [Title II, Part A ESEA](#), Supporting Effective Instruction State Grants, provides annual formula funds to SEAs, which in turn provide formula-based subgrants to LEAs, that may be used to address inequities in access to effective teachers for underserved students, provide professional development, reduce class sizes, and improve teacher recruitment, preparation, and retention, among other uses. Title II, Part A funds can specifically be used to implement MTSS and build educator capacity in this area.
- [Title IV, Part A of ESEA](#), Student Support and Academic Enrichment Program, provides formula funding to SEAs, which in turn provide formula-based subgrants to LEAs, to improve students' academic achievement by increasing the capacity of States, districts, schools, and local communities to provide all students with access to a well-rounded education; improve school conditions for student learning; and improve the use of technology to improve the academic achievement and digital literacy of all students.
- Under section 12(c) of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, the State Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Services Program provides services for individuals with disabilities to prepare and engage in competitive integrative employment or supported employment to achieve independence and self-sufficiency.
- The [Assistive Technology Act \(AT Act\)](#), authorized as *The 21st Century Assistive Technology Act*, provides formula grant funding to States to carry out activities that promote access to and acquisition of AT. Such activities include dissemination of AT information and assistance; device demonstration; device loans that support the reuse of AT no longer used by the original owner; financing options to support the acquisition of AT devices; and training, technical assistance, information, and referral.
- The Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) within the U.S. Department of Labor promotes [inclusive apprenticeship programs](#) that meet the needs of employers by developing policies and practices that attract people with disabilities into programs. The Partnership on Inclusive Apprenticeship provides technical assistance through podcast series, a resource library, policy and practice briefs, guides, toolkits, and other resources for employers and apprentices.
- [The Teacher Education Assistance for College and Higher Education \(TEACH\) Grant Program](#) provides grants to individuals who are completing or plan to complete course work to begin a career in teaching. TEACH grants require recipients to complete a teaching service obligation as a condition of receiving the grant.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE RESOURCES

The following federally funded technical assistance centers provide free resources to States, LEAs, schools, and members of the public:



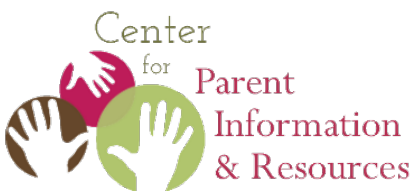
The [Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports \(PBIS Center\)](#) utilizes the PBIS evidence-based framework to strengthen systems and practices to improve social, emotional, and academic outcomes for children with disabilities. Tools such as the [Instructional and Restorative Alternatives to Exclusionary Discipline](#) guide assist teams with implementing practices in their school-based system.



The [Center for IDEA Early Childhood Data Systems \(DaSy\)](#) assists States to collect, report, and analyze high-quality Part C and Part B data. DaSy has [resources](#) on using data to examine the inclusion of children with disabilities across early childhood programs.



[Center on Inclusive Technology & Education Systems \(CITES\)](#) empowers school districts to build and maintain technology systems that include every student, particularly children and youth with disabilities who require assistive technology and accessible materials. Resources include a guide for [Cultivating a Culture of Inclusive Practices](#).



The [Center for Parent Information & Resources \(CIPR\)](#) provides information about federally funded parent training and information centers, located in every State, to support families in understanding the IDEA, their rights under the law, and how to work with schools to include children with disabilities. Resources include information on [school inclusion](#).



The [Collaboration for Effective Educator Development, Accountability, and Reform \(CEEDAR\) Center](#) supports students with disabilities by building the capacity of personnel preparation programs to support educators and leaders to implement evidence-based practices. Resources include using evidence-based practices for students with severe disabilities, universal design for learning, and inclusive education.



The [Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center \(ECTA\)](#) supports programs in developing more equitable, effective, and sustainable State and local systems that support access and full participation for every child with a disability and their family. Resources to support implementation of inclusion include [evidence-based practices](#) and the indicators of high-quality [inclusion](#).



The [IDEA Data Center](#) assists States in collecting, reporting, analyzing, and using high-quality data as required by the IDEA, including educational environments data. IDC provides technical assistance to SEAs and LEAs and has a wealth of online tools to help data users better understand the IDEA data landscape and address their existing or emerging IDEA data quality needs.



The [IRIS Center](#) develops and disseminates online resources about evidence-based instructional and behavioral practices to support the education of all children, particularly those with disabilities. Resources include modules on topics such as [inclusive school environments](#), [evidence-based practice summaries on instructional strategies and interventions](#), and [modules on evidence-based practices](#).



The [Lead IDEA Center](#) provides resources and training to Early Intervention and PreK-12 school leaders and State and local leaders to enhance outcomes for infants, toddlers, children, and youth who benefit from support and services provided under the IDEA.



