



How *all* Teachers Can Support
Students with Disabilities in

General Education Classrooms

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- 3 PURPOSE OF THIS TOOL
- 4 DESIGNING INCLUSIVE INSTRUCTION
- 5 SUPPORTS/SERVICES FLOWCHART
- 6 EXAMPLE SUPPORTS/SERVICES FOR STUDENTS
- 7 MTSS TERMS EXPLAINED



PURPOSE OF THIS TOOL

The purpose of this tool is to support general education teachers in designing first, best instruction for students with mild to severe disabilities through Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and differentiated instruction. Approaching design work differently, and proactively providing appropriate structures and supports for students, will help general educators include students with disabilities and improve their outcomes. Including all students with disabilities in Tier 1 instruction with their peers is the foundation for a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS).

There are numerous misconceptions about the relationship between MTSS and the responsibility of general and special education teachers. As outlined by the Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, “Special education has its fair share of myths and facts about the inclusion of students receiving special education services, especially those with significant cognitive disabilities. These common misconceptions often lead to situations where students are denied their right to spend the maximum amount of time in general education settings and doing work aligned with the state learning standards.”¹

1. Source: <https://www.k12.wa.us/policy-funding/special-education-funding-and-finance/inclusionary-practices-professional-development-project/myths-facts-about-inclusionary-practices>

