

All students, including students with disabilities, deserve access to a high-quality education that prepares them for future success. Students are best served when they have access to effective instruction on high-quality, grade-level curriculum that is tailored to their learning needs.

Schools and teachers keep track of individual student needs in various ways. [Individual Education Programs](#) (IEPs) are both a legal and practical tool for documenting the specific learning needs and supports necessary for students with disabilities to access their education. However, as schools navigate special education compliance requirements and as teachers focus on curriculum and instruction, IEPs are often siloed from the daily instructional planning process. This resource will equip general and special educators with strategies to support students with disabilities by connecting IEPs to daily instruction. Educators should:

- Review and understand [key IEP information](#),
- Develop supports for students with disabilities as part of [beginning-of-the-year planning](#), and
- [Continuously leverage IEP information](#) to support students in achieving high expectations.

## Key IEP Information

IEPs are often long, technical, and difficult to navigate, especially when it comes to daily instructional planning. The table below shows general and special education teachers the key elements of the IEP they should review, and what they should take away to plan for the delivery of supportive, high-quality, grade-level instruction for students with disabilities.

IEP Information	Essential Takeaway
<p><b>Present-Level Academic Functioning</b> includes qualitative and quantitative information about a student's independent performance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Qualitative:</b> elements of foundational reading skills, fluency, and foundational math skill development</li> <li>• <b>Quantitative:</b> grade-level equivalencies, lexile measures, and proficiency levels on statewide assessments.</li> </ul>	<p>Present-level academic functioning information helps teachers anticipate and deliver academic support to students with disabilities as they master grade-level content.</p>
<p><b>Special Factors</b> includes information on impacts or barriers caused by a student's disability that impede access to and success in general education. These factors include needs around communication, sensory function, accessibility, assistive technology, behavior, and health.</p>	<p>Information about special factors assists teachers in identifying specific needs and developing supports to encourage engagement in learning.</p>
<p><b>Accommodations</b> are adjustments in instructional delivery, learning environments, assignments or schedules that support students in achieving grade-level expectations. Accommodations do not alter expectations but rather support students in meeting them.</p>	<p>Accommodations information signals how teachers can provide consistent support to students with disabilities in achieving high expectations throughout daily instruction and assessments.</p>
<p><b>Related Services</b> are therapies and services that enable students with disabilities to achieve IEP goals, progress through the general education curriculum, and participate in non-academic activities.</p>	<p>Related services information indicates how teachers can collaborate with service providers to support students in accelerating growth in both grade-level content and related service skill areas.</p>

# Preparing for the Year

At the beginning of each school year, teachers prepare for instruction by reviewing grade-level standards and high-quality curriculum, designing stimulating and supportive learning environments, and planning for how to support students in mastering grade-level content. As educators prepare for the school year, they should align instructional planning with reviews of student IEPs to identify and act upon key IEP information.

