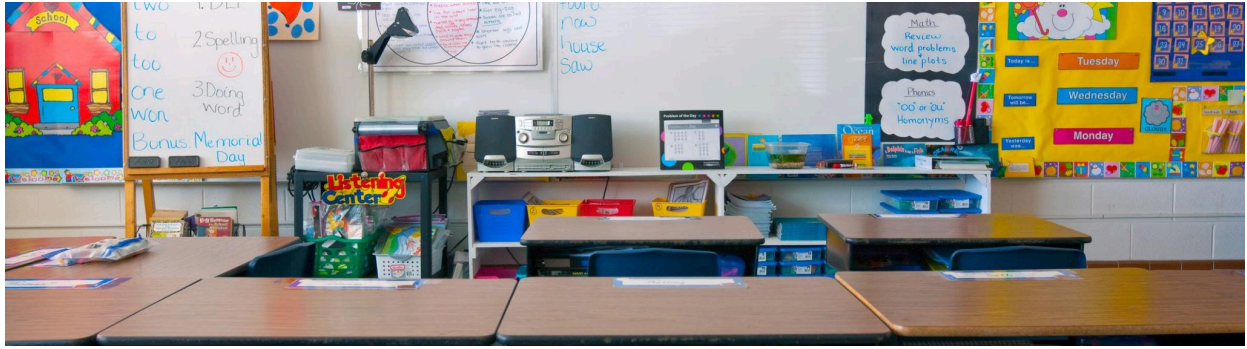


Cover



Handbook for Educational Assistants

and Substitutes

Hatch Special Education Office

Introduction

Thank you for your commitment to being an important part of the special education team who supports and provides services to students with disabilities attending Hatch Valley Public Schools.

This was designed to be a guide and resource to you. Hopefully, it will answer some of your questions about your role and how to meet the needs of students with disabilities. It is a general overview of your roles and responsibilities, special education, characteristics of disabilities, instructional and behavioral strategies, and resources. Information specific to the students you work with, and further direction will come from the administrators and teachers in your building.

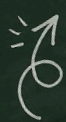
Our goal is to assist students in becoming as independent as possible and to prepare them for a bright future! We value your work and desire to serve our students and thank you for your dedication and professionalism. Please let us know how we may support you in your endeavor to grow professionally and be a valuable member of our team!

IN SPECIAL EDUCATION,
RELATIONSHIPS ♥
COME BEFORE
RESULTS.



Before we assess
progress,
WE BUILD CONNECTION.

Before we look at
performance, WE RECOGNIZE
EFFORT.



Before we focus on
outcomes, WE VALUE
THE JOURNEY.

Growth begins WITH TRUST,
RESPECT, AND RELATIONSHIP.

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Understanding Special Education



Understanding Special Education

What Special Education IS — and What It IS NOT

Helping every child reach their potential.



What Special Education IS



Individualized Support

Special education provides customized instruction and

services to meet a child's unique needs as identified in their IEP



A Legal Right

It's part of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)—federal law that ensures eligible students receive Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE).



A Team Effort Families, teachers, specialists and sometimes the student work together to set goals and make decisions



Support in the Least Restrictive Environment

(LRE) Whenever possible, students receive services alongside their peers in general education settings.

Focused on Access and Progress



Services are designed to help students access the curriculum and make meaningful progress—not to lower expectations



What Special Education IS NOT



A Place

Special education is not a specific classroom—It's a set of supports and services, which can be delivered anywhere from a general education classroom to a more specialized setting.



A Life Sentence

Students can enter and exit special education services as their needs change over time.



Giving Students the Answers

Special education does not mean teachers give students the answers or do the work for them. Instead, it focuses on teaching strategies, tools and supports to help students learn and grow independently



A Label or Limitation

Having an IEP does not define a child or limit potential. We see the whole child and celebrate their strengths!



Have Questions?

We're here to support you!

! ? Confidentiality and FERPA

Importance of Confidentiality and FERPA

- **Confidentiality is a legal requirement.** All information about students—including academic, behavioral, medical, and family-related details—is protected.
- **FERPA (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act)** protects student records. This means:
 - Only staff with a legitimate educational interest may access student information.
 - Do not share student information with anyone who does not directly work with the student.
 - Parents/guardians have the right to access their child's records- but do not have the right to know information about other students.
- **Conversations:** Avoid discussing students in public spaces (hallways, lounges, buses, community events, etc.).
- **Documents & Records:**
 - Keep IEPs, health plans, and other documents secure.
 - Do not leave papers or computers open where others can see.
 - Shred/dispose of documents appropriately.
- **Electronic Communication:**
 - Use district-approved platforms for email and messaging.
 - Never use personal devices/social media to share student information.
- **Ancillary Staff:** Follow the same FERPA and confidentiality rules as teachers—access is limited to what you need to provide your services.
- **Educational Assistants (EAs):** Information should only be used to support the student's learning and safety. Do not share details with others, including other students or parents. Let the teachers you work with be the one to communicate information to parents.
- **If in doubt—don't share.** Ask your administrator before disclosing information. You can also reach out to me before giving out information.
- If a parent or staff member without a need to know tries to have you give them information you are not sure they need, please refer them to your building administrator or to the Special Education Office.



