

Utah Special Education Program Improvement Planning System (UPIPS) Building Principal/LEA Interview Guide

1. What are the best things about your LEA’s special education program?

TIPS: Describe collaboration among general and special educators at your school, integration of students in special education into general education programs and activities, creative or unique programs at your school, which benefit all students, understandings of the variations in student performance, available resources, staff development, parents/guardians involvement, and support, etc. This is your chance to BRAG!!!

2. Child Find

a. Describe four ways your school assists students who are experiencing academic and social/behavioral difficulties.

TIPS: Do general education teachers, parents/guardians volunteers, and/or peers provide opportunities for extra skill practice for struggling students? Has your school added additional specialized staff such as a reading specialist/facilitator? Do you provide staff training on research-based academic/behavioral instruction? Are you using tiered academic instruction and behavioral supports (RtI model) across classes/grade levels? Does your school have school-wide positive behavioral supports in place? Do you have school-wide rules that are explicitly taught and reviewed with students? Are students frequently reinforced for appropriate behaviors? Are parents/guardians getting training/materials to use in helping their student at home?

d. What are two of your responsibilities when a student is referred for special education evaluation?

TIPS: To assure that the student’s teacher is using research-based instruction/programs and has implemented supplemental programs/interventions while collecting data on the student’s response to those. If research-based instruction/programs are not being implemented, do you provide the necessary supports to do so (e.g., training, purchase programs?). Ensure the referral form (Response to Intervention Form) is completed prior to assigning relevant staff members assessment responsibilities. Follow federal, state, and district procedures so that the school’s special education staff and school are in compliance.

3. Evaluation and Eligibility

a. Who are the required members of the evaluation/eligibility team?

TIPS: The evaluation and eligibility team is composed of the student’s parents/guardians and a “team of qualified professionals.” The team of “qualified professionals” is typically decided upon by the LEA and may include, but is not limited to, such school personnel as a student’s general education teacher, a special education teacher and/or another person knowledgeable in educational assessment, a school psychologist; and as appropriate a speech-language pathologist, an occupational and/or physical therapist, audiologist, and/or

other specialist for vision, behavior, or hearing. The LEA and parents/guardians may choose to have other individuals with special knowledge or expertise regarding the student be team members.

b. Describe two ways in which you participate in the evaluation process.

TIPS: Provide input at relevant team meetings regarding the student's statewide and district assessment, evaluate data on interventions implemented, provide data regarding office referrals where available and attendance records, assist the team evaluate current and historical classroom and assessment data, etc.

g. How does your team determine if the student's suspected disability is not due to a lack of instruction in reading and math?

TIPS: If your school uses a tiered (RtI) model for reading and/or math, and/or implements research-based instruction with fidelity with appropriate instructional time allocated according to state and district guidelines, then it is unlikely the student's disability is due to a lack of appropriate instruction. Documentation of programs, instructional strategies, and allotted instructional time, help defend this position.

4. IEP

a. Who are the required members of the IEP team?

TIPS: The required IEP members are the student's parents/guardians, the LEA, at least one general education teacher of the student, a special education teacher that will mostly likely be providing the services, an individual who can interpret the instructional implications of evaluation results if no other team member is able to do so, the student (when appropriate), and other individuals as appropriate including anyone who completed assessment measures on the student.

Note: If a required IEP team member will not be present during an IEP meeting, prior written permission must be obtained and documented by both the student's parents/guardians and the LEA on the IEP Excusal Form and their written input must be attached to the form prior to the IEP meeting.

b. Describe two of your responsibilities in the IEP process.

TIPS: Responsibilities of the LEA at an IEP meeting include chairing or supporting the chairperson of the IEP meeting, helping to identify resources that may be required for the student to benefit from special education, insuring that services discussed are resources that can actually be offered by the school/district, understanding the nature of the student's services so that evaluations can be made of the adequacy and success of those offerings, providing relevant information/data on the student's academic achievement, functional skills, and their school behaviors, etc.

d. What do you do to ensure the people implementing the IEP coordinate their efforts and services?

