

Utah Special Education Program Improvement Planning System (UPIPS) Special Education Teacher Interview Guide (Resource, Self-contained Support Class, VI, HI)

1. What are the best things about your school's special education program?

TIPS: Focus on the things that are great about the special education program in your school; for example, teaming and collaboration both with in special education and with general education, administrative support, available resources, staff development, parent/guardian involvement and support, creative or unique programs and techniques that you have implemented, ways that you are doing inclusion, co-teaching, etc. This is your chance to BRAG!!!

2. Child Find

a. Before making the decision to refer a child for a special education evaluation, list four types of documentation teachers keep to demonstrate that classroom interventions failed.

TIPS: Although prereferral interventions are no longer required under IDEA and the Utah State Board of Education Special Education Rules, Response to Intervention (RtI) data are. Teachers should identify their core curriculum (programs, student progress) and identify, and have data on a minimum of two supplemental programs/instruction/interventions. This is to demonstrate the appropriateness of curriculum materials, techniques, extra practice or small group instruction that have been used to insure that the student's difficulties are not the result of a lack of appropriate instruction in math and/or reading as per No Child Left Behind (NCLB). The student's general education teacher will also need to have current classroom based data, results of local and state assessments, classroom observations, and any evaluation results that may have been made available by parents/guardians.

b. Who are two people who can make referrals for special education evaluation?

TIPS: A parent/guardian or an LEA staff (e.g., general education teachers, building principal, school-wide assistance team members) can initiate referrals for evaluation for special education services.

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 the 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 such as 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 four ways in which you participate in the evaluation process.

TIPS: Describe any academic assessments that you administer, including norm-referenced tests such as the Woodcock-Johnson Psycho-Educational Battery, classroom-based assessments, diagnostic tests such as the DIBBLES or classroom observations of behavior. Explain that your role includes coordinating evaluation information, too, from a variety of sources, including parents/guardians, meeting with the student's evaluation team to analyze data and collecting additional data that may be deemed appropriate by the team. It may be your responsibility to pull all of these data together into a report summary.

c. Describe three ways that you or the team obtain parental input to the evaluation process.

TIPS: First, a contact is made from the general education teacher to the parents/guardians describing concerns regarding the student's school performance. This may be part of an on-going dialogue between the teacher and home about concerns the school staff have. Second, the person doing the educational evaluation of the student will often interview the parents/guardians for a history of the student's health and development. Illnesses, accidents, surgeries and the like are often important to gain a thorough knowledge of a student's background which may affect educational progress. Parents/guardians may have evaluative data from physicians, therapists, and counselors that they are willing to share with the team. Finally, all information gathered about the student is discussed with parents/guardians as they participate in the process of determining whether or not their student is a student with a disability.

d. How does your evaluation team summarize evaluation results?

TIPS: All assessment methods and their corresponding results are identified on the Eligibility Results Summary form (ERS) completed through using the district's IEP Goalview program.

e. What is your role in the eligibility determination meeting?

TIPS: Discuss your role in collecting and summarizing evaluation data for the group, unless that is to be done by a different member of the team. You can also mention your discussion with parents/guardians and other members of the team, the types of data gathered and whether or not additional data are required. You will participate with other members of the team in analyzing the data and determining if the student is a student with a disability.

f. What are two factors that you must consider when selecting tests to administer to a student?

TIPS: A variety of assessments must be used to gather relevant functional, developmental, and academic information about the student. Tests must reflect the student's aptitude or achievement level despite sensory, manual, or communication skills. Tests must be valid and reliable for the purposes used and must yield information sufficient to address the student's

needs whether associated with a particular disability or not. The student should be assessed in all the areas of the suspected disability, and tests administration must be in the student's native language or other mode of communication and may not be discriminatory on a racial or cultural basis.

g. When should the evaluation/eligibility team classify a child in another disability category rather than developmental delay?

TIPS: When adequate evaluation data are available to show that the student meets one of the other disability categories, the student must be classified in that category rather than developmental delay. This must always be performed prior to the student's 8th birthday.

h. Who maintains the current listing of the names and positions of individuals having access to personally identifiable information on students with disabilities? Where is the listing located?

TIPS: Identify the person within your school or district who develops this list of individuals having access to confidential student information and where this list is located either in the school building principal's office, the special education classroom, attached to special education file cabinets, or elsewhere. Typically, this list is attached to the locked filing cabinet(s) that contain the special education student files.

4. IEP

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

TIPS: The required members of the IEP team are the student's parents/guardians(s), the LEA, at least one general education teacher of the student, and/ or the special education teacher of the student, 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.