Professionalism

Professionalism

- Present yourself as a positive role model for students.
- Represent the District in a positive manner.
- Be punctual and attend work regularly.
- Arrive and Leave your assigned class/classrooms on time. Stay in that location for as long as you are assigned there- students may need assistance eventually even if not right from the start.
- Follow your schedule consistently. It's okay to help out another staff member, as long as it does not interfere with services required per a student's IEP.
 - ***Example- helping out with assembly, snack shack, but if you are consistently missing big chunks of time assigned to a students services every week- then you should probably not help- unless students are absent and/or missing their service time will not harm their progress (class is watching a movie, so not much support would be needed).***
- Share relevant information with the supervising teacher to facilitate problem solving, program planning, and student progress.
- If you are a child specific Educational Assistant, **you should be willing** to help out with other students on a day when your specific student is absent.
- If you have questions, seek answers and/or input.
- Discuss a student's progress or educational program **only** with the teachers/ ancillary providers who are responsible for that student's instruction.
- Discuss confidential school and student issues only with appropriate school personnel (following FERPA guidelines)
- Maintain a positive attitude.
- Refrain from talking about a student in the community.
- Understand and follow school policies and procedures.
- Maintain appropriate dress as advised by your administration. Be mindful of wearing safe shoes to perform duties. (i.e. – for lifting students, supporting in physical education class)
- Communication with parents is the teacher's responsibility. Refer parent inquiries regarding student progress to the student's teacher.
- Maintain student dignity by being discreet about students' physical needs.
- Refrain from discussing information about students in front of other students.
- Maintain a professional relationship with students at all times.
- Be flexible and willing to assist when and where needed. (We are all a team, so we help each other out)

- ***Example- you are a Child Specific EA and your student is out- it's a good time to see where else you can help out.***

- Seek opportunities for professional growth such as reading journal articles, attending available training sessions, and/or participating in staff development.
- Focus on what a student "CAN do", rather than what he/she cannot do.
- Follow the chain of command if something is not working how you feel it should be
 - Step 1: Talk to Classroom or Special Education Teacher
 - Step 2: Talk to Building Administration
 - Step 3: Seek support from the Special Education Office

!! Basic Expectations

Basic Expectations

Each school might have their own set of expectations for Educational Assistants, but these are some basic ones (may vary school to school).

- A. Staff is expected to be in their designated area for student drop off
- B. During breakfast and lunch, staff will actively monitor students.
Conversations with other staff members should be held to a minimum as the **priority** is our students. Lunch should be eaten during scheduled lunch time unless given prior approval by the classroom teacher.
- C. Staff will adhere to schedules provided by classroom teachers and should notify classroom teachers if a change needs to be made or a break is needed, in order to ensure the proper coverage occurs to support the students. Student services are legally required through the IEP and your presence in the classroom to support them is important.
- D. Phone Usage
 - 1) Phones should not be used for personal use.
 - 2) Phones can be utilized during break or lunch but should remain unseen during instructional times unless being used for instructional purposes or to contact another school staff member (classroom teacher or office).
 - 3) Special consideration will be made for cell phone use. If your phone is needed for personal emergencies, work with building administrators, special education and/or general education teachers.
- F. Staff will not share personal information with parents of the students.
This includes limiting contact by not sharing phone numbers or addresses.
- G. All communication needs to go through classroom teachers and/or case managers. If parents are requesting information about their child, please refer to the classroom teacher or case manager. Cordial conversation may occur with parents, however, any questions beyond how the day was for the child should be referred to the classroom teacher or case manager.
- H. If absent or tardy, staff should notify building administrators, special

education and/or general education teachers. If you are going to be absent, please put your absence in as early as possible in order to obtain a sub.

Areas of Disability

Areas of Disabilities under IDEA

Characteristics of Disabilities.pdf

1. **Autism (AU)**
A developmental disability affecting communication, social interaction, and behavior. It typically appears before age 3.
2. **Deaf-Blindness (DB)**
A combination of hearing and visual impairments that causes severe communication, developmental, and educational needs.
3. **Deafness**
A severe hearing impairment that impacts a child's ability to process linguistic information through hearing, with or without amplification.
4. **Emotional Disturbance (ED)**
A condition that includes disorders like anxiety, depression, or schizophrenia, which adversely affects educational performance.
5. **Hearing Impairment (HI)**
A hearing loss (not as severe as deafness) that still negatively affects educational performance.
6. **Intellectual Disability (ID)**
Significantly subaverage general intellectual functioning with deficits in adaptive behavior, affecting educational performance.
7. **Multiple Disabilities (MD)**
Two or more impairments (e.g., intellectual disability and orthopedic impairment), that cause severe educational needs not addressed by one service alone.
8. **Orthopedic Impairment (OI)**
A physical disability that adversely affects a child's educational performance, such as cerebral palsy or limb loss.