TIPS: Allocate appropriate planning time by finding times for staff members to meet to share information on students in special education, share knowledge, offer suggestions, and coordinate instruction. Schedule regular updates with general and special educators to discuss the progress of their students.

e. Describe your actions if a student transfers to your school with an existing IEP.

TIPS: Regardless of whether the student has transferred to your school from within the state or from out of state, the LEA must provide FAPE to the student including services that are comparable to those described in the previously held IEP until such a time as the new LEA either adopts the existing IEP, if appropriate, or conducts an evaluation and develops a new IEP that is consistent with federal and state law. Assuming that the student's parents/guardians have brought a copy of the IEP, the receiving school would need to examine the IEP and meet with the student's parents/guardians to resolve any questions about the document. If the parents/guardians have not brought a copy of the student's IEP, the first task would be to obtain a copy from the sending school.

f. How are general educators and other staff who are involved with a student with a disability informed of their responsibilities?

TIPS: The special educator of the student informs general educators and other relevant staff of their IEP responsibilities at the student's IEP meetings and various staffing meetings. This may be a responsibility of an assigned team leader, case manager. Like special educators, general educators and related servers do not have the option of not following the IEP's provisions as it is a legal agreement between the LEA and the student's parents/guardians.

5. U-PASS Data

a. Discuss four issues to consider when deciding how a student with disabilities will participate in the U-PASS testing program(s) (unless preschool, K or over 18).

TIPS: Determine where the student is performing in each subject area relative to the content standards and goals, determine student needs, if any, for testing accommodations appropriate for a given test, verify those accommodations are consistent with those identified on the student's IEP and are allowable according to the tests protocol, determine if student's IEP goals are aligned with content standards for his/her grade level, determine if the test content is appropriate for student given his/her performance on goals, etc.

b. Describe three things that you do when statewide tests (CRTs and others) are administered.

TIPS: You may want to list things such as assuring that all teachers understand test administration procedures, if they understand allowable accommodations for each test administered, decide who will administer tests to students with disabilities, and monitor accommodations being used with student who have disabilities.

c. Describe two ways you have utilized data provided from U-PASS testing results.

TIPS: You may discuss things such as evaluating grade level performance, over-all school performance, identifying subgroups and individuals in them for further instruction or practice, etc.

6. Access to the General Curriculum/LRE

a. How does the IEP team determine the amount of special education and related services a student needs?

TIPS: The amount of special education and related services that a student receives depends upon the student's IEP goals that have been written to address the student's educational needs. The variety, breadth, and depth of the goals direct the IEP team in determining how much instructional time will be required to assist the student in meeting his/her goals.

b. How does the IEP team determine placement?

TIPS: IEP team members determine the special education setting in which a student will receive special education services based on his/her IEP goals and where (setting) those goals can best be addressed. Settings may include the general education classroom with resource and/or itinerant special education services, a special education classroom or school, a home or hospital setting, or combinations of these. Special education rules dictate that students should not be removed from their general education classroom unless the nature or severity of their disability is such that education in general education classes, even with supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily. Thus, a student may not be removed from a general education classroom only because of needed modifications to the general education curriculum.

c. List three ways you ensure each student with disabilities participates with non-disabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate.

TIPS: You can look at a student's schedule to see when s/he is receiving special education services versus participation in the general education environment. You can ensure access for all students to non-special education activities of the school such as field trips, assemblies, and projects.

d. What are two responsibilities of general educators in developing and implementing an IEP?

TIPS: General education teachers assist IEP teams in developing present levels of academic achievement and functional performance (PLAAFPs) in reference to core/state standards and how the student's disability affects progress in the general curriculum from which meaningful academic goals can be written. General educators assist in determining meaningful behavior goals for students across school settings and assist with accommodations, modifications, and supports/services needed in general education settings and in assessments.

e. How do general education teachers access IEP information for students in their classes?

TIPS: General educators attending IEP meetings can have copies of student goals, particularly those to be implemented in their classrooms. They can also access student goals at staffings and collaborative meetings between general and special educators.

j. As the LEA, how do you ensure that general educators and related service providers access and use the information from IEPs for students with disabilities?

