

The State of the States: National Trends in State Education Agency Guidance on Special Education

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Abstract

In fall 2020, staff from the PROGRESS Center at the American Institutes for Research conducted a national scan of 57 state education agency (SEA) websites about key topics related to special education. The scan paid particular attention to the 2017 U.S. Supreme Court *Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District* decision and how SEAs communicate about the development and implementation of individualized education programs for students with disabilities. Analysis of the findings allowed PROGRESS Center staff and partners to capture current national trends that shape how SEAs communicate to local practitioners about the education of students with disabilities and identify areas of need, including identifying areas where information was incomplete.

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Introduction

The PROGRESS Center at the American Institutes for Research is an Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP)–funded technical assistance center whose mission is to promote progress for students with disabilities by supporting local educators and leaders (of kindergarten through transition age) in designing and implementing high-quality educational programs that ensure students with disabilities have access to a free appropriate public education (FAPE). In the past year, PROGRESS Center staff and partners have sought to identify current national trends that shape the field of special education and use that information to guide the center’s development of resources, tools, and technical assistance services.

As part of these efforts, in fall 2020, PROGRESS Center staff partnered with the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) to conduct a national scan of state education agency (SEA) guidance¹ and/or policies² about key topics related to special education. The scan paid particular attention to the 2017 U.S. Supreme Court *Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District* (hereafter, *Endrew F.*) decision and how SEAs communicate about the development and implementation of individualized education programs (IEPs) for students with disabilities.

The intended audience for this scan is SEA staff and those who are direct recipients of dissemination and communication efforts of SEAs, such as local districts, teachers, and professional development providers.

Why Scan the States?

SEAs can and should serve as valid sources of information and resources for local districts, schools, and community stakeholders, given their responsibility for supporting local education agency (LEA; e.g., district) efforts toward implementing the requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2018; e.g., providing FAPE). As such, we posit that to actualize the PROGRESS Center’s goal of incorporating policies, tools, and the use of evidence-based knowledge as a support mechanism to achieve improved outcomes for students with disabilities within LEAs, we must understand national trends in how SEAs provide information to stakeholders as well as how SEAs disseminate products and professional learning opportunities through their websites. Thus, the results from this scan identified critical

¹ For the purposes of this report, *guidance* is “general, non-mandatory recommendations provided by the SEA set forth to carry out policies given to districts from the SEA.” In this report, we use the term *guidance* to address directives, recommendations, and procedures set forth by the states to support LEAs.

² For the purposes of this report, *policy* is “mandatory objectives aligned to the legal requirements set forth in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act including legislation and/or regulations.” In this report, we use the term *policy* to reflect both state and federal directives provided to SEAs and LEAs.

information about how states communicate high-priority topics related to special education, highlighted trends in ongoing dissemination efforts, and facilitated the assessment of areas of need specific to guidance related to the *Endrew F.* decision, IEP development, and IEP implementation efforts.

Endrew F. Guidance

Two of the most significant Supreme Court decisions that have informed how districts implement the requirements of IDEA are the *Board of Education of the Hendrick Hudson Central School District v. Rowley* (1982) and *Endrew F.* The former decision, which established a basic floor of educational services for students receiving special education, was clarified by the *Endrew F.* decision, which set a more substantive bar for achievement and accountability (Yell & Bateman, 2020). This focus on achievement and accountability compels us to examine special education policies and practices and clarify how IDEA is explained to the field to ensure that students with disabilities have access to challenging instruction and opportunities to make progress in light of their individual circumstances.

Endrew F. also highlighted the need to ensure that special education services provide a meaningful educational benefit to students with disabilities. By stating that “[t]o meet its substantive obligation under the IDEA, a school must offer an IEP reasonably calculated to enable a child to make progress appropriate in light of the child’s circumstances” (*Endrew F.*, 2017, p. 16), the court provided states, districts, and schools an opportunity for a renewed focus on setting ambitious but realistic goals for students with disabilities. The decision magnified the notion that academic progress for students with disabilities is not only possible but also expected. To achieve this expectation, districts should engage in “candid introspection” and craft plans (i.e., IEPs) that reflect each child’s individual circumstances to pursue “academic and functional advancement” and potential for growth (*Endrew F.*, 2017, pp. 11–12; Turnbull et al., 2018).

Although it is difficult to assess the full impact of *Endrew F.* a mere 3 years after the decision (Yell & Bateman, 2020), it is possible to explore how SEAs communicate the decision with their local stakeholders (e.g., LEAs, teachers, parents, relevant community members). This scan sought to explore two components related to *Endrew F.*, namely if SEAs (a) communicated the decision at all and (b) provided districts with guidance about implications of the decision.

IEP Guidance: Development and Implementation

This scan also investigated SEA guidance about IEP development and implementation. During the past 40 years, the field of special education has seen significant federal efforts (e.g., OSEP-funded centers, Results Driven Accountability (RDA) initiative) to improve outcomes for



students with disabilities by (a) increasing access to quality services delivered through IEPs and (b) focusing on accountability efforts. While many SEAs have concentrated on compliance to the statutory requirements of IDEA, the RDA initiative has changed the focus to results, especially during the past decade. For this scan we looked specifically at the requirements articulated in IDEA. Activities supported through IDEA and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015) have sought to increase students with disabilities access to, and success in, general education; improve preservice preparation; provide access to high-quality professional learning for teachers, leaders, paraprofessionals, and related service providers; and improve postschool opportunities for students with disabilities. And, although access and accountability are critical components of providing equitable, high-quality special education services, evidence to date suggests that access alone has not been enough to adequately improve outcomes for many students with disabilities. Data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress remain flat, at best, for students with disabilities, and trends in schools' adequate yearly progress under No Child Left Behind, the precursor to ESSA, indicate that many schools failed to meet their targets solely, or in large part, because of their accountability for the performance of this subgroup (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019; Zumeta, 2015). These trends in outcomes for students with disabilities are one reason the IEP is such a critical component of special education; a well-crafted and thoughtfully implemented IEP can (a) impact what services a student receives, (b) frame how students with disabilities are assessed and accommodated in the general education setting, (c) drive the amount and kind of instruction targeted directly at their individual needs, and (d) serve as a critical tool for promoting progress in school.

