

The IowaSDI Practice Coach Handbook



August 2026



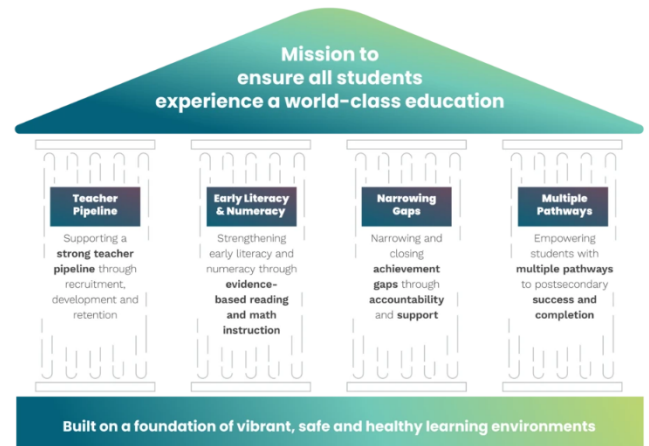
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Introduction and Overview

Iowa's Mission, Vision and Priorities

Iowa's vision for special education extends beyond compliance and is rooted in a results-focused framework; centered on the vision that all students experience a world-class education, empowering them to achieve their full potential. For learners receiving special education services, this means ensuring the provision of high-quality specially designed instruction (SDI) in order to improve educational outcomes that narrow and close achievement gaps for learners with disabilities. Iowa's SDI Framework defines the evidence-based practices for SDI that support this vision and mission, while the differentiated accountability system provides the structure for continuous improvement, accountability and support. Together, these efforts empower each student with the ability to pursue multiple pathways to postsecondary success and completion.



Iowa's SDI Framework serves as the foundation for improving outcomes for learners with disabilities by guiding practitioners (or coachees) through a systematic process of diagnosing for instructional design, designing for instructional delivery and delivering for learner engagement, while engaging in ongoing reflection and refinement. The framework translates the requirements of IDEA into evidence-based and high-leverage practices that lead to improved outcomes for learners with disabilities. Within special education, implementation of high-quality SDI is recognized as a critical driver for improving educational results for students with disabilities. Therefore, SDI Practice Coaching is an essential component of sustainable implementation, rather than a stand-alone professional learning activity. The work of Iowa's SDI Practice Coaches is grounded in building the capacity of coachees to implement high-quality, evidence-based SDI with fidelity. Through collaborative partnerships, Practice Coaches support each coachee to strengthen knowledge, confidence and efficacy with the practices and strategies learned through Iowa's SDI Framework and SDI content-specific professional learning packages.

SPECIALLY DESIGNED INSTRUCTION
IOWASDI
DIAGNOSE • DESIGN • DELIVER • ENGAGE

Iowa has long recognized that sustainable improvement in teaching and learning requires practitioners to receive ongoing support to apply new knowledge, reflect on practice, use data to inform decisions and continuously refine instruction. Recognizing that effective implementation requires more than initial training,

Iowa had previously established the SDI Coaching Skills Task Team through Collaborating for Iowa's Kids (C4K, 2012-2019), a partnership among the Iowa Department of Education, Area Education Agencies (AEA), School District (LEA) partners and other stakeholders to establish a common understanding of effective coaching practices across Iowa. The team examined implementation science, adult learning theory, research on effective coaching, Iowa's Continuous Improvement Model and the Iowa SDI Framework that could be used across instructional initiatives.

This work resulted in the Iowa Coaching Field Guide, first released in 2017, which established a statewide understanding of effective coaching practices. The Iowa Coaching Field Guide emphasised coaching as a collaborative, job-embedded and non-evaluative partnership focused on strengthening instructional practice through intentional planning, implementation support, reflection and continuous improvement rather than evaluation. Through observation, reflective dialogue, actionable feedback and collaborative problem solving, SDI Practice Coaches can partner with coachees to strengthen practices over time.



As Iowa's special education accountability system evolved into IDEA-Differentiated Accountability (IDEA-DA), the emphasis shifted beyond monitoring compliance to strengthening implementation and improving educational results for students with disabilities. IDEA-DA integrates continuous improvement, implementation science and technical assistance to support districts in building sustainable systems that improve educational outcomes for learners with disabilities. Within Iowa's IDEA-DA system, SDI Practice Coaching serves as one of the key implementation supports for improving educational outcomes by bridging new learning with implementation of evidence-based practices and the strengthening of district systems for continuous improvement efforts. Regular collaboration between SDI Practice Coaches and leadership teams are critical to supporting implementation planning, systems improvement, fidelity monitoring and collaborative problem solving. Successful adoption of evidence-based practices depends not only on what practitioners learn, but also on the systems, leadership, coaching and feedback structures that support consistent use over time. (Fixsen et al., 2005) Effective implementation requires intentional support that builds capacity, monitors progress and allows coachees and systems to adapt based on data and ongoing learning.

To strengthen and streamline the support provided to SDI Practice Coaches across the state, the Division of Special Education convened a team of representatives from across the state during the Summer of 2026. This team was tasked with reviewing and updating the existing tools and resources available to support SDI Practice Coaches, while also maintaining the original principles and framework tools that have guided Iowa's work from the beginning.

The SDI Practice Coaching Handbook

The Primary Implementation Resource for Iowa's SDI Practice Coaches

This SDI Practice Coaching Handbook now serves as the primary implementation resource for Iowa's SDI Practice Coaches. This Handbook provides an update to the former Coaching Field Guide and translates the foundational coaching principles established by the Coaching Field Guide, into practical, implementation focused information and resources that support SDI Practice Coaches throughout the coaching process. Together with the SDI Practice Coaching Hub, SDI Practice Coaching Communities of Practice (CoPs) and associated tools and resources, SDI Practice Coaches have access to a variety of supports that can be used to enhance their ability to support coachees and districts that they serve with efforts that influence and lead to lasting systemic change. Specifically, the Handbook is intended to:

- build upon the coaching principles established in the Iowa Coaching Field Guide,
- clarify the evolving role of the SDI Practice Coach within continuous improvement efforts,
- align coaching practices with the Iowa SDI Framework and current IDEA-DA expectations and requirements,
- provide practical coaching tools, templates, protocols and resources that support coaching before, during and after implementation,
- promote consistent coaching practices across districts while allowing flexibility to respond to local context and identified needs,
- strengthen collaborative partnerships that build coachee capacity and support continuous improvement, and
- support implementation efforts that lead to improved instructional practices and positive outcomes for students with disabilities.