Key Actions Based on IEP Information	Case Study Example
<p>Teachers should identify qualitative descriptions of <b>present-level academic functioning</b> in the IEP and consider opportunities to support students in building foundational skills as a supplement to instruction anchored in grade-level content.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify additional supports, specific to student needs, that are necessary to ensure meaningful engagement with grade-level content.</li> <li>Coordinate support staff to ensure target instruction addresses specific student needs.</li> </ul>	<p>Nicholas's fifth grade teacher was provided a copy of his IEP before the start of the school year. Upon receiving the IEP, his teacher discovered that Nicholas's present level of academic performance in ELA was that of a beginning first grader. The IEP also signaled that Nicholas lacked the ability to read grade-level texts independently and that his phonemic awareness was limited.</p> <p>Nicholas's teacher began to identify resources to use during small group time, such as front-loading vocabulary, building background knowledge, and providing small previews of content that would ensure he would be able to read grade-level texts alongside his peers.</p> <p>Nicholas's teacher also began to coordinate with the school-based intervention expert to ensure that supplemental small group instruction targeted developing Nicholas's phonemic understanding and building his reading fluency with grade-level texts. When Nicholas continued to struggle despite these supports, Nicholas's teacher talked to the intervention teacher about placing him in an <a href="#">Intensive Intervention Program</a> to supplement instruction.</p>
<p>Teachers should identify <b>special factors</b> that might pose barriers to access in areas of communication, sensory, accessibility, assistive technology, behavior, and health concerns.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop learning environments, routines and procedures, and instructional supports that address the special factors identified.</li> </ul>	<p>Nicholas's IEP described special factors that indicated Nicholas struggled to produce writing and interact with his peers. The IEP described many instances of Nicholas having loud outbursts and running out of the classroom when confronted with writing tasks or asked to engage in tasks that required social interaction.</p> <p><b>Learning environment:</b> Nicholas's teacher reconsidered seating arrangements and ensured he would have a neutral or "safe space" in the classroom should he be overwhelmed.</p> <p><b>Routines and procedures:</b> His teacher then began to work with his special education teacher to develop social stories for classroom tasks and procedures that supported him in engaging with peers or utilizing the "safe space" when necessary.</p>
<p>Teachers should identify accommodations information on the IEP that describes student support needs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Complete the <a href="#">accommodations</a> inventory.</li> <li>Identify areas within instructional routines that might need additional planning.</li> </ul>	<p>Nicholas receives occupational therapy twice a week to work on sensory challenges and fine motor skills such as writing and cutting. His teacher immediately began to consider ways to both support his developing fine motor skills and to ensure they did not interfere with his ability to engage with instructional materials and content.</p> <p>Nicholas's teacher began to consider time constraints that might interfere with Nicholas having the time necessary to complete tasks that involved extensive handwriting or cutting. During the first few weeks of school an activity required that Nicholas cut out all parts of a plant for identification. The teacher decided to identify the portions of the plant that would be easier for Nicholas to manipulate the scissors around and planned to precut the other components. His teacher weighed the value of taking time to support motor skill development alongside ensuring Nicholas was able to achieve mastery of the content standards regarding plants.</p>
<p>Teachers should identify related services information on the IEP.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review all services and identify areas of overlap with academic courses.</li> <li>Establish relationships with service providers to initiate collaboration through formal or informal meetings</li> </ul>	<p>Nicholas's teacher read in his IEP that he receives Adapted Physical Education and Occupational Therapy.</p> <p>Within the first week of the school year Nicholas's teacher met with his Adapted Physical Education teacher to discuss opportunities to support his physical education needs during instructional time. Later that week, she was making copies in the teachers' lounge when the occupational therapist happened to stop by. His teacher immediately took the opportunity to discuss any challenges he might encounter with written responses in English class and how she might provide opportunities to implement sensory activities throughout class. Although the meeting was brief, the occupational therapist noted that she might be available for a more in-depth collaboration during a future planning time with Nicholas's teacher.</p>

# Continuous Support

Educators should leverage each category of IEP information to support students in achieving high expectations throughout the school year. The steps below compose a process of continuous support that allows educators to effectively implement IEPs as part of daily instruction.



Identify the high standards and grade-level expectations captured within units and lessons.



Use IEP information to identify the gaps between student functioning and defined expectations.



Utilize resources and strategies to bridge the gap between student functioning and high expectations to accelerate students toward grade-level mastery.

## Present-Level Academic Functioning

Teachers should use present-level academic functioning information to plan for and provide appropriate scaffolds and supports that assist students in mastering grade-level content. Teachers should take the following steps:



Use grade-level, standards-aligned, [high-quality instructional materials](#) to plan and deliver instruction.



Compare prerequisite skills and knowledge required of students to their present level academic functioning information, and identify areas of concern or need that might interfere with students' abilities to access and engage with high-quality instruction.



Use resources and strategies to leverage high-quality materials in supporting students to achieve grade-level expectations:

- Review resources and suggested supports for special populations embedded within high-quality instructional materials.
- Deliver targeted instruction, in supplement to grade-level content, that primes students for new learning by front-loading vocabulary, providing background knowledge, and addressing prerequisite skills necessary to master grade-level content.
- Connect with school or district leaders to engage in [professional learning](#) that builds capacity to support students with disabilities in accessing grade-level, standards-aligned, [high-quality instructional materials](#) to plan and deliver instruction.

✘ Stop This	✔ Start This
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using lower grade-level materials that match present-level academic performance for students with disabilities during core instructional time.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using high quality, grade-level-aligned materials during core instructional time to support all students.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoiding the most challenging and rigorous elements of lessons to lower expectations to match present-level performance.</li> <li>• Using present-level academic information as the basis for classroom instruction.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborating with other instructional and support staff to ensure intervention/push-in/pull-out time accelerates students towards mastery of grade-level content by previewing content, frontloading vocabulary, and reviewing prerequisite skills.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Giving broad, sweeping statements about student performance such as "Student A can't read or write" or "Student B can't do math."</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explicitly stating the specific elements of academic functioning where students require support to identify resources and strategies that target specific student needs.</li> </ul>

## Special Factors

Teachers should use special factors information to understand and plan to remove the barriers that a student's disability might present to accessing high-quality instruction. Teachers should:



Create, share, and model rigorous learning and behavior expectations for all students.