Unfortunately, fulfilling the promise of the IEP remains a challenge for many educators. During the past several decades, possibly related to poor or limited training, many special educators have indicated they view the IEP as a burdensome paperwork requirement rather than a collaborative tool to facilitate sound implementation of special education. Studies have shown that many educators believe that IEPs do not help in day-to-day instruction and that many educators rarely refer to IEPs in their daily work (Giangreco et al., 1994; Lee-Tarver, 2006). IEP goals and objectives often are poorly written and lack a connection to assessment results, likely because they are disconnected from the job of teaching.

Under IDEA, it is the state's responsibility to ensure that all students with disabilities have access to FAPE and are educated to the maximum extent appropriate, alongside their general education peers. An IEP is the individualized plan that outlines the supports each student with a disability will receive, including specially designed instruction (SDI), accommodations, modifications, assessment procedures, and placements that are a pathway to ensuring access to FAPE. The student's IEP is developed by a team of individuals, generally consisting of the



student's teachers (both special and general education) and other school personnel with knowledge of the student, a school or district administrator, the parent or guardian, and the student (if age appropriate). The documents are legal and binding and should meet the student's learning needs, including services required by the student to maximize the student's potential with academic, social, and behavioral goals. Although the SEA does not develop the IEPs, it is responsible for ensuring that districts and schools develop and implement high-quality IEPs and provide students appropriate SDI. Thus, it is imperative that states ensure, through policy and practice, that all educators and school staff are effectively prepared to develop, interpret, and implement high-quality IEPs.

Research Questions

Given the nature of these topics (i.e., *Endrew F.* and IEP development and implementation), plus their potential for shaping national trends in special education and informing the work of the PROGRESS Center, we sought to address following research questions as part of this scan:

1. How do SEAs communicate with LEAs, schools, and other stakeholders about the *Endrew F.* decision and its implications for special education service delivery?
2. What policies or guidance do SEAs provide related to the roles and responsibilities for IEP development, including setting present levels of academic achievement and functional performance (PLAAFPs), writing goals, determining FAPE and the least restrictive environment (LRE), and designing service delivery?
3. Do SEAs provide guidance on or have policies related to the implementation of instructional practices, progress monitoring procedures, assessments, or evidence-based practices specific to students with disabilities?
4. What guidance, if any, do SEAs provide to districts about SDI, both as a stand-alone definition and within IEP development?

Method

We conducted our review in fall of 2020 using public-facing SEA websites for all 50 states, the District of Columbia, the Pacific entities (i.e., Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, Federated States of Micronesia, Marshall Islands), Department of Defense Education Activity, and the Bureau of Indian Education, for a total of 57 websites scanned.³ SEA websites were individually scanned using a systematic protocol that allowed us to address each research question.

³ The Puerto Rico SEA website required Spanish translation and was therefore not included in this scan at the time of publication.

Although we understand that SEAs may provide additional guidance beyond what is on their websites, we used this methodology to provide an objective landscape analysis of SEA guidance on high-quality IEP development and implementation. States use public-facing websites as a prime vehicle to communicate key information and make guidance available to districts and schools.

We defined the term *guidance* as any specific principles, statements of authority, policy, or mandates communicated to districts from the SEA website. In addition, we used a variety of indicators to investigate states' IEP guidance and its alignment with federal law, including the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Endrew F.* and IDEA. For instance, we reviewed SEA guidance to determine whether it referenced the *Endrew F.* decision and whether it provided related guidance on the SEA website. This guidance included the more substantive bar for the education of students with disabilities under IDEA and the requirement that all schools must offer an IEP that is "reasonably calculated to enable a child to make progress appropriate in light of the child's circumstances" (*Endrew F.*, 2017). We also reviewed whether the SEA provided guidance about IEP development overall and, if so, whether the guidance addressed the following for results:

- PLAAFP statement and/or statement of current performance (academic and/or functional)
- Writing measurable annual goals
- Monitoring of progress to achieve IEP goals
- Special education services (e.g., SDI)
- Related services (e.g., speech and language, social work services, counseling services, physical and occupational therapy)
- Supplementary aids and services and program modifications (e.g., instructional accommodations, modifications, supports necessary for the student to access core/general education programming)
- Participation in assessment (e.g., alternative assessment, testing accommodations)
- Identifying LRE (e.g., projected date, frequency, duration, and location of services)
- Ensuring meaningful parent involvement in IEP meetings
- Transition planning

We also conducted a thorough analysis of SEA websites to understand whether SEAs provide—or have provided—professional development to teachers and/or leaders on the development and implementation of IEPs. If states included information about SDI, we examined whether

that information contained a state-specific definition of SDI. Finally, we considered whether SEAs offered an electronic IEP system for districts and schools to support implementation.