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

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

TIPS: Remember that the special education teacher's responsibilities will vary depending on whether the IEP process is for a newly identified student with a disability or for a student continuing in special education. For a newly identified student, you may have conducted curriculum-based assessment as well as an eligibility assessment; those results are shared with IEP team members. You may be the chairperson of the IEP meeting for the student and will be responsible for getting all school-based professionals together with parents/guardians at a mutually agreed upon location and time and provide prior written notice to the student's parents/guardians. You may serve as moderator of the meeting making certain that all individuals have an opportunity for input and that all information put forth is collected for the student's file. As moderator, you will also be responsible for all pertinent documents being

presented, discussed, as necessary, signed, and placed in the student's file. You will be proposing the student's educational goals for the team's consideration. When approved with or without editing, your goals will be added to the student's IEP. You will obtain copies, too, of goals proposed by other team members that are approved and include those in the student's IEP. As coordinator of the IEP process, it will be your responsibility to see that parents/guardians have a complete and accurate copy of their student's IEP when the meeting is concluded.

For a continuing special education student, you will be presenting information on student progress relative to his/her IEP goals, including the sharing of on-going data regarding performance. IEP goals will be revised, as necessary, and you will likely be proposing new goals when previous ones are met. Other school and district-based members of the IEP team will also be sharing progress data, updating or rewriting goals. Again, the special education teacher will be responsible for getting all pertinent documents presented, explained, and signed at the IEP meeting and placed in the student's file.

c. On a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being low, how involved are the other required team members in the IEP meeting?

TIPS: Think across all of the IEP meetings you attend in a year's time. Think about those who not only attended the meetings, but also those who are actively involved in the process. How involved in the evaluation and determination of eligibility are others, is their input solicited for PLAAFPs, goals and classroom modifications, accommodations, and/or services at IEP meetings?

d. How do you coordinate the efforts and services of the IEP team?

TIPS: Do you have team meetings at your school on a regular basis? If so, specify how frequently they occur, whether or not they are structured, have agenda, are work sessions, have assignments, etc. Does your school have early out times so that staff can collaborate? Or do you and your team members keep in touch through e-mail, voice mail, memos, text messages etc. because of assignments across schools? Do you have assistance in keeping student files up-to-date with data, therapy notes, assessments and the like or do you have to make certain that everyone serving a student gets information into his/her file?

e. Describe three steps you would follow 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 teacher 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 special educator's first task would be to obtain a copy from the sending school. This can be time consuming, so if the teacher can gain confirmation of the student's enrollment in special education from the sending school or teacher, s/he can meet with the

parents/guardians regarding the services that the student received. Furthermore, s/he can develop a tentative schedule of instruction for the student based on his/her previous service plan, conduct assessments for placement, identify additional assessments needed, if any; identify resources needed to meet the requirements of the existing IEP, gather necessary equipment and materials, meet with other IEP team members, and implement the IEP as promptly as possible.

Note: Clearly document in the student's special education file the date they enrolled in your school (received the file) and identify the district, city, and state of the student's previous educational placement.

f. How do you inform general educators and related service providers of their responsibilities regarding IEP implementation?

TIPS: Individuals with responsibilities for IEP implementation should be present at the IEP meeting when general classroom and related service provisions are discussed. In the event that some IEP team members were unable to participate at the IEP meeting, the special educator can meet individually with each team member absent from the meeting, can discuss the responsibilities at a special education team meeting, can notify the members absent from the IEP through e-mails, memos, voice mail, etc. If anyone not attending the IEP meeting is unable to meet the responsibilities set forth at the IEP meeting, another IEP meeting will need to be held to solve those difficulties. 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. UPASS 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: You may want to look first at the age and grade level of the student to determine for which U-PASS assessments s/he will be eligible for during the school year. Next, one must consider the nature of the student's program and whether it is basically an academic or a functional program. Most special education students are in academically based programs even though they may be working below grade level in some areas. Third, you will want to consider what if any testing accommodations will be used for the student taking the general U-PASS assessments in core curriculum areas. The accommodations must match those used with the student in the general curriculum and classroom and should be set forth in his/her IEP. Accommodations are verified by checking against those allowed in the U-PASS testing program, especially the specific subtests. For example, reading directions aloud to students might be ok in some math subtests but not in any reading subtests. Since time of day may be important as well as location and familiarity of the tester to the student, you should consider who will be administering the test to the student, where, and when.

b. Describe three things you do when statewide tests (CRT's and others) are administered.

TIPS: Many special educators help their students brush up on test-taking skills, such as reading through a section of questions and answering the most familiar ones first. Educators

may give their students experience with the types of question formats by administering practice tests. Special educators may reassure students that they will be tested in small groups and can discuss each student's accommodations, if any, that they will be allowed to use. Many schools focus on or provide a nutritious breakfast to students taking tests as well as encouraging plenty of rest in the days ahead of testing.

c. Describe two ways in which you have utilized data provided by U-PASS testing results.