In order to provide SDI Practice Coaches with the most current, relevant and practical resources to support their work, this Handbook will continue to be reviewed and updated on a regular basis.



The SDI Practice Coaching Hub

The One-Stop-Shop for SDI Practice Coaching Tools and Resources

The SDI Practice Coaching Hub serves as the central location for coaching tools and resources that support Practice Coaches throughout the implementation process. Throughout this Handbook, you will find references to the necessary tools and resources that are available on the Hub. The small green circle with a white star inside of it () indicates that there are additional coaching tools and resources available on the Hub. The Hub has been intentionally designed to complement and align with this Handbook, providing practical tools that can be used before, during and after coaching interactions. Each resource is intentionally designed to support one or more phases of the coaching cycle: planning, implementation, observation, reflection and continuous improvement. When used together, these tools strengthen coaching partnerships and build coachee capacity, ultimately improving outcomes for students with disabilities.

In order to provide SDI Practice Coaches with the most current, relevant and practical resources to support their work, the Hub will continue to be reviewed and updated on a regular basis. You can visit the SDI Practice Coaching Hub by clicking [this link](#) or by scanning the QR Code.



Voices from the Field



Coaching Wisdom

"You don't have to memorize every tool.

Knowing where to find the right resource is just as important."



Why It Matters

Using the right tools at the right time helps coaches focus on what matters most: supporting coachees and improving student outcomes.



Try This

Visit and Bookmark the SDI Practice Coaching Hub homepage and explore one resource this week.



Remember

The Hub is here to support you through every step of your coaching journey.



Introduction to SDI Practice Coaching

Building Capacity and Improving Outcomes for Learners with Disabilities

Purpose and Value of SDI Practice Coaching

It is important to distinguish SDI Practice Coaching from other forms of practice or instructional based coaching. The primary function of SDI Practice Coaching is to improve the educational outcomes experienced by learners with disabilities. In order to achieve this goal, SDI Practice Coaching is intentionally focused on supporting each practitioner to become confident and competent in providing evidence-based, high-quality SDI, leading to improved outcomes for learners. SDI Practice Coaching is a key component in the continuous improvement process, contributing to the development of systems that sustain and improve the implementation of evidence-based practices for SDI over time. SDI Practice Coaching:

- builds practitioner confidence and professional efficacy,
- supports implementation of evidence-based practices,
- encourages reflective practice and professional problem solving,
- uses multiple sources of evidence to inform decisions,
- promotes continuous improvement, and
- keeps individual learner outcomes and progress at the center of coaching conversations.

SDI Practice Coaching provides the structure and ongoing support necessary to move from new learning to effective implementation. While training sessions introduce new knowledge and practices; SDI Practice Coaching helps coachees implement, refine and sustain those practices across authentic educational settings. Research has consistently demonstrated that training sessions paired with ongoing coaching results in significantly greater implementation of new instructional practices than professional learning alone. Without these opportunities and support in place, new practices are rarely implemented and those that are implemented, are not implemented well, diminishing the ability to create lasting change. (Joyce & Showers, 2002; Knight, 2007)

COMPONENT	IMPACT	CLASSROOM APPLICATION
Presentation of theory	Approx 5%	Very Low 
Demonstration of modeling	Approx 10%	Low 
Practice in simulated setting	Approx 20%	Medium 
Structured and open feedback	Approx 25%	High 
Coaching	Approx 90%	Very High 

Joyce and Showers (2002)

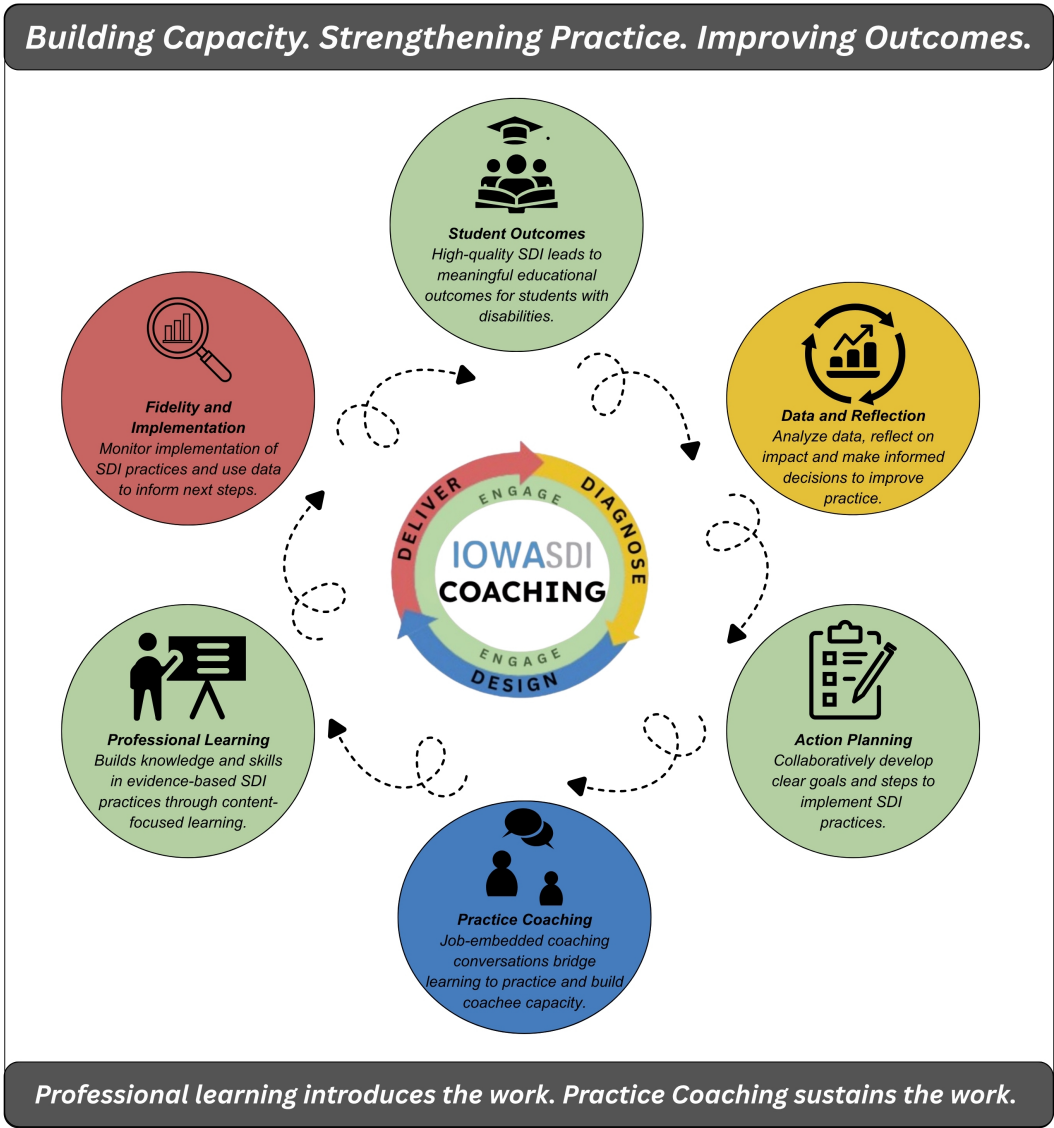
Training Sessions vs. Practice Coaching Sessions	
Provides new knowledge	Implements new knowledge
Introduces new practices	Builds sustainability of new practices
Develops understanding	Develops proficiency and confidence
Occurs in isolated settings	Includes job-embedded settings
Answers "What" and "Why"	Answers "How"