We assessed these indicators using dichotomous variables, whether the SEA website contained evidence of the indicator (Yes) or did not (No). We made no quality judgments about the publicly available guidance or information reviewed. However, for the purpose of supporting states' efforts to strengthen educational programming for students with disabilities, we collected qualitative information on each indicator to spotlight promising state efforts and offer guidance and recommendations for the field (see Appendix A). Upon review, staff coded each indicator as Yes or No. Two coders blind coded all indicators for a subset of states to ensure inter-rater reliability. Thirty percent of the states and territories were double coded, meeting at least 85% inter-rater reliability between coders. In cases of disagreement, coders met to discuss and share findings until they reached a consensus. Coding occurred in two segments. First, to achieve reliability using the protocol, the coders double coded 15% of the states to ensure at least 85% agreement. Then, halfway through the coding, the coders double coded an additional 15% of the states to ensure reliability was sustained and check for drift on any part of the protocol. All states met the minimum of 85% agreement at the mid-review double coding check.

To ensure accuracy of the results, after completing our scan, we contacted each SEA by email to allow opportunity to review our findings for accuracy and offer any additional pertinent information. We received 22 state responses, four of which confirmed complete accuracy. Eighteen states provided additional information, and internal coding was adjusted to reflect any missing data. For example, Maine offered its state definition of SDI and shared evidence of state-provided professional development on IEPs not originally identified in the scan. What follows is a summary of our findings and their implications.

Results

Research Question 1: *Andrew F.*

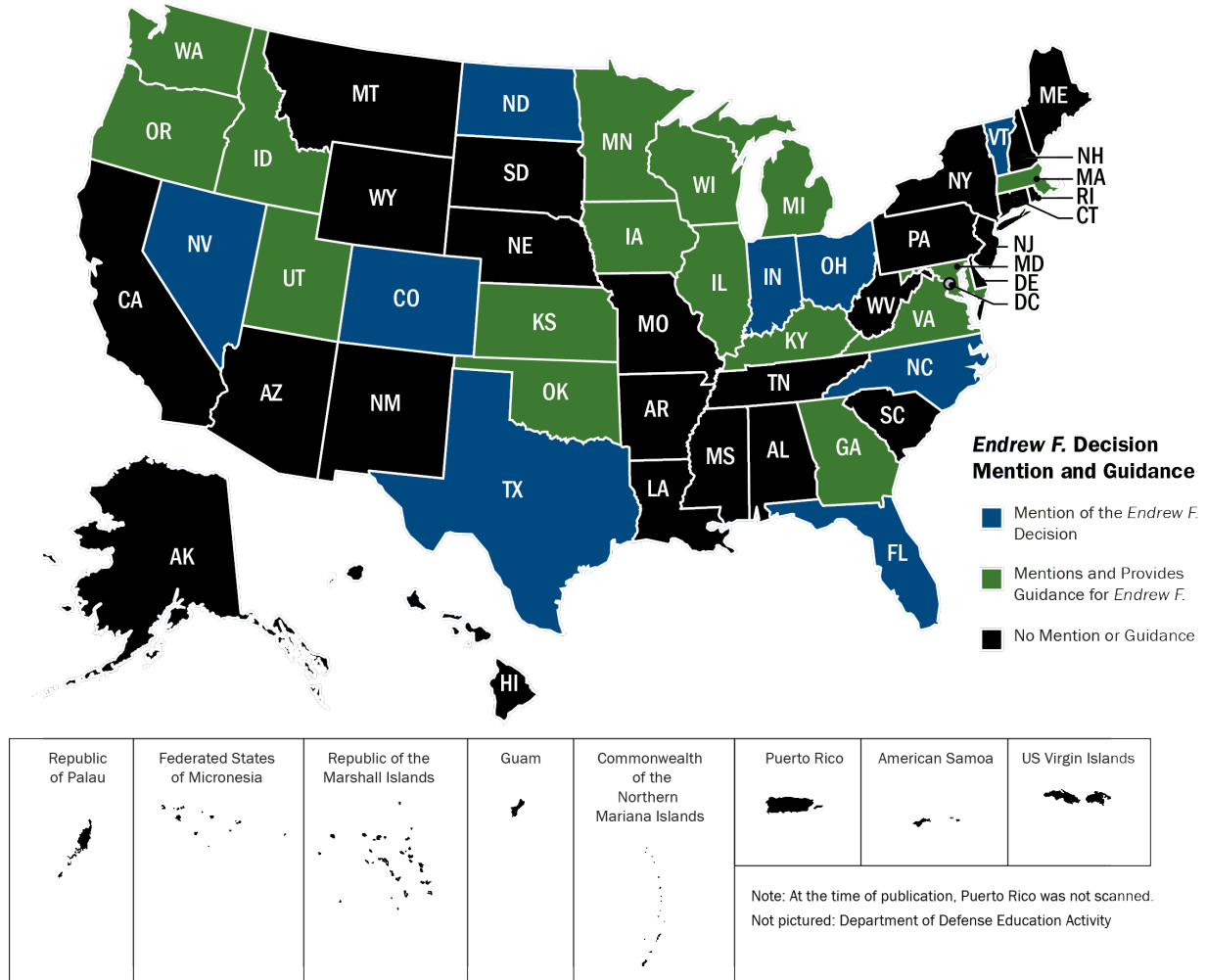
The first research question explored two elements: Did SEAs communicate about (i.e., mention) the *Andrew F.* decision, and, if so, did they provide districts with any guidance about it?