Review special factors information recorded in student IEPs, including sensory needs, accessibility support, assistive technology, behavior, and health concerns. Note details about student strengths and parent concerns.



Utilize approaches and resources that increase students' abilities to effectively learn and master grade-level content.

- Identify resources and strategies to assist students in addressing challenges caused by special factors (social stories, fidgets, noise cancelling headphones, frequent breaks, time management apps).
- Explicitly annotate these resources and strategies in the unit and lesson plans. Teachers should know when in the lesson they are adding the adjustment, how the student will experience it, and why they are doing it.

✘ Stop This	✔ Start This
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing students with unaligned instructional materials or in formats that reduce rigor instead of ensuring accessibility.</li> <li>• Using disability impacts to lower expectations for students.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing students with grade-level-aligned materials in <u>accessible formats</u>.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reactively considering the behavior and sensory support needs of students after student frustration occurs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proactively <u>designing classroom environments</u> that eliminate barriers to student interaction and engagement.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Designing classroom environments with excessive visual, auditory, or physical stimulation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intentionally selecting and displaying classroom decor, art, and other resources that support the functional and sensory needs of students.</li> <li>• Considering noise level while planning for classroom tasks and activities.</li> <li>• Priming students to be successful in managing changes and be flexible in supporting student sensory needs.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Waiting to provide support until students struggle to navigate social interactions or collaborate with peers, often due to a lack of priming or pre-planning.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Priming students for social engagement and collaboration required for learning tasks.</li> </ul>

## Accommodations

Teachers should provide accommodations throughout instruction and assessment to support students in reaching and demonstrating mastery of grade-level standards. Teachers can use accommodations to support students with disabilities in achieving high expectations when they:



Identify instructional routines and content within high-quality instructional materials that require accommodations to ensure student success.



Review IEP accommodations and complete the [accommodation inventory for instruction and assessments identified on the IEP](#).



Plan for and deliver accommodations throughout instruction and assessments:

- Annotate daily lesson plans to call out moments during instruction that will require accommodations:
  - » Identify areas where accommodations will be required within daily lesson plans and instructional routines,
  - » Deliver accommodations throughout instructional delivery and routines, and
  - » Document student responses.
- Implement accommodations throughout assessments to support students in expressing their understanding and mastery of grade-level standards.

✘ Stop This	✔ Start This
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using accommodations exclusively for assessments.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incorporating accommodations throughout instructional routines and practices. Remember that accommodations on the IEP are guaranteed to the student.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using accommodations to lower the expectations for student learning.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leveraging accommodations to ensure students are spending the majority of instructional time engagement in grade-level materials and tasks.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using modifications in place of appropriate accommodations.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using accommodations to support students with mastering grade-level content.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limiting accommodations to specific tools and resources described in student IEPs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flexibly allowing all students to use accommodations to support their learning, such as fidget toys or call down jars.</li> </ul>

## Related Services

Teachers should use related services to strengthen instruction in a manner that supports students in progressing toward grade-level mastery. They should:



Review grade-level learning expectations for students and identify where related service needs might impact students' abilities to master or demonstrate mastery of learning.



Review related services and goals defined within the IEP. Consider the implications that services might have on students in grade-level learning (ex. speech therapy while learning to read, occupational therapy for writing assignments, etc.).



Leverage opportunities during grade-level content classes to practice and apply newly acquired skills and strategies. Collaborate with service providers, when possible, to brainstorm these opportunities.

✘ Stop This	✔ Start This
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Overlooking the connections between related service skill development and academic growth for students.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Inviting related service providers into general education classes.</li> <li>Embedding opportunities to practice related services skills within academic classes.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Relying on special education teachers to collaborate with related service providers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Seeking out opportunities to discuss student goals and skills with service providers.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Using IEP meetings as the only opportunity to connect with related service providers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establishing routine check-ins with service providers to collaborate on skill development that overlaps with content.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expecting special education teachers to hold the sole responsibility of integrating related services with grade-level instruction.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Integrating related service skill development into academic courses to ensure students progress across domains.</li> </ul>