

IDEA Leadership Essentials

About the Lead IDEA Center

What We Do

GROW STRONG, CAPABLE LEADERS

In partnership with states, districts, and leadership preparation programs, we offer job-embedded professional learning, tools, and implementation supports that equip early intervention (EI) program and school building administrators with the knowledge and skills they need to build strong systems where students with disabilities belong, learn, and thrive.

Our Mission

We work with leaders to improve systems serving children with disabilities and their families through effective implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Did You Know?

In a 2020 national survey of elementary school principals, 71% reported a need for professional development to lead more inclusive schools, including meeting the needs of students with disabilities.

Source: Levin et al.,
Learning Policy Institute &
NAESP, 2020



Purpose of the Essentials

The IDEA Leadership Essentials define the key knowledge, skills, and mindsets administrators need to implement the IDEA in EI and PreK-12 settings. They highlight the leaders role in creating a data-driven, balanced system that supports all children, including those with disabilities. Each of the six Essentials offers an action-oriented statement, a core mindset, and success indicators, reflecting the complexity of leadership for children with disabilities.

How to Use This Resource

This IDEA Essentials Guide serves as a quick, portable reference for EI and PreK-12 administrators, outlining the knowledge, skills, and mindsets required to successfully implement IDEA.



Explore the Essentials

IDEA Leadership Essential



Professional, Legal, & Ethical Practices

Make ethically and legally sound decisions toward increased access and belonging for children with disabilities.

Understand requirements
Uphold rights and responsibilities



Educator/Provider Supports

Build and sustain a committed, collaborative, and capable workforce dedicated to fostering the success of children with disabilities.

Create learning opportunities
Promote staff retention



Instruction & Intervention Leadership

Monitor, evaluate, and improve service delivery, instruction, and interventions for children with disabilities.

Monitor delivery and practices
Use evidence-based interventions



Vision Setting & Strategic Leadership

Set a clear direction and communicate a shared vision that promotes collaboration and leads to strategic, impactful actions.

Establish a vision of belonging
Build commitment



Institutional Program Leadership

Align resources and develop operations and systems driven by continuous improvement to address IDEA challenges.

Promote collaboration
Align systems



Family & Community Engagement

Engage in and maintain authentic family and community partnerships.

Communicate effectively
Promote family engagement in decision-making