

MO-CASE Reinvent Special Education Initiative - Specially Designed Instruction

By Dr. Karla Arnold, Director of Innovation and Learning

In the winter of 2013, MO-CASE introduced the Re-inventing Special Education project to the membership. MO-CASE described an urgent need for Missouri educators to look deeply at the nature of special education and its relevance and effectiveness in helping “today’s schools meet current educational challenges.”

At the Fall 2013 Board of Directors meeting the following was determined:

“Our most urgent leadership priority is to ensure that special education is relevant, responsive, and effective in working with our colleagues in meeting the multitude of challenges Missouri schools face today. Achieving this priority requires a new vision for who we are as a profession and how we do our work as special educators.”

At that time, the Board of Directors went further to develop an emerging vision:

“Transformation of our current dual systems of general and special education into a single, unified and coordinated educational system with the capacity and competency to appropriately educate all students, including those with disabilities and other special needs within a community of professional support.”

The Board of Directors then determined the focus of the Reinvent Initiative would be Multi Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS).

MO-CASE is happy to announce we are moving forward with our Reinvent Special Education Initiative. At our June 2021 Board of Directors meeting, we brainstormed four big rocks for our Reinvent focus, and identified one main focus, but with all four being related to each other.

- **Multi Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS):** MO-CASE has done a lot of work on MTSS across the state in the past, and we want to ensure it remains a continued focus.
- **Quality Evaluations:** We believe a high quality comprehensive evaluation gives a strong understanding of how to serve and understand the disability and how it manifests itself.
- **Recruitment and Retention of Special Education Staff:** Missouri faces a critical shortage of special educators. However, special educators must continue

to have the knowledge, skills, and abilities to meet the unique needs of our infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities.

- **Specially Designed Instruction (SDI):** This remains our main focus at this time. MO-CASE has identified the importance of SDI to support the needs and ensure adequate progress for students with disabilities.

So what specifically is SDI?

- SDI is defined in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) as “adapting, as appropriate to the needs of each eligible child under this part, the content, methodology, or delivery of instruction:
 - To address the unique needs of the child that result from the child’s disability; and
 - To ensure access of the child to the general curriculum...”
- SDI can be provided in a variety of domains (i.e. academic, behavioral, social, etc.).
- SDI is often provided by a teacher in a co-taught setting.

Here’s what it is not:

- It is not differentiation (designing for all learners)
- It is not an accommodation (providing a change in how the student obtains information, such as Braille)
- It is not a modification (adjusting the content a student is meant to access)

This is what SDI should look like:

- SDI should adapt as appropriate to the needs of an eligible student, including content, methodology and or delivery of instruction.
- SDI should address the unique needs of a student that result from their disability.
- SDI should ensure access of the student to the general education curriculum so the students can meet educational standards.
- SDI should include specific, research-based instructional practices that, if implemented effectively and with fidelity, will increase the achievement of students with a disability so he/she can meet the educational standards of the public agency. (John O’Connor’s definition)

Along with our new focus, MO-CASE has reinstated the MO-CASE Reinvent Special Education Council. The purpose of the Council is to establish collaborative partnerships with professional organizations and leaders in order to change teacher practice across our state by shifting the focus of special education from regulatory compliance to results driven accountability. Additionally, we value supporting our professional partners on

initiatives they are already working towards. The Council met virtually for the first time on October 21, 2022, and will meet again on January 13, 2023. One final meeting this school year will take place in the spring of 2023.

The MO-CASE Board of Directors spent one full year studying Specially Designed Instruction, along with the other three identified big rocks, and kicked off our focus at the Fall Special Education Administrators conference in September with keynote John L. O'Connor. Additionally, we have planned three SDI webinars presented by Dr. Margaret (Peggy) Weiss, associate professor at George Mason University. Her research focuses on effective special education preparation and co-teaching. One was held on October 14, 2022, and the focus was a global view of SDI. The second webinar will have a co-teaching focus in regards to SDI and will be held on Friday, January 20, 2023. The third webinar will be held on April 14, 2023 with a focus of SDI in self-contained sessions. Registration information will be sent to the membership for the January and April webinars.