



Every Minute Counts: Calculating IEP Services to Improve Student Outcomes in Washington State

Report of the Existing Policies,
Guidance, and Related
Resources

2022

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Every Minute Counts: Calculating IEP Services to Improve Student Outcomes in Washington State is a project between members of the Institute for Innovation in Development, Engagement, and Learning Systems (IDEALS) and the Special Education Division of the Washington State Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI). The objective is to identify existing problems of practice related to Individualized Education Program (IEP) development and determine best practices for determining the amount and type of special education and related services contained in students' IEPs. The initial stage of the project includes a comprehensive report presenting the research literature, existing policies at the federal and state level, and other related resources.

The themes emerging from the literature place the student at the center of the collaborative decision-making process, with significant considerations rooted in sections of the IEP, including the Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance (PLAAFP) and annual goals. Progress monitoring and making student-centered decisions, as well as data-driven decisions, allow the IEP Team to determine and revisit the effectiveness of identified special education and related services and whether such services need to be altered to remain responsive to the student. Other themes emerging from the literature include applying evidence-based practices and providing clarity within the IEP to ensure that all IEP Team members understand and will effectively implement the services as intended by the team. Teaming remains an important element in determining the amount and type of special education and related services, with all members, including families, educators, and related service providers, contributing instrumental knowledge, perspectives, and expertise. Creativity and flexibility in service duration and frequency, delivery models, contexts, and group size are presented as themes in the literature, which allow for added individualization of the IEP. Additionally, guiding questions and considerations, as well as precautions, are compiled from the literature.

The report includes conclusions that present the complexity of determining special education and related services while also recognizing the true constraints that exist and encroach upon student-centered and data-driven decisions made within IEP Teams. The next stages of the project will include conducting focus groups with key partners to further understand the problem of practice and to identify solutions and additional guidance for the state of Washington.

As you review the Every Minute Counts: Report of the Existing Policies, Guidance, and Related Resources, we encourage readers to provide feedback using the form here: <https://forms.office.com/r/5QJYdyqu3W>.

IDEALS INSTITUTE

The Institute for Innovation in Development, Engagement, and Learning Systems (IDEALS) is a professional learning and research hub within the Johns Hopkins University School of Education in Baltimore, Maryland. Working with partners in state and local education agencies, schools, and communities, members of the IDEALS Institute aim to ensure that all people have access to quality care and education throughout their lives, from birth through adulthood. The work of the institute is based on the premise that quality leads to improved development, increased learning and engagement, and has lifelong positive effects for individuals and the community. Sustainable improvement comes through refining the entire ecosystem – from understanding and better serving people's needs to improving the standards and quality of service providers so that systems can encourage, track, and reward positive change. The IDEALS Institute assembles teams tailored to fit the unique needs of agency partners. Faculty and staff have expertise in early childhood education; special education; gifted and talented education; behavior intervention and social-emotional learning; competency-based workforce development; coaching and mentoring; teacher evaluation and professional learning; P-12 curriculum, pedagogical practice, and assessment; instructional and assistive technology implementation; and family engagement.

SPECIAL EDUCATION DIVISION OF OSPI

The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) oversees the fiscal and programmatic requirements of the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which ensures all children with disabilities have access to a free appropriate public education (FAPE). The OSPI's Special Education Division collaborates with Local Education Agencies (LEAs) and Educational Services Districts (ESDs) to ensure improved educational results and functional

outcomes for all children with disabilities, including the submission and review of both quantitative and qualitative data provided by LEAs to ensure that LEAs are implementing the fiscal and programmatic requirements of the IDEA. The Special Education Division also provides students, families, and community members with information about special education, to ensure that students and families know about their rights, answering questions they have about the special education process, and sharing ways that partners may provide input and get involved.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROBLEM

Every Minute Counts: Calculating IEP Services to Improve Student Outcomes in Washington State is a collaborative project between the IDEALS Institute and the OSPI Special Education Division. Members of the Special Education Division have identified an existing need to support school districts in utilizing best practices for determining the amount and type of special education and related services contained in students' IEPs. To date, IEP Teams are seeking additional guidance, structure, and supports for determining services hours for students with disabilities (SWD), and ensuring an individualized, personalized, and customized discussion of a student's needs as outlined in the present levels of academic achievement and functional performance information contained in the IEP. When determining the type of special education and related services and the amount of that service type, the IEP Team is required to consider a child's evaluation results, including curriculum-based measures and classroom performance (USDE, 2000). The IEP Team is required to utilize this assessment data in conjunction with the information they have regarding the nature of a student's disability and the potential impact of that disability on participation in the general education classroom to determine the manner and location in which services are provided (USDE, 2000).

THEORY OF ACTION FOR ADDRESSING THE PROBLEM

To address the current need, members of the IDEALS Institute recommended the development and implementation of a technical assistance guide and ongoing professional learning that would support IEP Teams throughout the state to develop IEPs that include individualized, customized, and data-based service delivery recommendations for every student with a disability. As presented in Figure 1, the intent is that this guide be co-developed and co-implemented by members of the IDEALS Institute, Special Education Division of OSPI, Directors of Special Education from the state's local school districts, representatives from Washington State educator preparation programs, and preservice and in-service special educators, including education staff associates (ESAs).

Figure 1

Key partner groups in the Every Minute Counts: Calculating IEP Services to Improve Student Outcomes in Washington State project.



Figure 2 presents an overview of the scope of **Every Minute Counts: Calculating IEP Services to Improve Student Outcomes in Washington State**. To adequately evaluate current needs and design appropriate guidance to address needs in a targeted manner, the project begins with a thorough review of the previously conducted research, existing policies, and related resources in this area. This information will be supplemented through the collection of qualitative data collected in focus groups. These efforts, as well as the iterative creation of the technical assistance guide, will be developed from the focus group findings. The partner groups will be actively involved in communicating how this guidance can be developed to provide the necessary support to preservice teachers, in-service educators, and participating members of IEP Teams throughout the state through a webinar and professional learning community (PLC).

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROBLEM (CONTINUED)

This report presents the findings of the review of literature currently available on this topic, including publications related to determining the type and amount of special education and related services, existing policies at the federal and state levels, and other related resources. The subsequent sections will present the foundational background and context, the methodology used to assemble this publication, findings, conclusions, and implications for next steps.

Figure 2

Scope of the Every Minute Counts: Calculating IEP Services to Improve Student Outcomes in Washington State project.

Scope of the Every Minute Counts: Calculating IEP Services to Improve Student Outcomes Project



BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

THE INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAM

The IEP contains information that is critical to ensuring that a student with a disability is receiving the appropriate services and supports to make meaningful progress in the educational system. As its foundation, assessment data presents the student's specific strengths, projected progress, and the supports necessary to progress academically and in other key areas. Present levels of performance provide a baseline for making comparisons and tracking student progress and the overall effectiveness of decisions documented with the IEP. The present levels also outline student needs and expected progress, and lead to the development of measurable annual goals and objectives. Like the present levels of performance, goals and objectives reflect the unique needs of the student and provide a means of measuring student progress and the effectiveness of current services and support. Throughout the IEP process, data remains a common thread that drives IEP Team decision-making and the determination of appropriate changes or additions to the student's IEP (California Department of Education, 2021).

The following sections provide information from the U.S. Department of Education on specially designed instruction and related services, highlighting the relevance and importance of *Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District* (2017) in determining special education and related services.

