Direct and Indirect Services

In Minnesota, children with disabilities who receive special education instruction and related services do so through direct or indirect services. This handout explains the terms.

Federal special education law, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), makes no reference to direct or indirect services, but it does state that the Individualized Education Program (IEP) must include a statement of the special education and related services … to be provided to the child or on behalf of the child... 300.320(a)(4)(i). Minnesota’s recommended IEP form uses the terms “direct instruction and services” and “indirect services.”

The IEP lists goals a child is expected to achieve in one IEP year and any other services the child may need to fully participate in learning. The team then determines how much and what kinds of services are needed.

**Direct instruction and services** are provided directly to a child by a special education teacher or related services professional. Direct service can be provided to an individual child or to a small group of children with similar needs. Direct instruction and services are provided to help a child meet the goals and objectives on the child’s IEP. For example, to address a goal for written language, a special education teacher could provide direct service in written language instruction.

**Indirect services** are not provided directly to a child. Instead, a special education teacher or related service professional provides these services to others who are working directly with a child. Indirect services could include activities such as staff consultation with a regular education teacher on situations resulting from a child's disability, modifying curriculum or environment for a child, observing a child, monitoring a child's progress in a specific area, or monitoring equipment or assistive technology used by a child.

**For both direct and indirect services**, the IEP will state the beginning date, frequency per week or month, minutes per session, location, and anticipated duration of the service. The information is used to calculate the amount of special education service time the child will receive, as well as the amount of time the child will not participate in the general education setting.

When thinking about direct and indirect services, parents might ask and discuss the following questions with others on the IEP team:

- Has my child made adequate progress with the current services?
- Does the amount of direct service time seem adequate to help my child achieve the IEP goals in one IEP year?
- What setting or location will be the most appropriate for providing direct services: a regular education classroom or a special education room?
- If my child will receive direct special education instruction with other children, how many children will be in the group? Do they have similar needs?
- How much indirect service time will be set aside to implement accommodations or modifications? Does the amount seem adequate?
- What will my child miss in the general education setting during the time he or she will be receiving direct services in a special education room?

In summary, direct and indirect services are provided for children in special education to help them accomplish their IEP goals and fully participate in learning.