FLEXIBLE GROUPING SERVICE DELIVERY MODEL

A UTAH STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE DOCUMENT

June 2025

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INTRODUCTION

The flexible grouping model is an inclusive model designed to support inclusion for students with disabilities while receiving specially designed instruction (SDI) in a general education classroom. This document is intended for special and general educators, paraeducators and administrators who are interested in implementing this service delivery model within their local education agency (LEA). The goal of the flexible grouping is for educators to provide SDI to students with disabilities, to meet their individualized education program (IEP) goals, while remaining in the general education classroom.

Flexible grouping is a data-driven teaching practice, where educators analyze data to group and regroup students while planning instruction aligned to meet student IEP goals. Flexible grouping is effective due to the intentional planning and collaboration between the general educator, special educator, and paraeducators to meet the individual needs of students with disabilities. Once the groupings are created, the educators provide SDI to the student(s) with disabilities that are specific to their needs and their IEP goals, allowing for service delivery time to be provided in the general education classroom.

FLEXIBLE GROUPING SERVICE DELIVERY PLAN

SERVICE DELIVERY LOCATION

This model is optimally implemented within the general education setting. Integration allows students to participate in lessons, discussions, and interactions while still accessing their special education services.

REQUIRED PROFESSIONALS

The delivery of SDI in a flexible grouping model requires the specialized expertise of many professionals. The general educator brings the majority knowledge of the core standards and content expertise to the team and provides SDI in collaboration with the special educator. The special educator has expertise in the implementation of the student's IEP, the strategies that support the individual student, and the requirements for the provision of SDI. Related service providers (i.e., speech-language pathologist (SLP), occupational therapist (OT), physical therapist (PT)) have expertise in specific areas of need. Paraeducators also have a role in the flexible grouping model and can provide SDI under the supervision and training of a special educator or related service provider.

SPECIALLY DESIGNED INSTRUCTION

Special education services are provided when trained individuals provide SDI. SDI means adapting, as appropriate to the needs of a student who is eligible under the Utah State Board of Special Education Rules[1] (SpEd Rules), the content, methodology, or delivery of instruction in order to:

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[1] N.B.: Utah Board of Education Administrative Rules (Board Rules) fall under the Utah Admin. Code under title R277. These rules can be found in two places: the USBE Administrative Rules webpage or the Utah Office Administrative Rules webpage. Therefore, Board Rules R277-609 refers to the same

a. Address the unique needs of the student that result from the student's disability; and

b. Ensure access of the student to the general curriculum, so that the student can meet the educational standards within the jurisdiction of the LEA that apply to all students (SpEd Rules I.E.51).

SDI is provided to students with disabilities and is determined by the services on their IEP. SDI may be provided during tier one instruction, intervention time, and/or may be provided in an additional setting based on their individualized need.

SERVICE DELIVERY PLAN

The flexible grouping model is implemented in the general education classroom. Prior to implementation, the general and special educator collaborate to design the instruction, incorporating individual students' IEP goals for SDI, and assign students into small groups. These groups are developed based on the needs of the students in the class, including those with IEPs, and the availability of general and special educators and trained paraeducators during flexible grouping class time. The small groups include students with and without disabilities. During designated times, the general, special and trained paraeducators provide instruction to a small group of students, incorporating SDI into instruction. Small groups may rotate between educators and paraeducators, allowing flexibility. Because educators are continuously collaborating and tracking student data, the student groupings change regularly based on progress and individual student needs. Examples of how the flexible groups can be comprised are listed in Table 1 below.

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rule as Utah Admin. Code R277-609. Similarly, though the Utah State Board of Education Special Education Rules (SpEd Rules) appear as a separate set of rules distinguished from Board Rules, they are in fact incorporated into Board Rules by reference (see Board Rules R277-750).

EXAMPLES OF FLEXIBLE GROUPING IN A GENERAL EDUCATION CLASSROOM

TABLE 1: EXAMPLES OF FLEXIBLE GROUPING CONFIGURATION (GROUP SIZE DETERMINED BY EDUCATORS AND CLASS NEED)

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4
SDI with general educator	Independent student activities monitored by paraeducator	N/A	N/A
SDI with general educator	SDI with special educator	Independent student activities	N/A
SDI with general educator	SDI with special educator	SDI with paraeducator/related service provider	Independent student activities
SDI with general educator	SDI with special educator	SDI with paraeducator/related service provider	Independent student activities monitored by parent volunteer

PREPARATION AND APPROACH

School teams who utilize the flexible grouping model need to consider the following information prior to implementation. These considerations are essential to ensuring the model functions effectively and that each student receives the appropriate support required for their academic success.