SERVICES WITHIN THE INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAM

The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) indicates that an IEP must include sufficient information about the amount of services that will be provided so that the level of commitment to resources is clear. Specifically, OSEP states:

What is required is that the IEP include information about the amount of services that will be provided to the child, so that the level of the agency's commitment of resources will be clear to parents and other IEP Team members. The amount of time to be committed to each of the various services to be provided must be appropriate to the specific service, and clearly stated in the IEP in a manner that can be understood by all involved in the development and implementation of the IEP. (71 Fed. Reg., 2006, p. 4667)

The IEP team needs to develop:

a statement of the special education and related services and supplementary aids and services, which would be based on peer-reviewed research to the extent practicable, to be provided for the child or on behalf of the child, and a statement of the program modifications or supports for school personnel that will be provided to enable the child: (a) to advance appropriately toward attaining the annual goals; (b) to be involved in and make progress in the general education curriculum, and to participate in extracurricular and other nonacademic activities; and (c) to be educated and participate with other children with disabilities and nondisabled children. (IDEA Regulations, 2012, 34 C.F.R. § 300.320 [a] [4])

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT (CONTINUED)

SPECIALLY DESIGNED INSTRUCTION

The hallmark of special education is specially designed instruction. According to IDEA:

Specially designed instruction means 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 ensure access of the child to the general curriculum, so that the child can meet the educational standards within the jurisdiction of the public agency that apply to all children. (IDEA Regulations, 2012, 34 C.F.R. § 300.39 [b] [3])

Specially designed instruction integrated within core instruction, supplemental intervention, and intensive intervention is different for each student with a disability because a student’s IEP should describe a unique set of supports that meet their learning needs and how environmental or instructional or curricular barriers impact the learning of the student with a disability. These supports are reflected in the student’s IEP and are to be infused throughout the student’s learning experiences and environments as described in the IEP (Beech, 2015). Specially designed instruction is based on individual learning characteristics and combines evidence-based practices, intensive instruction, accommodations, supplementary aids and services, program modifications, and personnel support. Table 1 describes the qualities that distinguish specially designed instruction (Maryland State Department of Education, 2019).

Table 1.

Clarity on Specially Designed Instruction

<i>Specially Designed Instruction is</i>	<i>Specially Designed Instruction is not</i>
<i>Only students with IEPs</i>	<i>All students</i>
<i>A service provided to a student</i>	<i>A place a student goes</i>
<i>In addition to the core instruction (supplemental)</i>	<i>In place of core instruction (supplant)</i>
<i>What the instructional team does</i>	<i>What a student does</i>
<i>Specific to the student, based on the impact of the disability</i>	<i>A schedule</i>
<i>Instruction that allows a student to make progress in the enrolled grade level standards AND changes the trajectory of growth to narrow/close the gap</i>	<i>Setting low expectations or teaching ONLY below grade level skills</i>
<i>An individually and intentionally designed plan of services and supports</i>	<i>A replacement for Universal Design for Learning (UDL) or Differentiated Instruction (DI)</i>
<i>Uniquely designed instruction that is designed to promote progress toward IEP goal(s)</i>	<i>A commercial program without individually designed supports and services</i>
<i>Based on individual learning characteristics and combines evidence-based practices, intensive instruction, intervention, accommodations, supplementary aids, program modifications and support to personnel</i>	<i>Only available in tier 2 small group, or tier 3 one-to-one instruction</i>
<i>Co-planned, co-implemented, and co-evaluated by a collaborative IEP team</i>	<i>Planned, implemented, and evaluated solely by a special educator</i>

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BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT (CONTINUED)

RELATED SERVICES

Related services help students with disabilities benefit from their special education by providing extra help and support in needed areas. The definition of related services by IDEA is below:

Related services means transportation and such developmental, corrective, and other supportive services as are required to assist a child with a disability to benefit from special education, and includes speech-language pathology and audiology services, interpreting services, psychological services, physical and occupational therapy, recreation, including therapeutic recreation, early identification and assessment of disabilities in children, counseling services, including rehabilitation counseling, orientation and mobility services, and medical services for diagnostic or evaluation purposes. Related services also include school health services and school nurse services, social work services in schools, and parent counseling and training. (IDEA Regulations, 2012, 34 C.F.R. § 300.34 [a])

As indicated in the Texas Education Agency (n.d.) IDEA requires that the IEP contain the following information when documenting the provision of related services:

- Frequency – How often the student will receive the service(s) (e.g., number of times per day or week). If the service is less than daily then the conditions for the provision of the services should be specified within the documents using a weekly reference (e.g., 1 hour per week, 30 minutes every two weeks, etc.).
- Duration – How long each “session” will last (number of minutes) and when services will begin and end (starting and ending dates).
- Location – Where services will be provided in the general education classroom or another setting such as a special education resource room.

ENDREW F. V. DOUGLAS COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT (2017) AND IMPLICATIONS FOR DETERMINING SPECIAL EDUCATION AND RELATED SERVICES

As the cornerstone of IDEA, the IEP comprehensively provides information about the student’s educational needs, measurable goals and objectives, and identifies specially designed instruction and related services to address the needs of the student. The importance of the IEP document is emphasized as the center of most special education disputes and court cases (Bateman, 2011).

In *Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District* (2017), the court sought to answer the following question: *What is the level of educational benefit school districts must confer on children with disabilities to provide them with a free appropriate public education (FAPE) guaranteed by the IDEA?* According to the Supreme Court’s ruling, the educational benefit requirement of IDEA is satisfied, and a student has received a FAPE if the student’s IEP sets out an educational program that is ‘reasonably calculated to enable the child to make progress appropriate in light of his circumstance’ (*Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District*, 2017, p. 16). This was a landmark ruling and the concepts of “educational benefit” and “reasonable calculation” provide a general guideline for making decisions regarding the appropriate level of services for SWDs.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT (CONTINUED)

As recommended by the California Department of Education (2021), to meet expectations for “educational benefit,” the IEP Team needs to keep two important points in mind:

1. The sections of the IEP must focus on ensuring that the instructional placement and related services will contribute to the student’s academic progress.
2. The IEP addresses the student’s present levels of performance and appropriately identifies goals that demonstrate that the student is receiving supports that lead to progress towards those goals.

Therefore, the court ruling emphasizes the importance of assessment information, the development of present levels of performance, and using such information to establish annual goals, related services, and educational placement.

The Endrew decision really revolutionized the concept of special education. The IEP, of course, memorializes what the child is supposed to get. What Endrew says is the minimum is not the standard that the child should be exposed to. The child should benefit and actually progress from the instruction. If the child is not progressing, then we need to look at what’s going on with the instruction and revise the IEP. Either the child needs different supports or the supports that are being provided are not being provided a with the quality and the fidelity that they need to be for the child to progress. So, the goal here with Endrew is the child should progress, not just be exposed to education (IRIS Center, 2022, p. 2).

Subsequent sections will present further considerations on how an IEP Team may apply both the concepts of “educational benefit” and “reasonable calculation” when determining special education and related services.

METHODOLOGY

SCOPE OF THE REVIEW AND SEARCH STRATEGY

A critical analysis of the available literature, policies, and related resources (hereafter referred to as literature) allows for the discovery of gaps in understanding and information. Figure 3 depicts an overview of the literature search strategy. The description of the problem and theory of action, as outlined in the above sections of this report, guided the search terms and selection. Research librarians and a research assistant supported the literature search. The search terms used allowed researchers to cast a broad net to ensure that all relevant literature was identified in this initial search phase.

