



SPECIAL EDUCATION NON-REGULATORY GUIDANCE

Appropriate Designation of Dedicated Aide Services

August 2025

The Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) provides this guidance on local education agency (LEA) responsibilities for designating the services of a dedicated aide for students with disabilities consistent with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and District of Columbia laws, regulations, and policy. This guidance is intended to support individualized education program (IEP) teams in making dedicated aide determinations and providing instruction in inclusive and least restrictive environments (LREs). This document generally constitutes non-regulatory guidance and does not impose any additional requirements beyond those included in applicable federal and local law and regulations.

BACKGROUND

Within the context of special education, a dedicated aide is a service whereby an individual provides one-on-one assistance to a specific student to enable the student access to the learning environment, related services, and curriculum throughout the school day. Generally, dedicated aides may provide support in the areas of academics, health, behavior, and/or communication. Dedicated aides should be well versed on the IEP of the student they are supporting, including having a deep understanding of how to support applicable interventions and supports as required. A dedicated aide is not a replacement for qualified personnel and should not be used to support whole-group instruction, but rather supplement instruction of a highly qualified teacher. Dedicated aides should not be used to cover vacancies or absences.

LEAs may establish qualification requirements when hiring dedicated aides, such as requiring dedicated aides to possess either an associate degree or a passing score on the Paraprofessional Certification, in addition to relevant experience working with students with disabilities. However, it is strongly recommended that LEAs provide continuous professional learning and training opportunities. This ensures the delivery of high-quality support by dedicated aides throughout their tenure with the LEA, enhancing their skills and effectiveness in serving students with disabilities. LEAs should consider training in the following areas:

- Behavioral intervention and supports
- Communication and functional supports
- Instructional learning supports (training in specific curriculum and interventions)
- Medical education (if applicable)
- Assistive technology
- Crisis prevention training (e.g., Mandt, Crisis Prevention Intervention, Safety Care)

DETERMINING THE NECESSITY OF A DEDICATED AIDE

As part of the IEP process, the IEP team must consider what accommodations, services, and supports are necessary for a student with a disability to access free appropriate public education (FAPE) in their LRE. A dedicated aide should be considered only after other less restrictive strategies, accommodations, modifications, and supports have been implemented with fidelity and the student demonstrates a continued need. The IEP team may determine that the services of a dedicated aide are required to assist a student with a disability with accessing special education and related services. This determination must be made on an individual basis and through consensus of the IEP team members. When designating the services of a dedicated aide, the IEP team must also determine how those services are implemented.

Before adding a dedicated aide to a student's IEP, IEP teams should engage in a comprehensive evaluation of several critical factors:

- The nature and extent of the student's academic, behavioral, and social and emotional needs, determining whether existing accommodations and services are adequate or if additional support is warranted;
- The potential impact of a dedicated aide on the student's independence, considering the risk that such assistance may inadvertently foster dependency rather than promote self-sufficiency; and
- The impact of a dedicated aide on the student's ability to engage and participate in their LRE.

Through evaluation of these considerations, IEP teams can make informed decisions that best serve the educational interests of the student, in compliance with local regulations and the commitment to providing FAPE.

When determining if the addition of a dedicated aide is appropriate for a student, considerations should include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Modifications to the student's learning environment to create an optimal setting conducive to learning;
- The effectiveness of current supports;
- Implementation of assistive technology that facilitates the student's access to educational materials;
- Functional behavior analysis;
- Development of comprehensive positive behavior support plans aimed at addressing specific behavioral challenges;
- Integration of peer support mechanisms to foster collaborative learning opportunities;
- Necessary alterations to the curriculum that accommodate the student's unique learning needs;
- Assistive technology and training; and
- Parent and student input.

It is important to leverage existing supports within the educational framework, including available personnel and resources, as a thoughtful use of available resources. Such an approach not only ensures compliance with educational standards but also aligns with best practices in fostering student independence and educational achievement.