- Prior to implementation, ensure individuals responsible for providing SDI have training in the provision of SDI, data collection and analysis, behavior management, and instructional strategies.
- Administrators and educators need to ensure teams are meeting the requirements of a student's IEP.

- Administrators collaborate with general education and special education teachers to create a detailed master calendar.

SERVICE DELIVERY MODEL IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE

- General and special educators collaborate by reviewing the targeted content standards and skills needed to demonstrate mastery and meet student IEP goals.
- Special and general educators meet to review student data.
- Using student data, all students are grouped based on a student's strength, skill, and need.
- General and special educators collaborate on lesson plans and share instruction strategies to effectively teach and support each small group.
- General and special educators review individual student IEPs to identify the SDI that will be provided and who will provide the SDI in the flexible grouping service delivery model.
- The special educator provides training and support to the paraeducator(s) to effectively deliver SDI for the student(s) with disabilities within the flexible groups.
- During the designated time, SDI is provided to the student(s) with disabilities, in flexible small groups as planned.
- The general educator, special educator, paraeducator, and related service provider (if applicable) meet regularly to review student data, assess progress, and regroup students based on student progress and needs.

USING SPECIAL EDUCATION FUNDED STAFF FOR FLEXIBLE GROUPING

Staff funded with special education funding may be used in multiple roles for flexible grouping, including providing SDI to students directly and supporting general educators and interventionists while they provide SDI. For example, a

paraeducator paid with special education funding may monitor other students completing independent work while the general education teacher provides interventions, including interventions that are SDI, to a group that includes a student with a disability. Time spent by special education-funded staff assisting other students to enable the general education teacher to provide SDI is considered part of providing FAPE. Such activities should be tracked and can be counted toward the special education program when time and effort are being tracked.

Special education funds may also be used, including as one of several funding sources braided together, to fund a reading or math interventionist who provides interventions to a group of students, including when the intervention is SDI for students with a disability. When braiding funding, an LEA should track the proportion of time spent providing services to students with disabilities, including whether other students participate in the intervention. Special education funding may be used to fund the interventionist's time spent preparing for and providing interventions that are SDI.

While a general education teacher may be paid with special education funding for the portion of time they are providing SDI in this model, calculating and documenting the proportion of time may be tedious and using special education funding may not be necessary.

DOCUMENTING SERVICES ON THE IEP

The flexible grouping service delivery model can be documented in the present levels of academic achievement and functional performance (PLAAFP) and in the services sections on the IEP. In the PLAAFP section of the IEP, IEP team members can outline how the student's SDI will be provided, who will provide the SDI, and what evidence-based or other effective practices work best for the student. In the services section of the IEP, the IEP team can indicate the amount of time the student receives a service (i.e., SDI) in the general education classroom. If the

student needs additional services in a special education classroom, this would be documented on a separate line in the services section of the IEP.

Parents (and students) are part of the IEP team and can provide input for the service delivery model. Parent and student input can be documented in the PLAAFP section of the IEP and/or the IEP meeting notes. Additionally, progress reports on the student's IEP goals can inform the IEP team if the service delivery model is effective and if not, recommendations for changes can be discussed by the IEP team. It is critical for the IEP team to look at the individual needs of each student, determine what service time will help the student to make progress, and ensure service delivery in the settings deemed necessary.

BENEFITS OF THE FLEXIBLE GROUPING SERVICE DELIVERY MODEL

The flexible grouping service delivery model allows students to remain with their peers without disabilities, build relationships, learn from a variety of educators, and engage in conversations and opportunities they would miss out on if they were to be removed from the general education class to receive special education services. Benefits of the flexible grouping service delivery model are listed below including links to the [Utah State Board of Education (USBE's) Evidence-Based Practice Playing Cards](#).