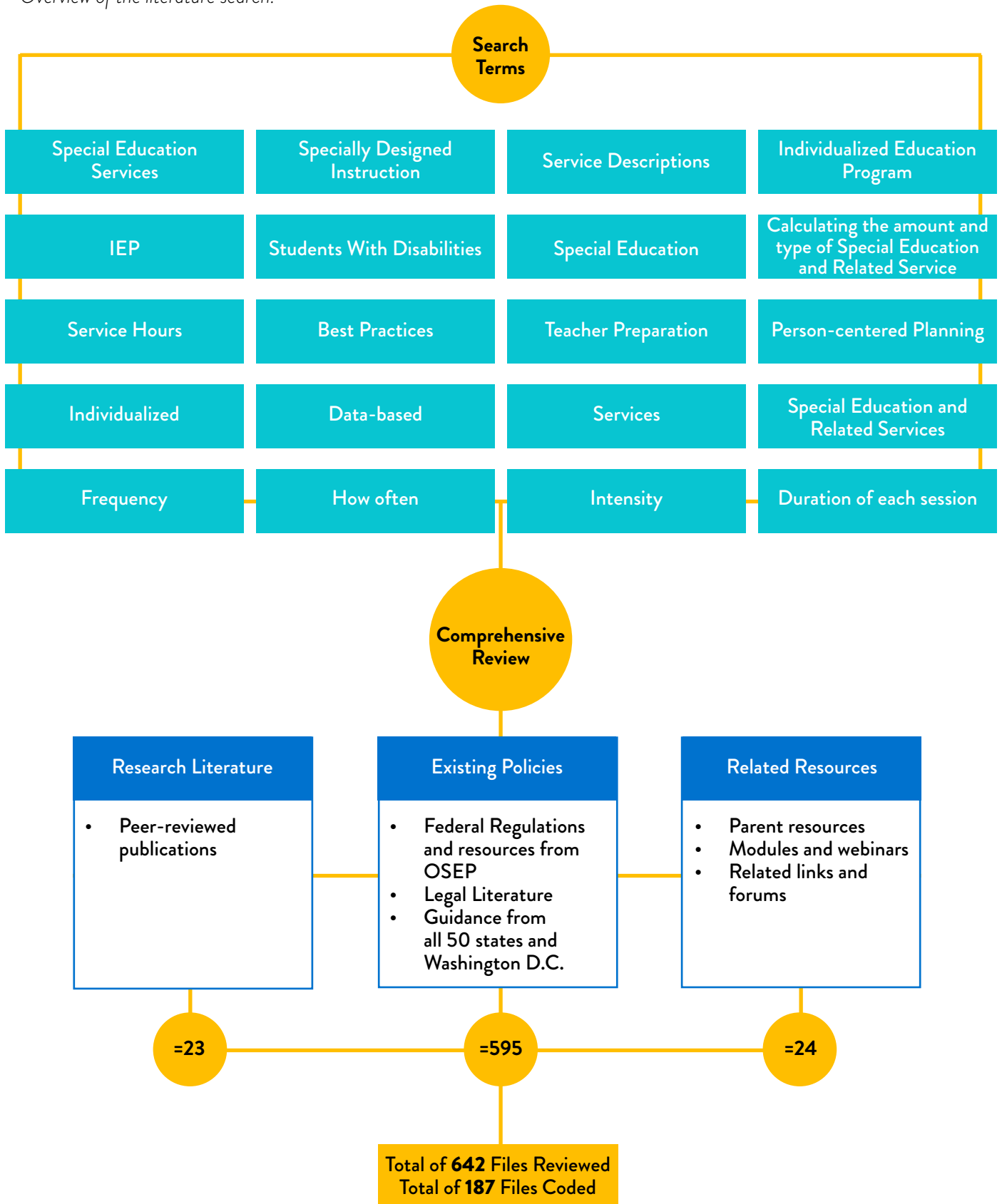
LITERATURE SELECTION

The subsequent stage led to a preliminary review consisting of manual scanning of the file titles, abstracts, headings and subheadings, and content of the identified literature. Using a coding process, researchers included literature related to determining the amount and types of special education and related services contained in students’ IEPs and excluded literature that did not address this issue.

METHODOLOGY (CONTINUED)

Figure 3

Overview of the literature search.



METHODOLOGY (CONTINUED)

IMPORTING DATA INTO THE QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS SOFTWARE (QDAS) PROGRAM

Researchers utilized NVivo Qualitative Data Analysis Software (QDAS), a computer software package that supports the organization and analysis of qualitative data. Once imported into NVivo, each piece of literature was identified as a file. Therefore, 642 files identified as relevant based on the previous preliminary review stage were imported into NVivo.

DATA EXTRACTION, CODING AND ANALYZING THE DATA

Broad codes and subcodes (i.e., themes) were created in order to support the sifting and organization of relevant data related to calculating the amount and type of special education and related services. As a literature review is an iterative process, further searches were conducted during the analysis phase to identify any new literature based on what was already coded. Specifically, state guidance and resources were targeted to ensure a comprehensive search.

RESULTS

A total of 642 files were reviewed and 187 files were coded with one or more codes. Figure 4 illustrates frequent words that emerged from the coded data.

Figure 4

Frequent words from the coded data.



The subsequent sections organize the coded data by themes and subthemes. The primary themes represent the importance of IEP Teams making student-centered and data-driven decisions that are strongly connected to significant sections of the IEP. Additional themes included applying evidence-based practices and providing clarity within the IEP; creativity and flexibility in service duration and frequency; and models, contexts, and size of service delivery. Following these themes, we present guiding questions and considerations, as well as precautions, compiled from this literature. Table 2 presents a matrix of the states that provide guidance on the themes organized in the subsequent sections of the report.

RESULTS (CONTINUED)

Table 2.

Matrix of State Guidance According to Identified Themes

	Individualized Decision-making	Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance	Annual Goals	Progress Monitoring	Reasonably Calculated	Evidence-based Practices	Clarity within the IEP	Team Decision-making	Partnering with Families	Engagement of Related Service Providers	Flexibility in Frequency and Duration of Services	Across Settings	Delivery Models	Providing Services to a Student Individually or within a Group	Guiding Questions and Considerations	Precautions
Alabama																
Arizona																
Arkansas																
California																
Colorado																
Connecticut																
Florida																
Idaho																
Indiana																
Iowa																
Kentucky																
Maine																
Maryland																
Mississippi																
New Mexico																
New York																
North Carolina																
Oregon																
South Dakota																
Vermont																
Washington																
Washington D. C.																
Wisconsin																

IDEA governs how states and public agencies provide early intervention, special education, and related services. Each state interprets IDEA to create policies and regulations that support and guide the implementation of special education services but must meet the minimum requirements set forth by IDEA. Interpretation of IDEA and guidance also changes over time based on legislation, regulations, and litigations. The results presented in this report provide a snapshot of the present guidance on determining special education and related services for SWDs in various states across the country.

RESULTS (CONTINUED)

INDIVIDUALIZED DECISION-MAKING

The literature makes clear that the process of identifying and determining the amount of special education and related services within the IEP must be reflective of all the student's unique needs. Implications of *Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District* (2017) emphasize that the individualized decision-making process must be based on the needs of the student and that providing a quality education with high expectations “enable[s] the child to make progress appropriate in light of his circumstances” (p. 16). Conscientious decision-making by the IEP Team affords the student access to and the ability to make progress in the general education curriculum and to benefit from their special education programming (Arizona Department of Education, 2017; Yell et al., 2013; IRIS Center, 2022; Kentucky Department of Education, 2021; Washington D. C. Office of the State Superintendent of Education, n.d.; State of New Mexico Public Education Department, 2020). Remaining student-focused ensures that special education, related services, and other supports not only allow a student to make progress in the general education curriculum but also advance toward student-specific academic and/or functional annual goals; participate in extracurricular and nonacademic activities; and be educated alongside other students, including peers without disabilities (Connecticut Department of Education, n.d.; IRIS Center, 2022). However, the literature does caution that decisions should not be made based solely on the student's category of eligibility (i.e., the needs commonly associated with the disability category), which would narrowly and inaccurately placing parameters around the type and amount of special education and related services would be detrimental (Arizona Department of Education, 2017; Beech, 2015; Washington D. C. Office of the State Superintendent of Education, n.d.).

Beech (2015) and IRIS Center (2022) provide the following guiding questions to support IEP Teams in determining services for the IEP:

- Does the student exhibit behaviors that impede the student's learning or that of others?
- Is the student an English language learner?
- If the student is blind or visually impaired, is instruction in braille and the use of braille appropriate for the student?
- What are the communication needs of the student?
- If the student is deaf or hard-of-hearing or dual sensory impaired, what are the student's language and communication needs?
- What opportunities does the student have for direct communication with peers and professional personnel?
- Does the student require assistive technology devices and services?
- Does the student require extended school year services?

It is important to note that IEP Teams should consider both the student's academic achievement and functional performance (New York City Department of Education, n.d.; Washington D. C. Office of the State Superintendent of Education, n.d.). Additionally, *Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District* (2017) further clarifies that IDEA requires that if a student with disabilities exhibits behaviors that impede their learning or the learning of others, the student's IEP Team shall consider the use of positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS). Failure to address such challenges if present, constitutes a failure to provide FAPE (IRIS Center, 2022).

RESULTS (CONTINUED)

Teams are advised to thoughtfully consider the interconnectedness of the present level statements on academic and functional performance and the annual goals and objectives within the IEP document. Information within these key sections is critical in determining the effectiveness of current special education and related services for the individual student and what, if any, changes related to the type and intensity of services should occur (Arizona Department of Education, 2017; IDEA Regulations, 2012, 34 C.F.R. § 300.320 [a]; Beech, 2015; Washington D. C. Office of the State Superintendent of Education, n.d.). Relevant and current data, including formal and informal assessments, progress reports, observations, and other relevant sources of information collected by various members of the IEP Team are essential in determining whether services are needed or should be altered to increase the student's accessibility to the general education curriculum and to ensure benefit from their special education program (State of New Mexico Public Education Department, 2020; Washington D. C. Office of the State Superintendent of Education, n.d.). The subsequent sections elaborate on how the knowledge of IEP Team members, including families and related service providers, as well as the progress and rate of growth inform the determination of special education and related services.