The [National Center on Accessible Educational Materials for Learning \(AEM Center\)](#) provides technical assistance, coaching, and resources to increase the availability and use of accessible educational materials and technologies for learners with disabilities across the lifespan. Resources include an [Online Learning Series on Accessible Materials & Technologies](#).



**National Center
on Deafblindness**

The [National Center on Deaf-Blindness \(NCDB\)](#) works with State deaf-blind projects and other partners to improve educational results and quality of life for children who are deaf-blind and their families. Resources include [Open Hands, Open Access \(OHOA\): Deaf-Blind Intervener Learning Modules](#) designed to increase awareness, knowledge, and skills related to intervention for students who are deaf-blind, and [Teaching Children Who Are Deafblind: Professional Development for Educators](#) modules.



The [National Center on Educational Outcomes \(NCEO\)](#) focuses on including students with disabilities, English learners, and English learners with disabilities in instruction and assessments. NCEO provides technical assistance and information on the inclusion of all students in comprehensive assessment systems.



**NATIONAL CENTER
on Inclusion Toward
Rightful Presence**

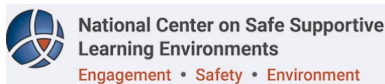
The [National Center on Inclusion Toward Rightful Presence](#) assists with implementation of practices that move school systems toward rightful presence for all students. The Center offers differentiated, strengths-based technical assistance to build capacity to implement and sustain systems, policies, and practices that foster an equity-based inclusion system. Resources include an [implementation guide](#), a [multi-tiered system of support framework for increasing equity in education](#), and [high leverage practices to improve inclusive educational environments](#).

National Center on
INTENSIVE INTERVENTION

The [National Center on Intensive Intervention \(NCII\)](#) has tools and resources to support general and special education teachers, interventionists, school psychologists and counselors, and other school staff working with students with intensive academic and behavioral needs. Resources for using evidence-based practices are included in the [What Counts as Evidence? Making Decisions for Instruction and Intervention within a Multi-Tiered System of Support](#) and [Tools Charts](#).



The [National Center for Pyramid Model Interventions \(NCPMI\)](#) assists States and programs in the implementation of the Pyramid Model for Supporting Social Emotional Competence in Infants and Young Children within early intervention and early education programs. Resources include the [indicators of high-quality inclusion as part of the Pyramid Model](#).



The [National Center on Safe and Supportive Learning Environments \(NCSSLE\)](#) offers information and technical assistance to States, districts, schools, institutions of higher education, and communities focused on improving school climate and conditions for learning. NCSSLE provides resources and technical assistance on high-quality measurement tools and has compiled a [School Climate Improvement Resource Package](#) for district and school leaders, teachers, school staff, and other members of the school community.



The [National Center for Systemic Improvement \(NCSI\)](#) provides technical assistance to States to transform their systems to improve outcomes for children and youth with disabilities. Resources include [Three Circles of Evidence-Based Decision Making to Support Students with Disabilities](#), [Guiding Questions: The FAIR Test](#) (a companion to the *Three Circles*), and a two-part series titled [Got Evidence? Where to Find and How to Use It to Make Sound Decisions About Evidence-Based Practices](#).



The [National Comprehensive Center](#) works with States and LEAs to enhance the quality of instruction, close achievement gaps, and improve educational outcomes for all students. A three-part series, [Designing for Diversity](#), addresses the challenges of moving diversity, equity, and inclusion from abstract ideas to actions that transform traditional practices in education.



The [National Technical Assistance Center on Transition: The Collaborative \(NTACT:C\)](#) provides information, tools, and supports to assist multiple constituents in delivering effective services and instruction for secondary students and out-of-school youth with disabilities.



The [Promoting Rigorous Outcomes and Growth by Redesigning Educational Services for Students with Disabilities Center \(PROGRESS Center\)](#) provides resources, tools, and technical assistance to support local educators and leaders (kindergarten through transition age) in developing and implementing high-quality educational programming for students with disabilities. Resources include online courses on [evidence-based instructional practices and intensive intervention](#).



The [Regional Educational Laboratory \(REL\) Program](#) conducts research and provides technical assistance on supporting an education system grounded in evidence-based practices. Available resources include an [infographic on evidence-based teaching practices](#).



The [STEM Innovation for Inclusion in Early Education Center \(STEMIE\)](#) focuses on developing and enhancing the knowledge base on engagement in STEM learning opportunities for young children with disabilities. STEMIE has an [inclusion framework](#) to ensure young children with disabilities can fully participate and engage in STEM learning opportunities and experiences.



The [TIES Center](#) provides information on inclusive practices and policies that support the movement of students with disabilities to more inclusive environments. Resources include learning modules and tip sheets, including an [inclusive education road map](#).



The [Title IV-A Center](#) provides States with support for implementing a Title IV, Part A Student Support and Academic Enrichment (SSAE) program. The center develops high-quality resources, information, and training aligned with well-rounded education to improve the safety and health of students. [Service Special Populations: Family Engagement](#) is a resource highlighting considerations and best practices in supporting special populations of students and their families.