9. **Other Health Impairment (OHI)**

Includes conditions like ADHD, diabetes, epilepsy, or Tourette syndrome, that limit strength, vitality, or alertness.

10. **Specific Learning Disability (SLD)**

Difficulties in basic academic skills such as reading, writing, or math, not caused by other conditions.

11. **Speech or Language Impairment (SLI)**

Difficulties with articulation, fluency, voice, or language that affect communication and academic success.

12. **Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)**

An acquired injury to the brain causing changes in cognition, behavior, or physical abilities that impact learning.

13. **Visual Impairment (VI), including Blindness**

A vision loss (partial or total) that impacts educational performance, even with correction.

You can view information about how a student qualifies under any of these areas in the NM Technical Evaluation and Assessment Manual ([NM TEAM](#)) and in the Special Education Handbook under the [Eligibility and Evaluations](#) section.

Roles of Teachers, EAs

Roles of Teachers and Educational Assistants

INSTRUCTION

Teacher's Role	EA's Role
*Determines appropriate objectives for groups and individual students. *Develops and implements student Individual Education Program (IEP) goals, accommodations and modifications. *Plans weekly schedules, lessons, room arrangement, learning centers, and activities for the entire class, as well as modifications and accommodations for students with IEP's (as appropriate) *Teaches lessons to the entire class, small groups, and individual students. (as appropriate) *Administers and scores assessments. *Determine the appropriate use of assistive technology to meet the needs of students. *Develops data collection tools and collects data on student progress.	*Follow the schedule and implement plans designed by the teacher(s). *Implements student IEP goals, accommodations and modifications as directed by the teacher. *Provides direct, individual assistance to student(s) so that they can participate, as independently as possible, in the least restrictive environment. *Implements student IEP goals, accommodations and modifications as directed by the teacher. *Administers informal assessments under the direction of the teacher. *Facilitates the use of assistive technology. *Collects data on student progress as designated by the teacher. *Provides assistance to individual students on completing follow-up or reinforcement activities. *Supports a student or small group of students during instruction.

BEHAVIOR AND SOCIAL SUPPORT

Teacher's Role (and ancillary as appropriate)	EA's Role
*Observes behavior, plans and implements behavior intervention plans and strategies for the entire class and for individual students. *Facilitates appropriate social interactions between students. *Develops data collection tools and collects data on student behavior.	*Implements and supports behavior plans and strategies under teacher direction. *Facilitates appropriate social interactions between students. *Collects data on classroom behavior as designated by the teacher.

COMMUNICATION

Teacher's Role	EA's Role
*Communicates with administrators, related service providers, general educators, EA's, and appropriate staff regarding student progress and/or concerns *Communicates with parents regarding student progress and/or concerns	*Communicates with case manager or teacher regarding student progress and/or concerns

PERSONAL CARE

Teacher's Role	EA's Role
----------------	-----------

*Provide personal assistance to students, as needed, to address mobility, positioning, personal care, daily activities, and utilizing the restroom.	*Provide personal assistance to students, as needed, to address mobility, positioning, personal care, daily activities, and utilizing the restroom.
---	---

CLERICAL

Teacher's Role	EA's Role
*Develop, model, and/or provide detailed instruction on preparing instructional Materials. *Develop an organization system to manage student work samples and materials.	*Prepare instructional materials based on a model and/or detailed instructions provided by a teacher. *Assist with organization of student work samples and materials, as directed by the teacher.

These are intended only as examples of the various types of job duties to be performed. The omission of specific duties does not exclude them from the position if the work is a similar, related, or logical assignment to the position. Duties may be assigned by the teacher(s), building administration and/or Special Ed Office. These duties may vary from school to school.

More information can be found under [Professionalism](#) or [Basic Expectations](#)

Working with Students

Working with Students with Health and Physical Needs

These are especially useful for ensuring student safety, dignity, and full access to their learning environments.

Hatch Valley Public School does offer a medically fragile stipend for students who have severe medical needs (G-tube feeding, changing, wheelchair, etc).

 Potty Training - Is it Special Ed or Not?

General Best Practices

- Know the student's care plan and IEP accommodations. Review regularly and ask questions if unclear.
- Communicate regularly with teachers, nurses, therapists, and case managers to ensure consistent support.
- Respect the student's dignity. Use respectful language, offer choices, and protect privacy during personal care.
- Work with the school nurse/health assistant for specialized training on individual student needs

Self Care Strategies

- Always be discreet when assisting with the self care needs of students. Carry diapers and supplies to the bathroom in a bag.
- Provide supervision of self care skills as needed, yet allow for privacy when appropriate.
- Discuss IEP goals related to self care skills with teacher and reinforce throughout the school day.
- Independence should be encouraged and taught while assisting a student with self care skills. Allow the student to do as much as possible while completing self care tasks. It will take longer in the beginning, but will pay off as the student becomes more independent!
- Ancillary Providers may provide guidance on toileting, feeding and dressing strategies.