Mention of the Decision

Of all websites scanned, 26 referenced the *Andrew F.* decision as a link related to a document, newsletter, or presentation (see Exhibit 1). The remaining websites ($n = 31$) did not have this information readily accessible or had no reference to *Andrew F.* at all. Of those that mentioned *Andrew F.*, the primary findings were posted shortly after the Supreme Court decision in 2017.

Nine mentions linked to legal presentations that followed at the time of the decision; five mentions linked to memos or newsletters; four mentions linked to special education guidance manuals; and one mention referenced the decision in the state strategic plan.

Exhibit 1. Mention of *Endrew F.* on State Education Agency Websites



Endrew F. Guidance

Nineteen websites provided guidance to districts on the impact of *Endrew F.* on student outcomes and/or the relationship to high-quality IEPs. Six states (10.5%; Iowa, Maryland, Massachusetts, North Carolina, Oklahoma, and Virginia) defined and gave guidance on *Endrew F.* directly on their public-facing websites. Exhibit 2 presents a snapshot of websites that mentioned and/or provided guidance on *Endrew F.*

Examples

Examples of *Endrew F.* language on public-facing websites included the following:

- [Iowa](#) provided information regarding the *Endrew F.* decision under the category of Legal Lessons using a resource titled “Education COVID-19 Guidance and Information,” which describes the court decision and its impact on IEP development. This guidance to educators states the following: “While the full impact of this decision has yet to be determined, one takeaway is that the adequacy of an IEP turns on the unique circumstances of the child for whom it was created.”
- [Massachusetts](#) provided guidance in the Education Laws and Regulations section, which includes a memo from the commissioner titled “Advisory on *Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District RE-1*, 2017 U.S. Supreme Court Decision of Special Education.” This memo advised educators that

[T]he decision is an important reminder to all school districts about the duty to provide for every student in special education an IEP that is “appropriately ambitious” in light of the student’s circumstances and to give every student with disabilities “the chance to meet challenging objectives.”

Other noteworthy state examples of *Endrew F.* language addressed on state websites included the following:

- [Virginia](#) parent information page
- [Oklahoma](#) EngageOK educator blog
- [Georgia](#) *Special Education Rules Implementation Manual*
- [Wisconsin](#) *Information Update Bulletin*
- [Illinois](#) reference to a CCSSO resource: *Ensuring an Equitable Opportunity: Providing a High-Quality Education for Students with Disabilities*

Research Questions 2 and 3: IEP Development and Implementation

The second research question explored the policies or guidance related to roles and responsibilities for IEP development, which included guidance on setting PLAAFPs, writing goals, determining FAPE and LRE, and designing service delivery. The third research question explored guidance related to IEP development and looked specifically for ways SEAs provided information related to implementation of instructional practices, progress monitoring procedures, assessments, or evidence-based practices specific to students with disabilities. We explored policies and guidance related to IEP development and implementation because of their potential impacts on improved instruction for students with disabilities. Because these two questions are so interconnected, we report the findings together. It was rare to find SEA guidance on only IEP development, without related guidance to IEP implementation, and vice versa.



IEP Guidance in Accordance With IDEA

In accordance with IDEA, all IEPs must incorporate specific, critical information, including the following: PLAAFP statement, annual measurable goals, plan for monitoring progress, statement of special education and related services, supplementary aids and services and program modifications, plan for participation in statewide assessment, LRE, transition planning for transition age students, and evidence of parent participation. Eighty-two percent of websites scanned provided districts with readily accessible IEP guidance across all categories using IDEA-specific language (see Exhibit 2). This guidance was primarily categorized as educator user manuals, federal guidance manuals for district administrators, individual guidance about specific IDEA language, parent manuals, videos, archived PowerPoint presentations, and some combination of these types of resources.

Annual Goals, PLAAFP Statement, Monitoring Plan, and Service Delivery. Guidance on developing PLAAFP statements and/or statements of current achievement, writing annual measurable goals, direction for including related services and supplementary aids and services and program modifications, guidance for participation in assessment, and transition planning supports were mentioned by 48 states, the District of Columbia, and the Department of Defense Education Activity. Of those websites, 98% presented specific information regarding monitoring progress and identifying LRE. Ninety-two percent of the websites scanned included resources and guidance for ensuring meaningful parent involvement in IEP meetings. Across all topics scanned related to IEP development and implementation, special education services (see Exhibit 2) was one area where many websites lacked guidance; 30% of the websites that had IEP guidance lacked any information about special education services within that guidance.

Standardized IEPs and Professional Development. On the websites scanned, it was very common to find resources on IEP development combined with professional development for educators specific to writing IEPs (see Appendix B for map). Seventy-five percent of the websites that included IEP guidance also had information about professional development specific to writing IEPs. In our review of websites, 10 websites (i.e., Alabama, Connecticut, Georgia, Kentucky, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia) indicated use and/or plans for future implementation of statewide standards-based electronic systems to enhance their IEP development.