[What Works Clearinghouse \(WWC\)](#) reviews research on programs and practices to provide educators with the information needed to make evidence-based decisions.

Resources include an [extensive database of evidence-based practices and programs](#) that have undergone rigorous reviews for effectiveness and [practice guides](#) that provide an overview of evidence-based practices and examples of applying them in classrooms.

Disclaimer: This document includes links to information, resources, and examples created and maintained by other public and private organizations. These links, resources, or examples are provided for the user's convenience. The opinions expressed in any of these materials do not necessarily reflect the position or policies of the Department. The Department does not control or guarantee the accuracy, relevance, timeliness, or completeness of this non-Department information. The inclusion of these links, resources, and examples is not intended to reflect their importance, nor is it intended to endorse views expressed, or products or services offered, on these non-Department sites.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ In 2015, the ESEA was reauthorized by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).
- ² Prior to 1990, the IDEA was called the Education for All Handicapped Children Act.
- ³ In this document, the term “child/children with a disability,” “student/students with a disability,” or “youth with a disability” means a child who has been evaluated in accordance with the IDEA requirements and found to be a child with a disability as defined in 34 C.F.R. § 300.8 and who, by reason thereof, needs special education and related services.
- ⁴ For the purposes of this document, the term ‘educators’ refers to general education teachers, special education teachers, specialized instructional support personnel, paraprofessionals and school administrators.
- ⁵ To increase readability, the Department has used the term “LEA” in place of “public agency.” Public agency is defined in 34 C.F.R. § 300.33 to include the SEA, LEAs, educational services agencies (ESAs), nonprofit public charter schools that are not otherwise included as LEAs or ESAs and are not a school of an LEA or ESA, and any other political subdivisions of the State that are responsible for providing education to children with disabilities. The program requirements under Part B of the IDEA apply to public agencies. See 34 C.F.R. §§ 300.120 and 300.600(b)(2).
- ⁶ The information provided within this guidance does not address every requirement of the ESEA and the IDEA.
- ⁷ Children with disabilities in public schools are also protected from discrimination on the basis of disability by other Federal laws, including Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. This document does not address the rights of students with disabilities under those laws.
- ⁸ U.S. Department of Education. *A History of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*. <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/IDEA-History>
- ⁹ U.S. Census Bureau. *2021 American Community Survey data*. <https://data.census.gov/table?q=DPO2&t=Disability>
- ¹⁰ U.S. Department of Education, EDFacts Data Warehouse: “IDEA Part B Child Count and Educational Environments Collection,” 2023-24. Available at <https://data.ed.gov/dataset/71ca7d0c-a161-4abe-9e2b-4e68ffb1061a/resource/aa572553-f494-49a6-a01e-99c52f0cf948/download/bchildcountandedenvironment2023-24.csv>
- ¹¹ IDEA section 614(d)(1)(A)(i), 34 C.F.R. § 300.320(a)(1)(i) and (2)(i).
- ¹² ESEA section 1111(b)(1)(B) and (E).
- ¹³ Ibid. The ESEA was reauthorized in 2015. The revisions to the ESEA retain similar high expectations for students.
- ¹⁴ IDEA section 601(c)(5)(C).
- ¹⁵ Hehir, T., Grindal, T., Freeman, B., Lamoreau, R., Borquaye, Y., & Burke, S. (2016). A Summary of the Evidence on Inclusive Education. Abt Associates. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED596134.pdf>
- ¹⁶ IDEA section 601(c)(5)(C).
- ¹⁷ For the purpose of this document, the terms “general education” and “general education class” have the same meaning as “regular class,” “regular classroom,” “regular educational environment,” “regular education class,” “regular educational setting,” and “regular classroom setting” under 34 C.F.R. §§ 300.42, 300.114, 300.115, 300.116, 300.208, 300.309, 300.310, 300.320, and 300.647.