Health Support Tips

- Follow medical protocols exactly as written (e.g., seizure response, diabetes monitoring, feeding tubes).
- Stay trained and current on health procedures (e.g., CPR, medication administration, lifting techniques).
- Maintain cleanliness—wash hands before and after providing any care, and properly dispose of supplies.
- Document care or incidents as required—accurate records protect the student and you.
- Practice universal precautions at all times to protect yourself and others.
- Wear gloves when coming into contact with bodily fluids. (changing diapers, feeding, wiping noses, etc.)
- Use proper hand washing techniques to protect yourself and others, before and after assisting with feeding, when coming in contact with bodily fluids. Wash with soap and water for at least 15 seconds.
- Clean materials and items mouthed by students only with a safe cleaner.
- Call for a custodian to clean blood, vomit, urine and bowel spills.
- Follow the proper disposal of diapers recommended by your school nurse and custodians.
- Place soiled clothes in a double lined plastic bag and seal tightly.
- Alert nurse of any skin breakdown or rash noted during diapering.

Promoting Student Independence

- Encourage “doing with,” not “doing for.” Prompt and support students to do as much as they can themselves.
- Use assistive technology and mobility tools appropriately to support participation in all school activities.
- Celebrate effort and progress in independence, even small steps.

Physical Needs & Mobility Support

- Use proper body mechanics to protect both you and the student during transfers or positioning.
- Stay alert to fatigue or pain—some students may not verbalize discomfort easily.
- Ensure access to all school environments—help remove barriers and plan ahead for transitions or field trips.
- Seek training from the Physical Therapist, Occupational Therapists, and/or Special Education Teacher concerning lifting and positioning for specific students.
- Encourage independence of students.
- Be aware of evacuation plan for students using walkers/crutches or wheelchairs.

Social and Emotional Considerations

- Foster peer relationships. Support inclusion in groups and social activities.
- Respect the student's voice. Even if non-verbal, honor their preferences and ways of communicating.
- Be patient and calm. Some students may need extra time or space, especially when routines are disrupted.

Safety Reminders

- Never leave a medically fragile student unattended unless specifically directed.
- Report concerns immediately (medical, emotional, behavioral, etc.) to appropriate staff.
- Know emergency procedures. Keep your radio/communication device on if required.

Team Communication

- Keep lines of communication open. Ask clarifying questions if something changes or seems unclear.
- Respect confidentiality. Don't discuss student medical needs in public areas.
- Be part of the team. Your insight is valuable—share what you observe with the IEP team.

Accommodations and Modifications

Accommodations and Modifications

This is designed to be helpful for **Educational Assistants (EAs)** on understanding and supporting **accommodations and modifications** for students with disabilities.

Accommodations and modifications are types of adaptations that are made to the environment, curriculum, instruction, or assessment practices in order for students with disabilities to be successful learners and to participate actively with other students in the general education classroom and in school-wide activities. Specific accommodations and modifications are identified and approved for students by the IEP (Individual Education Plan) Team. The special education teacher will share the specific accommodations and modifications for each student to be successful. As a paraprofessional you will assist in providing the appropriate accommodations and modifications in academic settings.

Accommodations: Access the Same Learning

Accommodations are changes to *how* a student learns the material—**not what** they are expected to learn.

- **Goal:** Help students access the same grade-level curriculum.
- **Standards and expectations remain the same.**

Examples:

- Extended time on assignments or tests
- Preferential seating
- Use of a calculator or speech-to-text
- Directions read aloud
- Breaks during class or testing
- Visual schedules or graphic organizers

EA's Role:

- Ensure tools and supports are in place daily
- Gently remind teachers if accommodations are missing

- Encourage independence while providing support
 - Track or note when accommodations are helpful or need adjusting
-

Modifications: Changing What Is Learned

Modifications change *what* a student is expected to learn and/or demonstrate.

- **Goal:** Provide access to curriculum at a level appropriate to the student's ability.
- **Expectations are adjusted.** This may include simplified tasks or reduced work.

Examples:

- Shortened assignments
- Lower reading level materials
- Alternate assessments
- Fewer answer choices on multiple-choice tests
- Grading based on IEP goals instead of grade-level standards

EA's Role:

- Follow the teacher's or special educator's guidance when adapting materials
 - Help deliver instruction at the student's level
 - Record observations and progress toward IEP goals
 - Promote dignity and inclusion alongside academic support
-

Communication Tips

- **Clarify with the teacher** if you're unsure whether a support is an accommodation or modification
- Keep a **positive, supportive tone** when helping students—focus on their strengths and successes
- **Respect confidentiality** when discussing students' needs

Quick Comparison Feature

	Accommodation	Modification
Changes how learning happens	✓ Yes	✗ No

Changes what is learned	 No	 Yes
Grade-level expectations	 Same	 Adjusted
Example	Extra time on test	Alternate test with fewer questions

“In learning you will teach, and in teaching you will learn.”
Phil Collins



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Helping every child reach their potential.