Through on-going and job-embedded support, SDI Practice Coaching facilitates systemic change by supporting coachees to apply new learning, analyze evidence of learner performance, reflect on data and decisions, and identify meaningful next steps to support continued development and growth. SDI Practice Coaching builds practitioner capacity so that high-quality,

evidence-based practices are consistently implemented with fidelity and ultimately lead to increased independence and sustainability over time. Rather than serving as an evaluation process, SDI Practice Coaching is a collaborative partnership focused on continuous growth, problem solving and reflection that leads to improved outcomes for learners with disabilities.



The SDI Practice Coaching image illustrates how professional learning, practice coaching, action planning, fidelity, data and continuous improvement work together to strengthen coachee practice and improve outcomes for students with disabilities. As you read this Handbook, refer back to this image to see how each tool, process and coaching method fits within Iowa's broader implementation framework.



Key Competencies and Beliefs of SDI Practice Coaches

As described in the Iowa Coaching Field Guide (2017), effective coaching is grounded in relationships, trust, collaboration and continuous learning. SDI Practice Coaches are selected based upon the valuable experience and expertise they bring to practice-based coaching and their SDI content area. Effective SDI Practice Coaches demonstrate the following experience, knowledge and skills relevant to their role:

- prior experience in and strong understanding of the SDI content area,
- prior experience in and strong understanding of diagnosing, designing and delivering SDI for learners with disabilities,
- experience partnering with coachees and leadership teams,
- ability to build trusting, collaborative relationships;
- effective communication and facilitation skills,
- commitment to reflection and continuous learning,
- ability to analyze data to guide decisions,
- problem-solving and systems-thinking skills, and
- commitment to improving outcomes for students through collaborative coaching.

Effective coaching is further grounded in a set of shared beliefs about professional growth, adult learning and continuous improvement. These beliefs influence not only what SDI Practice Coaches do, but how they engage with coachees throughout the coaching process. SDI Practice Coaches believe:

- every practitioner is capable of continuous professional growth;
- professional learning is strengthened through reflection, application and feedback;
- productive struggle is a natural and valuable part of learning;
- evidence should guide instructional decisions;
- collaborative partnerships strengthen professional practice; and
- improving coachee practices leads to improved learner outcomes.

These beliefs create coaching relationships characterized by trust, shared responsibility, and a commitment to ongoing learning. As such, SDI Practice Coaching is a non-evaluative support for practitioners that uses a collaborative and strengths-focused approach to building professional capacity and growth over time.



Voices from the Field



Coaching Wisdom

“Your first responsibility isn’t changing instruction – it’s building trust.”



Why It Matters

Trust is the foundation of every successful coaching partnership. When coachees know you are there to learn alongside them, they are more willing to reflect, take risks and refine their practice.



Try This

Start your first conversation by asking:
“What is one instructional success you’ve experienced recently?”



Remember

Relationships first.
Results second.



The SDI Practice Coach Role

SDI Practice Coaches support practitioners to implement newly learned, evidence-based practices from the SDI training into their day-to-day work through the use of various coaching methods, action planning, data-based decision making and implementation strategies. The focus of SDI Practice Coaches is always on improving outcomes for learners with disabilities, which occurs as implementation of the evidence-based practices from the SDI professional learning packages are strengthened. SDI Practice Coaches work and train alongside their coachees throughout years of implementation to help them reflect, problem solve, use data and continuously improve implementation of evidence-based practices. Key responsibilities for SDI Practice Coaches include:

- Providing professional learning support that includes:



- participating in SDI professional learning alongside coachees,
- helping coachees apply newly learned evidence-based practices,
- connecting professional learning to authentic settings for implementation, and
- supporting implementation of content-specific SDI learning.

- Facilitating continuous improvement through activities such as:



- guiding reflective conversations,
- supporting collaborative problem solving,
- assisting coachees in developing meaningful action plans, and
- using implementation data to monitor progress and identify next steps.

- Increasing capacity through the use of effective coaching strategies and methods such as:



- observing and modeling evidence-based practices,
- providing strengths-based, actionable feedback,
- supporting data-based decision making, and
- building coachee confidence and self-efficacy.