- ¹⁸ See, for example, the IDEA section 618 Data Products: Static Tables Part B Child Count & Educational Environments Table 13: Number and percent of students ages 5 (in kindergarten) through 21 served under the IDEA, Part B, by educational environment and state. Based on data submitted by States, in 2022-2023, of the 7,095,053 students with disabilities served under the IDEA Part B, 4,759,604 or 67% of students with disabilities were in the regular class 80% or more of the day.
- ¹⁹ U.S. Department of Education. Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), Nation's Report Card, retrieved December 6, 2024 from: https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/dashboards/achievement_gaps.aspx
- ²⁰ National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2019. Monitoring Educational Equity. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/25389>.
- ²¹ In 2021-22, the four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate (ACGR) for students with disabilities was 71 percent, while the U.S. average ACGR for public high school students was 87 percent. Irwin, V., Wang, K., Jung, J., Kessler, E., Tezil, T., Alhassani, S., Filbey, A., Dilig, R., and Bullock Mann, F. (2024). Report on the Condition of Education 2024 (NCES 2024-144). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. <https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2024144>
- ²² Government Accountability Office. 2024. Education Could Improve Information on Accommodations for Students with Disabilities [GAO-24-105614]. <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-24-105614.pdf>
- ²³ U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. November 28, 2023, Policy Statement: Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Early Childhood Programs. <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/idea-files/policy-statement-inclusion-of-children-with-disabilities-in-early-childhood-programs/>
- ²⁴ Barrett, C. A., Stevenson, N. A., & Burns, M. K. (2019). Relationship between disability category, time spent in general education and academic achievement. *Educational Studies*, 46(4), 497–512. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03055698.2019.1614433>
- ²⁵ Kart, A., & Kart, M. (2021). Academic and Social Effects of Inclusion on Students without Disabilities: A Review of the Literature. *Education Sciences*, 11(1), 16. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci11010016>
- ²⁶ Hehir, T., Grindal, T., Freeman, B., Lamoreau, R., Borquaye, Y., & Burke, S. (2016). A Summary of the Evidence on Inclusive Education. Abt Associates. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED596134.pdf>
- ²⁷ U.S. Department of Education. About Us. <https://www.ed.gov/about>
- ²⁸ IDEA section 612(a)(5).
- ²⁹ ESEA section 1111(b)(1)(B) and (E).
- ³⁰ See for example ESEA sections 1111(a)(1)(B), Title I State plans; 1112(a)(1)(B), Title I local plans; 1114(b)(7)(A)(iii)III), schoolwide school plans.
- ³¹ IDEA section 614(d)(1)(A).
- ³² See OSERS [Dear Colleague Letter on Free Appropriate Public Education](#) (November 16, 2015).
- ³³ IDEA sections 612(a)(5) and 614(d)(1)(A).
- ³⁴ IDEA sections 602(9) and 614(d)(1)(A).
- ³⁵ The term “parent” is defined in IDEA section 602(23) and 34 C.F.R. § 300.30.
- ³⁶ IDEA section 614(d)(1)(B).
- ³⁷ IDEA section 612(a)(14) and 34 C.F.R. § 300.156.

- ³⁸ In developing the list of inclusive educational practices, the Department relied upon the U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services joint [Policy Statement on Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Early Childhood Programs](#) (November 28, 2023), as well as congressional findings contained in section 601 of the IDEA.
- ³⁹ ESEA section 1111(b)(1)(A)-(D); 34 CFR § 200.1(a).
- ⁴⁰ ESEA section 1111(c).
- ⁴¹ ESEA sections 1111(d)(1)(B) (for CSI schools), 1111(d)(2)(B) (for TSI schools), and 1111(d)(2)(B)-(C) (for ATSI schools).
- ⁴² ESEA section 1111(d)(1)(B)(vi).
- ⁴³ ESEA section 1111(d)(2)(B)(iii)-(iv). See OESE non-regulatory guidance, *School Improvement and Related Provisions*, available at <https://www.ed.gov/media/document/school-improvement-guidance> (January 2025)
- ⁴⁴ ESEA section 1003(b)(1)(A).
- ⁴⁵ IDEA section 611(e)(2)(C)(xi) and 34 C.F.R. § 300.704(b)(4)(xi).
- ⁴⁶ IDEA section 616(d)(2) and 616(b)(2)(C).
- ⁴⁷ For more information, see [State Performance Plans/Annual Performance Reports \(SPP/APR\) — Individuals with Disabilities Education Act](#).
- ⁴⁸ For additional information related to how the Department makes determinations under section 616(d) of IDEA, see: <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/how-the-department-made-determinations/>.
- ⁴⁹ 34 C.F.R. §§ 300.149 and 300.600(b). See also <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/idea-files/guidance-on-state-general-supervision-responsibilities-under-parts-b-and-c-of-the-idea-july-24-2023/>
- ⁵⁰ IDEA's LRE requirements are further explained in the "Improving Learning Environments through Inclusive Educational Practices" section of the guidance.
- ⁵¹ 34 C.F.R. § 300.120.
- ⁵² See [OESE letter to Chief State School Officer](#) (September 3, 2024).
- ⁵³ There are similar requirements related to States' reporting of State-level and LEA-level data under IDEA. Specifically, SEAs must annually report to the public on the performance of each LEA on the targets in the State's performance plan, and SEAs use this data to issue annual determinations on each LEA's implementation of the IDEA. 34 C.F.R. §§ 300.602(b) and 300.600(a)(2) and (a)(4), respectively. SEAs are also required to annually report to the Secretary, and make publicly available, the State's performance on meeting the targets in the State's performance plan. 34 C.F.R. §§ 300.602(b)(i)(B) and (b)(2) and 300.600(a)(4). In addition, States must publicly report on the participation and performance of children with disabilities on assessments. 34 C.F.R. § 300.160(f).
- ⁵⁴ U.S. Department of Education. [Opportunities and Responsibilities for State and Local Report Cards Under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, As Amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act](#). September 2019. <https://www.ed.gov/sites/ed/files/2020/03/report-card-guidance-final.pdf>
- ⁵⁵ Ibid.
- ⁵⁶ State and local report cards must include data disaggregated by student subgroup. Students with disabilities are one of the student subgroups included in ESEA. See: U.S. Department of Education. [Opportunities and Responsibilities for State and Local Report Cards Under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, As Amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act](#). September 2019.