What Special Education IS



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Student Communication- AAC

Augmentative and Alternative Communication

AAC stands for **Augmentative and Alternative Communication**. It refers to all the ways a person can communicate **without using spoken words**. AAC is often used by individuals with disabilities that impact speech or language production, including students with autism, cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, or significant speech delays.

What Does "Augmentative" Mean?

- **Augmentative** means **adding to** a person's existing speech.
- It supports natural speech that may be limited, unclear, or inconsistent.

What Does "Alternative" Mean?

- **Alternative** means **replacing** speech when a person is unable to speak at all.

Types of AAC

AAC ranges from **no-tech** to **high-tech** options:

No-Tech/Low-Tech AAC:

- Gestures or facial expressions
- Sign language
- Picture boards
- Communication books
- PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System)

High-Tech AAC:

- Speech-generating devices (SGDs)
- Tablets with AAC apps (e.g., Proloquo2Go, TouchChat, LAMP)

- Eye-gaze systems for users with limited mobility
-

Why AAC is Important

- Gives individuals a **voice** and increases **independence**
 - Enhances **participation** in classroom and social settings
 - Supports **language development** and learning
 - Promotes **dignity and autonomy**
-

Educational Assistant Tips When Supporting AAC Users:

- **Always presume competence.** Just because a student uses AAC doesn't mean they don't understand.
- **Model AAC use.** Use the student's device or system during your interactions ("aided language input").
- **Wait for responses.** Give students enough time to express themselves.
- **Keep the AAC system nearby and accessible.**
- **Encourage communication for a variety of reasons**—not just answering questions, but also asking, commenting, joking, and protesting.



Positive Behavioral Strategies and Supports

Positive Behavioral Strategies and Support

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is a proactive approach that helps all students succeed by teaching and reinforcing positive behavior. EAs play a key role in supporting and modeling positive behavior throughout the school day.

PBIS webpage- [PBIS World](https://www.pbisworld.com/)

IRIS Standard Behavior Series- FBA, BIPs, etc-
<https://t.e2ma.net/message/k0z9lk/g1xpw9>

Core Principles of Positive Behavior Support

1. **Behavior is communication.**
 - Understand what the student is trying to express with their behavior.
 - Sometimes behavior isn't really behavior- it is just a student's way of trying to express what they can not say with words.
 2. **All behavior serves a purpose.**
 - Ask: What is the student trying to get or avoid?
 3. **Positive reinforcement builds skills.**
 - Students are more likely to repeat behaviors that are noticed and praised.
 4. **Structure and consistency help students feel safe.**
-

Behind most behaviors exists a skill deficit

- Language and social difficulties
- Sensory processing difficulties
- Academic and writing skill deficits
- Difficulties managing stress and anxiety
- Attention difficulties
- Difficulties handling transition and change
- Difficulties with self esteem
- Organizational difficulties

Proactive Strategies

These help *prevent* challenging behavior by setting students up for success:

- **Build relationships**—connect with students, show interest, greet them by name.
 - **Use visual schedules, cues, and routines** to reduce anxiety and promote predictability.
 - **Offer choices** when possible to increase student ownership and control.
 - **Give clear, simple directions**—use “do” instead of “don’t” statements.
 - **Model calm behavior** even in challenging situations.
 - **Use praise and specific feedback:**
 -  “Nice job following directions right away!”
 -  “Thank you for using kind words.”
-

Responding to Challenging Behavior

- **Stay calm and neutral**—your tone can de-escalate or escalate a situation.
 - **Redirect instead of react.** Give an appropriate alternative (e.g., “You can take a break or finish the work quietly.”)
 - **Reinforce positive behaviors** that occur after the challenging moment.
 - **Avoid power struggles.** Offer time and space when needed.
 - **Follow the student’s behavior plan** or IEP behavior supports.
 - **Document incidents** objectively (what happened, what you saw/heard).
-

Teach Replacement Behaviors

Help students learn what to do **instead** of the challenging behavior:

If a student...	Teach to...
Yells to get attention	Ask for help with a signal or words
Runs away when upset	Request a break or use a calm corner
Refuses to work	Ask for more time or support
Interrupts frequently	Raise a hand or wait for a turn

Your Role as an EA

- Be consistent with expectations and consequences
- Reinforce classroom rules and routines
- Encourage and model respectful behavior
- Support social-emotional learning activities
- Communicate observations to the teacher or behavior team

Additional TIPS

- Diffuse stressful situations for students through redirection and distraction when appropriate.
- Provide positive reinforcement. Avoid focusing on punitive consequences or loss of privileges.
- Avoid discussing incidents of behavior that occurred in the past.
- Physical intervention is used as a last resort. This intervention is utilized only by those trained in Crisis Prevention Intervention. Must complete documentation if physical intervention is used.

Remember:

“Kids do well when they can.” – Dr. Ross Greene

When students struggle, it's our job to help them build the skills they need to succeed.