- Strengthening systems through:



- collaboration with district leadership teams,
- provision of support for implementation planning,
- monitoring the fidelity of implementation, and
- documentation of coaching interactions that inform continuous improvement efforts.

Supporting implementation is not an isolated event; it is a continuous process of learning, applying, reflecting, refining and sustaining new practices over time. The SDI Practice Coach commits to partnering with coachees and leadership teams across a three-year journey of growth and impact. Sustainable progress and improved outcomes occur when effective practices become the way SDI Practice Coaches routinely work and coachees are supported to develop their ability to analyze challenges, identify solutions and continuously refine their practice. This focus on capacity building allows improvement to become sustainable within classrooms, schools and districts.



What Effective SDI Practice Coaching Is and Is Not

Research on effective coaching suggests that the greatest impact occurs when coaching moves beyond providing answers and instead engages coachees in meaningful thinking, reflection, and professional inquiry. One of the most important roles of an SDI Practice Coach is to support the development of the knowledge, confidence and problem solving skills necessary to continue improving long after formal coaching support has ended. As a result, coaching becomes a collaborative process that develops professional expertise, confidence and continuous improvement rather than simply providing advice or solving immediate problems.

Coaching conversations become more powerful when they encourage coachees to examine evidence, consider multiple perspectives and identify their own next steps for improving instruction. Effective SDI Practice Coaches create open and trusting environments while also encouraging coachees to reflect deeply, examine assumptions and remain focused on improving learner outcomes. SDI Practice Coaches work to build their coachees' agency while balancing the support provided with appropriate challenges.

SDI Practice Coaching is:	SDI Practice Coaching is not:
✓ focused on individual student outcomes and closing achievement gaps, ✓ centered around the Guiding Principles and Critical Features of Iowa's SDI Framework, ✓ data-driven support that uses data sources aligned to the SDI learning to inform decision making, and ✓ provides ongoing continuous improvement support for coachees and district leadership teams.	✗ a one size fits all approach for responding to coachee needs and supporting students, ✗ focused on a specific "program" or "curriculum", ✗ evaluative in nature or used for staff evaluation, or ✗ based on topics or requirements unrelated to the SDI professional learning.



The Hub provides more detailed descriptions of the role, including the IDEA-DA Key Support Roles Tools resource document.

Reflection

As you begin your SDI Practice Coaching work, consider:

- How can I create coaching conversations that encourage reflection rather than simply providing answers?
- In what ways can I support coachees while also promoting independent problem solving?
- How will I keep individual learner outcomes at the center of every coaching conversation?



Continuous Improvement

We learn. We apply. We reflect. We refine.
Stronger instruction. Greater engagement. Meaningful growth. Better outcomes.



SDI Practice Coaching Process

Coaching for Student Outcomes and Coachee Support: Diagnose, Design, Deliver

With the increasing complexity of needs and circumstances that present themselves in schools, the relationship between SDI Practice Coaches and their coachees is more vital than ever. Whether the coach is just beginning in their role, or seasoned in working with their colleagues, the SDI Practice Coaching Process supports all phases, from developing the coaching relationship to refining and revising the SDI Action Plan. This process is organized and operationalized by Critical Features of the SDI Framework and is applicable in any situation where coaching supports are warranted. This process guides SDI Practice Coaches through concrete actions to take as they partner with coachees to Diagnose, Design and Deliver the SDI Action Plan.

DIAGNOSE for Coaching Design

In the Diagnose phase of the SDI Coaching Process, tools and resources aligned to the SDI content learning are utilized to collect and analyze multiple sources of data in order to:



- understand each coachee's level of implementation of the evidence-based practices provided in the SDI package,
- identify areas of strength to leverage, and
- determine areas for growth.

Diagnosing for coaching design is the process of collecting multiple sources of evidence to understand where each coachee is in their implementation of evidence-based practices and to determine the coaching supports that will have the greatest impact. Rather than assuming what a coachee needs, coaches use data, observations and collaborative conversations to identify strengths, prioritize areas for growth and develop individualized action plans.

Coachee Self-Assessments

Self-assessments provide an opportunity for coachees to reflect on their own implementation, confidence and professional learning needs. They offer valuable insight into how coachees perceive their strengths and challenges and create a starting point for collaborative coaching conversations. During the diagnose phase, coaches use self-assessment data to:

- understand the coachee's perspective,
- identify areas of confidence and uncertainty,
- compare self-perception with other sources of evidence, and
- establish shared coaching priorities.

Self-assessments should initiate reflection rather than serve as an evaluation. Self-assessments are tailored to content-specific content. To learn more, please review the SDI Professional Learning Package information at the end of this handbook.

Framework Implementation Tool (FIT)

The FIT provides structured data about how consistently evidence-based practices and the SDI Framework's Critical Features are being implemented. Rather than focusing on isolated behaviors, the FIT helps SDI Practice Coaches examine patterns of implementation across the instructional framework. The FIT helps shift coaching conversations from opinion to evidence. FIT data is used to:

- identify implementation strengths and barriers,
- determine the level of implementation of targeted practices, and
- prioritize coaching efforts based on implementation data.



Each practitioner participating in one of the SDI Professional Learning Packages is to complete the FIT twice per year. Resources and tools on the Hub include:



- FIT User Guide
- FIT Overview and Recorded Webinar
- FIT Data Analysis Routine
- Guide for Removing Barriers Based on FIT Data
- Access to Reporting User Role

Fidelity Checks and Observations

Fidelity and observation data helps determine whether practices are being implemented as intended. Before changing practices, coaches first determine whether existing practices are being delivered with fidelity. Fidelity checks ensure coaching addresses implementation before recommending new practices. Fidelity checks and observations are tailored to content-specific content. Fidelity checks and observations are used to:

- verify consistency of implementation,
- identify components that may be missing,
- determine whether outcomes are related to implementation or intervention design, and
- guide coaching toward improving quality and consistency.

Fidelity checks and observations should be completed on a regular basis, embedded into the SDI Coaching Process to support the development and on-going refinement of SDI Action Plans. When new practices have been introduced in training sessions and practitioners have received coaching and had time to implement the new practice, fidelity checks and observations should be completed to help inform if additional supports are needed in the SDI Action Plan. Once a baseline is established, on-going fidelity checks and observations should be completed to monitor progress and determine when full implementation is accomplished. To learn more, please review the content-specific information at the end of this handbook.

