The Four-Step Process guides educational teams in making individualized student decisions that increase access to the grade level general education curriculum and related learning who have identified disabilities. The process begins by having teachers work collaboratively with a general education teacher to create a unit of instruction or working with an existing unit of instruction. The goal is to provide students with disabilities access to the grade level curriculum that results in acquisition of the expected knowledge, skills, and abilities.

In the first step, the team identifies the standards addressed by the instructional unit. Then they look at the critical function or big idea of each standard. This helps the team identify crucial learning to maintain focus on the end goal.

In the second step, the team defines the outcomes of instruction of the instructional unit. The team determines if any adjustments to the outcomes is necessary for the student. This may include reducing the breadth of an outcome, reducing the complexity of an outcome, specifying the information in an outcome, or reducing the number of outcomes. Based on these decisions, formative assessments are determined.

Step three is the most in-depth part of the process. In this step, the team develops the instructional activities, identifies barriers that may keep the student from accessing the instruction, participating in the activities, and demonstrate learning. Identified barriers allow the team to provide supports that will remove or reduce the barriers. Supports may include scaffolding, modified materials, alternative ways for the student to show the acquired learning, etc. The principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), providing multiple means of representation, action and expression, and engagement, help determine the barriers. The UDL principles direct the team to look at how information is presented (Representation), how the student is able to interact with the materials and demonstrate knowledge (Action and Expression), and what interests and engages the student in the learning process (Engagement).

In the final step of the process, the team creates a matrix to embed IEP objectives throughout the instruction as much as possible. Embedding the objectives in the ongoing instruction increases the application, helps the student generalize, and decreases the time away from the general education instruction.

The chapter in Kleinert and Kearns book (2010), Ensuring Access – A Four-Step Process for Accessing the General Curriculum explains the process with more detail and examples.