Keys to Positive Communication

Keys to Positive Communication

- Maintain close proximity and use a low volume when communicating with students.
- Provide clear and simply stated directions of what you expect the child to do instead of telling them what you don't want them to do.
- Repeat back to the student what you think they are saying to clarify what the student means.
- Some children may require a model, picture, or sign of the action paired with the verbal direction.
- Use age appropriate language when speaking with students. (Refrain from using "baby talk"). Encourage students to use age appropriate language.
- Allow students time to communicate independently using their mode(s) of communication.
- Allow for extra processing and response time.

For Example:

Instead of Saying	Say/Model	Reinforce
"No yelling!"	• "Use a calm voice." • "Use an inside voice."	• "Speak in a low voice while saying... Now I can listen, you are using a quiet voice." • "Nice job using your inside voice."
"Don't run!"	• "We walk in the Hallway." • "Use walking feet." • "Walk please."	• "I like the way you're walking." • "Thanks for walking!"
"Stop calling out!"	• "Raise your hand." • "When you raise your	• "Thank you for raising your hand."

	hand, the teacher will answer your question.”	• “I like the way you raised your hand to share your ideas.”
--	---	--

“When people talk, listen completely.”

Ernest Hemingway



Ways to Positively Reinforce a Student

Ways to Positively Reinforce Students

Verbal Praise

Use specific, sincere language to reinforce desired behaviors.

-  “Thank you for using kind words with your classmate.”
-  “You really stayed focused—great job!”
-  “I noticed you followed directions the first time. That helps the whole class!”

Nonverbal Reinforcement

Sometimes actions speak louder than words.

-  Thumbs-up
-  Smile or nod
-  Clap or quiet cheer
-  Silent applause (great for students who are sensory-sensitive)

Privileges or Opportunities

Provide a positive experience as reinforcement.

- Line leader
- Help deliver a message
- Pick a classroom activity
- Choose a partner or seat
- Extra recess or tech time

Tangible Reinforcers

Best when used thoughtfully and paired with praise.

- Stickers or stamps
- Token or point systems
- Certificates or recognition boards
- Classroom store items

Social Reinforcement

- Peer shoutouts or compliments
- Lunch or break with a favorite adult
- Student of the week/month recognition
- Group rewards for meeting classwide goals

Behavior-Specific Praise Tips

Be clear about *what* the student did well and *why* it matters:

-  “You stayed in your seat and kept working even when it got tricky. That’s perseverance!”
-  “You asked for help instead of getting frustrated. That’s a great strategy.”

Important Reminders:

- Reinforce immediate, observable behavior—catch it when it happens.
- Be authentic—students can tell when praise is forced or vague.
- Tailor reinforcement to the student’s age, needs, and preferences.
- Focus on effort and growth, not just the outcome.
- Use reinforcement to build intrinsic motivation, not dependency.

Strategies for Facilitating Student Independence

Strategies for Facilitating Student Independence

Supporting students to become more independent means ***doing with, not doing for.***

Every small step a student takes on their own is a step toward greater confidence and capability.

1. Presume Competence

- Believe that every student *can* learn and participate meaningfully.
 - Avoid making assumptions based on disability or past performance.
 - Offer support while expecting effort and growth.
-

2. Use Prompting Hierarchies

- Provide only the level of help needed—then gradually reduce.
- Follow this general order from least to most intrusive:

Type of Prompt	Example
Natural cue	Bell rings = time to pack up
Gesture/visual	Point to schedule or picture icon
Verbal prompt	“What comes next?”
Modeling	Show how to start a task
Physical prompt	Light hand-over-hand to guide

Always aim to fade prompts over time to encourage self-reliance.

3. Provide Visual Supports

- Use **visual schedules**, task strips, timers, and first/then boards.
 - These reduce anxiety, build routine, and support task completion.
-

4. Offer Choices

- Give controlled choices to promote decision-making and engagement:
 - “Do you want to use crayons or markers?”
 - “Would you like to work at the table or on the rug?”
-

5. Allow Wait Time

- Pause after giving a direction—some students need extra time to process.
 - Wait at least **5–10 seconds** before repeating or prompting again.
-

6. Teach Functional Routines

- Break down tasks into small, teachable steps (e.g., handwashing, organizing materials).
 - Use **task analysis** to teach multi-step routines with visuals or practice.
-

7. Celebrate Small Successes

- Acknowledge effort and progress, even if the task isn't fully completed.
 - “You zipped your jacket halfway—great effort!”
 - “I saw you tried on your own before asking. That’s awesome!”
-

8. Encourage Problem Solving

- Instead of fixing issues right away, ask guiding questions:
 - “What could you try?”
 - “What do you think happens next?”
-

9. Promote Self-Advocacy

- Teach students how to ask for help, request breaks, or express preferences.
 - Reinforce self-advocacy as a strength, not a weakness.
-

10. Collaborate with the Team

- Follow strategies in the IEP or behavior plan.
 - Share observations about new skills or where more independence is emerging.
-

Remember:

“Independence is not doing everything alone—it’s knowing how and when to get support.”