IEP Reviews and Checklists

Reviewing IEPs and supporting documentation helps coaches understand the expectations established for individual learners. SDI Practice Coaches examine whether SDI, accommodations, goals and progress monitoring are aligned and reflected in practice. The emphasis is on ensuring decisions support meaningful learner progress. IEP reviews are used to:

- ensure planning aligns with identified learner needs,
- identify opportunities to strengthen alignment between planning and practice, and
- support coachees in translating IEP requirements into day to day practices.

IEP Reviews and Checklists serve as another data source to include in the SDI Coaching Process, supporting the development and on-going refinement of SDI Action Plans. These should be completed in tandem with fidelity checks and observations. IEP reviews and checklists are tailored to content-specific content. To learn more, please review the SDI Professional Learning Package information at the end of this handbook.

Student-Level Data

Student outcome data provides evidence of how practices are impacting learning. SDI Practice Coaches analyze multiple sources of student data with their coachee and leadership teams, including progress monitoring, formative assessment, work samples and observational data, to determine whether current practices are producing the intended outcomes. Ultimately, student data serves as a key measure of whether practice changes are making a meaningful difference. Student-level data is used to:

- identify trends in learner performance,
- evaluate the effectiveness of practices,
- determine whether coaching efforts are leading to improved student outcomes, and
- adjust coaching priorities based on learner progress.



Student-level data serves as another source to include in the SDI Coaching Process, supporting the development and on-going refinement of SDI Action Plans. These should also be completed in tandem with fidelity checks and observations. Student-level data measures are tailored to content-specific content. To learn more, please review the content-specific information at the end of this handbook.

Bringing It All Together

Effective coaching diagnosis relies on multiple sources of evidence rather than any single data point. By combining coachee self-reflection, implementation data, fidelity measures, IEP reviews and student outcomes, coaches develop a comprehensive understanding of current practice. This holistic picture allows SDI Practice Coaches to identify the highest-leverage coaching priorities and collaboratively design supports that strengthen coachee implementation and improve outcomes for learners with disabilities.

DESIGN for Coaching Delivery

The coaching plan developed during the Design phase includes:



- SMART goals aligned to the evidence-based practices identified in the SDI package,
- evidence-based coaching strategies and methods that support implementation of targeted practices,
- action planning that identifies specific next steps, responsibilities, timelines and evidence of progress documented within the SDI Action Plan.

The Design phase of the SDI Coaching Process transforms information gathered during the Diagnose phase into a focused coaching plan. During this phase, the SDI Practice Coach and coachee work collaboratively to analyze implementation data, identify priorities and develop a coaching plan that supports the implementation of evidenced-based practices. Rather than prescribing solutions, the coach and coachee engage in a partnership that emphasizes shared decision-making, reflection and continuous improvement. Practice Profiles are content-specific and provide detailed guidance aligned to the evidence-based practices within each SDI professional learning package.

Practice Profiles

Practice Profiles are foundational tools within the SDI Coaching Process. They describe what high-quality implementation looks like by identifying the essential functions of a practice across varying levels of implementation—from unacceptable variation to ideal implementation. Practice Profiles establish a common language between the SDI Practice Coach and coachee, allowing both individuals to focus coaching conversations on observable practices rather than subjective opinions. Practice Profiles are used to:

- clarify expectations for implementation,
- compare current practice to the desired level of implementation,
- identify specific instructional behaviors for coaching,
- break complex instructional practices into manageable coaching goals, and
- monitor growth over time using consistent implementation criteria.

Coaches should constantly reference the appropriate Practice Profile when setting goals, planning coaching supports and providing feedback. To learn more about these, please review the content-specific information at the end of this handbook.

Coaching Action Plan Guide

The Coaching Action Plan Guide provides suggested questions for beginning/developing SDI Practice Coaches, and more advanced questions for those with established relationships who are operationalizing and optimizing their skills. This document is not a script, but a planning support for existing practice. Each section



of Diagnose, Design and Deliver includes the collection of evidence, the dialogue and conversation to use that evidence, and the resulting potential coaching actions. The Coaching Action Planning Guide is used to:

- identify potential coaching questions that align to support the coachee with each step of Diagnose for Instructional Design, Design for Instructional Delivery, Deliver for Learner Engagement, and
- identify potential action steps that align to support the coachee with each step of Diagnose for Instructional Design, Design for Instructional Delivery, Deliver for Learner Engagement.



In summary, the Coaching Action Planning Guide is a helpful tool found on the Hub that guides consideration of potential supports and actions for coachees working through implementation of each Key Component of the SDI Framework. This tool can be used and referred to throughout the coaching process.

SMART Goals

SMART goals provide the structure for focused and measurable coaching. Rather than setting broad intentions such as "improve instruction," SMART goals identify exactly which practice will improve, how success will be measured, and when progress will be reviewed. Well-developed goals ensure coaching remains focused, intentional and aligned to improved implementation fidelity. A high-quality SMART goal is:

Specific – identifies the precise instructional practice to improve,

Measurable – includes observable evidence or implementation data,

Achievable – is realistic given the educator's current implementation level,

Relevant – aligns directly to evidence-based SDI practices and student learning needs,

Time-Bound – establishes a clear timeline for implementation and review.

SDI Practice Coaches use SMART goals to:

- prioritize one or two high-impact instructional practices,
- align coaching to identified implementation needs,
- establish shared expectations between coach and coachee,
- monitor progress using implementation evidence, and
- celebrate incremental growth while adjusting coaching supports as needed.

An effective SMART goal remains focused on educator practice rather than student outcomes alone. Student data informs the goal, but the coaching target is the instructional behavior that will improve student learning. For example:

"Over the next 6 weeks, the teacher will use the strategy of explicit modeling in the SDI instructional routine during daily literacy instruction. This goal is met when the fidelity check for this strategy is at 80%"



The SMART goal framework is used for every goal written into the SDI Action Plan. A SMART goals overview is a tool found on the Hub that provides direction for the coaching cycle by connecting implementation data, specific evidence-based practices and measurable growth.