- ⁵⁷ The list provided includes selected elements that are required by ESEA to be included in State and local report cards. For a full list of requirements, see: U.S. Department of Education. [Opportunities and Responsibilities for State and Local Report Cards Under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, As Amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act](#). September 2019.
- ⁵⁸ ESEA section 1001.
- ⁵⁹ U.S. Department of Education. [Supporting School Reform by Leveraging Federal Funds in a Schoolwide Program, Non-Regulatory Guidance](#). September 2016.
- ⁶⁰ ESEA section 1115(c). See also U.S. Department of Education. [Supporting School Reform by Leveraging Federal Funds in a Schoolwide Program, Non-Regulatory Guidance](#). September 2016.
- ⁶¹ For more information to support the implementation of Title I programs, see: U.S. Department of Education. [Supporting School Reform by Leveraging Federal Funds in a Schoolwide Program, Non-Regulatory Guidance](#). September 2016.
- ⁶² ESEA section 1114(b)(6). The ESEA requires Title I schoolwide plans to be based on the comprehensive needs assessment that takes into account information on the academic achievement of children, particularly the needs of children who are failing, or are at-risk of failing, to meet challenging State academic standards, which may or may not include students with disabilities depending on the school's needs assessment. See: U.S. Department of Education. [Supporting School Reform by Leveraging Federal Funds in a Schoolwide Program, Non-Regulatory Guidance](#). September 2016.
- ⁶³ ESEA section 1111(c)(2).
- ⁶⁴ ESEA section 1114(b)(2); 34 C.F.R. § 200.26(a).
- ⁶⁵ U.S. Department of Education. [Supporting School Reform by Leveraging Federal Funds in a Schoolwide Program, Non-Regulatory Guidance](#). September 2016.
- ⁶⁶ ESEA section 1114(b)(7).
- ⁶⁷ ESEA section 1114(b)(7)(A)(i), (iii).
- ⁶⁸ ESEA section 1114(b)(7)(A)(ii).
- ⁶⁹ U.S. Department of Education. [Supporting School Reform by Leveraging Federal Funds in a Schoolwide Program, Non-Regulatory Guidance](#). September 2016
- ⁷⁰ UDL is a research-based framework that removes barriers to learning by incorporating multiple means of engagement, representation, action and expression into the design and implementation of instruction and assessment. For more information about UDL, visit <https://udlguidelines.cast.org/>.
- ⁷¹ See ESEA [section 8101](#)(33).
- ⁷² Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (n.d.). What is PBIS? <https://www.pbis.org/pbis/what-is-pbis>
- ⁷³ U.S. Department of Education. [Supporting School Reform by Leveraging Federal Funds in a Schoolwide Program, Non-Regulatory Guidance](#). September 2016.
- ⁷⁴ ESEA section 1114(b)(3); 34 C.F.R. § 200.26(c).
- ⁷⁵ U.S. Department of Education. [Supporting School Reform by Leveraging Federal Funds in a Schoolwide Program, Non-Regulatory Guidance](#). September 2016.
- ⁷⁶ ESEA section 1114(a)(1), (3).
- ⁷⁷ ESEA section 1114(a)(3)(C)