TIPS: By asking educators about their collaborative activities, sitting in on meetings and staffing, and observing in classrooms, LEA's can determine whether general educators and related servers are using IEP information.

7. Paraeducators

a. How are paraeducators trained in your school?

TIPS: Paraeducators are trained by the district staff and by the educator to whom they are assigned. Identify that the district offers a variety of training courses to all paraeducators and provides paraeducators with the opportunity to attend annual paraeducator conferences. Further training is provided by the educator to whom the paraeducator is assigned. Identify if additional training opportunities are provided by other school staff.

b. How is supervision provided for paraeducators when they are assigned to your school?

TIPS: The educators to whom paraeducators are assigned provide the first level of supervision with support from building administration.

8. Program Improvement

a. What is your school focusing on to improve success for all students?

TIPS: Is your school focusing on reading, math, science, appropriate behaviors, social skills, or other areas? What activities are you using to improve the knowledge and skill of all students in these areas? I

b. How do these activities provide access for students with disabilities?

TIPS: Are activities accommodated or modified so that all students with disabilities can be included?

c. What are your priorities for improving your school's special education program?

TIPS: List areas of needed improvement such as streamlining the referral to placement process, the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education programs or student participation in state and district-wide assessments, etc.

9. Professional Development

a. How do you determine professional development needs in your school?

TIPS: Needs for professional development may be identified from student test results, disciplinary referrals, teacher input, school committee members (identified on your school improvement plan), parental/guardian requests, etc.

b. Who are the groups of people included in the training?

TIPS: Are all certified school staff involved, including general and special educators, related service providers such as speech-language pathologists, paraeducators, and other auxiliary staff? Are some training opportunities for prespecified staff (e.g., grade levels, specific academic areas, teams, reading.)? Are there any training for non-certified staff (e.g., paraprofessionals, cafeteria workers, school secretaries)?

11. LRBI/Discipline and Safe School Data

a. When should an IEP team conduct a Functional Behavior Assessment (FuBA) and write a Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP)?

TIPS: According to federal and state mandates A FuBA/BIP is required on the 11th day of a students' disciplinary removal (change of placement), and when a safe school violation occurs AND the behavior is determined by the IEP team to be a manifestation of the student's disability. If a safe school violation is found not be a manifestation of the student's disability, a FuBA/BIP are completed as appropriate. It is best practice however, to complete a FuBA/BIP when a student's behavior is having a negative affect on their/others education over a period of time, prior to the behavior leading to a disciplinary action that affects the student's placement.

b. When is it mandatory to conduct a manifestation determination?

TIPS: A manifestation determination must be conducted within 10 school days of any decision to change student's placement due to a violation of the school's code of conduct. This may one behavioral occurrence (e.g., code of conduct, safe school violation) or multiple occurrences that within the year have accumulated to 10 or more school days.

d. What are two steps you and your team take when a student with an IEP has a behavior problem?

TIPS: Ensure that the classroom has multiple positive behavioral supports in place (refer to the Preliminary and Level 1 behavioral strategies/interventions outlined in the Least Restrictive Behavior Interventions (LRBI Manual, USOE 2001). Ensure that the student has the prerequisite skills necessary to complete current level of work and that accommodations identified on the student's IEP are being implemented. Take baseline data prior to implementing other behavioral interventions. Meet with the parents/guardians to discuss concerns and identified potential remedies. If needed, the IEP team may conduct a FuBA and develop and implement a BIP.

e. Describe your procedure and practice when you remove a special education student from school for more than 10 days in a school year.

TIPS: A manifestation determination must be conducted before the student's school removals accumulate to more than 10 days, and when a safe school violation occurs and the student is referred to a district hearing. General and special education services must be provided to the student during his absence from school. It is best practice to provide home and hospital services during all times of removal but special education services are required on the 11th day of school removal.

g. Who maintains discipline information on students with disabilities? Where are such records located?