Effective Coaching Methods

Effective coaching requires selecting the coaching methods that best match the coachee's goals, current implementation level and stage of learning. No single coaching method is appropriate for every situation. Instead, SDI Practice Coaches intentionally combine multiple methods throughout a coaching cycle to build knowledge, develop skills, strengthen implementation and sustain instructional change. The SDI Practice Coaching Process identifies nine evidence-based coaching methods.

1. Work Session - An informal collaborative working session focused on building shared understanding around a specific instructional issue. Work Sessions serve as the foundation for most coaching cycles because they promote collaborative problem solving. Examples include:



- analyzing student data,
- reviewing Practice Profiles and developing action plans, and
- examining lesson plans and planning instructional supports.

2. Workshop/Training - A structured learning experience designed to increase educator knowledge around a specific topic. Examples include:

- facilitating team professional learning, and
- introducing new instructional resources.

3. Observation - The coach observes classroom instruction to collect objective evidence regarding implementation of targeted practices. Observation data focuses on:

- observable instructional behaviors,
- student engagement, and
- fidelity of implementation and evidence connected to Practice Profiles.

4. Feedback - Following an observation, the coach facilitates reflective conversations using objective evidence to reinforce strengths and identify opportunities for growth. Effective feedback is:

- timely, specific, descriptive;
- connected to agreed-upon coaching goals, and
- focused on observable practices.

5. Modeling - The coach demonstrates instructional practices while the educator observes implementation. Modeling allows educators to:

- see effective practices in action and observe instructional routines,
- notice teacher language and decision-making, and
- ask questions during debriefing.

6. Co-Teaching - The coach and educator jointly plan, teach, and reflect on instruction while sharing responsibility for student learning. Co-teaching provides opportunities for:

- guided practice and immediate feedback,
- shared instructional decision making, and
- gradual release of responsibility.

7. Guided Inter-Visitation - The coach and educator observe instruction in another classroom with a predetermined observation focus. Following the observation, participants:

- compare notes, reflect on observed practices and discuss potential applications, and
- identify implementation ideas.

8. Sharing Resources - The coach provides instructional materials, assessment tools, curriculum supports, research summaries, or planning templates that support implementation. Resources supplement coaching but should not replace active coaching interactions. Examples could include:

- sharing information from statewide SDI CoP, and
- providing support to implement tools and resources from the SDI professional learning.

9. Relationship-Building - Relationship-building occurs throughout every coaching cycle and serves as the foundation for effective coaching. Activities include:

- active listening, establishing trust, celebrating progress; and
- clarifying expectations, identifying educator needs and supporting reflection.

Strong coaching relationships increase educator engagement, trust and willingness to implement new practices.



Selecting Primary and Secondary Coaching Methods

Each coaching session should include implementation of effective coaching method(s) identified through the SDI Action Plan. Coaching methods are selected based on the purpose of the coaching action. Because coaching is responsive rather than scripted, the identified coaching methods may change throughout the coaching cycle as implementation progresses. The table on the next page helps make connections across coaching methods.

Coaching Goal	Primary Method	Possible Secondary Methods
Analyze student data	Work Session	Feedback, Sharing Resources
Introduce new instructional practice	Work Session	Workshop/Training, Modeling
Observe implementation	Observation	Feedback
Demonstrate instructional routine	Modeling	Observation, Feedback
Practice implementation together	Co-Teaching	Feedback
Observe exemplary instruction	Guided Inter-Visitation	Work Session
Provide instructional tools	Sharing Resources	Work Session
Establish coaching partnership	Relationship-Building	Work Session



The Hub includes the Effective Coaching Methods Operational Definitions resource document, which can be used to help build understanding and application of various effective coaching methods. This resource should be referred to throughout the coaching process and as questions arise. Additionally, a “Coaching Sentence Stems” resource is also available to support SDI Practice Coaches as they begin to implement new strategies.

Bringing It All Together

The Design phase creates the roadmap for successful coaching implementation. By combining implementation data, Practice Profiles, SMART goals, coaching methods and action planning, SDI Practice Coaches establish a clear pathway for improving instructional practice.

Effective coaching design is intentional rather than reactive. Coaches thoughtfully select goals that are achievable, prioritize coaching methods that match educator needs and document agreed-upon next steps within the SDI Action Plan. Throughout this process, coaching remains collaborative, strengths-based and grounded in evidence-based instructional practices.

When thoughtfully designed, coaching becomes a continuous cycle of planning, implementation, reflection and refinement. Each coaching interaction builds upon previous learning, helping educators strengthen implementation fidelity while ultimately improving outcomes for students receiving Specially Designed Instruction. As coaches develop coaching plans, they should consider the following questions:

- Does the SMART goal align directly with evidence-based SDI practices and the identified implementation needs?
- Have Practice Profiles been used to identify the specific instructional behaviors that will be the focus of coaching?



- Are the selected coaching methods appropriate for the educator's current level of implementation and learning needs?
- Does the Action Plan clearly identify responsibilities, timelines and evidence of progress?
- Have opportunities for observation, reflection and feedback been intentionally built into the coaching cycle?
- Is the coaching plan flexible enough to be adjusted as implementation data and educator needs evolve?

Thoughtful planning during the Design phase increases the likelihood that coaching will be purposeful, sustainable and focused on continuous improvement rather than isolated coaching events.

DELIVER for Coachee Engagement

In the Deliver phase of the SDI Coaching Process, implementation of high-leverage, evidence-based coaching support is focused on in order to:



- support fidelity implementation of the evidence-based practices from the SDI learning,
- monitor coachee progress on the SDI Action Plan, FIT, Fidelity Checks; and
- revise, refine and make adjustments to support continuous improvement and growth.

This phase of coaching focuses on active implementation of the SDI action plan. Progress monitoring the SDI action plan is an on-going process. The majority of coaching conversations should include use of student, classroom and/or system data. Multiple sources of data should be reviewed and analyzed to inform decision making throughout the process. Similar to how progress monitoring is conducted for students, progress monitoring for coaching always starts with implementation fidelity of the plan.