- ⁷⁸ ESEA section 1111(g)(2)(E).
- ⁷⁹ IDEA section 613(a)(2)(D) and 34 C.F.R. § 300.206.
- ⁸⁰ ESEA section 1115(c).
- ⁸¹ ESEA section 1115(b)(2)(D)
- ⁸² IDEA sections 602(9) and 614(d), 34 C.F.R. § 300.320.
- ⁸³ IDEA section 614(d)(1)(A)(i)(I) and 34 C.F.R. § 300.320(a)(1).
- ⁸⁴ IDEA section 614(d)(1)(A)(i)(II) and 34 C.F.R. § 300.320(a)(2).
- ⁸⁵ IDEA section 614(d)(1)(A)(i)(IV) and 34 C.F.R. § 300.320(a)(4).
- ⁸⁶ 34 C.F.R. §300.320(a)(1)(i).
- ⁸⁷ See [OSERS Policy Guidance on Free Appropriate Public Education \(FAPE\) \(November 16, 2015\)](#). States are permitted to define alternate academic achievement standards for children with the most significant cognitive disabilities, provided those standards are aligned with the State’s academic content standards, promote access to the general curriculum, and reflect professional judgment of the highest achievement standards possible, in accordance with 34 C.F.R. § 200.1(d). 34 C.F.R. § 300.160(c)(2)(i).
- ⁸⁸ See [OSERS Policy Guidance on Free Appropriate Public Education \(FAPE\) \(PDF\) \(November 16, 2015\)](#).
- ⁸⁹ 137 S. Ct. 988, at 1000. See the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP’s) [Q&A on U. S. Supreme Court Case Decision Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District Re-1 \(December 7, 2017\)](#).
- ⁹⁰ IDEA section 614(d)(1)(A)(i)(II)(aa) and 34 C.F.R. § 300.320(a)(2)(i)(A).
- ⁹¹ IDEA section 602(29) and 34 C.F.R. § 300.39(a)(1) and (b)(3).
- ⁹² IDEA section 602(33) and 34 C.F.R. § 300.42.
- ⁹³ For more information on supplementary aids and services, see: Progress Center. [Creating a Comprehensive Statement of Special Education and Aids and Services within the IEP](#). Retrieved on December 6, 2024 from <https://promotingprogress.org/resources/webinar-statement-special-education-and-aids-and-services> and IRIS Center. [Individualized Services & Supports](#). Retrieved on December 6, 2024 from <https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/module/iep01/cresource/q3/p08/>
- ⁹⁴ 34 C.F.R. §§ 300.320(a)(4)(i) and (ii) and 300.324(a)(3)(ii).
- ⁹⁵ [OSERS Return to School Roadmap: Development and Implementation of Individualized Education Programs in the Least Restrictive Environment under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act \(September 30, 2021\)](#)
- ⁹⁶ IDEA section 612(a)(14)(B)(iii) and 34 C.F.R. § 300.156(b)(2) for SEAs and 34 C.F.R. § 300.201 for LEAs.
- ⁹⁷ See [OSEP Letter to Clarke](#) (May 28, 2008). In Letter to Clarke, the Department stated that “the use of paraprofessionals remains the same as the position set out in our response to public comments on the June 21, 2005, Notice of Proposed Rulemaking. See 71 FR 46611-46612. The Act [IDEA] and regulations require states to establish and maintain qualifications to ensure that personnel necessary to carry out the purposes of Part B, including speech-language paraprofessionals, are appropriately and adequately prepared and trained. 34 CFR §300.156(a). The use of paraprofessionals and assistants who are appropriately trained and supervised is governed by state law, regulation, and written policy, giving states the option of determining whether paraprofessionals and assistants can be used to assist in the provision of special education and related services under Part B of the Act, and, if so, to what extent their use would be permissible. States have the flexibility to determine whether to use paraprofessionals and assistants, and, if so, to determine the scope of their responsibilities.”

- ⁹⁸ 34 C.F.R. §§ 300.320(a)(4)(i) and (ii) and 300.324(a)(3)(ii).
- ⁹⁹ [OSERS Return to School Roadmap: Development and Implementation of Individualized Education Programs in the Least Restrictive Environment under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act \(September 30, 2021\)](#)
- ¹⁰⁰ IDEA section 612(a)(14)(B)(iii) and 34 C.F.R. § 300.156(b)(2) for SEAs and 34 C.F.R. § 300.201 for LEAs.
- ¹⁰¹ See [OSEP Letter to Clarke](#) (May 28, 2008). In Letter to Clarke, the Department stated that “the use of paraprofessionals remains the same as the position set out in our response to public comments on the June 21, 2005, Notice of Proposed Rulemaking. See 71 FR 46611-46612. The Act [IDEA] and regulations require states to establish and maintain qualifications to ensure that personnel necessary to carry out the purposes of Part B, including speech-language paraprofessionals, are appropriately and adequately prepared and trained. 34 CFR §300.156(a). The use of paraprofessionals and assistants who are appropriately trained and supervised is governed by state law, regulation, and written policy, giving states the option of determining whether paraprofessionals and assistants can be used to assist in the provision of special education and related services under Part B of the Act, and, if so, to what extent their use would be permissible. States have the flexibility to determine whether to use paraprofessionals and assistants, and, if so, to determine the scope of their responsibilities.”
- ¹⁰² For the purposes of this document, the term “general education teacher” has the same meaning as “regular education teacher” under 34 C.F.R. § 300.321(a)(2).
- ¹⁰³ See Paulsrud, D., & Nilholm, C. (2020). Teaching for inclusion – a review of research on the cooperation between regular teachers and special educators in the work with students in need of special support. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 27(4), 541–555. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2020.1846799>.
- ¹⁰⁴ U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Office of Special Education Programs, [45th Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act](#), 2023, Washington, D.C. 2024.
- ¹⁰⁵ ESEA section 8101(42), IDEA section 614(d)(1)(B), 34 C.F.R. 300.321.
- ¹⁰⁶ IDEA section 614(d)(1)(A)(i)(II), (d)(1)(B), and (d)(3)(A). 34 C.F.R. § 300.324.
- ¹⁰⁷ IDEA section 614(d)(1)(B), 34 C.F.R. § 300.321. See also, [OSEP Letter to Anonymous \(July 25, 2003\)](#)
- ¹⁰⁸ IDEA section 614(d)(1)(C), (d)(4)(B) and 34 C.F.R. § 300.324(a)(3) and (b)(3).
- ¹⁰⁹ 34 C.F.R. § 300.323(d).
- ¹¹⁰ For a description of blending, braiding and sequencing funds, see page 2 of [Resource Leveraging & Service Coordination to Increase Competitive Integrative employment for Individuals with Disabilities](#) (August 2022). Additionally, the Department and the White House hosted a webinar entitled “[Blending and Braiding: Using Different Funding Streams to Meet the Needs of the Whole Child](#)” (October 2024).
- ¹¹¹ IDEA section 612(a)(14) and 34 C.F.R. § 300.207.
- ¹¹² “Professional development” is defined in [section 8101\(42\)](#) of the ESEA.
- ¹¹³ ESEA section 2103(b)(2).
- ¹¹⁴ For more information about a school climate, visit: [National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments](#).
- ¹¹⁵ IDEA sections 602(9) and (14), 612(a)(1) and (a)(5), and 614(d).
- ¹¹⁶ See IDEA section 612(a)(5) and [Dear Colleague Letter \(DCL\) related to Preschool Least Restrictive Environments \(LRE\)](#).
- ¹¹⁷ IDEA section 612(a)(5)(A).

