PARTICIPANT HANDOUT · FUTURE SYSTEMS LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK

Designing the Future of Special Education Systems

Keep every right and protection IDEA guarantees. Redesign the structures around them so students learn more, educators teach more, and leaders act with the authority they already have.

Five design priorities

Use this framework with your leadership team. For each priority, name where your system is today and the first move toward the redesign.

Priority	Move from	Move toward	Leader question
1. Individualized learning	The IEP as an annual compliance document, owned by special education	A dynamic plan used weekly, tied to grade-level standards, reviewed with timely data, co-authored by students and families	*When did our IEPs last change instruction mid-year?*
2. Workforce design	Special educators as case managers, schedulers, and data clerks; recruitment as the only lever	Protected co-planning time, compliance separated from teaching, career pathways, integrated related services, trained paraprofessionals	*What takes our special educators away from students?*
3. Access by design	Accommodations added after students hit barriers; tools bought but not used	UDL, accessible materials, and AT in every classroom, with AI used responsibly and implementation measured	*Which of our tools are used every day, and by whom?*
4. Shared responsibility	Students with disabilities as "special education's students"	General and special educators own outcomes together; students with disabilities in the district's main plan	*Do outcomes for students with disabilities appear in our district strategic plan?*
5. Responsive accountability	Compliance findings and corrective actions after problems occur	Integrated data, root-cause analysis, and continuous improvement that spots patterns early	*How would we know a problem is forming before it becomes a finding?*

Preserve, reconsider, redesign

PRESERVE	RECONSIDER	REDESIGN
IDEA rights and procedural safeguards Individualization Family partnership	Habits mistaken for requirements Default pull-out schedules Annual-only progress review	The IEP as a dynamic plan Educator roles and time Access built in; accountability that improves

Reflect

1. Think of a time a well-intentioned policy, process, or service decision limited a student's opportunity. What structure made it happen?

2. Picture a special educator's Tuesday in 2030. What is the one change that would close the biggest gap between that day and today?

TOOLS FOR THE NEXT 30 DAYS

Law or habit? Audit one process

Pick one process: IEP meetings, evaluation timelines, or service scheduling. List its steps and mark each one. Then ask whether each local practice still earns its time.

Step in the process	Federal law	State rule	Local practice	Keep, change, or drop?
	☐	☐	☐	
	☐	☐	☐	
	☐	☐	☐	
	☐	☐	☐	

Examples. Annual IEP review: law. Parents on the IEP team: law. Considering AT for every student with an IEP: law. A full meeting for every IEP change: often habit (IDEA allows amendments by agreement). Services outside general education by default: habit. Confirm against 34 CFR Part 300 and your state's rules.

Before you adopt a technology or AI tool

- ☐ **Accessible.** Does it work for students and families with disabilities?
- ☐ **Private.** Is student data protected under FERPA and IDEA confidentiality? Where does it go?
- ☐ **Accurate.** Who checks the output, especially anything that goes into an IEP?
- ☐ **Equitable.** Will it reach the students and schools that need it most?
- ☐ **Human-led.** Do people on the IEP team make every eligibility, service, and placement decision?
- ☐ **Measured.** How will we know it improved instruction, independence, or educator time?

My 30-day commitment

What is one practice we continue because it is familiar, or feels safer, rather than because it produces better outcomes for students?

What I will change One practice or system, named specifically	
Who I need with me The people who must be part of it	
How I will know it worked The sign of progress within 30 days	
My first step and date What I will do this week	

Context worth knowing

7.5 million students ages 3 to 21 served under IDEA in 2022-23, 15% of public school students.[1]

77% of special education vacancies were filled with fully certified teachers before 2024-25.[2]

April 2027 ADA Title II deadline for large public entities, including many districts, to meet WCAG 2.1 AA for web content and apps (April 2028 for smaller entities).[3]

Sources: (1) U.S. Department of Education, IDEA Section 618 data. (2) NCES School Pulse Panel, 2024-25. (3) U.S. Department of Justice, ADA Title II rule as amended April 2026. Federal administration of IDEA is changing in 2026; IDEA's rights and requirements remain in law.

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