TIPS: As a special educator, you may have used results from U-PASS testing to pinpoint individual student achievement with respect to Utah's core curriculum goals. These scores will aid you in identifying areas to probe further for learning problems as well as to celebrate a student's strengths. By looking at your students as a whole group and then by subgroups, you may have used U-PASS data to target specific areas of the core where students seem to be experiencing more difficulties so they can be addressed. A look at the whole group will also indicate in which areas students seem to be generally on-track or performing better than anticipated.

d. What are three ways students with disabilities can participate in U-PASS testing programs?

TIPS: Currently, students with disabilities can participate in U-PASS testing programs without accommodations, with accommodations, or in the Utah Alternate Assessment (UAA) programs.

6. Access to the General Curriculum

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 student receives depends upon the IEP goals that have been written to address the student's educational needs. The variety, breadth, and depth of the goals help the IEP team determine 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: Special education placement is made on the basis of the student's IEP goals and the setting(s) in which they 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 and the team ensure each student with disabilities participates with non-disabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate.

TIPS: As a special educator, you may use a variety of ways to keep students working with their non-disabled peers. In some schools, general and special educators co-teach certain classes, special education or related service pullout may be restricted to just the core areas in which the student has demonstrated difficulties, paraeducators or peer tutors may be used to provide extra support to student with disabilities in general classes and general and special educators may collaborate on teaching methods or techniques to keep students with disabilities in the general classroom. Computer software, audio texts, and pre-teaching techniques often help the student with a disability stay up with his/her general education class.

7. Paraeducators

a. How are paraeducators trained when working in your program?

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 paraprofessionals when they are assigned to your program?

TIPS: Describe who provides supervision of the paraeducators assigned to your program. If you are the main supervisor, please describe when and what you do when supervising paraeducators. Do you conduct observations of their work, use a checklist, or rating system in evaluating their work? Do you provide verbal and/or written feedback to them based on your observations? How is corrective feedback given?

8. Student Success

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

TIPS: If your school has reading, math, writing, science, behavioral, and/or other goals for all students, discuss what those are, what data were used to identify them, how they were selected, and by whom.

b. How do these activities (goals) include provisions for students with disabilities?

TIPS: Do the special education students at your school participate in activities related to the school's goals in their general education classrooms, your classroom, in after school programs, out of school? Are the goals the same for them or modified in some ways? How is progress toward these school-wide goals being measured? How are student efforts being recognized?

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

TIPS: If you set annual goals for improving your special education program, discuss these. Are these goals developed cooperatively with others at your school (e.g., colleagues in general and special education, school administrator(s), students, parents/guardians, related service providers, etc)? How are you measuring goal attainment?

9. Personnel Development/CSPD

a. How are professional development training need determined in your school or LEA?

TIPS: It is likely that professional development activities are determined both at the district and school level. Sometimes training needs are related to Utah State Office of Education mandates such as updated special education rules or highly qualified teacher status. Sometimes educators identify their own training needs or interests and seek out conferences and workshops offering appropriate training. Similarly, school faculties often select areas of focus such as math, reading, or science and then identify training needs in those areas. Training may be provided on-site or at specific workshops and conferences. These training activities may be on-going during a school year or more, or may be one-time occurrences.

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

TIPS: You may want to separate out major training events by your school and by the district and then describe the groups of people (e.g., general educators, special educators, related servers, paraeducators, etc.) who are involved.

c. What professional development activities are provided for you in your school or LEA?

TIPS: Be prepared to identify some professional development activities in which you have participated in as a special educator during the past 2-3 years. These may include regularly scheduled meetings of preschool teams to learn new programs, techniques, review legal issues, etc.

10. Student Progress

a. How often are parents give reports on their student's progress on IEP goals? What does the report include?

TIPS: Parents/guardians of special education students are entitled to reports of their students' progress on IEP goals as often as parents/guardians of non-disabled students receive reports of their students' progress in general education. Describe how often reporting periods occur in your school and what you include in the report to parents/guardians.

b. What are three things you do if a student isn't making sufficient progress to achieve his/her IEP goals by the end of the IEP year?

TIPS: Hopefully, you will not wait until the end of the IEP year to take action if a student is not making adequate progress toward meeting IEP goals. You can look at the student's placement in the instructional program in question, to see if s/he is appropriately placed. If so, you may want to look at the student's motivation to see what sort of effort is being put forth. If motivation is an issue, you could try a reinforcement program to get the student going. You can also look at the instructional program you are using to see if it has clearly delineated teaching strategies and adequate opportunities for practice. If not, you may need to supplement the program, provide re-teaching, or extra practice time. If your efforts to improve the instructional program don't lead to student success, you may need to consult others (e.g., the student's parents/guardians, a reading or math consultant in the district, a behavior specialist, or a specialized team of individuals) to give you some assistance. In some instances, it may be necessary for to reconvene the IEP team to make adjustments to the student's IEP goal that is of concern.