Supporting Inclusion

Supporting Inclusion

Inclusion means that students with disabilities are **valued members of the school community**, learning alongside their peers in general education settings to the greatest extent possible—with the support they need to succeed.

1. Believe All Students Can Learn

- Start with a strengths-based mindset.
 - Focus on **what the student can do**, not just what they struggle with.
 - High expectations = high potential.
-

2. Use Inclusive Language

- Say: “Student who uses a wheelchair” instead of “wheelchair-bound.”
 - Say: “Student receiving special education services” instead of “SPED kid.”
 - Use names first. Disabilities don’t define students.
-

3. Support Participation in All Activities

- Adapt lessons, games, and projects so everyone can join.
 - Offer choices, visuals, or peer supports when needed.
 - Celebrate different learning styles and contributions.
-

4. Be a Social Connector

- Help build friendships and peer relationships:
 - Pair students in buddy activities
 - Model inclusive behavior and language
 - Encourage kindness and curiosity—not pity
-

5. Follow IEP Accommodations & Modifications

- Ensure students have access to the supports listed in their plans.
 - Communicate with the special education team if something isn't working or needs adjusting.
 - Suggest and/or seek out strategies for General Education teachers to use with the students (Do NOT hesitate to reach out to the Special Ed Teachers at your school, ancillary service providers, and/or the Special Ed Office)
-

6. Avoid Over-Supporting

- Allow space for students to try things on their own before stepping in.
 - Use prompting strategies that encourage independence and confidence.
 - Support fading adult help over time.
 - Don't do the work for students.
-

7. Include Students in Decision-Making

- Offer real choices during activities.
 - Allow students to share their opinions, likes, and dislikes.
 - Promote student voice and self-advocacy.
-

8. Treat Inclusion as a Whole-School Responsibility

- Inclusion isn't just a special education issue.
 - All staff—including cafeteria workers, bus drivers, and recess monitors—shape a school's climate of belonging.
 - Every interaction matters.
-

9. Keep Learning and Reflecting

- Attend trainings, ask questions, and seek input from therapists and special educators.
- Reflect on what's working and how to grow in your role as an inclusive educator.
- Document what works and doesn't work, along with student refusals for offered services

 Remember:

“Inclusion is not about helping them fit in. It's about creating a space where everyone already belongs.”



Case Manager VS Service Provider

Case Manager VS Service Provider

What is the difference between a **case manager** and a **service provider** in Special Education? They both play important roles in supporting students with disabilities.

Case Manager

* Primary Role: The case manager oversees the implementation of the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP). They ensure that all parts of the IEP are being followed, that the student's progress is being monitored, and that communication between the school, the family, and the student is consistent.

☐ Responsibilities:

- o Coordinating IEP meetings and updates
- o Monitoring the student's overall progress toward their IEP goals
- o Communicating with the student's family, teachers, and other staff
- o Ensuring compliance with legal timelines and special education procedures
- o Acting as the main point of contact for the student's educational team
- o Assisting with collection of data during the re-evaluation process

- Who It Might Be: A case manager is often a special education teacher or another designated professional at the school who is responsible for ensuring that the student's needs are met according to their IEP.

Service Provider

* Primary Role: Service providers deliver the direct, specialized services that are outlined in the student's IEP. They work directly with the student to provide specific interventions, accommodations/modifications, therapies, or instructional support.

□ Responsibilities:

- Providing the specific services listed in the IEP, such as speech therapy, occupational therapy, or specialized instruction
- Working on goals directly related to the student's needs in areas like academics, communication, social skills, or motor skills
- Documenting progress toward the specific goals for which they are responsible
- Collaborating with the case manager and other team members to ensure holistic support for the student

-Who It Might Be: Service providers can include speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, special education teachers, educational assistants, or any other specialist providing direct services to the student.

****Where there is overlap****

- Communication: Both roles collaborate closely, with the service provider sharing data and progress updates with the case manager.

- IEP Meetings: Both may attend IEP meetings, with the case manager taking the lead on coordination and service providers contributing information about the student's progress in their areas.

Overall-

The case manager is the coordinator and point person for the student's IEP, while service providers deliver the specialized services to meet the IEP goals.



Common Terms and Definitions

Common Terms and Definitions

Adapted Physical Education (APE) – A related service for children who exhibit delays in motor development in addition to or in place of physical education including modifications of activities so students may participate more fully in physical education class.

Assistive Technology (AT) – Any item, piece of equipment, or product, which is used to increase, maintain, or improve functional capabilities of students with disabilities.

Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)- It refers to all the ways a person can communicate **without using spoken words**. AAC is often used by individuals with disabilities that impact speech or language production, including students with autism, cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, or significant speech delays.

Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP) – A plan including target behaviors, behavioral strategies, positive reinforcement, and consequences for student behaviors. The plan is designed to teach students to demonstrate appropriate behavior and social skills.