Coaching Log

The Coaching Log is a collaborative tool that is shared between the SDI Practice Coach and coachee. The Coaching Log provides teams a consistent way to document and share actions and next steps as they work together through the SDI Coaching Process. SDI Practice Coaches and coachees, together, use the Coaching Log to:

- help the SDI Practice Coach, coachee and team keep organized and focused on actions that they will be implementing between coaching sessions,
- assist with other team members who are coaching with the coachee/leadership to be knowledgeable about actions being implemented, and
- use as a way to communicate and/or self-reflect on actions that have been done and identify potential next steps.

Beginning with the 2026/2027 school year, Coaching Logs will be kept using the new ACHIEVE tool. While it will be required for some coaches to record every coaching session in the Coaching Log, it is highly recommended for all SDI Practice Coaches. Resources and tools on the Hub include:



- Coaching Log User Guide,
- Coaching Log Overview and Recorded Webinar, and
- Reporting Role Access Process

Coach Self-Assessment (CSA)

The Coach Self-Assessment (CSA) provides structured data reflecting the coach's ability to support implementation of the SDI Framework's Critical Features and evidence-based practices. Rather than focusing on isolated practices, the CSA helps coaches examine patterns of implementation across coaching settings. The CSA helps shift coaching practices from opinion to evidence. SDI Practice Coaches use CSA data to:



- identify their areas of strength and barriers related to coaching the SDI Framework's Critical Features and evidence-based practices, and
- prioritize their professional learning and growth opportunities based on data.

Each SDI Practice Coach supporting implementation of one of the professional learning packages is required to complete CSA twice per year. Resources and tools on the Hub include:

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 - CSA User Guide
 - CSA Overview and Demo Recorded Webinar
 - CSA Data Analysis Routine
- Guide for Removing Barriers based on CSA data
 - Reporting Role Access Process

SDI Practice Coach Calibration

The SDI Practice Coach Calibration process provides structured data through intentional self-reflection and observation of the SDI Practice Coach's ability to implement effective coaching strategies and skills. The Coach Self-Reflection (CSR) tool is used to support the coach through guided self-reflection as a part of this process. The CSR tool should be completed around the same time a coaching observation is completed using the SDI Practice Coaching Observation Tool (COT). The CSR and COT are intentionally aligned to support further reflection and professional development of the coach. Following the completion of the CSR and COT, a debrief session is held between the coach and observer. During this session, the coach and observer focus on identified strengths and develop actions to support the coach's continued professional development. The Department's Division of Special Education staff will serve as the observer in this process.

While the CSA focuses on the SDI Practice Coach's content-specific knowledge, this Coaching Calibration process focuses on the strategies and skills any practice coach must develop to effectively support their coachees. Similar to the CSA, the process also focuses on patterns of implementation across coaching settings rather than focusing on isolated coaching behaviors. The process is intended to promote each SDI Practice Coach's reflection and growth as they work to support their coachees. SDI Practice Coaches use the Coaching Calibration data to:

- examine their level of implementation of effective coaching strategies,
- intentionally reflect upon coaching practices to identify areas of strength and professional growth, and
- identify next steps and action items to continue in their professional development.

Each SDI Practice Coach supporting implementation of one of the professional learning packages is required to complete the Coaching Calibration Process three times per year. Resources and tools on the Hub include:

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 - CSR Template
 - Overview and Instructions for Use

Additionally, a Coaching Conversation Analysis Tool is available as an optional tool that a coach may choose to use to help deepen their self-reflection.

Bringing It All Together

With regular review of these data sources throughout implementation, the SDI Practice Coach and coachee are able to make adjustments to the SDI Action Plan to support further progress, resulting in an effective and responsive continuous improvement cycle. The SDI Practice Coach may also provide actionable data and updates reflecting on-going progress, strengths, barriers and support needs to support the leadership team's decision making and action planning at the system level.

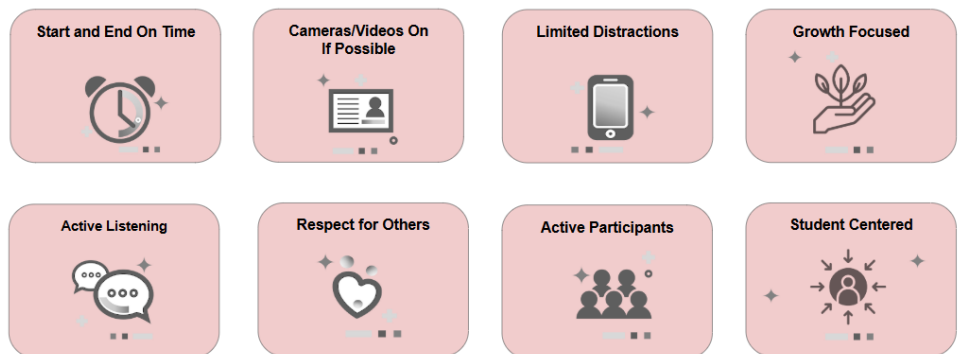
Additional Resources and Supports for SDI Practice Coaches

SDI Practice Coach CoP

Each month, a Community of Practice (CoP), specifically for SDI Practice Coaches, tailored to each SDI content area is held. Each CoP is designed to provide statewide updates related to the SDI coaching materials and content, support accessing and using package materials, offer opportunities to share ideas and strategies that promote problem solving and growth, receive information and updates that are shared back to the local team and leadership, as well as engage in an ongoing feedback and continuous improvement process that informs and supports statewide development needs.

Examples of activities that occur in CoPs include: introduction of new content and/or tools, application of coaching strategies to SDI content, data review and analysis, sharing success stories and strategies, brainstorming/problem solving identified barriers, small group discussion and reflection, large group discussion and reflection, sharing statewide information and updates, and discussion around problems of practice/case studies.