Exhibit 2. Information Regarding IEP Development and Implementation on State Education Agency Websites

State	IEP development	Present levels of academic and functional performance	Annual goals	Monitoring of progress	Special education services	Related services	Supplemental aids and modifications	Participation in assessment	Least restrictive environment	Meaningful parent involvement	Transition services	Professional development
Alabama	X	X	X	X		X	X			X	X	X
Alaska	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Arizona	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Arkansas	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
California	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Colorado	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Connecticut	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Delaware	X	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X	
District of Columbia	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Florida	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Georgia	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Hawaii	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
Idaho	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Illinois	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Indiana	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X
Iowa	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Kansas	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Kentucky	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Louisiana	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X

State	IEP development	Present levels of academic and functional performance	Annual goals	Monitoring of progress	Special education services	Related services	Supplemental aids and modifications	Participation in assessment	Least restrictive environment	Meaningful parent involvement	Transition services	Professional development
Maine	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Maryland	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Massachusetts	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Michigan	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Minnesota	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	
Mississippi	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Missouri	X			X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
Montana	X	X	X	X		X	X	X		X	X	X
Nebraska	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
New Hampshire	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
New Jersey	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
New Mexico	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	
New York	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
North Carolina	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
North Dakota	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Ohio	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Oklahoma	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Oregon	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Pennsylvania	X						X					X
Rhode Island	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	

State	IEP development	Present levels of academic and functional performance	Annual goals	Monitoring of progress	Special education services	Related services	Supplemental aids and modifications	Participation in assessment	Least restrictive environment	Meaningful parent involvement	Transition services	Professional development
South Carolina	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	
South Dakota	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Tennessee	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Texas	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Utah	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Vermont	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Virginia	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Washington	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
West Virginia	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Wisconsin	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Wyoming	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Department of Defense Education Activity	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Guam	X									X	X	

Note. Only states that mentioned and/or had guidance related to *Endrew F.* are included in this exhibit; the exhibit excludes those states that met neither category.

Examples

Examples of IEP guidance documents related to both development and implementation include the following:

- [Idaho](#) *IEP Guidance Handbook: High-Quality Practices*
- [North Dakota](#) *Guidelines: Individualized Education Program Planning Process*
- [Connecticut](#) *Using a Word Bank Process to Develop Standards-Based IEP Goals & Objectives: A Guide to Common Core State Standards-Based IEPs*
- [Michigan](#) *Family Matters Fact Sheet: Educational Placement and the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)*
- [Maryland](#) *Guidance for IEP Teams: Participation Decisions for the Alternate Assessments and Instruction Using Alternate Standards*

Some states included IEP guidance as part of a comprehensive document more broadly intended to shape special education systems, train administrators, or support districtwide creation of high-quality special education departments. Examples include the following:

- [Kansas](#) *Special Education Process Handbook*
- [Georgia](#) *Special Education Rules Implementation Manual*
- [South Dakota](#) *Individual Education Program (IEP): A Technical Assistance Guide*

Research Question 4: Specially Designed Instruction

The final research question explored the topic of SDI. Within this topic, we searched for two specific items:

1. Do states define SDI in accordance with IDEA or use a state-specific definition?
2. Do states provide guidance related to how SDI integrates into IEP development and implementation?

OSEP describes SDI as:

adapting, as appropriate . . . , 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 [IDEA Regulations, 300.39(b)(3)].



SDI is the instruction delivered to a student with an IEP to help the student access the general education curriculum. SDI goes beyond differentiated instruction and addresses the unique needs that exist because of a student’s disability. In our search, we found 38 websites that defined special education services as “specially designed instruction” (see Appendix C). Of those websites, 73% provided a state definition and guidance for SDI in IEP development.

Examples

A few examples of states with independent SDI guidance are as follows:

- [Indiana](#) *Considerations for Specially Designed Instruction*
- [Virginia](#) special education website that clearly defines the term on the website
- [Mississippi](#) guidance document, *Access for All Guide*, provides information about the instruction and services for all students and specialized instruction for students with an IEP

Summary

Our analysis allowed us to capture current national trends that shape how SEAs communicate to local practitioners about the education of students with disabilities. In general, the vast majority (i.e., 86%) of the SEA websites we scanned included at least half, or more, of the elements we looked for within our protocol.⁴ However, our findings reinforce the need to create guidance about both the procedural and substantive components of the IEP, as well as ways to address effective implementation. Areas of strength, areas where information was lacking, and limitations are described in this section.

Overall, using IDEA-specific language, SEAs offered ample guidance and direction to educators for IEP development. As noted earlier, categories of guidance included educator user manuals, federal guidance manuals for district administrators, individual guidance about specific IDEA language, parent manuals, videos, PowerPoint presentations, and some combination of these types of resources. In some scenarios, educator manuals provided specific examples within the context of each IEP subsection referenced. Oftentimes, professional development was prerecorded, asynchronous, and readily accessible, which allowed educators to benefit from flexible access to useful resources when they needed them. In addition, parent/family resources in nearly all SEAs were readily available and linked directly to the special education page of the SEA website. Many SEA websites included links to multiple user-friendly resources and connections for parent/family access.

⁴ Please note that we did not attempt to rate the clarity, usefulness, or quality of any information we found.



Three areas of need and/or areas where we found limited information from this scan included (a) guidance specifically referencing the implications of the *Endrew F.* decision, (b) guidance for determining appropriate special education services within the IEP, and (c) clear guidance on the definition of SDI and its role in IEP development. The need for SEAs to clarify guidance about determining special education services and providing guidance and/or a definition of SDI directly aligned to IDEA language are clearly connected. In many cases, SEAs defined SDI vaguely as “special education services”; in 19 scanned websites where we did not find a state or federal definition of SDI, we also did not find guidance about how to determine special education services in the IEP. In only two cases did we find websites that defined SDI but lacked guidance about special education services.