“Keep the student in the center of every IEP decision to be made. In that way, each element of the IEP is in alignment with every other element of the IEP and the whole document accurately reflects a complete, accurate, and current picture of the student” (Oregon Department of Education, n.d., p. 1).

PRESENT LEVELS OF ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AND FUNCTIONAL PERFORMANCE

The Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance (PLAAFP):

Is a clear description of (a) the student's academic achievement and functional performance strengths, preferences, and interests; (b) how the student's disability impacts the student's involvement in the general education curriculum (or developmentally appropriate activities) and identification of areas of concern; (c) a summary of input from parents and the student; and (d) a synthesis of a variety of assessment data, including the student's instructional levels in identified areas of concern and the student's status on the prior IEP goals (if applicable). (Mississippi Department of Education, 2020, p. 13)

This anchoring section of the IEP forms the foundation for all subsequent decisions, including the determination of annual goals, accommodations, supplementary aids and services, and the type and frequency of special education and related services (Arizona Department of Education, 2017; Gibbs & Dyches, 2016; New York City Department of Education, 2021).

The development of the PLAAFP, as with subsequent sections of the IEP, should be collaborative, with each team member having information and data on the individual student that adds to the cohesive development of the IEP (Easterseals Outreach Program & Technology Services, 2020). High-quality IEPs are ones in which the child's needs as outlined in the PLAAFP are used to drive service decisions (Maine Department of Education, 2021). Results of recent evaluation data are critical in determining areas and levels of need. If there is insufficient data to determine services, additional data should be collected by the IEP Team (New York City Department of Education, 2021). The guiding questions in a later section of this report provide further guidance to ensure that services remain student-specific and rooted in the PLAAFP.

RESULTS (CONTINUED)

ANNUAL GOALS



You can think of special education and related services as the bridge between achievement right now and achievement in a year's time (Gibbs & Dyches, 2016).

The literature establishes the connection between goals and services and emphasizes the importance of identifying the annual goals of the IEP prior to determining the type and amount of special education and related services (Colorado Department of Education, 2017; Gibbs & Dyches, 2016; State of New Mexico Public Education Department, 2020; New York City Department of Education, 2021). The development of annual goals necessitates a team approach, with all members contributing and providing input. To remain student-centered, the amount of specially designed instruction and related services should be designed to narrow the gap between the student's current performance and the grade-level standards so that the student can progress toward the outcomes identified in the IEP (Maryland State Department of Education, 2019; Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, n.d.). Such considerations provide insight into the

least restrictive level of service sufficient to support the student so that the goal can be achieved (Maryland State Department of Education, 2019; Alabama State Department of Education, 2019; New York City Department of Education, 2021; North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2021).

Furthermore, Maine's Department of Education (2020) and Maryland's State Department of Education (2019) specify that there should be a goal for every service and thus a service for every goal. Wisconsin's Department of Special Education (2021) recommends listing the connecting annual goal number(s) for each supplementary aid or service supports. If there is no corresponding goal, it is acceptable to identify needs that require the aids and services. According to Wrightslaw (2021), "goals can be written for a related service just as they are for other special education services" (para. 7). In contrast, the State of New Mexico Public Education Department (2020) notes that goals should not be tied specifically to related services. This statement is clarified with the following example: "There is rarely, if ever, a need for an 'OT goal,' an 'SLP goal,' or a 'PT goal,' as these related services are intended to support the child's overall academic and functional goals" (p. 3). Overall, findings on this topic are mixed. Some states specify an exact alignment between goals and services, while others do not. Some states indicate that goals should be categorized to align directly with specific related services and others warn against this. However, as it is noted above, the annual goals play a critical role in determining special education and related services for the student, which may or may not require a direct one-to-one connection with a goal.

Imposing exact rules about the amount, types, or categorization of goals and how these align with services constitutes a somewhat formulaic approach to IEP development. Guidelines for the alignment of goals and services should, at the heart, be data-centered and student-centered, rather than based on a state or LEA algorithm.

PROGRESS MONITORING

According to the National Center on Intensive Intervention (2016), progress monitoring is critical for (a) assessing student performance, (b) quantifying the student's rate of improvement or responsiveness to an intervention, (c) adjusting the instructional programming to increase effectiveness based on the needs of the student, and (d) evaluating the overall effectiveness of the implemented intervention. IDEA requires a description of how a student's progress toward meeting the annual goals will be measured and when periodic progress reports will be shared with parents (20 U.S.C. § 1414 [d] [1][A][i][III]).

RESULTS (CONTINUED)

Continuous progress monitoring is an important part of the decision-making process to determine and revise the types and amount of special education and related services. The Iowa Department of Education (2019) emphasizes that public agencies have a responsibility to provide services and monitor progress as often as needed to help educators understand the student's response to special education. Furthermore, public agencies must analyze student data and compare performance against a target to determine that a student is on track to meet measurable annual goals.

Progress monitoring “creates a data base regarding a student's progress, allowing the teacher to evaluate the success of the student's educational program and change the program if needed, which will ultimately result in more effective programming” (Goran et al., 2020, p. 341). Maryland and Wisconsin emphasize continuous and accurate progress monitoring by drawing conclusions from the data to determine “a child's previous rate of academic growth (using trend data); whether the child is on track to achieve or exceed grade-level proficiency; any behaviors interfering with the child's progress; and additional information and input provided by the child's parents” (Maryland State Department of Education, 2019, p. 2; Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, n.d.). Progress monitoring also allows for the early identification and responsiveness to slow or minimal progress or regression (Arkansas Department of Education, n.d.). “If the student is making sufficient progress, it may be possible to reduce the intensity of services. If the rate of progress is below expectations, the duration and frequency of services may need to increase or the nature of services may need to change” (Beech, 2015, p. 106). Simply put, without effective and accurate progress monitoring, there is no way of determining whether a student is benefiting from the special education and related services they are receiving, and this can significantly impact the student and future decisions regarding services.

Maryland's State Department of Education (2019) provides the following guiding questions to help make decisions based on progress monitoring data:

- What gains were made during the last IEP, or if more appropriate, the last Individualized Family Services Plan (IFSP)?
- In what content areas were gains made?
- What skills were mastered? How do these skills connect with multiple standards?
- What supports, strategies, and specially designed instruction were implemented? How did the student respond?
- What factors influenced progress? What factors led to an increased rate of learning?
- What data must be collected for ongoing progress monitoring?

Giangreco (2001) provides the following considerations for actively using data to make decisions about the continued need for services or adjustments to the type, mode, and frequency of services:

- The level at which the student is currently performing;
- The level at which the student needs to perform in order for her or his goals to be accomplished;
- How much time it might take for the student to meet this goal;
- How frequently the team will collect information about the student's progress; and
- When the team should review the data to see if goals have been reached.

RESULTS (CONTINUED)

PROGRESS MONITORING

Giangreco (2001) also emphasizes the importance of reviewing data in a timely manner to make use of this information through responsive, data-driven decisions. Further, there may be instances when additional information is needed to make accurate decisions:

After the team has decided what they believe the data mean, it's time to consider possible steps, select a course of action, and take that action. Though it is common and appropriate to consider instructional and curricular changes, in some cases the team may also want to change the data collection method. Existing methods may not provide the information you are seeking or may not be sensitive enough to detect modest levels of progress. Whatever decisions the team makes should be informed by data it has collected. (p. 53)

In addition to accurate and informative data to support decision-making, progress monitoring should occur across a variety of contexts, as services are delivered in various educational environments. For example, students may learn social skills in small groups in a pull-out setting with the speech-language pathologist. Additional practice and generalization may occur during lunch with the support of a special education teacher or paraprofessional. In addition to services occurring across settings, the special educator and speech-language pathologist may share the responsibility of collecting data and monitoring progress (Goran et al., 2020).