- ¹¹⁸ See OSEP Letter to Anonymous (April 25, 1996).
- ¹¹⁹ IDEA section 614(d)(1)(A)(i)(IV)(cc) and (V) and 34 C.F.R. § 300.320(a)(4)(iii) and (a)(5).
- ¹²⁰ 34 C.F.R. § 300.116(e).
- ¹²¹ IDEA section 612(a)(5) and 34 C.F.R. § 300.115(b)(2).
- ¹²² 34 C.F.R. § 300.116(a)(1).
- ¹²³ IDEA section 612(a)(5) and 34 C.F.R. § 300.116.
- ¹²⁴ 34 C.F.R. § 300.116(c). See also OSEP Letter to Cohen, August 6, 1996; [OSEP Dear Colleague Letter on Free Appropriate Public Education \(FAPE\)](#) (November 16, 2015); [OSEP Letter to Breeskin](#), (November 22, 2019).
- ¹²⁵ 34 C.F.R. § 300.115(a).
- ¹²⁶ 34 C.F.R. § 300.115(b).
- ¹²⁷ [OSEP Letter to Trigg](#) (November 30, 2007).
- ¹²⁸ OSEP has repeatedly stated that a “lack of adequate personnel or resources does not relieve school districts of their obligation to make FAPE available to students with disabilities in the least restrictive educational setting in which their IEPs can be implemented.” See, for example, Letter to Anonymous (July 25, 2000), Letter to Williams (March 24, 2000), and Letter to Anonymous (February 23, 1998).
- ¹²⁹ Nonacademic and extracurricular services and activities may include counseling services, athletics, transportation, health services, recreational activities, special interest groups or clubs sponsored by the LEA, referrals to agencies that provide assistance to individuals with disabilities, and employment of students, including both employment by the LEA and assistance in making outside employment available.
34 C.F.R. § 300.107.
- ¹³⁰ Assistance to States for the Education of Children with Disabilities and Preschool Grants for Children with Disabilities, Final Regulations, Analysis of Comments and Changes, 71 Fed. Reg. 46540, 46,585 (August 14, 2006).
- ¹³¹ U.S. Department of Education. [Non-Regulatory Guidance Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants October 21, 2016](#).
- ¹³² See U.S. Department of Education [Dear Colleague Letter on Using Federal funds to Support Humanities](#) (July 13, 2016) and [Dear Colleague Letter: Federal Funding for Technology](#) (January 25, 2023).
- ¹³³ U.S. Department of Education. [Non-Regulatory Guidance Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants October 21, 2016](#)
- ¹³⁴ See [OSEP Memo 11-07](#) (January 21, 2011).
- ¹³⁵ U.S. Department of Education. [Non-Regulatory Guidance Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants October 21, 2016](#)
- ¹³⁶ Mazzotti, V. L., Rowe, D. A., Kwiatek, S., Voggt, A., Chang, W.-H., Fowler, C. H., Poppen, M., Sinclair, J., & Test, D. W. (2021). Secondary Transition Predictors of Postschool Success: An Update to the Research Base. *Career Development and Transition for Exceptional Individuals*, 44(1), 47-64. doi: [10.1177/2165143420959793](https://doi.org/10.1177/2165143420959793)
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- ¹⁴² U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, Regional Educational Laboratory Midwest. (n.d.). *The Importance of Student Sense of Belonging*. Retrieved on December 6, 2024 from <https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/sites/default/files/RELMW-6-2-3-4-StudBelong-508.pdf>
- ¹⁴³ U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, Regional Educational Laboratory Program. July 1, 2020. Student Sense of Belonging — What does the research say about systems and structures that schools can use to support students with their sense of belonging in the school space? Retrieved on December 6, 2024, from <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/rel/Products/Region/northwest/Ask-A-REL/60072>
- ¹⁴⁴ Molina Roldán, S., Marauri, J., Aubert, A., & Flecha, R. (2021). How Inclusive Interactive Learning Environments Benefit Students Without Special Needs. *Frontiers in psychology*, 12, 661427.
<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.661427>
- ¹⁴⁵ For more information about UDL, visit OSEP-funded technical assistance center [CAST](#).
- ¹⁴⁶ For more information on implementation science, visit the OSEP funded: [State Implementation and Scaling-Up of Evidence Based Practices Center](#)
- ¹⁴⁷ CAST. [About Universal Design for Learning](#).
- ¹⁴⁸ [Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports](#).
- ¹⁴⁹ DeMatthews, D., Billingsley, B., McLeskey, J., & Cowart Moss, S. (2023). Inclusive principal leadership: Moving toward inclusive and high-achieving schools for students with disabilities (Document No. IC-8b). Also see the [Collaboration for Effective Educator Development, Accountability, and Reform Center](#) website.
- ¹⁵⁰ Many OSEP-funded technical assistance centers provide free evidence-based instructional strategies and intervention supports for children with disabilities. A list of OSEP technical assistance centers can be found at the end of this document.
- ¹⁵¹ Applicable legal requirements include relevant provisions of the IDEA and the ESEA.
- ¹⁵² U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. [Press Release — Public School Leaders Report 90 Percent Average Daily Student Attendance Rate in November 2023 \(January 18, 2024\)](#)
- ¹⁵³ For additional information see the TIES Center website on [Inclusive Leadership and Systems Change](#).
- ¹⁵⁴ DeMatthews, D., Billingsley, B., McLeskey, J., & Cowart Moss, S. (2023). Inclusive principal leadership: Moving toward inclusive and high-achieving schools for students with disabilities (Document No. IC-8b). University of Florida, Collaboration for Effective Educator Development, Accountability, and Reform Center website: <http://cedar.education.ufl.edu/tools/innovation-configurations/>
- ¹⁵⁵ Giangreco, M. F., Suter, J.C., & Doyle, M. (2010). Paraprofessionals in Inclusive Schools: A Review of Recent Research. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation*, 20(1), 41-57.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10474410903535356>

