



For students with more complex needs, the majority of instruction prior to the pandemic may have been delivered in a highly structured and intensely staffed program. As students transition from a home virtual learning environment (or move back and forth between distance and in-person learning), staff will need to consider how to support students as they make these transitions. It is important to consider the balance between supporting learning while also managing the prospective overload in demands and expectations in shifting school environments.

We've identified some critical planning steps, and scaffolds to support the transition back to the classroom that will enable educational teams to support student's complex needs with intention and purpose. The goal is to provide students with access to opportunities to grow and develop in the key and essential areas identified in their individualized education plans. A unified and integrated model for planning and modifying support will help staff achieve that goal for their students.

## Getting Set Up

These three steps set the foundation for the work that will happen on a weekly basis. These steps are completed at the beginning of a classroom planning cycle (e.g. the beginning of the school year) and are adjusted or updated if and when needed (e.g. essential team members change; new students enroll; significant changes occur to students' IEPs).

### Step 1 Build on Your Mindset of Integrated Team Planning

Integrating the needs of learners across domains and specialists is a highly effective practice that is directly aligned to the students' IEPs. This intentional mindset will allow staff to effectively and efficiently plan and implement learning as students transition back to the classroom. In our system, we start the year by establishing priorities specific to the individual program's needs. The team then develops rubrics and works together in self-evaluating and establishing focus areas for the year. Using this process emphasizes the core belief that the learning environment is the responsibility of ALL team members, not just the teacher. This is collective and integrated work.

Check out the [Self-Evaluation of Program Effectiveness](#) ([rubric template](#) and the [sample](#) customized for students with complex communication and access needs). In our programs for students with moderate to severe disabilities, we have identified FIVE priority areas for teams to integrate into their planning and implementation:

- Core academic instruction provided to all students
- Students receive "language input" across the day using the symbols they are learning to use expressively
- All students have access to clearly defined communication strategies and tools
- Students have opportunities for reciprocal interactions
- Within learning activities, materials are adapted for physical and sensory needs

Because Placer County Office of Education uses the Center for Educational Leadership (CEL) "5 Dimensions of Teaching and Learning", we also align our selected priorities within this framework in order to build a shared understanding of what these high-quality instructional targets are for students with more complex needs. The rubric can be customized for whatever priority areas your team is aiming for, and for whatever framework you are using to support the implementation of high-quality instruction.

***The point is to get your teams working towards the same unified outcomes, and thinking about how they can integrate their planning to support the overall shared responsibility to effectively design the classroom learning environment for their students.***

## Step 2

### Identify Each Student's Toolbox

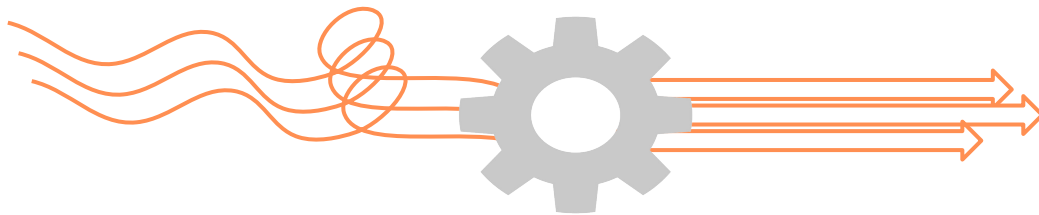
One of the barriers IEP teams may face as students with complex needs transition back to school is whether or not all of the student's equipment was able to be utilized in the virtual environment and if it was, the extent to which it was supported and implemented effectively. Did the student access and use the equipment? Did the student require prompting/supports? Also, there may be situations where new equipment was employed for virtual access and then the question is whether or not that equipment continues to have a functional use in the in-person school setting. IEP teams may use the "[AT Consideration Notetaking Sheet](#)" as a scaffold to help support decision making in the student's education program. Additional training and resources as well as a step-by-step guide for supporting your teams in conducting **AT Consideration** are available on the [Open Access Website](#) or in this one-page resource "[Quickguide for the AT Consideration Process](#)".

## Step 3

### Align Student's Goals to Classroom Activities and Staff Responsible

The final critical step to building an effective foundation for integrated planning is to work together as a team to know and understand the students and their overall learning needs or priorities (e.g. what are the IEP goals that need to be incorporated into a total classroom plan?). The **Classroom Matrix** scaffold is a tool that is designed to support IEP teams as they engage in this process of aligning IEP goals to specially designed programming with the school day. For more information, read the "[Best Practices for Using a Classroom Matrix to Ensure Lesson Plans Address All Learner's Needs](#)".

Check out the [Classroom Matrix](#) scaffold and samples for a [preschool program](#) and [middle school program](#).



## Week by Week

The next three steps describe how teams can plan and work together on a weekly basis in order to share out an integrated learning plan for for the classroom as well as for individual students to ensure all students needs are being met.

## Step 1

### Plan Social Connection and Integrated Curriculum-Based Learning Activities for the Week

The process of completing the Classroom Matrix leads the team towards identifying targeted classroom-wide activities that align with the individual learning needs of each student in the program. We have set two priorities for our programs: to specifically integrate "social connection" activities to support our students Social Emotional needs and foster communication and collaboration. We also plan and incorporate integrated curricular lessons and activities to support student's individual needs and goal areas in group learning activities based on standards. The following are lesson planning tools for each focus area.

Check out [Planning Tool for Social Connection Activities](#) and a [sample](#) for distance learning. Check out [Planning Tool for Integrated Curriculum-Based Activities](#) and a [sample](#) for distance learning.

## Step 2

Update Weekly Classroom Schedule with live links (for those students in hybrid or distance learning)

All of that is summarized in one central plan shared with the family each week when students are in hybrid or distance learning. One **Weekly Calendar** for all providers, students and families. Setting up learning expectations over the course of a week, versus a day, is important for our learners. Students and parents need flexibility as they work to implement and support plans in the home environment (which should happen when students are in school all day as well!).

For more information about setting up these plans when students are in distance learning, read the "[Best Practices for Designing a Weekly Distance Learning Plan for a Classroom](#)". Click here for the [Weekly Calendar template](#) and samples for a [preschool program](#) and [middle school program](#).

## Step 3

Develop Individualized Weekly Plans (for those students in hybrid or distance learning)

*The final step* is to provide a layer of individualization, communicating those student-specific things that parents need to know in order to effectively support or implement a plan.

The **Individualized Weekly Plan** has two parts:

- Participation Plans: this section provides space to give parents any specific instructions for both the "social connection" and "integrated curricular" activities designed for the classroom as a whole, that will allow them to focus on their child's unique or specific needs.
- Learning at Home Plan: this section provides space to identify "learning at home" activities. For every IEP goal that was NOT addressed during the classroom-wide activities, we encourage providers to support the family with suggestions of how they can embed these skills into a normal routine or activity. We want to give families some less structured activity ideas, that can fit into a family's busy day or tie into typical family routines, and also tie into student's interests and what motivates them. These are great plans to share with families even when the student is in in-person learning and encourage families to support skill development across the day.

For more information, read the "[Best Practices for Designing Individualized Weekly Plans at Home](#)".

Check out the Individualized Weekly Plan samples for a [preschool student](#) and a [middle school student](#).

