

ILTS 180

Director of Special Education

Study Guide Workbook

Covers Subarea I

Special Education Program & School Environment

Subarea I: Special Education Program & School Environment (33%)

Objective 001: Foundations of Education

Inclusion — An educational philosophy in which students with disabilities are educated alongside their general education peers to the maximum extent appropriate.

Normalization — The principle that individuals with disabilities should have access to living conditions and routines as close as possible to those of the broader society.

Self-Determination — The capacity of individuals to make choices, set goals, and direct their own lives with an understanding of personal strengths and needs.

Least Restrictive Environment — The federal requirement under IDEA that students with disabilities be educated alongside non-disabled peers to the greatest extent appropriate.

Pluralistic Society — A community composed of diverse cultural, linguistic, and experiential groups whose varied backgrounds shape the design of equitable educational programs.

High-Performing Culture — An organizational climate in which high expectations, continuous improvement, and shared accountability drive outcomes for every learner.

Historical Timeline

Year	Event	Significance
1954	Brown v. Board of Education	Established that separate educational facilities are inherently unequal, laying groundwork for disability rights
1975	Education for All Handicapped Children Act (P.L. 94-142)	Guaranteed free appropriate public education and IEPs for students with disabilities
1990	IDEA signed into law	Renamed and expanded P.L. 94-142; added transition services and strengthened family rights
2004	IDEA Reauthorization	Aligned special education law with No Child Left Behind; emphasized evidence-based practices

Objective 002: Vision of Educational Excellence

Transformational Leadership — A leadership approach that motivates others by inspiring a shared vision and fostering commitment to organizational goals beyond self-interest.

Instructional Leadership — A leadership style focused primarily on improving the quality of teaching and learning within an organization.

Distributed Leadership — An approach in which decision-making authority and leadership responsibilities are shared across multiple individuals in an organization.

Consensus Building — A collaborative process of reaching agreement among diverse stakeholders through dialogue, negotiation, and mutual accommodation.

Stakeholder Engagement — The systematic involvement of all parties with a vested interest in a program, including staff, families, students, and community members, in planning and decision-making.

Strategic Planning — A disciplined process of identifying long-term organizational goals, determining priorities, and allocating resources to achieve a desired future state.

Leadership Styles Comparison

Style	Core Focus	Key Strength
Transformational	Inspiring a shared vision and cultivating belief in a common mission	Drives cultural change and long-term commitment from staff
Instructional	Improving the quality of teaching, curriculum, and student achievement	Directly linked to measurable gains in student outcomes
Distributed	Sharing authority and responsibility across teams and individuals	Builds organizational capacity and sustainability of leadership

Objective 003: Learning Environment

School Climate — The collective perceptions, values, and interpersonal dynamics that shape the overall quality of life within a school community.

Developmental Appropriateness — The alignment of instructional expectations, materials, and environments with the typical developmental ranges of the students being served.

Cultural Responsiveness — The practice of designing instruction and environments that recognize, affirm, and build upon the cultural backgrounds and lived experiences of all students.

Culturally Sustaining Practice — An approach to education that actively maintains and extends students' cultural and linguistic competencies rather than replacing them.

Dignity — The inherent worth and respect owed to every individual, regardless of ability, background, or behavior, that must be preserved in all school interactions.

Equity — The fair distribution of educational resources, opportunities, and supports so that every student, including those with disabilities, can achieve meaningful outcomes.

School Climate Dimensions

Dimension	What It Means	Director's Role
Safety	Physical and emotional security for all members of the school community	Establish clear behavioral expectations and anti-bullying policies
Relationships	Trust and mutual respect among staff, students, and families	Model collaborative communication and invest in staff-family partnerships
Teaching & Learning	High expectations and responsive support for every learner	Promote differentiated instruction and evidence-based interventions
Environment	Orderly, welcoming, and accessible physical spaces	Ensure facilities meet accessibility standards and reflect inclusive values

Objective 004: Instructional Program

Assistive Technology — Any device, software, or equipment that helps individuals with disabilities perform tasks that would otherwise be difficult or impossible.

Differentiated Instruction — An approach in which teachers proactively adjust content, process, and product based on each student's readiness, interests, and learning profile.

Universal Design for Learning — A curriculum framework that builds in flexible means of representation, engagement, and expression to reduce barriers for all learners from the outset.

Continuous Improvement — A cyclical process of planning, implementing, evaluating, and revising programs based on data to achieve ongoing gains in quality and outcomes.

