AI in special education

Supporting thoughtful use of AI for educators

Instructor guide

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How to use this instructor guide

Purpose of this guide

Provide context for instructors on how to deliver the *AI for special education* course.

Who this guide is for

- Instructors, facilitators, and educators
- Anyone preparing to present the course content, whether in classrooms, professional development sessions, or online environments
- Presenters who may be new to accessibility, AI tools, or Microsoft 365 education features and want additional support

What this guide includes

- Course overview
- Best practices for accessible training
- A breakdown of each module, including learning objectives, key points and definitions, and a reflection prompt

What this guide does *not* include

- Technical deep dives into AI
- Platform setup instructions
- Formal certification requirements

Training components

- Instructor guide (this document)
- PowerPoint slide deck

What you'll need

- Access to Microsoft 365 Education (Word, Outlook, OneNote, Teams, PowerPoint)
- Microsoft 365 Copilot (if available at your school)
- A device for completing activities (computer or tablet)
- Openness to experiment and make mistakes
- Your existing special education expertise—this course builds on what you already know

Course overview

Purpose of this course

Empower educators to understand and apply AI through an accessibility first lens.

Course description

This course equips special education teachers with practical strategies for using Microsoft AI tools to streamline administrative tasks, personalize learning, and foster inclusive communication—while maintaining professional judgment and oversight.

Audience

- K-12 educators, special education teachers, school administrators-

Course structure/modules

- Module 1: Introduction to AI in special education
- Module 2: Apply responsible AI principles in learning environments
- Module 3: Streamline administrative tasks with AI
- Module 4: Use AI to personalize learning for students with disabilities
- Module 5: Support multilingual and accessible family communication

Note: Each module is listed, including the learning focus, key takeaways, and instructor activity. Each module overview also includes key information from the course to provide an idea of the focus but does not include all the necessary materials to instruct the course. To gain a comprehensive understanding of the course material, please refer directly to the course.

Estimated course duration

- 1 hour in-person training
- Approximately 2 hours of on-demand training

Learning objectives

By the end of this course, audiences will be able to:

- Explain how AI can be used to create inclusive learning experiences for all students.
- Demonstrate ways AI can streamline administrative tasks to reduce educator workload.
- Use AI to better communicate with families and multilingual learners.
- Implement AI responsibly when it supports instructional goals, with teacher oversight

Introduction to AI in special education

Learning focus

Understand how AI supports inclusive teaching and reduces workload

By the end of this module, audiences will be able to:

- Describe how AI can support the work of special education teams and contribute to inclusive, well organized learning environments.
- Identify potential benefits and considerations when using AI tools in special education, including time saving opportunities and the need for thoughtful oversight to protect privacy and compliance.
- Explain ways AI can assist with differentiated instruction, multilingual family communication, and routine administrative tasks to strengthen student outcomes and educator effectiveness.

1.1 What AI is and why it matters

- Brief, practical definition of AI in education
- AI as a *support tool*, not a replacement for teacher judgment
- Connection to accessibility: enabling equitable access, personalization, and efficiency

1.2 The role of AI in special education

- AI as thoughtful support in education

- o   AI for differentiated instruction
  - o   Adjusting reading levels, generating adapted materials
- How AI supports diverse learning needs
  - o   Accessibility tools (Immersive Reader, live captions, text-to-speech)
  - o   Real-time translation for multilingual learners and families
- Teachers remain the experts while AI helps support administrative tasks

1.3 The benefits and challenges of AI

- Time-saving: drafting communications, progress notes, activities
- Streamlined administrative tasks
- More time available for direct student engagement

1.4 Challenges and risks

- Risk of inaccuracies, bias, or misalignment with IEP goals
- Privacy concerns (FERPA, IDEA)
- Teacher responsibility for verifying outputs

1.5 Key takeaways

- AI is a support tool, not a substitute for teacher expertise.
- AI can reduce administrative workload and save time.
- AI enables more personalized, inclusive learning experiences.
- Responsible implementation and review of AI outputs are essential.

1.6 Optional instructor activity

- **Reflection:** Identify one time-consuming task and plan to use AI this week

- **Quick wins:** Three practical ways to start using Microsoft AI tools

Responsible AI principles in learning environments

Learning focus

Implement AI responsibly, ensuring privacy, equity, and teacher oversight

By the end of this module, audiences will be able to:

- Summarize Microsoft's Responsible AI principles and explain their relevance in educational accessibility.
- Apply responsible AI workflows (Plan–Prompt–Review–Record–Communicate–Evaluate) to classroom and administrative tasks.
- Assess how fairness, privacy, inclusiveness, transparency, and accountability intersect in daily educational decision-making.
- Identify educator responsibilities in ensuring safe, equitable, and compliant AI-assisted practices.

2.1 Why responsible AI matters in education

- AI affects access, fairness, and trust
- Educators interact with sensitive data
- Responsible AI ensures equitable and safe use

2.2 Overview of Microsoft's responsible AI principles

Fairness

Avoid disparate impact; ensure accessible experiences. This principle guides educators to examine whether AI-assisted materials or recommendations serve all learners equitably, including students with disabilities or multilingual families.