The importance of progress monitoring and responsiveness to the data collected, which may require adjustments to interventions and services, shifts the concept of the IEP process being a document that is revised annually. Instead, for progress monitoring and action to effectively occur, the IEP document should be iterative in nature. The IEP is not static, and IEP teams should consider whether strategically reviewing and updating an IEP may better support students and ensure that interventions and services are being provided are based on progress monitoring data. Washington's OSPI (2020) Multi-tiered Systems of Supports Framework provides additional information on this concept.

REASONABLY CALCULATED

According to the Supreme Court, the educational benefit requirement of IDEA is satisfied, and a student has received a FAPE if the student's IEP sets out an educational program that is 'reasonably calculated to enable the child to make progress appropriate in light of his circumstance' (*Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District*, 2017, p. 16).

The Supreme Court has referred to the development of special education and related services as a general standard, not a formula; there can be no prescriptive model for determining whether special education programming is appropriate or delivers educational benefit. Rather, the unique circumstances of the student are to be the centerpiece of any and all IEP decisions.

In an online module developed by the IRIS Center (2022), Yell, a University of Carolina professor in Special Education, states that IEP Teams must use their expertise as a team to make a prediction of reasonable growth or progress for the student. This best estimate is based on recent, relevant, and meaningful assessment data that addresses all needs, as well as the input of that child's family members. When considering progress appropriate in light of a child's circumstances, it is imperative that the IEP Team develop reasonable but ambitious goals that are reflective of the assessment data and are responsive to family members. Yell continues to provide the following analogy:

The best practices, if we consider the term in light of the child's circumstances, are number one: to remember that the assessment is the baseline for everything that comes after it in the IEP. If we use the analogy of a house being the actual IEP, the assessment is the foundations of the house. And if the assessment is incorrect or the assessment isn't a good foundation, the rest of the house or IEP tends to fall. So, everything is based on the assessment and that's really the keystone of everything that we do. So, it means our best practices are: We do a relevant assessment of all of a child's needs. And then we link that to the rest of the IEP. If we identify a need, we have to address it with a goal or a service, but most likely both a goal and a service. And then we have to monitor progress. But it's all based on that original assessment. (IRIS Center, 2022, p. 5)

RESULTS (CONTINUED)

As discussed in the previous sections, Yell provides a thorough explanation of how present level statements, annual goals and objectives, and progress monitoring are intertwined in the decision-making process. This online module is an excellent resource for IEP Teams to develop a practical understanding of how to create data-driven IEPs.

EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICES

Another consideration when determining services and supports for SWDs is to use evidence-based practices. Cook, Smith, and Tankersley (2011) define evidence-based practices as identified instructional techniques and interventions meet a prescribed criteria related to research design and have the greatest potential to positively impact students with disabilities.

As mandated by IDEA, teachers and service providers should select academic and behavioral interventions that have research to indicate effectiveness. Additionally, teachers and service providers should be knowledgeable in explaining the research evidence behind proposed special education interventions and related services to the team, including family members (Yell et al., 2013). Sources of information about the research base include professional journals and websites, such as the [What Works Clearinghouse Find What Works](#) sponsored by the Institute of Educational Sciences (IES), and the [Council for Exceptional Children \(CEC\) Standards for Evidence-Based Practices](#).

CLARITY WITHIN THE IEP

Services within the IEP must be clearly documented, including beginning and ending dates, frequency, location, and duration statements. The U.S. Department of Education has directed school districts to provide sufficient detail in IEPs to ensure that the resources the district will commit is clear to all members of the IEP Team, including families (71 F.R. 46540). To provide clarity within the IEP, Beech (2015) states, “The IEP Team should describe the specific nature of the special education services and how they will be provided” (p. 108). The precision of the language is especially needed so that educators and service providers clearly understand their responsibilities and expectations in implementing the specific services to which a student is entitled based on assessments of the student’s needs (California Department of Education, 2021; Maryland State Department of Education, 2019). Such clarity in the IEP helps ensure proper IEP implementation and supports future decisions for continuing, revising, or discontinuing services (Arizona Department of Education, 2017; Arizona Department of Education, 2019; California Department of Education, 2021).

State by state guidance in specifying the amount of service hours in an IEP varies. Generally, ambiguity in IEP service delivery should be avoided. Therefore, prescribing a service “as needed” or providing a range for services does not constitute best practice (Arizona Department of Education, 2019; California Department of Education, 2021). Designating a service “as needed” is of particular concern because it prevents the team from planning and organizing the delivery of specially designed instruction in advance (California Department of Education, 2021). However, Wisconsin’s Department of Public Instruction (2010) and Brown (2010) permit the indication of a range for special education or related services to be provided to the student to meet unique needs. Both states caution that a range should not be used for administrative conveniences, such as personnel shortages and availability or budgetary constraints. Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (2010) clarifies that “the range also cannot be unreasonably wide (generally more than 15 minutes) because this does not provide a clear commitment of resources” (p. 8). Brown (2010) for the New York City Department of Education provide the example of “30-40 minutes per day as determined by the student’s evidence of fatigue” (p. 1).

RESULTS (CONTINUED)

TEAM DECISION-MAKING

The development of an IEP requires a collaborative process, which includes general education classroom teachers, special education teachers, related service providers, parents, and the student. All members have a role in developing goals and objectives and measuring progress. Although special educators may be considered the primary professional responsible for collecting data and reporting progress towards goals and objectives, the nature of services should be delivered across a variety of settings. Thus, decisions should include all providers, such as general educators and related service providers, within those settings (Goran et al., 2020). Collaboration and consideration of the interrelated knowledge and disciplinary expertise of the IEP Team are important in determining special education and related services (Giangreco, 2001). Each team member must be prepared to share information about the student's unique circumstances and the types of services that would best address the student's needs (Idaho State Department of Education, 2019). Together, team members should review and make decisions based on the student's data, including past progress and rate of student growth; past delivery of specially designed instruction, interventions, and services or supports; and the effectiveness of those past services (Maryland State Department of Education, 2019; Wrightslaw, 2021).

PARTNERING WITH FAMILIES

As integral members of the IEP Team, the information and perspectives shared by families are crucial in ensuring that decisions on special education and related services are based on the child's unique needs. However, "parents often feel voiceless and powerless" (Waterstone, 2017, p. 533), as they may be surrounded by a number of professionals on the IEP Team using special education terminology that may be difficult to understand and navigate. "Many parents sit silently because they are overwhelmed and confused by what is happening around them" (Waterstone, 2017, p. 533).

Given the *Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District* (2017) finding that "the educational program must be appropriately ambitious in light of [the child's] circumstances" (p. 16), families should be encouraged to participate in IEP Team meetings and provided with opportunities to share information related to the circumstances of their child. Parental voice and involvement can shed light on why the child's needs warrant specific services and how services can benefit the child. As discussed earlier, the IEP process is collaborative, and other members of the IEP Team should clarify decisions regarding special education and related services, as well as explain the research foundations implicate certain interventions and services that are based on evidence.

ENGAGEMENT OF RELATED SERVICE PROVIDERS

It is important to acknowledge and make decisions that reflect the data collected by and the input of IEP Team members. As related service providers have specific expertise, providers should be engaged in "the development of and decision-making process relating to IEP goals (and, if appropriate, short-term objectives), frequency and duration of services, as well as monitoring of the IEP and progress toward IEP goals" (Arizona Department of Education, 2008, pp. 6-7). The related service provider plays a key role in communicating assessment results and progress reports to the entire team to assist the team in making sense of the data to then determine the appropriateness of the related service, and if applicable, continuation, changes, or discontinuation of the service (New York City Department of Education, 2021).

RESULTS (CONTINUED)

ENGAGEMENT OF RELATED SERVICE PROVIDERS

As recommended by the New York City Department of Education (2021), related service providers who will be participating in the IEP meeting should prepare in advance by:

- Reviewing any new progress or assessment reports;
- Identifying strategies that have been successful with the student;
- Reflecting on the student’s progress toward meeting IEP goals, and considering preparing draft annual goals (however, a complete discussion of all issues, including annual goals, must occur at the IEP meeting, including considering input from parents);
- Considering special factors that have impeded or may impede the student’s learning; and
- Identifying the student’s strengths and interests (p. 47).