- Students engage in peer interaction in a structured environment
  - [Positive peer influence](#)
  - [Cooperative Learning](#)
- Students gain access to classroom discourse in the general education classroom
  - [Classroom discussion](#)
- Students build relationships with peers and teachers
  - [Belonging](#)
  - [Teacher Student Relationships](#)
- Students build confidence while practicing skills in a safe environment
  - [Prior Ability and Achievement](#)

- o [Mastery Learning](#)
- Educators have multiple opportunities for progress monitoring
  - o [Formative Assessment](#)
- Educators provide immediate feedback while focusing on the needs of each individual student
  - o [Scaffolding](#)
  - o [Feedback (via technology)](#)
- General and special educators collaborate consistently
  - o [Collective Teacher Efficacy](#)

CAUTIONS OF THIS SERVICE DELIVERY MODEL

When using the flexible grouping model, it is important to be cautious and avoid making mistakes that might prevent this service delivery model from being successful. Some common missteps to be cautious of while implementing this model include grouping, planning, clear roles, using multiple curriculums, and over assessing. Read more about the risk these missteps pose and how to avoid them below.

AVOID HOMOGENEOUS STUDENT GROUPING

When implementing the flexible grouping model, it is essential to avoid static or homogeneous grouping of students. The objective is to form groups that utilize the strengths of educators while addressing the greatest needs of each student. Avoid grouping students solely by their characteristics (e.g., students with disabilities, multi-language learners, accelerated learners) or pairing them with educators based on specific licenses (e.g., students with disabilities only grouped with special educators). The focus should be on ensuring that the groups facilitate accessible, grade-level standard intervention for all students, fostering strong engagement and interactions between students and educators. Regular and fluid movement of groups is crucial to efficiently meet the evolving needs of students.

ALLOCATE ADEQUATE TIME FOR COLLABORATION AND PLANNING

To ensure the success of the flexible grouping model, it is crucial to allocate time for collaboration and planning among general and special educators. This alignment of instructional goals and service times is essential for meeting students' educational needs. Clear and open communication is pivotal; without it, the model risks inefficiencies such as students not receiving their designated service delivery time, redundancies within their education, gaps in content coverage, and delaying students' progress in their educational learning.

CLEARLY IDENTIFY ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

For this model to function effectively, roles and responsibilities must be clearly defined and communicated to those who will be providing SDI to the student. Regularly scheduled collaboration and planning time are necessary to prevent service delivery issues and to ensure all students' goals are met.

ENSURING PROGRESS IN THE GENERAL EDUCATION CURRICULUM

The purpose of special education is to help students bridge achievement gaps in the general education standards. Overcoming these gaps is challenging when students with disabilities are exposed to multiple sets of curriculums to learn from, depending on when and where their service time is delivered. Educators should consider using interventions that are provided in the general education curriculum or design ways to adapt or differentiate the general education curriculum when providing special education services.

AVOID OVER ASSESSING

Students with disabilities are often given different assessments or double the number of assessments, because the curriculum being used in the general education classroom is different from the curriculum being used for their special education services. This practice causes over-assessment. Students should only be given assessments matching the curriculum within the general education classroom. If additional data is needed for the IEP, educators should work together to determine what data to collect and when the data will be collected. Assessment data is shared amongst the necessary IEP team members to make decisions on student groups and IEP goal progress.

HOW TO COMMUNICATE WITH PARENTS

When sharing information with parents about flexible grouping, highlight how this service delivery model is going to allow their student the opportunity to continue to interact with their peers without disabilities and have access to the general curriculum and standards. Additionally, instruction will be provided in a small group, allowing more opportunities for the student to respond and for the educator to monitor the student's progress. Be sure to communicate the number of special education minutes their student will receive in the general education setting.

REFLECTION AND FEEDBACK

Below are questions educators and administrators may want to consider when determining the effectiveness of the flexible grouping service delivery model.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What impact (both positive and negative) did the flexible grouping model have on student outcomes, including academic performance, IEP goal progress, and student engagement?
- How was the flexible grouping model implemented across different educators, classrooms, or school?
  - Were there any variations in implementation of the model, and if so, what and why?
  - What changes, if any, need to be considered to make the service delivery plan more successful in the future?
- What are the key takeaways or lessons learned from the implementation of the flexible grouping model that can be documented and shared to improve the future student outcomes when using this service delivery model?
- What data or evidence did you collect to monitor the progress and effectiveness of the flexible grouping model?
  - How was this data used to inform decision-making and determine future improvements?

SUPPORTIVE RESOURCES

- [2024 USBE SES Meaningful Inclusion Manual.pdf](#)
- [Utah Portrait of a Graduate Competencies](#)
- [Utah's Personalized, Competency Based Learning PCBL Framework September 2023](#)
- [Utah's High Quality Instruction (HQI) Cycle](#)
- [Formative Assessment Process Toolkit](#)
- [Flexible Grouping for Inclusivity](#)
- [Flexible Grouping: What You Need to Know](#)