Child Specific Aide (1:1 Aide)- An Educational Assistant assigned to a specific student to help support their individual needs. Typically done for severe behavioral or medical reasons. (Should be used rarely)

Extended School Year Services (ESY) – Special education and related services during the summer. The purpose of ESY is to prevent a child with a disability from losing previously learned skills. The IEP team approves ESY goals for the student to work on. Not all students receiving special education services receive ESY.

Fine Motor – Motor skills related to the small muscle groups such as handwriting, using both hands to complete tasks, and buttoning.

Gross Motor – Motor skills related to the large muscle groups such as walking, sitting, and jumping.

Individual Education Program (IEP) – An Individualized Education Program (IEP) is the educational program that has been designed to meet that child's unique needs. Each child who receives special education and related services has an IEP. The IEP is developed by teachers, parents, school administrators, related services personnel, and students (when age appropriate) It includes educational goals and objectives, modifications and accommodations, documents progress and defines the services and placement of the student.

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) – The educational placement that is as close as possible to the general education environment that permits a child to receive the most educational benefit while participating in a regular educational environment to the maximum extent appropriate.

Occupational Therapist (OT) – Works with students to improve fine motor skills and meaningful activities of daily life such as self-care skills, education, recreation, or work.

Physical Therapist (PT) – Works with students to improve gross motor skills (large muscle groups) and mobility.

Special Education – Specialized instruction to fit the unique learning strengths and needs of students with disabilities. A major goal of special education is to teach the skills and knowledge the child needs to be as independent as possible. Special education programs focus on academics and include therapies and related services.

Speech and Language Therapist – Provides therapy to help a student develop or improve articulation (pronunciation), communication skills, pragmatics (social skills) and oral-motor skills.



Special Education Acronyms

Special Education Acronyms

ADHD - Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder

ASD - Autism Spectrum Disorders

AT - Assistive Technology

APE - Adaptive Physical Education

ASL - American Sign Language

BIP - Behavior Intervention Plan

ED - Emotional Disability

ESL - English as a Second Language

ESY - Extended School Year

FBA- Functional Behavior Assessment

IDEA - Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

IEP - Individual Education Program

LRE - Least Restrictive Environment

MD- Multiply Disabled

OHI- Other Health Impairment

OT - Occupational Therapy

PECS - Picture Exchange Communication System

PT - Physical Therapy

LI- Low Incidence (Life Skills or Developmental Skills- severe cognitively impaired students)

SLP - Speech and Language Pathologist

SLD - Specific Learning Disability

SLI- Speech or Language Impairment

TBI- Traumatic Brain Injury

TEAM- Technical Evaluation and Assessment Manual



Resources

Resources

[Special Education Handbook](#)

[Policies and Procedures Manual \(Special Ed\)](#)

[Positive Behavior Supports](#)

IRIS Standard Behavior Series- FBA, BIPs, etc-

<https://t.e2ma.net/message/k0z9lk/g1xpwc9>

 Characteristics of Disabilities.pdf

 Potty Training - Is it Special Ed or Not?

[Other Resources](#) - Resources on a variety of topics can be found here. If you want additional resources for any topic, please do not hesitate to reach out to the Special Education Office that could be included as well.

[DirectSTEP On Demand Special Ed PD](#)- (Direct Specialized Training for Education Professionals) **FREE** on demand PD provided by the NM Office of Special Education

Special Ed Connection- (LRP Special Ed Connection is an online subscription service from LRP Publications that provides resources and guidance for special education professionals. It offers a wide range of information, including legal interpretations, practical strategies, and news updates related to special education law and best practices)- **(MORE INFO COMING SOON)**

[Identifying and Serving ELs Students with Disabilities](#)- There is a NEW requirement and aligned Canvas course on NMPED for Identifying and Serving EL's with Disabilities

Crisis Prevention Institute (CPI)

The core training program of Crisis Prevention Institute's (CPI) Nonviolent Crisis Intervention training equips staff with proven strategies for safely diffusing anxious, hostile, or violent behavior at the earliest possible stage. Since CPI can

be used with any student in crisis, each school should have a trained and certified team of staff (not just special educators). A current list of HVPS staff trained and certified in CPI can be found [here](#).

In the event that someone at your school must use a CPI hold, this [form](#) needs to be completed and filled out and sent to the Special Education Department. Parents need to be notified within 24 hours and offered a copy of the completed form. Once a CPI hold has been done and the notification form is completed, the team should get together and debrief about the situation. Here is a [debriefing form](#) that should be used as well.

Texas Resource Library

Tips, videos, etc on Special Education topics-

<https://spedsupport.tea.texas.gov/resource-library>

From the US Department of Education- Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) English to Spanish Translation Glossary (for IDEA terminology)- <https://www.spanadvocacy.org/glossary/glossary.html>

[Adapting Curriculum for Students with Special Needs](#)



Need more help?

Are you needing help in a specific area?

You can reach out to any the following:

- Another EA in your building
- Special Ed teacher in your building or another
- Building Administrator
- Special Ed Department
- Fill out this [Assistance Request form](#)