The New York City Department of Education (2021) specifically outlines guidelines for the participation of related service providers at IEP Team meetings. It is advised that a related service provider participate when a student is recommended for related services. Participation is suggested when a modification to a service is being considered or an initiation of a related service is being recommended. If a related service provider is unable to participate, it is recommended that information be submitted that may include: (a) current levels of performance; (b) progress toward meeting the service’s annual goals; (c) proposed annual goals, and if applicable, short-term objectives; and (d) recommendations for continuation or discontinuation of the service, and/or changes in frequency, duration, group size, and/or location.

Related service providers may have specific recommendations regarding the frequency, amount, and duration of the service being recommended, as well as the delivery model to facilitate the student’s functioning most appropriately in educational settings (Kentucky Department of Education, 2021). Related service providers may remove barriers by integrating therapies across school settings and in naturally occurring environments (Kentucky Department of Education, 2021; Arizona Department of Education, 2008). Additionally, “the unique, individual needs of the student determine a school-based therapist’s methods of service delivery and caseloads. Considerations of caseload and service delivery approaches often require a cooperative effort between the therapist, teaching staff and administration” (Kentucky Department of Education, 2021, p. 27).

Providers will guide decisions on the delivery of services “including individually or in groups, direct (hands-on) or indirect (consultation); how therapy may be reinforced by teachers, paraeducators, parents, and other staff; equipment management; and what training may be necessary to enable others (e.g., staff, parents, peers) to implement and support the therapy goals” (Arizona Department of Education, 2008, p. 16). Additionally, service providers, including teachers, may need training or consultation from related service staff to integrate discipline-specific approaches in the classroom. Professional development led by a related service provider or special educator may increase the implementation and effectiveness of inclusive practices, and this may lead to increased collaboration amongst staff across the school (Giangreco, 2001).

RESULTS (CONTINUED)

THINKING CREATIVELY AS A TEAM

The following sections elaborate on the ways that IEP Teams can creatively develop a plan for how services will be delivered based on a student's strengths, needs, interests, and preferences. Such considerations include flexibility in scheduling, delivering services across a variety of contexts and delivery models, and providing services individually or as part of a group. These discussions and decisions should always be made by the IEP Team, with the student serving as the central focus.

Flexibility in Frequency and Duration of Services

The frequency and duration of services should be reasonably calculated to allow the student an opportunity to achieve the measurable annual goals outlined in the IEP (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2021). Flexibility may be necessary to remain responsive to the needs of the student and allow for added opportunities for meaningful delivery. Flexibility supports student progress and, as an added benefit, provides the most efficient use of a provider's time (Arizona Department of Education, 2019).

Service delivery decisions should not be based on administrative convenience, such as student course schedules (e.g., bell schedules) (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2021).

Flexible scheduling may be warranted if the team anticipates the student will achieve goals at varying rates. For instance, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (2021) suggests that the team may enter in services with different duration dates when the team anticipates the student will achieve some goals sooner than others. Similarly, "it may be appropriate to specify in the IEP more intense therapy services early in the school year, fading to less intense services as the year passes and routines are established across programs and activities of the school day" (Arizona Department of Education, 2008, p. 21). This approach can support a student to learn a new skill and then provide the student with more time to practice other curricula or classroom demands as the year progresses (Arizona Department of Education, 2019; Kentucky Department of Education, 2021).

For students who may benefit from monitoring their own progress and engaging in periodic check-ins with a related service provider, scheduling on a monthly basis may be appropriate (Arizona Department of Education, 2019, p. 62). Ultimately, the Arizona Department of Education (2008) advises that the frequency and duration of the service be clearly documented within the IEP and understood by the IEP Team.

RESULTS (CONTINUED)

Across Settings

Student-centered decision-making may necessitate interventions be provided in a variety of settings (e.g., academics, lunch, recess, and specials). As outlined in the Arizona Department of Education (2008):

With a variable time schedule, there can be flexibility from month to month, which would be reflected in the IEP. For example, on an IEP that calls for one hour of occupational therapy per month, one month may include: 20 minutes of hands-on intervention during handwriting in the classroom (week one); 10 minutes of intervention in the classroom and consultation with the teacher (week two); 15 minutes intervention during art (week three); 10 minutes intervention during PE and 5 minutes intervention during transitions in the hallway, going from the bus to the classroom. Month two may include: 30 minutes intervention in the classroom (week one) and 15 minutes intervention in art (week two) and another 15 minutes intervention in the classroom (week four). (p. 21)

Delivery Models

Flexible scheduling permits a combination of delivery models (e.g., direct, integrated/collaboration indirect, and consultation) to be provided to or on behalf of the student and ensures that the needs of the student are being addressed. The following sections describe various service delivery models provided by the Kentucky Department of Education (2021):

- Direct: (With the student)
 - The education professional provides intervention directly to the student with the goal of improved motor or communication function to support the student to participate and make progress in their educational curriculum.
 - The education professional works directly with the student to improve his or her independence by addressing and supporting the development of self-care skills or communication skills related to the student's educational program.
 - The education professional supports a student to use a checklist to adapt his or her work environments to improve the student's performance in prevocational or vocational programs.
- Integrated/Collaboration/Direct: (With the student and/or on behalf of the student)
 - The education professional develops and provides "hands-on" interventions during naturally occurring school activities.
 - The education professional provides interventions alongside the student's classroom peers within the natural environment and emphasizes integration and generalization of skills into actual school activities (e.g., offering strategies for the student during journal writing, trying a slant board, offering strategies on step negotiation with a student when navigating a crowded stairwell).

RESULTS (CONTINUED)

- Consultation: (Support for school personnel)
 - The education professional observes, monitors, and provides critical analysis of student's performances and responses that prevent the student from benefiting from his or her special educational program (e.g., troubleshooting or adjusting equipment/programs).
 - The education professional provides training and technical assistance to other staff working with the student so they can effectively assist the student in making progress on his or her goals.
 - The education professional communicates knowledge about basic practices to other team members to increase understanding or awareness (e.g., leading others to graph student performance data, team members making others aware of resources).
 - The education professional identifies and optimizes natural opportunities for embedding skills and generalization during daily routines.
 - The education professional collaborates and coordinates with staff and families for needed change in instruction and learning environments (e.g., adapting the physical environment, modifying educational materials, relaying school information to staff on the nature and implication of the student's medical condition).
 - The education professional obtains adaptive equipment and designs strategies to enable the student to use the equipment so he or she functions more independently in their educational environment.
 - The education professional trains the teachers, paraprofessionals, and parents in activities, strategies, and use of adaptive equipment (e.g., determine if the student is positioned properly in a wheelchair).

Delivery models may include a mixture of the approaches identified above. Considering more than one delivery model may lead to increased collaboration across team members, with providers working together to implement interventions and strategies with consistency, across settings, and across disciplines. This may lead to shared data collection and analysis (Kentucky Department of Education, 2021).

Giangreco (2001) emphasizes that determining the combination of delivery models means aligning each decision with the purpose to be served.

For example, suppose a team agrees that they need a physical therapist to teach staff how to safely position and move a student with physical disabilities. This could be accomplished through a consultation or begin as an indirect service, where the therapist spends some time on-site supervising staff who are positioning the student. Once things are going well, the service mode could be changed to a periodic check. (p. 38)

IEP Teams may also decide that a service will be provided concurrently. Concurrent services occur simultaneously and should be used thoughtfully based on the needs of the students. This approach should be used sparingly as they do not effectively clarify to the IEP Team the specific duration and frequency of the service. An example of a concurrent service would be if "occupational therapy is being provided as a related service, without a separate annual goal. The occupational therapist is assisting with the student's written language goal and is providing the service at the same time and location that the student is receiving their SDI for written language" (Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, 2019, p. 10). Though the IEP does not require the documentation of the delivery model, just the type of service, frequency, duration, and beginning and ending dates of service, it is imperative that IEP Team members consider and decide together the delivery model to ensure that it meets the needs of the student (Giangreco, 2001). With regard to concurrent services, it is important for all team members to understand how the concurrent services will be delivered (i.e., manner and location) and to make this transparent for parents and other IEP team members through documentation.

RESULTS (CONTINUED)

Providing Services to a Student Individually or within a Group

The IEP Team may also consider whether related services will be provided to a student individually or within a group. According to Board of Education of the City of New York (n.d.), group related services may be recommended when:

- Peer relationships support or aid the attainment of IEP goals.
- Common interests, values, or skills create an optimal context for learning.
- Skills can be practiced most effectively in the presence of others.
- Students demonstrate the ability to function in a group.

