

# Specially Designed Instruction (SDI) in Preschool

## A Framework for High Engagement and Learning

### OVERVIEW

A learner eligible for special education services is entitled to Specially Designed Instruction (SDI) at no cost to the family, to meet his/her unique needs as a learner with a disability. This includes *adapting 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 to the general curriculum*, so that the child can meet the educational standards of the responsible administrative unit (ECEA 2.43(2)(c)) These special education and related services must be designed to meet the learner's unique needs and prepare them for further education, employment and independent living (CFR 300.1).

This Framework is intended to support teams in the determination of a disability, identifying special education and related services needs, designing, and delivering special education services to best meet the needs of young learners with disabilities and a range of educational needs. "Special Education" means Specially Designed Instruction.

### THE GENERAL CURRICULUM

The general curriculum includes the appropriate activities expected of all children. The Colorado Academic Standards include 10 content areas for preschool through 12th grade, the preschool standards have indicators of progress that describe what children may do by the end of their preschool experience Colorado's Early Learning and Development Guidelines describe a trajectory of children's learning and development from birth to eight years old, giving depth and maintaining a broad view of development in all aspects of children's growth. They ensure a holistic approach to creating positive early childhood environments and are aligned to the Colorado Academic Standards as well as the Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework.

### ABOUT THIS SDI FRAMEWORK

This is an adaptation of the SDI framework developed by the Iowa Department of Education<sup>1</sup>. The Framework was deliberately designed to be applicable across the various needs of learners with disabilities in early childhood settings in Colorado.

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<sup>1</sup> Iowa's Specially Designed Instruction (SDI) Framework [PDF]. (2017, August). Iowa Department of Education.



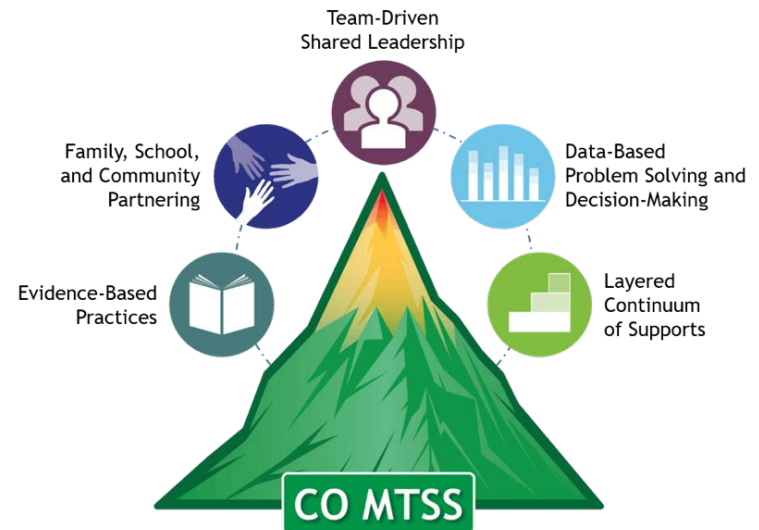
## GUIDING PRINCIPLES ABOUT SDI

The following foundational beliefs are of key importance as we work together to improve our preschool outcomes, service delivery and SDI for our learners here in Colorado:

- Learners receiving special education services are general education learners first and always.
- Highly effective special education services and outcomes are dependent on highly effective Universal Instruction and a school-wide multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS).
- Effective SDI is designed through collaboration between families and highly qualified educators.
- SDI is delivered by special education and general education teachers and professionals in various settings across the day.
- The Colorado Academic Standards implemented in high-quality early childhood settings should support assessment, design and delivery of SDI.
- Highly effective SDI flows from high quality, authentic and specific assessment information.
- SDI supports learners to use tools, materials and strategies to access the general preschool curriculum.
- SDI helps educators and families address children’s unique needs that are a result of the individual’s disability.

## SDI IN AN MTSS FRAMEWORK

Learners eligible for special education services are entitled to SDI to address their unique needs and to ensure access to the general curriculum so they can meet educational standards. Therefore, in many cases learners with disabilities will need supports including targeted and/or intensive interventions. This may include accommodations, modifications, services and supports within and across a layered continuum of supports. For example, a learner with a disability and IEP goal in understanding verbal directions may require accommodations such as visual supports to access instruction at the universal tier. The learner may also require individualized instruction such as pre-teaching/reteaching to be able



to engage with the universal instruction. However, the need for individualized systematic instruction of specific routines within routines may be needed to progress toward grade level standards.

These supports and services are just examples of SDI that a learner may need that extends across the tiers of MTSS ranging from more intensive to less intensive. What is most important to know is that SDI can occur in any educational setting and includes all the unique educational needs of a learner with a disability.

The SDI Framework outlines Key Components and Critical Features of the practices to support effective SDI. The Framework does not replace a system’s implementation of MTSS. Effective universal instruction and intervention systems are foundational to effective SDI. Therefore, the practices evident in the SDI Framework should be used within the context of a school’s instruction and supports available to all learners. For example, a school’s MTSS/PBIS system should be taken into consideration to best support a strong system of supports for all learners including learners with disabilities. Practices that impact universal instruction and intervention systems impact learners with disabilities as well.

The SDI Framework is a guide to engage educators and families to support the determination of a disability, identifying special education and related services needs, design, and delivery of effective SDI. Effective SDI is evident when the Key Components and Critical Features are evident in practice—when learners with disabilities progress toward and meet preschool standards and are actively engaged in their learning across daily routines and activities. The Key Components and Critical Features are aligned with a range of research on effective instruction for learners with disabilities.