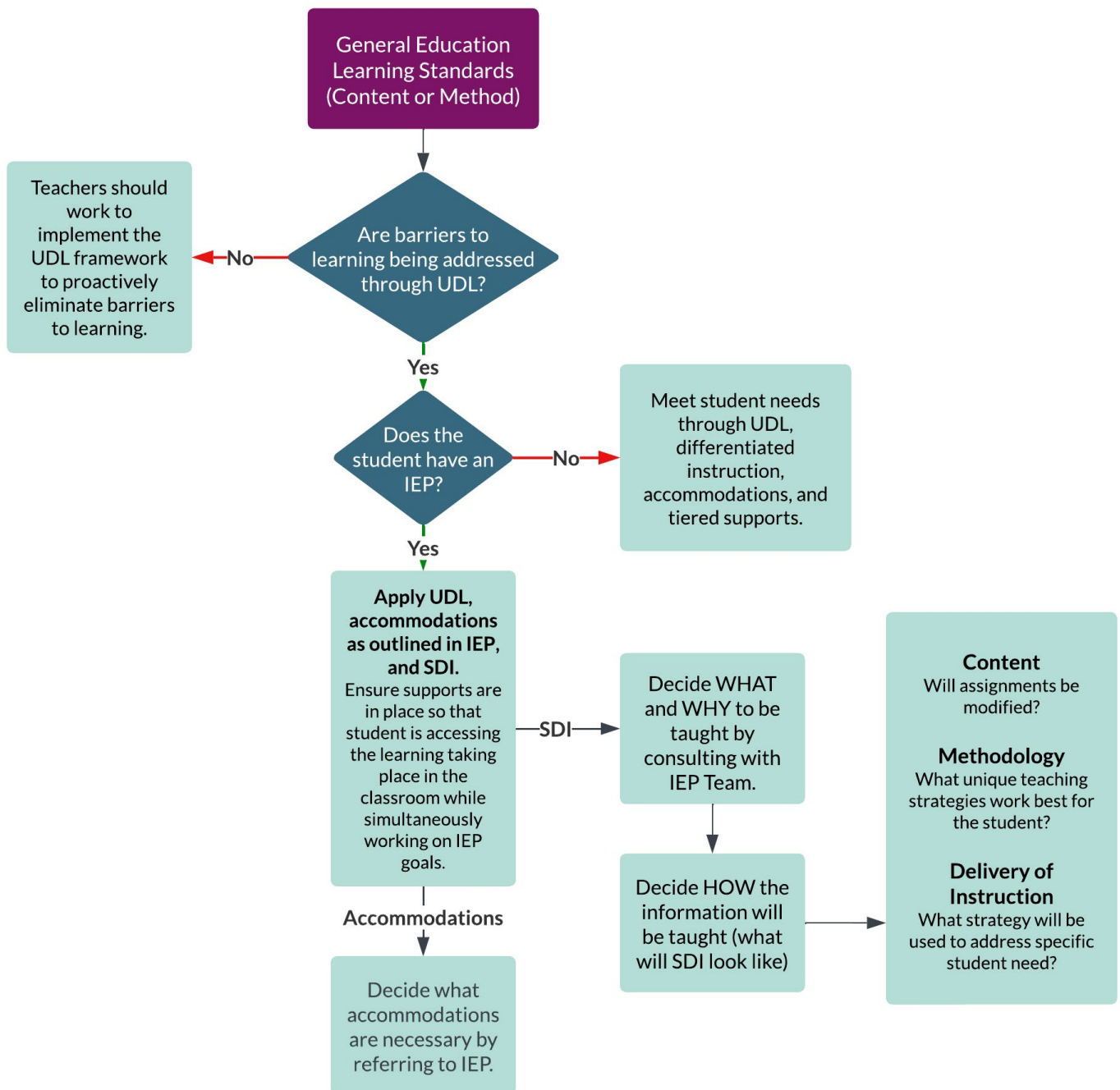
DESIGNING INCLUSIVE INSTRUCTION

General education teachers have a responsibility to implement Specially Designed Instruction (SDI) in Tier 1. They can also provide Tier 2 and 3 intervention to students with disabilities based on data and consultation with special education teachers. In this model, there is a shifting role for special education teachers, where they move beyond providing direct services to students as they consult, co-plan, co-teach, collaborate, and coach colleagues who serve students with disabilities. Below, we outline a process that general education teachers can use to plan instruction for all learners that incorporates SDI for students with disabilities.

PROCESS FOR DESIGNING INCLUSIVE INSTRUCTION

1. Review grade-level standards and determine if essential standards are focused on a.) acquiring content (content standards) or b.) learning new skills (method standards) in order to design appropriate pathways for students to learn and share what they know. [Learn more about content and methods standards.](#)
2. Determine barriers that may prevent learners with significant support and/or acceleration needs from learning and sharing what they know in accessible, relevant, and meaningful ways. The [UDL Guidelines](#) provide a helpful lens for thinking about options/choices necessary in an inclusive classroom.
3. Universally design instructional methods, materials, and assessments using universal accommodations to reduce barriers. [See page 6.](#)
4. Review student IEPs for additional accommodations/SDI and Section 504 plans and make necessary revisions to lesson design and delivery. If you have any questions, consult with special education teacher.
5. Teach lesson using the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), providing all students with choice and voice.
6. Use universally designed formative assessments to determine student progress. Bring evidence to Professional Learning Community (PLC) or other data review meeting to discuss how to target instruction for students who have not yet met mastery of grade-level standards.
7. Provide targeted instruction using additional SDI and differentiated instruction.
8. Reflect on student progress toward the grade-level standard as well as IEP goals and determine if students may need additional support in Tiers 2 and 3.

SUPPORTS/SERVICES FLOWCHART



EXAMPLE SUPPORTS/ SERVICES FOR STUDENTS

UNIVERSAL/TIER 1 SUPPORT EXAMPLES FOR ALL STUDENTS

Tier 1 Academic Supports for Instruction/Assignments

- ▶ Sentence starters
- ▶ Graphic organizers
- ▶ Visual aids and pictures to aid in comprehension
- ▶ Manipulatives
- ▶ Use of recording devices (audio and video)
- ▶ Chunking information/directions
- ▶ Access to math charts for assignments (multiplication charts, hundreds charts, math notes, key words notes, number lines, math journal notes)
- ▶ Timers
- ▶ Pre-recorded videos
- ▶ Assignment checklists
- ▶ Grading rubric
- ▶ Exemplars of finished work
- ▶ Access to devices to complete assignments
- ▶ Access to digital accessibility tools (speech-to-text, text-to-speech, translations)
- ▶ Extended time

Tier 1 Behavioral Supports

- ▶ Access to a quiet space or seating away from distractions
- ▶ Checklist specific to emotional regulation, conflict solution, or classroom routines
- ▶ Flexible seating (different type of chair, wiggle cushions, cube chairs, standing desks)
- ▶ Ability to take a break (access to a break space in the class)
- ▶ Visual and written classroom expectations, routines, and procedures

SPECIALLY DESIGNED INSTRUCTION EXAMPLES (SDI)

(can be provided via push-in by interventionist, ELL support teacher, special educator, or general educator)

- ▶ Not penalized for spelling errors
- ▶ Social pragmatic instruction, including positive self-talk, role play, growth mindset, and coping strategies
- ▶ Small group instruction during centers/group time to target deficits
- ▶ Re-teach subject matter using a different methodology
- ▶ For reading tests: pull into small group and scaffold questions for students based on their needs
- ▶ Provide direct (additional) teaching to help organize their thoughts/ideas/responses based on their IEP goals
- ▶ Use of district approved computer programs that have adaptive learning capabilities
- ▶ Modifying content and providing materials based on IEP goals

MTSS TERMS EXPLAINED

MULTI-TIERED SYSTEMS OF SUPPORT (MTSS)

A comprehensive continuum of evidence-based, systemic practices to support a rapid response to students' needs with regular observation to facilitate data-based instructional decision-making.