Our work on this website scan is not without limitations. It is critical to note that we did not rate, rank, or assess any resources we located. Although we are confident in our processes and the subsequent findings, the search was conducted using dichotomous variables only (yes or no) and was not intended to address the quality, relevance, or usefulness of any documents or resources. In addition, resources were located by scanning only primary SEA websites. Some SEAs may use additional sites (e.g., [Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network](#)) rather than the primary department of education website as a mechanism for disseminating information. SEAs also may use education service districts, education service centers, or other regional entities as sources of information for districts and schools; these websites were not scanned.

Implications

This website scan provided a clear picture of what is and is not currently communicated by SEA websites regarding *Endrew F.*, IEP guidance, and SDI. Our findings indicate that, although almost all websites have at least some information and/or guidance, areas of need and implications for the field exist, namely about the determination of special education services and the provision of professional development for special educators. The field of special education is relatively new compared with other aspects of education; it has been slightly more than 45 years since the passage of federal legislation that first mandated students with disabilities receive FAPE (i.e., Education for All Handicapped Children Act, 1975). As the research base in special education continues to evolve and inform what practices do and do not show promise for students with disabilities, the responsibilities of special educators also continue to evolve. Research tells us that, as practice, policies, and roles of special educators change, the provision of high-quality professional development plays an important role in teacher efficacy and longevity in the field (Miller, 2019). Given what we learned from this scan, it is imperative that SEAs consider providing some level of guidance or professional



development opportunities to local educators, specifically about IEP development and implementation.

Suggested Next Steps

The following are suggested next steps for SEAs:

- Examine the analytics of the SEA website to gauge utility of resources.
- Further explore the quality of the resources provided on the website.
- Offer training opportunities to local leaders on how to utilize IEP guidance documents.
- Connect LEA staff with professional development opportunities.

Moving forward, we suggest that SEAs review their guidance related to determining special education services on IEPs and the connection between special education services and SDI. High-quality IEPs are a cornerstone to achieving positive educational outcomes for students with disabilities (Lowman, 2015). As mentioned previously, the IEP is a critical element of special education; a well-crafted and thoughtfully implemented IEP includes the type of services a student receives, including how a student is provided accommodations and the level of instruction targeted directly at the student's individual needs. If SEAs provide unclear guidance on determining special education services within the IEP or around what constitutes SDI, IEPs may miss the mark for students with disabilities.

With these suggestions in mind, the PROGRESS Center will focus its work on supporting improved implementation of IEPs and high-quality education programs for students with disabilities in collaboration with SEAs and LEAs.

In summary, despite the noted limitations of this scan, the scan provides a useful foundational snapshot of the information that is currently available on SEA websites. In many instances, SEAs provided clear, seemingly useful, and comprehensive supports for their educators (see Appendix A). We encourage SEAs to continue to refine their websites, address areas of need, and include examples of the resources linked in this report as they refine their guidance to educators. In addition, the PROGRESS Center will continue to develop and disseminate resources and technical assistance to support local educators, leaders, and community members in the field of special education to better address the procedural and substantive requirements of the IEP and encourage SEAs to deliver clear, concise, comprehensive guidance to their constituents, with an eye toward improving outcomes for all students with disabilities.



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Appendix A. Georgia State Spotlight

PROGRESS Center

at the American Institutes for Research®



PROGRESS Center State Spotlight: Georgia



ABOUT THE PROGRESS CENTER

The PROGRESS Center promotes progress for students with disabilities by providing information, resources, tools, and technical assistance services to support local educators and leaders in developing and implementing high-quality educational programming. The PROGRESS Center supports local education agencies (LEAs) and public, private, and charter schools to improve special education programming in accordance with the standards set forth by the *Endrew F. v. Douglas County Schools* United States Supreme Court decision.



WHY A NATIONAL SCAN?

In an effort to guide technical assistance, resource development, and dissemination efforts, PROGRESS partnered with the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) to conduct a nation-wide scan of SEA guidance around key topics related to special education, including the development and implementation of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and the *Endrew F.* Supreme Court decision.



HOW WE CONDUCTED THE SCAN

The team reviewed SEA websites to understand how states currently provide guidance to districts and schools. We conducted our review using public-facing SEA websites for all 50 states, the District of Columbia, the Pacific Entities, Department of Defense Education Activity, and the Bureau of Indian Education. While we understand that SEAs may provide additional guidance beyond what is included on their websites, we used this methodology to provide an objective landscape analysis of SEA guidance on high-quality IEP development and implementation.





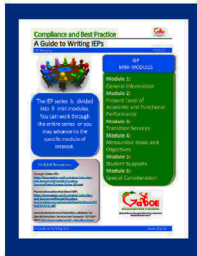
WHY GEORGIA?

Georgia's Department of Education has a comprehensive website with easy to access information, guidance, and examples. In a scan of state guidance around special education, we found that Georgia's website offers guidance around the following components of educational programming for students with disabilities:

Of 57 websites scanned, Georgia was 1 of 3 that had information on every element we searched.

- IEP development & implementation
- Present levels of academic achievement & functional performance (PLAAFP) statement
- Writing measurable annual goals
- Monitoring of progress to achieve IEP goals
- Special education services, including SDI
- State definition of SDI
- Professional development around IEP development & implementation
- Related services (e.g. speech)
- Supplementary aids & modifications
- Participation in assessment
- Identifying least restrictive environment
- Ensuring meaningful parent involvement in IEP meetings
- Transition planning
- Guidance around the use of a standards-based electronic IEP system

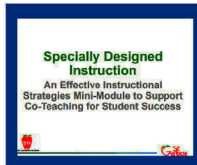
In addition to providing guidance on IEPs, Georgia offered related guidance to its districts around the *Endrew F.* Supreme Court decision.