Additionally, while the SDI Framework is content free, professionals should use appropriate tools to address specific learner needs. For example, the Division of Early Childhood (DEC) Recommended Practices should be used to focus diagnosis, design, delivery and engagement on practices that have the highest expected outcomes for young children.

## SUGGESTED USES

The SDI Framework provides a profile of the critical features and effective practices of determining disability, identifying special education and related services needs, designing, and delivering effective SDI that engages learners. The framework and its associated resources are intended to be used by educators to guide decision-making to support learners with disabilities, to self-assess their own skills in providing SDI, to guide coaching conversations around critical features of SDI and to inform ongoing professional learning focused on SDI. This framework should not be used as a teacher evaluation tool. It is not intended to be an implementation guide



## Key Components and Critical Features

### ELIGIBILITY ID FOR INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN

*Use authentic assessment in order to:*

1. Define areas of concern and verify potential reasons for the concern.
  - a. Gather and triangulate multiple sources of data
  - b. Thoroughly review the learner's developmental history focusing intentionally on the setting, routines, and activities as well as the learner's performance to develop a learner profile
  - c. Pinpoint skills and/or behaviors that are not at mastery
  - d. Develop an observable, measurable concern that has a verifiable standard based on the data gathered
2. Identify strengths, interests and preferences that sustain learner engagement
  - a. Identify existing skills in which to build on through specially designed instruction
  - b. Identify preferences for learning, materials, adult instructional behaviors, and activities that will maximize the likelihood a learner will remain engaged
3. Determine critical supports needed for learner success
  - a. Analyze the data collected in order to recommend and outline where specially designed instruction needs to begin
  - b. Make an instructional match which includes the environment and approach/materials needed for the learner to access and make progress in the Colorado Academic Standards

### DESIGN FOR INSTRUCTIONAL DELIVERY

*Develop a plan with a team who has relevant and specialized knowledge, which:*

4. Incorporates evidence-based practices aligned to learner needs
  - a. Apply diagnostic results to select appropriate supports for:
    - i. Access
    - ii. Engagement
    - iii. Increasing specific skills
  - b. Explicitly state learner outcomes
  - c. Determine intensity and frequency of alterable variables (e.g. grouping, materials, accommodations, time, etc.)
  - d. Use high leverage instructional practices that match the concept/skill being taught and the learner's needs
  - e. Maintain high expectations, is coordinated and is inclusive of the necessary services and supports
5. Aligns to the Colorado Academic Standards and is age appropriate
  - a. Align learning targets to grade level, learning progressions and foundational skills
  - b. Align the learner's IEP goals, progress monitoring and supports to
  - c. Connect supports and services to instruction the learner is receiving throughout the preschool routines
  - d. Aligned to Colorado Academic Standards and evident in:
    - i. Learning targets
    - ii. IEP goal statements
    - iii. Progress monitoring
    - iv. Services and Supports
6. Maximizes opportunities for access and engagement
  - a. Address appropriate accommodations & modifications
  - b. Consider multiple means of engagement, action and expression and representation which are matched to learner need

- c. Provide instruction in the general education environment and removal is considered only if needed for learner success.

### DELIVER FOR LEARNER ENGAGEMENT

*Use evidence-based, high-leverage instructional practices in order to:*

7. Deliver the instruction as designed and monitor instructional fidelity
  - a. Regularly use implementation fidelity checklists/walkthroughs/observations to ensure:
    - i. all parts of the instructional plan are implemented as intended
    - ii. the instructional plan is implemented with the frequency/intensity/duration as planned
    - iii. instruction includes evidence-based, high-leverage instructional practices
  - b. Intentionally and regularly engage ongoing implementation support for feedback and guidance (e.g., family, coaches, content experts, PLC, etc.)
8. Monitor learner progress
  - a. Use assessments/data sources that link directly to skills taught
  - b. Collect and use formative and summative assessments as planned
  - c. Gather data with sufficient frequency to make instructional decisions.
9. Adjust instruction as necessary based on learner progress and instructional fidelity
  - a. Intentionally collaborate to review/analyze learner data to enhance instructional practices and materials
  - b. Examine implementation data and progress data to consider:
    - i. continuing the plan as written
    - ii. gathering more data
    - iii. improving implementation
    - iv. reducing supports/services
    - v. intensifying/modifying supports



# Key Components and Critical Features

## INDICATORS THAT SUPPORT ENGAGEMENT FOR LEARNING

1. High Expectations-Family & Teachers:
  - a. Share high expectations for the learner
  - b. Partner to promote self-determination in the learner
  - c. Have access to and understand the curricular expectations and standards required of the learner
  - d. Advocate for multiple approaches and strategies that will support the learner and hold their interest
  - e. Recognize their roles in the teaching and learning process and stay up to date on pertinent responsibilities in supporting the learner
2. Positive Communication Family & Teachers:
  - a. Persistently and clearly communicate high expectations
  - b. Communicate about the learner using preferred methods
  - c. Communicate honestly, openly and with respect
  - d. Seek to understand by asking questions and actively listening
  - e. Recognize that they are partners in the teaching and learning process

3. Active Involvement-Families & Teachers:
  - a. Engage in collaborative and active problem solving
  - b. Value full participation and support active involvement
  - c. Support and promote positive and trusting relationships with learners
4. Support Learner Learning-Families & Teachers:
  - a. Intentionally create and/or support safe, accessible and inviting environments for learning
  - b. Establish and connect learners to real life learning environments
  - c. Support and promote instruction that maximizes access and learner opportunity for growth
  - d. Actively seek means to improve learner engagement