If services are to be provided within a group, the IEP Team should determine the maximum group size. The Board of Education of the City of New York (n.d.) provided guidance that “services may be provided to a group of two or more students, with the maximum group size not to exceed eight students. Where services are provided to a mixed group that consists of both SWDs and nondisabled students, the combined group size may not exceed the group size maximum for any individual student with a disability in the group” (p. 21). Overall, the IEP Team’s decision should be based on the individualized needs of the student as described by the student data.

According to the Board of Education of the City of New York (n.d.), individual related services may be recommended when:

- Specialized techniques that cannot be provided in a group are needed.
- The desired skills and their practice require privacy.
- Intensive treatment, with maximum opportunities for repetition and learning new skills, is needed.
- The student’s behavior, attention, and/or other factors are managed most appropriately on an individual basis.
- The student has complex conditions that cannot be addressed in a group setting.

Thinking creatively as a team may afford related service providers the opportunity to increase the impact of therapies; increase collaboration and progress monitoring with other educators; minimize disruptions within the classroom; and increase opportunities for students to remain with their peers (Arizona Department of Education, 2019).

GUIDING QUESTIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS

The literature includes guidance and prompts for IEP Teams to consider and discuss to determine what types of services are needed, including the amount, location, and provider for that service. These guiding questions and prompts are compiled and outlined below and were collected from the following sources: Board of Education of the City of New York (n.d.), Maryland State Department of Education (2021), Giangreco (2001), IRIS Center (2022), Kentucky Department of Education (2021), and Mississippi Department of Education Office of Special Education (2020).

Future technical assistance from the Every Minute Counts Project will provide streamlined guidance which incorporates the below guiding questions and considerations.

General Considerations Based on the Needs of the Student

- What types of services and supports would address the student’s areas of concern and specific needs?
- Does the student need specialized strategies to compensate for his or her disability?
- What special education provider (e.g., SLP, OT, PT, BCBA) is most appropriate to design and monitor, and provide specially designed instruction?
- Does a service area require collaboration or support from other special education providers or personally (e.g., related service providers)?
- Will the services of other special education providers, (e.g., related service providers) be required alone, or in combination with, the special education teacher services?
- Do the services support the student’s cultural and linguistic background?
- Do the services address secondary transition needs for students aged 16 and older (or earlier for states with younger age requirements)?

RESULTS (CONTINUED)

General Considerations Based on Educational Programming and Access

- Will the services be relevant to the student's broader learning program?
- Does the student require the related service provider's knowledge and expertise as a necessary component of the student's educational program?
- What type and amount of developmental, corrective, and supportive services are needed to ensure the student benefits from general and special education?
- Will the services contribute to the student's access, involvement, and progress in the general education curriculum due to special education service delivery (i.e., consideration of what the student would miss when receiving this service)?
- Will the services maximize student participation with non-disabled peers?
- Will the services be non-intrusive (i.e., most in keeping with the general practices of the classroom)?
- What will the nature of the services (e.g., direct, indirect) be, and for what percentage of the school day (e.g., part-time, full-time)?
- Are concerted efforts being made to place and maintain the student in the general education setting with the identified services? Is the rationale for decisions leading to a student's services being delivered outside of the general education classroom well-documented?
- Is the student's rate of skill acquisition, potential for progress, or level of function likely to change with therapy intervention?
- Are decisions being made based on current data?

General Considerations Related Directly to the IEP

- Is there a clear relationship between the student's annual IEP goals, the specially designed instruction and the gap from the student's current performance and the grade level standards such that the student can be expected to make reasonable progress in the general education curriculum?
- Do the services consider the student's history and progress data with previous general education, special education, and related services?
- Is the frequency and duration of services sufficiently intensive to address all the student's annual goals and objectives (e.g., academic, functional, behavior) and support an accelerated rate of learning?
- Do the services consider the student's history and progress data with previous general education, special education, and related services as well as consider those skills and supports necessary to participate meaningfully in extracurricular activities?

Considerations Specific to Special Education Services

- Does the student require ongoing changes to the content or scope of the general education curriculum (e.g., less or more content at grade level, or content at a different grade level)?
- What instructional approaches from the general education environment support student engagement and progress (e.g., graphic organizers, schedules, or checklists)?
- What other instructional methods have worked well for this student in the past?
- What adaptations to the delivery of instruction does the student need to pursue his or her IEP goals or identified parts of the general education curriculum?
- Do proposed adaptations to the delivery of instruction or different instructional methods help the student be a member of the classroom or might they cause the student to stand out in negative or stigmatizing ways?
- Does the frequency, intensity, or combination of services suggested as "special education" extend beyond what can be provided through the general education classroom or a Section 504 plan?

RESULTS (CONTINUED)

CONSIDERATIONS SPECIFIC TO RELATED SERVICES

Educational Relevance, Clarity of Purpose, and Necessity of Related Services

- Educational Relevance
 - Can the service be explicitly linked with a component of the student's educational program?
- Clarity of Purpose
 - Is the purpose of the related service to promote effective implementation and evaluation? Examples include:
 - select and monitor the use of equipment,
 - make adaptations,
 - transfer information/skills to other team members,
 - be a resource or support to families, or
 - apply skills specific to the professional discipline.
- Educationally Necessary
 - If the student does not receive a proposed related service, is there reason to believe that he or she will not: (a) have access to an appropriate education; or (b) experience educational benefit?
 - Will the absence of the service interfere with the student's access to or participation in his or her educational program this year?
 - If the team answers, "Yes" to any of the following questions, the service under consideration probably is not educationally necessary.
 - Could the proposed service be addressed appropriately by the special educator or classroom teacher?
 - Could the proposed service be addressed appropriately through core school faculty or staff (e.g., school nurse, guidance counselor, librarian, teachers, administrator, bus drivers, cafeteria staff, or custodians)?
 - Has the student been benefiting from his or her educational program without the service?
 - Could the student continue to benefit from his or her educational program without the service?
 - Could the service be appropriately provided during non-school hours?
 - Does the proposed service present any undesirable or unnecessary gaps, overlaps, or contradictions with other proposed services?

Service Delivery Model

- Are services provided through a variety of service delivery models to meet the unique needs of the student and not based solely on service availability?
- What combination of service models is appropriate given the purpose to be served?

Impact on Other Services

- In determining the frequency of the services, how might the amount chosen for one discipline's involvement affect the amount for another?
- Are services comprehensive enough to allow the student to access their educational program, and are they reasonably calculated to enable the student to make appropriate progress considering the student's circumstance?

Across Settings

- Are services provided during the student's daily educational routine with skills taught across all educational settings?
- Are services planned to optimize the student's ability to practice tasks in multiple settings, including future employment and independent living environments?
- Will the services provide the student who is deaf or hard of hearing opportunities for direct interaction with peers and educational personnel in the student's own language or communication mode?

RESULTS (CONTINUED)

Team Collaboration and Data Collection

- Are therapeutic services provided through a team approach with team members sharing information, strategies, and techniques to promote consistency in program implementation and generalization of the skill by the student?
- Are regular team meetings held to provide communication of information and outcomes that guide the plan of activities?
- What kinds of information will the team collect to determine whether the supports have been successful?

Additional Considerations for Determining Related Services

- Will the services employ evidence-based practices whenever feasible?
- Will bilingual special education or related services be needed?
- Will the services of a paraprofessional be required as an “other support service” or in combination with special education teacher services?
- Will other supplementary aids and services (e.g., assistive technology, behavior intervention plan) be required?

Considerations for Modifying Related Services

- Is a change in frequency, duration, or group size (i.e., increase or decrease) necessary to meet the student’s needs?
- Are modifications needed to respond to significant changes in the student’s health or functional status, for example, in the aftermath of surgery or prolonged illness?
- Are modifications needed as part of a transition plan leading to termination from related services?

Considerations for Discontinuing Related Services

- Does the student no longer require the related service provider’s knowledge and expertise as a necessary component of the student’s educational program.
- Does the student no longer require the related service to access and/or participate in the general curriculum?
- Could the student’s needs be addressed successfully by another service provider or the educational team, and the expertise of the current education professional is no longer necessary?
- Is the student able to integrate their acquired skills into the everyday environment and successfully participate in their primary program without services or with declassification services for up to twelve months?
- Have the student’s skills reached a plateau and little or no change is expected, and the student can successfully participate in their primary program without services or with declassification services for up to twelve months?
- Can the student’s needs be effectively addressed through classroom accommodations or modifications?
- Has the student maximized their function in the educational setting in keeping with their abilities?
- Has the student learned appropriate strategies to compensate for their disability?
- Has the student met all goals that might have required the support of an education professional?