NOTABLE MATERIALS

2019 Guide to Writing IEPs Training Series

This brief provides guidance around best practices for writing IEPs. The document is designed for districts to tailor and tier technical assistance and professional learning, by using one component of the module at a time or selecting to use the module in its entirety for their IEP Professional Learning.



Specially Designed Instruction: An Effective Instructional Strategies Mini-Module

This presentation describes Specially Designed Instruction (SDI) and includes information on effective instructional strategies designed to ensure the success of all students in the classroom.



Special Education Rules Implementation Manual

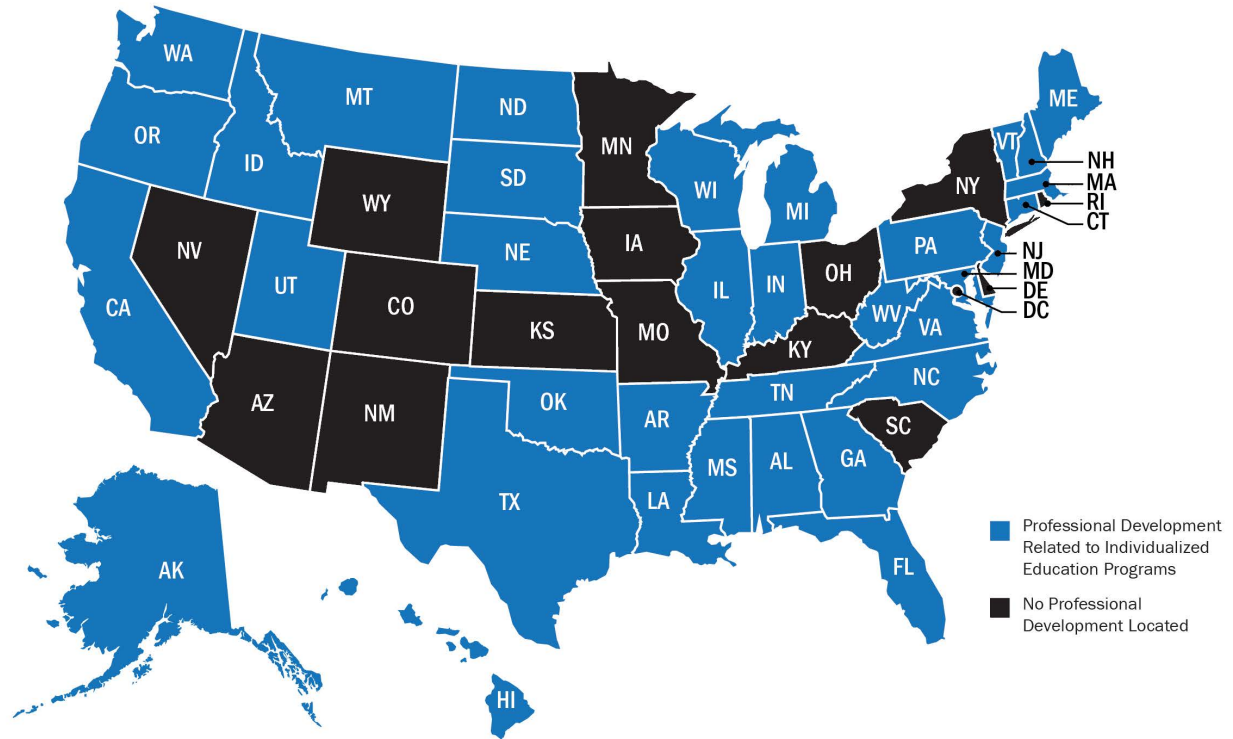
This manual discusses FAPE in depth, including its definition, how to determine eligibility, methods and payments, accessible instructional materials, and more.











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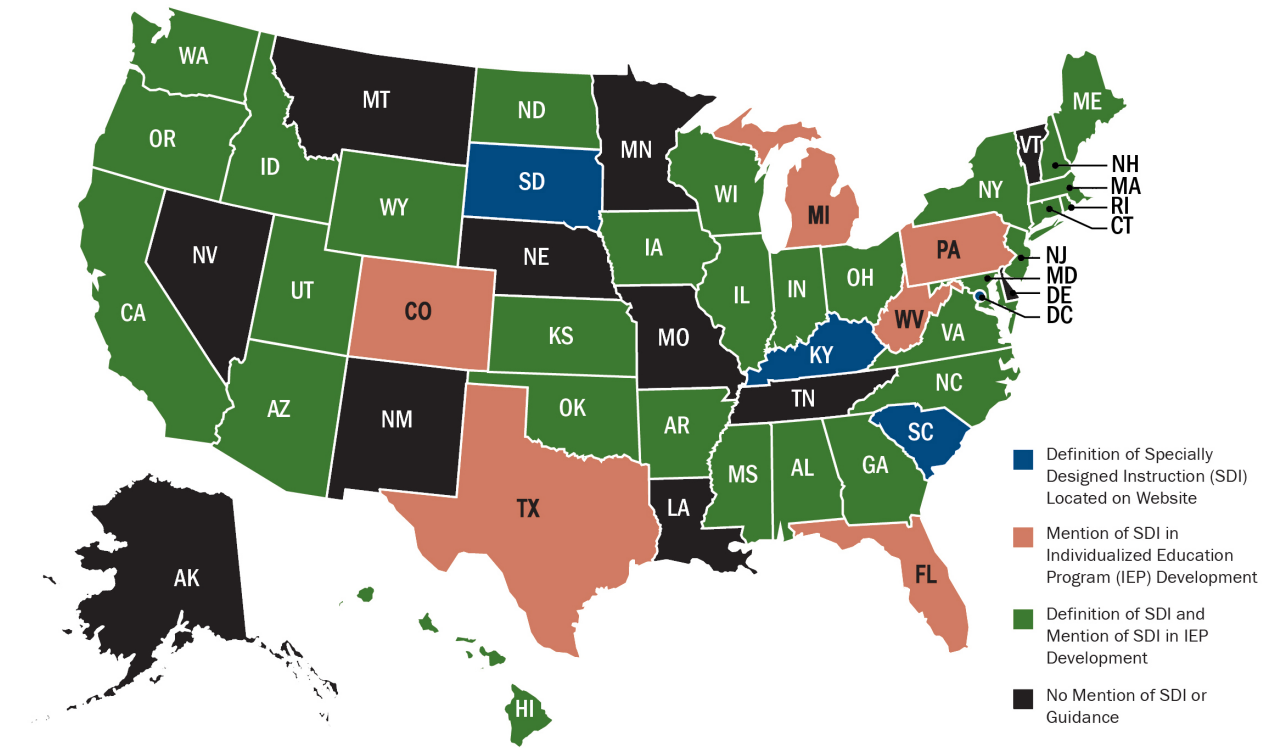
Appendix B. Map of State Education Agencies That Provide Professional Development Related to IEPs











