

What are related services for students with disabilities and how are they provided?

Overview of Related Services

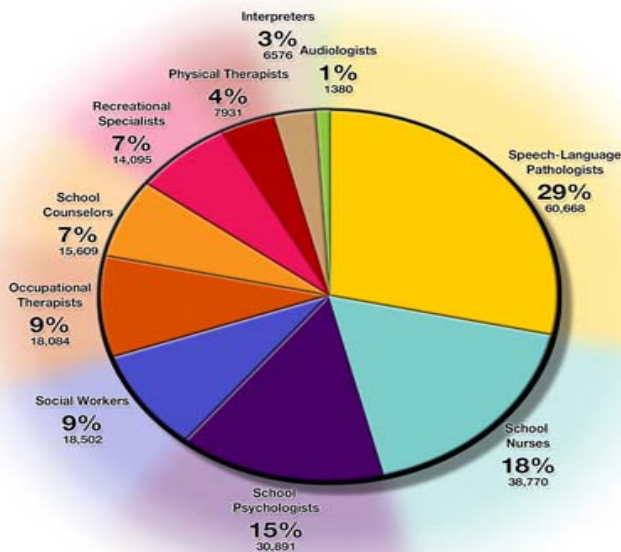
Related services are the supportive services or activities necessary for some students with disabilities to maximize their educational outcomes. Any related service or support that helps a student to benefit from or achieve the goals set out in his or her **individualized education program (IEP)** should be provided by the appropriate related services personnel. Special education and related services are intended to be flexible to meet the needs of an individual student. Appropriately matched to those needs, related services can assist students with disabilities by helping them to:

- Participate in the general education curriculum with their peers
- Meet their annual educational goals
- Take part in extracurricular and nonacademic activities

The additional support provided through related services and **related services personnel** (also known as specialized instructional support personnel) can help a student in an area of need such as writing, speaking, or moving. There is a wide range of special needs; therefore, there are many different types of related services. Related services might meet a student's school transportation requirements or help with his or her social-emotional needs. As with special education, related services are not meant to be a one-size-fits-all solution, nor are they disability specific. Rather, related services should be associated with the student's IEP goals and called out in the IEP. They are intended to help students meet their IEP goals and to be tied to those specific educational outcomes, rather than be mere isolated services. Related services in schools may include but are not limited to:

- Audiology
- Counseling services
- Early identification and assessment of disabilities in children
- Interpreting services
- Medical services (for diagnostic or evaluation purposes)
- Occupational therapy
- Orientation and mobility services
- Parent counseling and training
- Physical therapy
- Psychological services
- Recreation including therapeutic recreation
- Rehabilitation counseling
- School health services and school nurse services
- Social work services in schools
- Speech-language pathology services
- Transportation

The chart below displays the percentages of related service providers by the type of service.



*Adapted from the Data Accountability Center.
2009 School year. ideadata.org*

Because they are tailored to meet the specific needs of individuals with disabilities, it is not possible for IDEA '04 to offer a complete and exhaustive list of the available related services. Despite this open definition, however, there are some limitations to what related services can include. For example, related services *do not* include the provision of surgically implanted devices such as **cochlear implants**, **baclofen pumps**, or **insulin pumps**. On the other hand, related service providers *do* routinely check some devices to make sure they are on or functioning properly, for example making certain that a student is wearing his hearing aid and that the hearing aid's battery is working, or simply being aware of the warning signs that a device isn't functioning properly by noticing changes in the student's perceptions of sounds.

For Your Information

Related services in schools are provided to students with IEPs and their families at no charge. However, students might have disability related therapy needs outside of what can be offered in a school setting, for example a regimen of range-of-motion exercises or post-surgical treatment. These needs are often addressed in a clinical setting and generally covered through insurance and not through the school system. Further, services offered by a doctor are usually not considered a related service.

Identifying Related Services

As you have learned, related services and special education services go hand-in-hand, providing students with the extra supports and services they need if they are to fully benefit from their individualized educational program or meet their individually designed learning goals. Before students can receive related services, though, they must be identified through the special education eligibility process as having a disability. Once a referral to special education is made, educators and professionals from other disciplines, such as speech-language pathology services or psychological services, form a **multidisciplinary team** to assess the students' evaluation for special education and related services. This process specifically assesses the identified or suspected areas of concern and is individualized for that student. It includes all aspects of the student's performance, including speech or communication abilities, social-emotional skills, fine- or gross-motor skills, general intelligence, and behavior.