- ¹⁵⁶ See the IRIS Center’s professional development module on [Family Engagement](#)
- ¹⁵⁷ Lieb, J., Classen, A., Wright, L., & Filce, H. (2023). Family experiences of engagement in inclusive childcare programs for toddlers. *Journal of Childhood, Education & Society*, 4(2), 193-218. <https://doi.org/10.37291/2717638X.202342251>
- ¹⁵⁸ Under 34 C.F.R. §§ 300.167 through 300.169, States are required to establish and maintain an advisory panel for the purpose of providing guidance with respect to special education and related services for children with disabilities in the State.
- ¹⁵⁹ OSEP funds a network of parent information and resource centers to support the implementation of the IDEA. For more information, see the [Center for Parent Information and Resources](#).
- ¹⁶⁰ Brooks, M.P., Rollins, S.K., Collins, J., & Mayanja, N. (2019). *Taking It To the Next Level: Strengthening and Sustaining Family Engagement through Integrated, Systemic Practice*. Washington, DC: Institute for Educational Leadership.
- ¹⁶¹ National Technical Assistance Center on Transition, Instruction in Self-Advocacy, retrieved on December 6, 2024 from <https://transitionta.org/topics/pre-ets/self-advocacy/#key-resources>
- ¹⁶² Schena, D., Rosales, R., & Rowe, E. (2023). Teaching Self-Advocacy Skills: A Review and Call for Research. *Journal of Behavioral Education*, 32(4), 641-689. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10864-022-09472-7>
- ¹⁶³ There are many resources to support building the self-advocacy skills of students with disabilities, including: <https://www.parentcenterhub.org/priority-selfadvocacy/> and <https://www.pacer.org/students/transition-to-life/advocating-for-myself.asp>
- ¹⁶⁴ For a list of Assistive Technology Act programs for each State, visit: <https://at3center.net/>