Republic of Palau 	Federated States of Micronesia 	Republic of the Marshall Islands 	Guam 	Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands 	Puerto Rico 	American Samoa 	US Virgin Islands 
Note: At the time of publication, Puerto Rico was not scanned. Not pictured: Department of Defense Education Activity							



Appendix C. Map of Communication Regarding Specially Designed Instruction in State Education Agencies



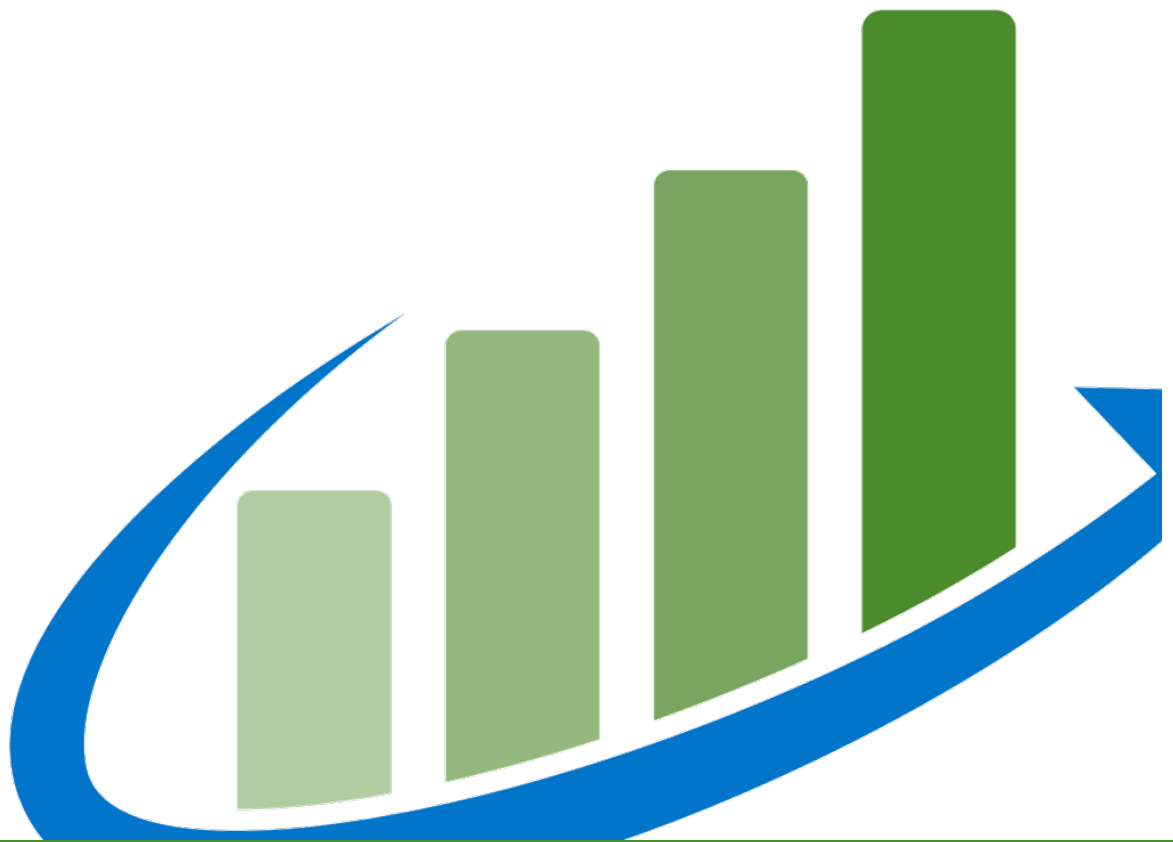
Republic of Palau 	Federated States of Micronesia 	Republic of the Marshall Islands 	Guam 	Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands 	Puerto Rico 	American Samoa 	US Virgin Islands 
Note: At the time of publication, Puerto Rico was not scanned. Not pictured: Department of Defense Education Activity							



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