Once the evaluation is complete, the multidisciplinary team reviews and discusses the results to determine whether the student is eligible for special education and related services. If the team determines that the student is eligible, they develop the individualized educational goals and objectives for the student, an IEP. During this meeting, related services providers might also share their expertise and suggest how a specific service or combination of services might help a student achieve his or her individual goals. In regards to related services, each team must determine:

- How the service will be delivered (i.e., will it be a [direct or indirect service](#))
- The frequency of the service (e.g., once a week, twice a month)
- The duration of the service (e.g., 30 minutes per week, 120 minutes per month)
- Where the service will be provided (e.g., in the general education classroom, resource room, or other setting)
- When the service will begin (i.e., its start and end dates)

This information is documented on the IEP form

Related service personnel are not required to attend IEP meetings. However, in cases when a specific area of student's performance is of particular concern, input from a related services provider can be invaluable. Their multidisciplinary perspective contributes to discussions about the services required by the target student. They also help ensure that the related services are integrated into the students' educational program. Here are some considerations for the team to think about when integrating services into students' programs:

- Students' daily schedules
- Most appropriate times to provide the service to help meet the goals

For Your Information

In some cases, a student who has a disability may not require special education services, therefore not qualifying as a student with a disability under IDEA '04.

This student may still qualify for related services under [Section 504](#) if the student's disability limits his or her ability to learn or carry out another major life activities such as walking, seeing, hearing, breathing, or communicating

Providing Related Services in Schools

More and more students with disabilities are educated in general education classrooms alongside their peers. Just as an IEP team would look at the [least restrictive environment \(LRE\)](#) for special education services, they should do so for related services. IEPs should allow the student to have access to the general education curriculum and to be included with typical peers as much as possible. The main benefits of doing this are that the student:

- Remains in the general education classroom longer
- Practices functional skills in the general education classroom
- Does not miss as much instruction
- Is better prepared for inclusive environments both in and out of school
- Might have higher expectations placed on him or her

Although the goal is to provide related services to the greatest possible extent in the least restrictive environment, service delivery should be considered along a continuum that includes the services outlined in the boxes below.

Consultative/ collaborative services

General education and related services providers work together to meet the needs of the student with a disability. The student remains in the general education classroom.

Classroom-based services

All services are brought to the student in the classroom setting (e.g., general education, special education, resource). The therapist or service provider may work individually with the target student or with a small group that includes him or her.

Pull-out services

Student is taken out of the classroom to a different location (e.g., gym, library, hallway) to receive the related service.

Of course, some services are a better fit for one option than another. For example, it might be appropriate for a speech-language pathologist to provide services within the classroom environment, whereas it might prove necessary to pull a student out for a school health–related service such as nursing (e.g., *catheterization*). Service delivery models might change throughout the course of treatment depending on the needs of the student. For example, a model might start off by providing direct one-on-one services to teach a skill, but then switch to a consultative/ collaborative role in order to help a student generalize his or her skills within the classroom environment. Related services for a student are most effective when the responsibilities and the service do not belong solely to the related service provider. The *magic* is not what happens in a visit from a related service provider. Rather, what really makes a difference is the implementation of techniques or practices by those who are with the student every day as part of an ongoing routine.

Regardless of the service delivery option, it is essential that related services personnel be an integral part of the school environment or culture and be active participants in the educational activities of students with disabilities. By being an integral member of the school, related services providers can act as a resource to all educators and school personnel at the schools they serve. This can be challenging because school systems might have related services personnel who are:

- School employees hired through the school system and assigned to a particular school
- Itinerant therapists hired through the school system. These itinerant service providers might serve more than one school and travel between their assigned schools. This may mean they are at a school for a portion of every day, or on a routine schedule (e.g., every Monday and Wednesday).
- Contractual personnel hired through a home health agency or a rehabilitation hospital to provide services for a school system
- Self-employed therapists hired through their private practice

Because of the challenges inherent to the work of related service personnel (e.g., travel between schools, contracted positions), teachers should strive to keep related personnel abreast of any information pertinent to students they have in common. It is important for teachers and related service providers to communicate and keep each other informed about student progress.

For Your Information

Some teachers believe that related services are only beneficial for the student receiving them. However, when services are provided within the contexts of the classroom, the benefits can extend beyond the student with a disability. For example:

- Students without disabilities can learn ways to support their peers with disabilities in the classroom (e.g., keeping aisles clear for a student who uses canes for mobility, providing wait time for a student with articulation difficulties to speak).
- Teachers can learn to provide specific interventions or strategies that can help all students.