RESULTS (CONTINUED)

In Figure 5, Giangreco (2001) presents an IEP decision-making model, which outlines information, ideas, and questions that should be considered before, during, and after making decisions about IEP special education and related services. As indicated above and represented in the model below, educational relevance, clarity of purpose, and necessity of related services are important questions when considering related services. When determining service frequency, Giangreco (2001) emphasizes that, “there is no formula to make such decisions; rather it’s based on the student’s needs, past performance, and priorities,” and “the only way to tell whether the judgment was a good one comes with implementation and evaluation” (p. 38).

Figure 5

IEP decision-making model regarding special education and related services.

IEP Decision-Making about Special Education and Related Services

Before	During	After
<p>Background and Legal Context</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Definitions and Related Information (e.g., special education, related services, court decisions, parental involvement, the IEP team) <p>Team Practices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn About Team Members • Acknowledge varying decision-making values (e.g., more is better, only as specialized as necessary) • Develop a Shared Framework • Clarify the Process • Seek Consensus <p>Learn About the Student</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student Characteristics • Educational Program Components (e.g., IEP goals/objectives, participation in general education curriculum, general supports/accommodations) <p>Learn About the Context</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn About Existing Options 	<p>Determine Special Education and Related Services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine the Special Education Services (e.g., curricular, instructional, adaptations) <hr/> <p>Some Students with IEPs May Need Related Services</p> <p>Ask Vital Questions About Need for Each Proposed Related Service</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the proposed related service educationally relevant? • What is the purpose of the proposed related service? • Is the proposed related service educationally necessary? <hr/> <p>Decide “What” Before “How”</p> <p>Decide How Services are Provided</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modes and Frequency of Service • Consider Approaches that Build School and Classroom Capacity • If Paraeducator Support is Proposed, Consider its Use and Impact • Remember, IEP Services Can Be Modified if Needed 	<p>Implement the Special Education Services as Documented in the IEP (and Related Services if Identified)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a Schedule • Develop a Written Plan, Including Data Collection Methods • Ensure Appropriate Training, Supervision, and Support of Team Members • Implement the Plan and Collect Data <p>Evaluate the Impact of Services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use Data to Determine Impact on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) access to and participation in school (b) IEP goals/ objectives (c) general education outcomes, and (d) valued life outcomes (e.g., health, safety, relationships, activities, places, choices, self-determination) • Use Data to Make Decisions About the Continued Need for the Services or Adjustments to the Type, Mode, or Frequency

Giangreco, M. F. (2001). *Guidelines for making decisions about I.E.P. services*. Montpelier, VT: Vermont Department of Education. <https://scholarworks.uvm.edu/cessfac/7/>.

RESULTS (CONTINUED)

PRECAUTIONS

The literature identifies several precautions when calculating special education and related services within the IEP. The unique educational needs of the student are to be the central focus of the decision-making process. As discussed, teams should refrain from basing decisions narrowly on the category of the student's disability (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, n.d.; Indiana Department of Education, 2021).

An accurate description of a student's services provides clarity to families, educators, and service providers to ensure that these services are delivered as intended. When providing such clarity, the IEP Team and school administrators cannot consider the expense of special education services. Additionally, convenience of school or program scheduling, class periods and bell schedules, availability of the service provider, or other administrative reasons should not drive IEP Team decisions (New Mexico Public Education Department, 2011; Albuquerque Public Schools, 2012; Maine Department of Education, 2021; New York City Department of Education, 2021; Arkansas Department of Education, n.d.; South Dakota Department of Education, 2020; Indiana Department of Education, 2021).

Students are to receive the full duration of service as indicated on their IEPs (Brown, 2010). Delivering services with fidelity, including frequency, duration, and setting, as well as implementing interventions with fidelity is crucial. IEP alterations that are conducted without required documentation must not occur, as this can negatively impact service efficacy and shared decision-making on behalf of the student (IRIS Center, 2022).

CONCLUSION

“Using effective IEP services decision-making practices ultimately contributes to providing quality education for students with disabilities, resulting in meaningful outcomes. If done well, this can make a difference in the lives of students with disabilities and their families — and that’s what good education is all about!” (Giangreco, 2001, p. 54)

For SWDs, their families, providers, and other members of the IEP Team, the IEP is an essential document that entitles a student with a disability to FAPE and informs efficacious delivery of services. When developed and implemented collaboratively, an IEP outlines the critical decisions a team has made to address the unique needs resulting from a student’s disability and enables progress in the general education curriculum. Specially designed instruction and related services can change the trajectory of a student’s growth whereby the gap between the performance of SWD and their same-age peers can be narrowed or closed. The development and implementation of the IEP provide the opportunity for SWD to access the general education curriculum and peers with and without disabilities.

In *Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District* (2017) the Supreme Court noted that the core of IDEA is the student’s individual circumstances and unique needs. The utilization of this language emphasizes that a “one size fits all” program does not meet the requirements of the IDEA. Referred to as a “fact-intensive exercise” (*Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District*, 2017, p. 11), the collaborative development and implementation of the IEP focuses on the student’s “potential for growth” (p. 12) based on the student’s PLAAFP. Continuous progress monitoring is the ‘navigational device’ that informs and steers decisions about the student’s growth and helps the team make IEP decisions that are appropriate. There are additional considerations that also must be incorporated, such as thinking creatively about service delivery models and opportunities for learning and practice across various environments.

The determination of special education and related services is a complex decision-making process necessitating collaboration. Though a formulaic approach or decisions may automatize the process, this approach negates IDEA. Instead, the process must be student-centered, and data driven. Turning away from convenience leads to unease as there is limited guidance in the federal guidelines. The intent of this report was to provide a comprehensive picture of current literature, including policy and state guidance to provide a national scope. The states listed below provided guidance and are represented in this report.

Alabama	Indiana	North Carolina
Arizona	Iowa	Oregon
Arkansas	Kentucky	South Dakota
California	Maine	Texas
Colorado	Maryland	Vermont
Connecticut	Mississippi	Washington
Florida	New Mexico	Washington D. C.
Idaho	New York	Wisconsin

The findings outlined within the report present the current guidance on determining special education and related services for SWDs. This problem of practice continues to be challenging and nuanced, and states do their best to interpret IDEA and effectively support SWDs. This report is meant to provide guidance that allows IEP Teams and educator preparation programs to foster IEP development that is individualized, effective, and responsive to SWDs. However, it is important to recognize that continual improvements to these practices remain to ensure that SWDs receive FAPE in their educational programming.

We welcome feedback on the Every Minute Counts: Report of the Existing Policies, Guidance, and Related Resources. Please use the form here: <https://forms.office.com/r/5QJYdyqu3W>.

NEXT STEPS

The purpose of the “**Every Minute Counts**” project is to identify and address existing problems of practice related to IEP development and indicate best practices for determining the amount and type of special education and related services contained in students’ IEPs. Members of the IDEALS Institute, in collaboration with OSPI, will utilize the results of this literature review and focus group findings provided by Directors of Special Education, representatives from teacher preparation programs, and preservice and in-service special educators across Washington state. The results from this report and the themes that emerge from the focus groups will lead to the creation of a technical assistance guide and corresponding professional learning materials to support individuals across the state. In the spirit of collaboration, members of the IDEALS Institute are also cooperating with OSPI to connect this work with other partnership projects, including the Keeping Exceptional Special Educators (KESE) Grant, CEEDAR Center Washington Intensive Technical Assistance Center, Washington Teacher Residency Technical Advisory Workgroup, and the Inclusionary Practices Professional Development Project.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work would not have been possible without the efforts of Nick Gillon, Assistant Director of Development and Learning Systems at IDEALS, Dr. Tania May, Assistant Superintendent of Special Education at Washington OSPI, Jennifer Story, Program Improvement Coordinator at Washington OSPI, and Dr. Rebecca Lynn, Program Improvement Supervisor at Washington OSPI.

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CONCLUSION

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