TIPS: Name the title(s) of the person who collects school-wide and classroom information on student discipline. This may be the principal, assistant principal, counselor, school psychologist, and general and special educators. Confidential information should be maintained in a locked filing cabinet(s).

h. How are incidences, types, and durations of disciplinary actions, including suspensions of one day or more, tracked?

TIPS: If you are using a software program to track disciplinary information at your school, please list the name of the program and briefly describe what information is collected. Identify who is responsible for inputting that information and how that information is shared with parents/guardians and district, state, and federal mandates.

If the school serves grades K-8, only skip #s 12c and 12d

12. Transition

c. What are two purposes of developing a school to post-school transition plan for students with disabilities?

TIPS: Transition plans help students identify post-school options, direct student coursework, increase student participation in community experiences as a means of acquiring necessary skills, and facilitate identifying needed post-school services.

d. List things the IEP team considers when developing a school to post-school transition plan.

TIPS: The IEP team members consider the students' needs, strengths, preferences, and interests. As well as the instructional and related services, community experiences, employment, and adult living goals that are needed to facilitate what the student wants and is able to obtain from post-school living.

13. Extended School Year (ESY)

b. What are two things you consider to determine whether a student is eligible for extended school year services?

TIPS: The IEP team will want to consider both retrospective and predictive data when determining eligibility for ESY services. Retrospective data typically indicates regression and recoupment with respect to students' skills. If regression is so serious over a break in instruction that recoupment means basically beginning instruction anew or at a significantly lower level, then a student may require ESY to maintain FAPE. The student may also require ESY if they are at a critical point in instruction, which would be lost if their current skill level was not maintained. Predictive data takes into account the severity of the student's disability; his/her overall rate of progress in skills of self-sufficiency and independence that would be unlikely to continue without ESY. Predictive data may also be used to identify students unable to remain in their current least restrictive placement without ESY services.

14. Procedural Safeguards

a. What are five of the IDEA procedural safeguards or parent's rights?

TIPS: There are numerous procedural safeguards, which can be reviewed more thoroughly in the Utah State Board of Education Special Education Rules. Here is a listing of them by topic: parental/guardian opportunity to examine their student's records, parents/guardians participation in meetings regarding their student's special education program, the right to an independent educational evaluation if dissatisfied with the LEA's evaluation, written prior notice whenever the LEA proposes or refuses to initiate or change the identification, evaluation, educational placement or provision of FAPE to a student, provision of procedural safeguards notices to parents/guardians, parental/guardian consent when the LEA proposes to identify, evaluate, place or change the placement of a student, the right to file a complaint against an LEA with the state office of education, the right to mediation, the right to file a due process complaint, the right to file civil action, the right to confidentiality of student information and transfer of parental/guardian rights at the age of majority.

15. Rules

a. What training have you had related to the state special education rules?

TIPS: Describe who provided training to you on the state special education rules and when it occurred. Generally, the special education district staff provide yearly training to all special educators and district/school administrators, with more specific follow-up trainings for throughout the year.

16. Parent Involvement

a. What are two ways that parents are involved in placement decisions?

TIPS: Parents/guardians help determine how the student will be involved and progress in the general education curriculum and what special education services their student will receive and in what setting(s) as they are members of the student's IEP team.

b. Describe five areas in the over-all special education process in which parents are involved in determining the educational needs and provision of services for their student.

TIPS: Parents/guardians are involved in the evaluation and determination of eligibility phase of the process, the development of their student's IEP (PLAAFPs, goals, accommodations, etc), in placement decisions, in the level of their student's participation in general education classrooms/activities and district and statewide assessments, and parent/guardian teacher meetings on student progress.

20. IEP Meetings

a. How are teachers documenting excusal or attendance not needed at IEP meetings?

TIPS: Prior written permission from the student's parents/guardian and the LEA must be obtained and documented on the IEP Excusal Form which must have the person's input into the IEP meeting attached in writing, prior to the IEP meeting.

21. What additional resources and/or training are needed to improve the special education program in your school or LEA?

TIPS: Consider your desires for improving your program and what, if any, training would assist with that. Are there more global areas of training needed in areas such as reading, math, and positive behavioral support programs?