Source: Federal Every Student Succeeds Act

WHAT IS UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING (UDL)

UDL is an educational framework based on decades of neuroscience research endorsed by the Every Child Succeeds Act (ESSA). ESSA appropriates the UDL definition found in the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008, which defines UDL as a scientifically valid framework for guiding educational practice that – (A) provides flexibility in the ways information is presented, in the ways students respond or demonstrate knowledge and skills, and in the ways students are engaged; and (B) reduces barriers in instruction, provides appropriate accommodations, supports, and challenges, and maintains high achievement expectations for all students, including students with disabilities and students who are limited English proficient.

Three principles of UDL support educators in providing options and choices, so students have pathways for how they engage with learning, how they learn, and how they share what they know. An explanation of the three principles of UDL follows.

- ▶ **Provide multiple means of engagement:** If we want students to learn, we have to foster both attention and commitment by providing students with authentic, meaningful experiences in learning. All students need access to options that help them connect their own strengths to new learning activities, as well as access to their peers to foster collaboration and community.
- ▶ **Provide multiple means of representation:** The second principle of UDL reminds educators to provide multiple means of representation to build knowledge and comprehension in all learners. Not all learners comprehend information in the same way, have the same background information, or have access to the same vocabulary. There must be multiple access and entry points so all students can grow as learners as they work toward the same goal.
- ▶ **Provide multiple means of action and expression:** It is not enough to comprehend information if there is no way to express it. Students need numerous methods to express their understanding as they develop into writers and speakers in ways that are developmentally appropriate for them and that embrace emerging technologies.

LEAST RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENT (LRE)

Federal law provides that each local school district must ensure that “...to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are not disabled, and special classes, separate schooling or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability of a child is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily.”

Source: Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

SPECIALLY DESIGNED INSTRUCTION (SDI)

SDI is defined in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) as “adapting, as appropriate to the needs of an eligible child under this part, the content, methodology, or delivery of instruction—

- (i) To address the unique needs of the child that result from the child’s disability; and
- (ii) To ensure access of the child to the general curriculum...”

In practical terms, SDI is instruction that is tailored to a particular student. It addresses their IEP goals; accounts for their disability; provides modifications or adaptations to content; and encourages access to the general education curriculum.

Source: [Council for Exceptional Children; Specially Designed Instruction](#) | [Council for Exceptional Children](#)

DIFFERENTIATION, ACCOMMODATION, AND MODIFICATION

Differentiation is a global term that identifies when students have individualized options to learn and share what they know. Both UDL and differentiated instruction result in differentiated experiences for students, and both frameworks use **accommodations**, which can help students learn the same material as their peers. In differentiated instruction, teachers are responsive to the needs of students based on formative assessment data and may provide accommodations specifically to students who benefit from them. Students with dyslexia, for example, might be assigned an audio version of a book. In a universally designed classroom, the audiobook option would be provided to all learners as a universal accommodation. A **modification** is a change to the curriculum for students with significant support needs. For example, a student could be assigned shorter or easier reading assignments if they have modifications outlined in their IEP. Note that modifications would not be provided to all learners in a universally designed classroom.

Source: [Understood.org](#)

RELATIONSHIP AMONG MTSS, UDL, DI AND SDI

MTSS is a framework for enhancing the adoption and implementation of a continuum of evidence-based practices to achieve important outcomes for every student. Consider MTSS as the umbrella term for all system improvement efforts. Within an MTSS system, all students need access to inclusive Tier 1 instruction aligned to grade-level standards. This requires that teachers are proactive and eliminate barriers to learning through UDL. When formative assessment data suggests that students aren't making progress toward grade-level mastery, teachers may differentiate instruction to provide targeted learning experiences and Tier 2A classroom intervention. SDI is unique to individual student needs for students with disabilities. A student receiving special education services should have access to UDL, DI, and SDI in Tier 1 classrooms within MTSS while also having access to additional tiers of support as necessary.

UNIVERSAL SUPPORTS/TIER 1 SUPPORTS

Universal or Tier 1 Supports refer to core, high quality, evidence-based academic, behavioral, and social-emotional instruction which is accessible for 100 percent of students in all settings. Approximately 80-85 percent of students are typically expected to meet learning targets when a system of universal support/Tier 1 are installed and used.

Source: [*Building MTSS Quick Guide, Michigan DOE \(page 8\)*](#)

TIER 2 SUPPORTS

This first layer of additional support, Tier 2, occurs outside of the time dedicated to core instruction, in groups of 5-8 students, and focuses primarily on providing increased opportunities to practice and learn skills taught in the core.

Source: [*The National Center for Learning Disabilities*](#)

TIER 3 SUPPORTS

Tier 3 is more explicit, focuses on remediation of skills, is provided for a longer duration of time (both in overall length of intervention and regularly scheduled minutes of instructional time), and occurs in smaller groups (i.e., groups of 1-3 students).

Source: [*The National Center for Learning Disabilities*](#)



www.wasa-oly.org/inclusion

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www.novakeducation.com