SDI Practice Coach CoP Norms and Values



SDI Practice Coach Kick-Off

The Statewide SDI Practice Coach Kick-Off is held at the beginning of each school year and provides an opportunity for new and returning SDI Practice Coaches to network, collaborate and connect with others from across the state. The Kick-Off is required for all SDI Practice Coaches and is designed to: develop understanding of key responsibilities and requirements of their role, receive timely updates and information, familiarize with, and begin to apply effective coaching methods within the context of the SDI Framework, and familiarize with the various tools, resources and references that can be used to support SDI Practice Coaching work.

SDI Professional Learning

SDI Practice Coaches are most effective when they participate in the SDI training alongside the coachees they support. This enhances the SDI Practice Coach's ability to make connections to job-embedded practice and helps them stay up to date with current learning. While new SDI Practice Coaches are required to attend these sessions, it is highly recommended and encouraged that all SDI Practice Coaches attend these sessions alongside the schools they support. A veteran that has already completed the full training would not necessarily be required to do so. Either way, it is imperative that each SDI Practice Coach is aware of the scope and sequence of learning being provided and that coaching efforts are aligned with training session content.



The SDI Professional Learning Packages

The SDI Professional Learning Packages have been developed as a part of Iowa's initiative to develop a comprehensive system of professional development and support focused on improving outcomes for learners with an Individualized Education Program (IEP). These packages are designed to ensure participants receive the learning and coaching support needed to implement new practices and improve educational outcomes for learners with disabilities. Each package provides aligned training materials, coaching resources, tools and processes for implementation and resources to facilitate data-driven decision making and continuous improvement efforts.

The development of each package has been informed by evaluation results completed by Measurement Inc. as a part of the state's professional development grant (SPDG) focused on developing a comprehensive system of professional development for special education. In addition, statewide collaborative efforts between the Department, AEAs, and District officials that lead to development of the SDI Framework further informed the development of each package. The development and refinement of content has been an ongoing process that includes a team, or Community of Practice (CoP), of content experts representative of the DE, AEA, and LEAs. Each package is designed with evidence-based professional learning strategies and principles of adult learning in order to scale up implementation of high-leverage and evidence-based practices.

As of Summer 2026, four established packages are available for full implementation in the following SDI content areas: Literacy, Significant Cognitive Disabilities Literacy, Preschool and Secondary Transition. Packages for Mathematics and Social Emotional Behavior are currently being piloted.

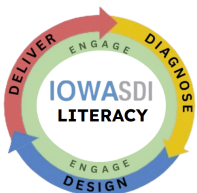
Practice Coach Resources

- Coaching Guides
- Teacher Action Plans
- Coaching Logs
- Self-Assessment Tools
- Fidelity Checks
- Observation Tools



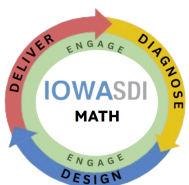
Tools to support coaching before, during and after implementation.

Literacy SDI



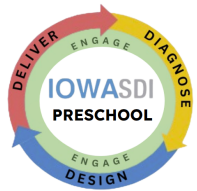
The SDI Literacy course is designed to improve literacy outcomes for students with disabilities by building coachee capacity to provide high-quality SDI consistent with the IDEA definition of SDI (34 CFR §300.39). The course supports practitioners in adapting the content, methodology or delivery of instruction to address a student's unique needs and ensure access to the general education curriculum. Participants will learn how to design and deliver SDI that is appropriately ambitious, individualized, and reasonably calculated to enable progress in light of a student's circumstances using Iowa's SDI Framework. Resources and tools are currently in development and will be added to the Hub soon!

Mathematics SDI



The 2026-2027 professional learning pilot is designed to build practitioners' capacity to provide high-quality, standards-based SDI. Participants will develop a shared understanding of Iowa's SDI Framework and learn to use multiple sources of student data to identify barriers to grade-level mathematics. The professional learning will focus on designing and delivering rigorous, inclusive mathematics instruction aligned to the Iowa Academic Standards for Mathematics through the use of high-leverage, evidence-based instructional practices and mathematical progressions. Resources and tools are currently in development and will be added to the Hub soon!

Preschool SDI

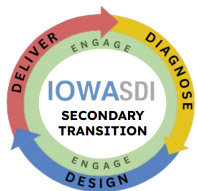


This interactive preschool package equips practitioners with the knowledge, tools and supports needed to implement high-quality SDI for all learners, including children with IEPs. Grounded in Iowa's SDI Framework and the DEC Recommended Practices, participants examine the three key components and nine critical features of effective SDI while exploring practical strategies that can be embedded into everyday preschool routines and instruction. Through hands-on learning, coaching supports, and implementation tools, participants strengthen inclusive practices, increase program fidelity, and improve outcomes for young children. Resources and tools on the Hub include:



- Coaching Guides
- Practice Profiles, Observation Tools, Fidelity Checks
- Teacher Self- Assessment Tool to guide coaching

Secondary Transition SDI

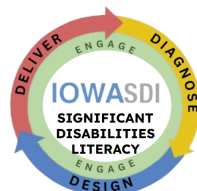


Secondary Transition SDI is focused on supporting college and career readiness for students with IEPs. Through this package participants will strengthen their knowledge and ability to implement Iowa's SDI Framework as it relates to secondary transition planning and services. Through these modules, coachees and coaches alike will strengthen their practices around each Key Component and Critical Feature of the SDI Framework with the ultimate goal of improving the post-school living, learning, and working outcomes for the students they serve. Resources and tools on the Hub include:



- Coaching Guides
- Practice Profiles, Fidelity Checks, Observation Tools
- Practice Coach Implementation Planning Tool
- FIT and CSA Data Analysis Tools

Significant Disabilities Literacy SDI



Specially Designed Literacy Instruction for Students with Significant Disabilities is designed to provide practitioners the knowledge and skills to expand language, communication and comprehensive literacy skills for students with the most complex needs and support IEP teams in developing their interprofessional collaboration knowledge and skills in order to diagnose, design, and deliver high quality specially designed language, communication and literacy instruction. Resources and tools on the Hub include:



- Coaching Guides
- Project Core Program Implementation Guide for Coaches and Facilitators
- Iowa Literacy Observation Tool (ILOT)

Social Emotional Behavior SDI



Information, resources and tools for Social Emotional Behavior SDI are currently in development. More details will be coming soon!



Acknowledgements

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