DESIGNING DEDICATED AIDE SERVICES

If the IEP team determines a dedicated aide is necessary, the service must be documented on the student's IEP with specific goals and progress monitoring measures. IEP teams should consider the following when designing dedicated aide services:

- All possible less-restrictive accommodations, supports, services, interventions, and strategies;
- What supporting documentation should be provided as evidence in Special Programs;
- The location of service (inside general education setting versus outside general education setting);
- The daily schedule of assistance, given that the dedicated aide is a time-limited support that should be written into the IEP as a temporary measure;
- A begin and end date of the dedicated aide service; and
- Skills the student will develop with support from the dedicated aide.

PROGRESS MONITORING

Once the IEP team has assessed and determined that a student with a disability requires the support of a dedicated aide, it is essential for LEAs to establish robust internal mechanisms to facilitate the ongoing monitoring of the impacts associated with this form of support. The role of the dedicated aide is to assist in fostering the student's academic and behavioral progress, and as such, it is crucial to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of the aide's support.

While a dedicated aide can have positive impacts for students with disabilities, if not carefully monitored, dedicated aides can have unintended negative consequences. Without proper oversight, the presence of a dedicated aide may inadvertently lead to student dependence and lack of educational and social and emotional progress. It is crucial that IEP teams consider the student's LRE to ensure students do not develop unintended dependencies. This means that IEP teams must ensure that IEPs are reviewed regularly and meet the requirements of the LRE, as required by IDEA.

To ensure that the dedicated aide services are effectively driving student progress, IEP teams should implement comprehensive progress monitoring measures. These measures should be reviewed at regular intervals (i.e., every 45 to 60 days) as part of a structured process to evaluate the ongoing necessity and efficacy of the aide's support. During these review meetings, IEP teams should assess the collected progress monitoring data to determine whether the dedicated aide's assistance is continuing to promote the student's educational growth and whether the support remains necessary for the student to receive FAPE.

Progress monitoring measures should be carefully individualized to reflect the specific supports provided by the dedicated aide, as outlined in the student's IEP. This may include tracking improvements in academic performance, behavioral interventions, social interactions, and other key areas where the aide's involvement is intended to make a significant impact.

Considerations for monitoring progress should include the following:

- The student's ability to independently complete tasks and assignments over time;
- Behavioral improvements and the reduction of disruptive incidents;
- Enhanced participation in classroom activities without the need for continuous prompting;
- Social and emotional development, including interactions with peers; and/or
- Achievement of specific IEP goals that were identified as areas of concern.

By closely monitoring these areas and adjusting support accordingly, LEAs and IEP teams can ensure that the use of a dedicated aide remains aligned with the student's needs and promotes meaningful progress.

FADE PLANS

In addition to assessing the current need for a dedicated aide, these routine meetings should focus on the development of a fade plan, which outlines a gradual reduction in the dedicated aide's level of support as the student demonstrates increased independence and capability. The fade plan is essential in helping the student transition away from the reliance of one-on-one support, fostering autonomy while still ensuring that appropriate assistance is available as needed. This process should be carried out in phases that are carefully monitored to avoid any disruption to the student's progress.

When developing a fade plan, LEAs should consider the following components for monitoring:

- Baseline assessment and data collection;
- Goals to support independence;
- Phased reduction of support;
- IEP meeting cadence;
- Implementation of alternative supports; and
- Benchmarks to transition to minimal support.

Adding the support of a dedicated aide can be a critical service to promote student growth and achievement for some students with disabilities. By committing to ongoing training for dedicated aides, intentional and consistent progress monitoring, and fade plans, IEP teams can effectively manage the transition from dedicated aide support to enhanced student independence. This process not only facilitates the gradual reduction of reliance on one-on-one support but also preserves the individualized assistance necessary to guarantee the student's access to FAPE.

If you have questions regarding LEA special education obligations, please contact the special education policy team at OSSE.DSEpolicy@dc.gov.