Reliability and safety

AI should behave consistently and safely. Educators must validate outputs to ensure they align with instructional goals and do not introduce harmful or misleading information.

Privacy and security

Protect learner data through role-based access and district-approved tools. AI usage must comply with FERPA/IDEA guidelines and safeguard sensitive information at every step.

Inclusiveness

Design for all learners. AI tools should expand—not limit—access by supporting multiple formats, languages, and interaction modes.

Transparency

Communicate when AI is used. Sharing how AI assisted in creating materials builds trust with students, caregivers, and colleagues.

Accountability

Educators remain the decision-makers. Teachers must review, revise, and assume responsibility for final outputs to ensure appropriateness, accuracy, and alignment with local policies.

2.3 Practical classroom workflow for responsible AI use

- **Plan:** Select tasks appropriate for AI assistive use
- **Prompt:** Use specificity while avoiding PII
- **Review:** Keep "human in the loop"
- **Record:** Document use for accountability
- **Communicate:** Transparency in family-facing content
- **Evaluate:** Check impact on accessibility and outcomes

2.4 Key takeaways

- Responsible AI is essential in education because AI directly impacts equity, access, trust, and the use of sensitive learner data.
- Microsoft's Responsible AI principles provide a framework to ensure AI is fair, safe, private, inclusive, transparent, and accountable.
- Educators remain accountable for AI-assisted decisions and must apply human judgment, review, and oversight at every stage.

2.5 Optional instructor activity

- **Privacy checklist:** Review your current AI use for FERPA compliance
- **Bias audit:** Examine three AI outputs for potential bias or inaccuracy
- **Action plan:** Create a personal policy for responsible AI use in your classroom

Module 3:
Streamline administrative tasks with AI

Learning focus

Apply AI strategies for administrative efficiency

By the end of this module, audiences will be able to:

- Recognize how AI tools can support administrative efficiency and identify situations where Teach or Copilot may be a better fit based on task needs and educator preferences.

- Use Copilot to support drafting, summarizing, refining, or translating individualized documentation, with educator review and oversight.

- Use Teach to help create structured, repeatable workflows for routine tasks such as lesson planning, rubrics, and data-collection templates, where consistency is helpful.

- Combine Teach and Copilot thoughtfully to support complete workflows that prioritize accuracy, compliance, and student-centered practice.

3.1 Draft and refine individualized documentation with Copilot

- Use Copilot to support nuanced, student-specific writing tasks such as summarizing observations, documenting performance, and follow-up communications

- Refine language for clarity, tone, and audience while maintaining professional judgment

- Review and verify AI-generated drafts to ensure accuracy, compliance, and alignment with student needs

3.2 Create structured planning documents with Teach

- Use Teach for administrative tasks that follow predictable structures, such as lesson plans, rubrics, and data-collection templates
- Build consistent workflows using guided, step-by-step prompts
- Export Teach-generated content for use in Word or Teams

3.3 Pair Teach and Copilot for structured planning and followthrough

- Use Teach to organize structured thinking for multi-step administrative tasks
- Use Copilot to personalize, rewrite, or summarize structured content for specific students or audiences
- Apply responsible AI practices, including privacy awareness, prompt design, and educator review, throughout the workflow

3.4 Key takeaways

- Use Copilot for individualized writing tasks requiring nuance and clarity.
- Use Teach for structured, repeatable workflows and standards aligned materials.
- Combine Teach + Copilot for efficient, end to end administrative processes.

3.5 Optional instructor activity

- **Prompt practice:** Write and refine prompts for your specific needs
- **Time audit:** Track time saved on one administrative task
- **Template creation:** Build a reusable prompt library for common tasks

Personalize learning for students with disabilities using AI

Learning focus

Apply AI strategies for classroom personalization

By the end of this module, audiences will be able to:

- Understand how AI tools like Copilot and Immersive Reader can make reading materials more accessible for students with disabilities.
- Use Reading Progress and Copilot to create differentiated reading passages and track student fluency and comprehension.
- Support math learning by using Math Assistant and accessibility features to provide clear, step-by-step explanations.
- Create accessible presentations and multimedia using Copilot, Accessibility Assistant, alt text, and live captions.
- Identify learning barriers and choose appropriate Microsoft tools to personalize instruction and measure student progress.

4.1 Adapt reading materials for focus and comprehension

Copilot + Immersive Reader

- Copilot can rewrite dense passages into plain-language summaries and generate guiding comprehension questions aligned to lesson objectives

- Immersive Reader provides line focus, spacing adjustments, calming page themes, and Read Aloud, offering multimodal entry points

TIP: *Dictate allows students with writing or motor challenges to respond verbally instead of typing*

4.2 Personalize reading and track progress

Reading Progress + Copilot

- Reading Progress in Teams enables fluency recording, automated analysis, and longitudinal data to identify growth and patterns
- Copilot helps generate differentiated passages (current level, easier, stretch version) and targeted comprehension questions

Additional tools to personalize the experience

- Immersive Reader supports decoding with syllable division and fluency modeling before independent practice
- Insights dashboards help teachers refine the next assignment based on accuracy, miscues, expression, or rate
- Read Aloud provides modeled fluency and supports comprehension by reading text aloud before independent practice

4.3 Make math accessible for all learners

Math Assistant in OneNote + Copilot

- Math Assistant in OneNote produces clear, step-by-step solutions for complex problems (e.g., fractions with unlike denominators).
- Copilot can rewrite mathematical steps in plain language and add notes on *why each step matters* to build conceptual understanding.

