

Top 10 Special Education Tips for the Upcoming School Year

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Top 10 Special Education Tips

1. Start identifying/preparing for novel circumstances where students with disabilities may need accommodations to participate in unique school-related activities. E.g., senior class trip out of town, sports activities, school dance.
 - Identifying and planning in advance will prevent last-minute scrambling and help ensure that all students are able to participate.

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2. Remind teachers and related services providers to review the annual IEP goals being implemented this year and collect baseline data for such goals to assist with determining whether any goals should be revised. Develop goal data sheets to prepare for collecting data. Have teachers and service providers ensure that they have an IEP goal for their service, and if not, be sure to add a goal. IEP goals can be modified by amendment (with parent consent) or by convening the CSE.

Top 10 Special Education Tips

3. If your district has a policy for independent educational evaluations with cost or distance limits, you should review your policy to ensure that any cost limits are consistent with the prevailing rates in your community and there are sufficient evaluators located within any distance limits.
 - If your district does not have a sufficiently detailed IEE policy, you should adopt one.

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4. Start identifying students with disabilities who will be turning 21 during the upcoming school year to determine the extent to which they may be interested in remaining in school until their 22nd birthday (and perhaps longer if permitted in your district). Advanced notice will make it easier to make appropriate arrangements.

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5. Review your district's Response to Intervention procedures to ensure that they are sufficiently detailed and meeting the needs of your student population. Particular emphasis should be placed on reading instruction for students in grades kindergarten through four. In addition to the general education curriculum (Tier I), there should be at least two other tiers (Tier II and III) based on student need, with Tier III being in the smallest group setting with the greatest frequency and duration. Clear and concise data should be collected and monitored at each tier level.

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6. Arrange all mandatory staff training for physical restraints and time out
 - All staff are required to receive annual training on:
 - Policies and procedures for the use of time out and physical restraint
 - Evidence-based positive, proactive strategies
 - Crisis intervention and prevention procedures and de-escalation techniques
 - In addition, any staff who may need to implement timeout or physical restraint are required to receive annual, evidence-based training in safe and effective developmentally appropriate timeout and physical restraint procedures

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7. Meet with building level administrators to review the process for pattern determinations and manifestation-determination-review meetings. Procedures should be confirmed for tracking suspension-and-removal data throughout the school year so that pattern determinations are timely – and appropriately – conducted and MDR meetings are held when legally required. Staff should be reminded that these rules apply to students with IEPs and Section 504 students, as well as students suspected of having a disability.

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8. Ensure all staff members understand their IEP implementation responsibilities/have access to IEPs, 504 Plans, and BIPs before the start of the school year and put procedures in place so substitutes are also familiar with that information. Document all of this.

Top 10 Special Education Tips

9. Review the current capabilities of your district's special education teachers and literacy/reading specialists to determine the extent to which they are trained to use multiple methodologies during reading instruction.

Top 10 Special Education Tips

- A student with a disability will almost never be entitled to a specific teaching methodology to receive a free appropriate public education. However, if a student is not making sufficient progress under a specific reading program or methodology, the use of a different reading program or methodology could help address the student's needs (other possible options include providing reading instruction in smaller group setting or for a greater frequency and/or duration). Training your staff in multiple reading programs/methodologies will give your district more options when students fail to make sufficient progress.

Top 10 Special Education Tips

10. Check in with your school nurses to see if they're aware of any students whose disability-related needs have changed. Parents may share such information directly with school nurses, as opposed to with teachers or special education administrators. If a student's needs have changed, the district may need to amend the student's existing IEP or Section 504 plan to address such emerging needs. For students without an IEP or Section 504 plan, a new or revised need may provide the basis for an initial referral to the CSE or Section 504 team.

Top 10 Special Education Tips

- The existence of a health care plan does not override the district's child-find obligations. When considering whether a student is eligible for an IEP or Section 504 plan, the district should view the student as if the health care plan is not being implemented. This is based on the ADA Amendments Act, which prohibits consideration of the ameliorative effects of mitigating measures when assessing eligibility for classification under Section 504.

Honorable Mention:

- Review your district's home instruction procedures to ensure that students receiving home instruction based on a temporary disability (e.g., anxiety, immobility issues, allergies) should be referred to the CSE after six months (and perhaps as early as four months since the evaluation process could last two months) because at that point the student's disability will no longer be deemed temporary. The district would have a child-find obligation to ensure that the student does not meet the eligibility criteria for classification under the IDEA. Even if the parents indicate beforehand that they are not interested in an IEP, the district should still send the parents a request for consent for an initial evaluation, which the parents can refuse to sign, thus relieving the district of its child-find obligations.

Honorable Mention:

- Remind teachers and related service providers of their obligation to collect substantial regression data throughout the year to prepare for identifying students who require extended school services in summer 2025.

Thank You

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