11. LRBI/Discipline and Safe Schools 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 be proactive when a student is known to have behavior problems and conduct and implement a FuBA/BIP prior to disciplinary actions result in a change to 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 that resulted in either more than 10 days of removal (change of placement) or a safe school violation and subsequently a district hearing. 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. The manifestation determination must be completed by the student's IEP team within 10 school days of the aforementioned situations.

c. What is your involvement in the IDEA disciplinary procedures for students with disabilities?

TIPS: Hopefully, you are at least informed when one of your students with disabilities is suspended from school. In many schools, administrators rely on special education staff to help navigate the discipline rules that apply to students with disabilities. If any of your students have been removed for more than 10 school days in a year, have you participated in Manifestation Determination meetings, helped identify appropriate alternative settings for students, conducted FBAs and BIPs, helped identify re-entry goals for the student, been given resources to help you continue to serve a student who is being disciplined? If so, these are items to be discussed when answering this question.

12. Transition

a. What are four things you do to facilitate transition planning for students age 16 and up and earlier if appropriate?

TIPS: The special education teacher can make certain that post-secondary goals and transition services are identified by age 16, or earlier if appropriate, through vocational assessments and preference checklists, prevocational units and courses in and out of special education and career planning activities of the school in which the student is enrolled. These data and activities can help the student, parents/guardians and teacher develop meaningful post-secondary goals. These goals may include the completion of specific types of vocational courses while in secondary school, on-the-job experiences or other community-based activities that may be facilitated through the student's secondary school general or special education program. The special educator can get vocational agency personnel involved in the planning, too, so that important linkages are established before the student leaves school.

b. What data and information do you consider during school to post-school transition planning?

TIPS: As mentioned in the previous answer, it is important to have some data from vocational planning assessments which may include aptitudes for certain skills as well as job preferences checklists. Career exploration and job sampling may be part of the secondary coursework at your school or other activities of the guidance and counseling program and results from that can yield useful information. Parents/guardians and student input, student academic performance looking especially at strengths may help the IEP team plan for the student. If the student has or is planning to have a part-time job while attending school, information about the student's performance, likes, and dislikes about the job can provide useful insights as well.

c. What are three things you do to involve adult service agencies such as Vocational Rehabilitation in the secondary transition process?

TIPS: Special educators in secondary settings often conduct a parents/guardians, student and agency fair at which local agency representatives meet with parents/guardians and their students to share basic information about services and answer questions. This helps both parents/guardians and their students and agency personnel meet each other initially and sets the stage for future meetings. With parents/guardians permission, the special educator can invite agency personnel of interest to the parents/guardians and student, to IEP meetings where post-secondary goals will be developed, revised or eliminated depending on the student's age and grade in school or post-school. When an agency representative is invited to a meeting, the teacher can provide some information on the agenda for the meeting so the representative can bring current and relevant information to share.

d. What other agencies might you involve in school to post-school transition planning?

TIPS: Representatives of sheltered employment settings, Division of Services for Persons with Disabilities, representatives of day programs, group homes, and other services

appropriate to meet the student's needs could be invited to transition planning with written prior notice and parental/guardian permission.

13. Extended School Year (ESY)

a. What are two things you consider to determine whether a student is eligible for ESY 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. New teachers may have had training on the rules at their in-state college or university or through a teacher induction program. 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 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. Sometimes, IEP teams in conjunction with other specialized teams within a district make placements in special classrooms, schools, or programs and parents/guardians must be involved with that process as well.

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

TIPS: Parents/guardians are involved in the identification process when their student is evaluated for special education. They have the right to present evidence of their own regarding the student, evidence from individuals with special expertise regarding the student such as a health care provider and help determine what evaluations will be completed with their student. Parents/guardians also assist in the determination of whether their student is a student with a disability. If the student is identified as a special education student, parents/guardians are involved in developing educational and behavioral goals for their student, determining types of services, determining accommodations for general classroom settings, determining the student's type of participation in statewide assessment programs. Parents/guardians are also actively involved in determining the placement of their student for special education services. Parents/guardians are involved in annual IEP meetings for their students where decisions are made about services, goals, and accommodations for the student. For secondary students, parents/guardians are involved in transition meetings, meetings with outside agency personnel and developing postsecondary and vocational goals for their students.

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. Think also about more global areas of training needed in the LEA such as in the area of reading, math, and behavioral programs in which you feel you and your colleagues could benefit from additional training and/or resources.