Evidence-Based Practice — An instructional strategy or intervention that has been validated through rigorous research to produce meaningful improvements in student outcomes.

Curriculum Modification — An alteration to the scope, sequence, or content expectations of the general curriculum made to meet the individual needs of a student with a disability.

Technology Applications in Special Education Programs

User	Technology Tools	Purpose
Students	AAC devices, screen readers, text-to-speech, word prediction software	Reduce barriers to communication, reading, and written expression
Staff	IEP management platforms, data collection apps, progress monitoring dashboards	Streamline documentation, track goal progress, and inform instructional decisions
Administrators	Student information systems, compliance tracking tools, communication platforms	Monitor program outcomes, ensure IDEA compliance, and communicate with stakeholders

Objective 005: Assessment & Evaluation

Formative Assessment — Ongoing evaluation conducted during instruction to monitor student understanding and guide adjustments to teaching before a unit or program concludes.

Summative Assessment — An evaluation conducted at the conclusion of an instructional period to measure the extent to which goals and standards have been achieved.

Data-Driven Decision Making — The practice of systematically collecting, analyzing, and acting on multiple sources of evidence to improve educational programs and outcomes.

Standards Alignment — The process of ensuring that instructional goals, content, and assessments are coherently connected to established grade-level or program standards.

Program Evaluation — A systematic process of gathering and analyzing information about an educational program's design, implementation, and outcomes to judge its effectiveness.

Progress Monitoring — Frequent, brief assessments used to track a student's rate of improvement toward IEP goals and to determine whether current instruction is sufficient.

Assessment Levels in Special Education

Level	Focus	Data Sources
Student	Individual progress toward IEP goals and grade-level standards	Formative probes, progress monitoring data, IEP goal attainment rates
Program	Effectiveness of services and interventions across a group of students	Aggregate outcome data, placement patterns, service delivery records
System	District-wide compliance, equity, and alignment with state standards	State reporting, compliance audit findings, standards alignment reviews

Objective 006: Research & Change

Evidence-Based Practice — An instructional or programmatic approach validated through rigorous research showing consistent, positive effects on student outcomes.

Implementation Fidelity — The degree to which a program or intervention is delivered as designed, following all required components, dosage, and procedures.

Change Process — The staged progression an organization moves through when adopting new practices, from awareness and decision through sustained use.

Action Research — A reflective inquiry process in which educators systematically study their own practice and organizational context to generate locally applicable knowledge.

Concerns-Based Adoption Model — A framework describing seven stages of concern individuals experience when encountering an educational innovation, from awareness to refocusing.

Institutionalization — The final stage of the change process in which a new practice becomes embedded in organizational routines, culture, and resource allocation.

Stages of the Educational Change Process

Stage	Description	Director's Task
Initiation	Decision to adopt a new practice is made; early awareness and commitment are built	Communicate the rationale clearly, secure stakeholder buy-in, and allocate initial resources
Implementation	Staff begin using the new practice; challenges and resistance are common	Provide ongoing professional development, coaching, and monitor fidelity of use
Institutionalization	The practice becomes routine, embedded in culture and organizational systems	Integrate the practice into hiring, evaluation, budgeting, and long-term planning

Practice Questions

1. A director of special education wants to honor the historical foundations of the field when developing program philosophy. Which milestone most directly established the legal right of students with disabilities to receive a free appropriate public education?

- A. Brown v. Board of Education, which declared racially separate schools unconstitutional
- B. The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, which mandated FAPE and IEPs for eligible students
- C. The normalization movement, which promoted community-based living as a philosophical ideal
- D. The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, which prohibited discrimination in public accommodations

2. A new director of special education meets resistance from building principals when trying to shift toward a more inclusive service delivery model. To build sustainable change, what should the director do first?

- A. Issue a written directive requiring all principals to comply with the new model by the end of the semester
- B. Hire a consultant to design a professional development series without input from building leadership
- C. Facilitate a collaborative process with principals and other stakeholders to develop a shared vision and goals
- D. Request that the superintendent mandate the new model at the next board of education meeting

3. A director reviews data showing that student IEP goal attainment rates have declined over two consecutive years. Which action reflects the most effective use of data-driven decision making?

- A. Convene a program review team to analyze patterns in goal attainment data and identify systemic factors
- B. Increase the frequency of IEP meetings for all students to discuss progress with families
- C. Require teachers to write fewer annual goals so that attainment rates are easier to achieve
- D. Adopt a new IEP management software platform to automate data collection and reporting

Answer Key

1. B
2. C
3. A

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