Make a lesson accessible and effective

- Use these simple steps to combine math assistance, AI support, and built-in accessibility features to create an inclusive learning experience.
    - Build the lesson in OneNote
    - Generate the math steps with Math Assistant
    - Simplify the steps with Copilot
    - Apply accessibility supports, like alt text and simple visual models
    - Add guided and supported practice

4.4 Create accessible presentations and multimedia

- Copilot in PowerPoint can draft slide outlines and generate clear, plain-language content from teacher prompts.
- Accessibility Assistant checks and prompts educators to:
- Fix reading order
- Add meaningful alt text
- Replace text embedded in images with real text
- Live Captions in PowerPoint or Teams support students who are deaf or hard of hearing or who benefit from real-time text reinforcement.
- When sharing recordings, instructors should provide accurate captions and accessible handouts using selectable text rather than image-only content.

4.5 Key takeaways

- Educators can choose Microsoft tools like Copilot, Immersive Reader, Reading Progress, Math Assistant, and PowerPoint accessibility features to reduce barriers and support engagement.

- Responsible use is essential: review AI-supported content for accuracy, accessibility, privacy, and compliance with IEP goals and legal requirements.

- Educators remain decision-makers to maintain trust, compliance, and student-centered practice.

4.6 Optional instructor activity

- **Tool exploration:** Enable Immersive Reader in Teams and demonstrate features to students

- **Data analysis:** Review Reading Progress data for one student and plan next steps

- **Accessibility check:** Audit one lesson for accessibility and apply AI tools

Support multilingual and accessible family communication

Learning focus

Communicate effectively with families and multilingual learners using AI

By the end of this module, audiences will be able to:

- Recognize the communication barriers families may experience, including language differences and complex educational terminology, and how these affect partnership.

- Use AI tools like Copilot and Microsoft Translator to make educational documents clearer and more accessible while keeping educator judgment at the center.

- Apply strategies that help both written and live meeting communication feel welcoming, accessible, and culturally responsive for multilingual families and families with disabilities.

- Review and refine family communications to ensure they remain clear, inclusive, and supportive of strong engagement across diverse communities.

5.1 Translate and simplify written communication

Accessibility builds trust with families

- Barriers multilingual families face
- Importance of plain language and cultural responsiveness
- How accessibility supports trust-building

Ways to remove educational barriers

- Use Copilot to convert IEP goals/updates into plain language
- Use Microsoft Translator for multilingual versions
- Best practices:
- Review for accuracy
- Include transparency note, such as "Generated with AI and reviewed by educator"
- Secure sharing

5.2 Make live meetings accessible

- Live Captions and real-time translation
- Accessibility features for Deaf/Hard of Hearing families
- Transcription and follow-up materials
- Policies to check before recording/transcribing meetings

5.3 Offer flexible engagement options

- Not all families can attend live meetings – support inclusive communication
- Share information in multiple formats

- AI-generated summaries in multiple languages
- Accessible PDFs, transcripts, video recaps
- Respecting family schedules and accessibility needs

5.5 Key takeaways

- AI breaks down language barriers and makes complex information accessible to all families.
- Teachers should walk families through how to enable Live Captions in Microsoft Teams, creating more inclusive meetings.
- Copilot in Outlook or Word can help write friendly follow-up emails or messages for families.
- Copilot can enable educators to share information in multiple formats.

5.6 Optional instructor activity

- **Translation practice:** Translate one parent communication and review for accuracy
- **Plain language exercise:** Use Copilot to simplify an IEP goal for family understanding
- **Communication audit:** Identify three ways to make family communication more accessible

Put it all together:

Your AI action plan

Questions to pose to your audience at the completion of the presentation:

- "Which accessible AI practices will you bring into your weekly routine?"
- "How will you communicate AI use transparently with families and students?"

Carry AI into everyday accessibility

To help carry AI into everyday accessibility practice, invite participants to identify **one short-term action** and **one longer-term goal.**

This week:

Choose one task to pilot with AI (e.g., drafting a progress note, adapting a reading passage, or simplifying family communication).

This month:

Identify one workflow or instructional practice to refine using responsible AI principles and accessibility checks.

Final takeaways

Conclude the course by reinforcing these course-wide messages:

- **AI is a tool that supports educator expertise**, not a replacement for professional judgment.

- **Responsible AI principles** guide safe, equitable, and compliant practice across all use cases.

- **Accessibility is strengthened when AI is used intentionally,** reviewed carefully, and aligned to student and family needs.

- **Effective communication and trust remain central to student success**, especially when engaging families and multilingual communities.

- **The true value of AI is reclaimed time,** allowing educators to focus more deeply on teaching, relationships, and student outcomes.