




**STATE OF HAWAII**  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
P.O. BOX 2360  
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96804

OFFICE OF STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

September 1, 2020

**TO:** Complex Area Superintendents, Principals (All), District Educational Specialists, Public Charter School Directors, Teachers, and Related Service Personnel

**FROM:** Heidi Armstrong   
Assistant Superintendent

**SUBJECT:** **Specially Designed Instruction and Distance Learning for Students with Disabilities**

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide clarification regarding the delivery of specially designed instruction (SDI) and distance learning, specifically online curriculum. Schools are reminded they must ensure students with disabilities are provided a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) during distance learning opportunities. This includes providing SDI in addition to the services, accommodations, and/or modifications documented in a student's Individualized Education Program (IEP).

**SDI Defined**

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) defines SDI as "adapting, as appropriate to the needs of an eligible child under this part, the content, methodology or delivery of instruction:

- (i) To address the unique needs of the child that result from the child's disability; and
- (ii) To ensure access of the child to the general curriculum, so that the child can meet the educational standards within the jurisdiction of the public agency that apply to all children." [34 CFR Sec. 300.39(b)(3)]

**Components of SDI**

The following are the critical components of SDI:

- Adapting: making changes to instruction to address student's strengths and needs.
- Content: knowledge and skills to be mastered.
- Methodology: strategies and interventions used to target specific skills.
- Delivery of Instruction: teaching that results in access to and progress in the curriculum for students with disabilities; instructional context or conditions.

In order to provide a FAPE for students with disabilities, it is necessary for SDI to be developed and implemented across all instructional delivery models, including the use of self-directed online curricula.

### **Online Curricula**

Currently, many schools are using online, self-directed curricula such as Acellus Learning Accelerator, Florida Virtual School, and Arizona State University Prep Digital to provide instruction for students. In order to provide SDI for students with disabilities, it is not appropriate to rely solely on these programs. These programs are not capable of providing students with the SDI needed to address their individual strengths and needs. If a student with a disability is assigned one of these programs, the student should be provided with a dedicated special education teacher who can develop and implement SDI. Examples of the implementation of SDI in conjunction with a self-directed online program include but not limited to the following:

- Adjusting the content of the course to ensure it is in alignment with a student's instructional level.
- Previewing course content and pre-teaching requisite skills necessary to access a lesson.
- Chunking lesson material, scheduling intermittent breaks, providing timely and specific corrective feedback, or implementing positive reinforcement systems.
- Holding frequent one-on-one, or small group synchronous sessions to provide direct instruction on IEP goals using evidence-based strategies (e.g., using model, lead, test, to practice phonemic awareness; using self-regulatory strategy development to address written expression).
- Creating paper packets to supplement the online program and provide opportunity for additional skill practice.
- Ensuring students are using assistive technology when appropriate (e.g., text-to-speech, speech-to-text, etc.).

### **Distance Learning**

Distance learning, inclusive of SDI, can be implemented in a variety of ways using synchronous or asynchronous delivery models in the delivery of FAPE. Examples of SDI using various service delivery models can be found on the [Specially Designed Instruction \(SDI\) and Online/Distance Learning](#) information page.

If you have any questions, please contact your Special Education District Educational Specialists or the Exceptional Support Branch, at (808) 305-9806.

HA:cr

c: Superintendent  
Deputy Superintendent  
Assistant Superintendents  
State Public Charter School Commission