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The Students

Although some of this beginning material is basic knowledge, many schools do not ascertain whether or not educators have the necessary foundational information about the appropriate characteristics and strategies for learners with disabilities and the legislative requirements. Students in inclusion classrooms present varying learning, social, behavioral, emotional, communicative, physical, perceptual, sensory, and cultural levels, backgrounds, and challenges that require specific instructional plans and strategies (Boscardin, Mainzer, & Kealy, 2011; Karten, 2010b, 2010c). This diversity necessitates the thoughtful and innovative expertise of leaders and coaches who collaboratively assist general and special educators to help students achieve their highest potentials while enforcing and honoring each student's and family's legislative rights.

Principals, curriculum supervisors, school leaders, teacher leaders, and school intervention coaches assume the role of an inclusion coach to ensure that students receive the appropriate education, while some districts also hire the professional direction of outside inclusion coaches. Collective voices determine and apply the appropriate strategies and student interventions. No one possesses a monopoly on the strategies since a team approach values diverse experiences and perspectives. The ongoing collaborative and inclusive insights connect to a spectrum of learners, families, and educators with pedagogical structure that positively impacts students with and without disabilities to achieve successful postsecondary outcomes. Peers and families must also be strong strategic partners, who look beyond a child's labeled disability to recognize his or her strengths. All parties therefore ensure that the highest level of learning is honored and achieved within a student's least restrictive environment (LRE).

Although there is diversity within each group of learners, the commonalities offered generate appropriate knowledge, skills, and strategies that principals, inclusion team leaders, and coaches share with their staff. Examples are delineated in the lists that follow for students with emotional, learning, and

intellectual differences. The goal is for educators to expand on these lists with additional strategies and interventions for all populations of learners.

Students With an Emotional Difference

1. These students may display externalizing or internalizing behavior ranging from acting out to displaying defiance, to compulsivity, to being withdrawn or depressed.

2. In order to create a behavioral intervention plan (BIP) for students, conduct a functional behavioral assessment (FBA) that determines the reasons or triggers for the behavior (e.g., work is too hard or easy, student wants extra attention—be it negative or positive).

3. Although the characteristics of students with emotional and behavioral disorder (EBD) are not always as visible as other disabilities, they are real and cannot be dismissed as willful (e.g., just as a child who is blind or has a physical disability would not be asked to *see* or *walk* the right way, neither should a student with an emotional and behavioral disturbance be expected to *just behave*).

4. Proactive measures need to be in place, rather than having a *wait and see* attitude, with all staff receiving the knowledge and training with *what if* scenarios that delineate the nature of the behavior and what might be expected.

5. Enlist the expertise of school psychologists, counselors, social workers, and behavioral interventionists to formulate plans.

6. Offer structured and fair rules that are positive, observable, and measurable with associated consequences delineated and consistently enforced.

7. Examine polices and procedures to decide on appropriate scaffolding and accommodations that ensure the physical and emotional safety of all students.

8. Get to know students to connect with their interests and to offer the appropriate motivators for reinforcement schedules.

9. Offer realistic and timely feedback.

10. Educate peers about emotional differences and how they should react to behaviors.

Students With a Learning Difference

1. This group of learners displays intense diversity with a wide range of strengths and weaknesses. Attention, memory, and reasoning, as well as auditory and visual processing, may be impacted.

2. One-third of all students who receive special education (SE) services have a learning disability (U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

3. Types of learning disabilities include, but are not limited to, the following:

   a. *Dyslexia*—difficulties with reading, ranging from fluency to verbal expressions to knowing sounds of letters and/or comprehension of words and ideas

   b. *Dysgraphia*—difficulties with writing, ranging from physically forming letters to organizing thoughts in written expressions

   c. *Dyscalculia*—difficulties with mathematics, including counting, telling time, knowing number facts, computations, and problem solving

   d. *Dyspraxia*—difficulties with motor skills ranging from fine motor skills such as cutting or holding a pencil to large motor skills involving coordination in sports, general clumsiness, speech, and personal grooming

   e. *Dysphasia*—difficulties attaching meaning to language, including verbal skills, grammar, semantics, reading comprehension, information processing, and nonverbal messages

4. An overlapping of characteristics may often be presented under the label of another disability with students under these labels also having learning disabilities (LD) that are manifested within the inclusive classroom setting (e.g., attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder [ADHD], Asperger's, Tourette's, autism, auditory-processing disorders, receptive or expressive speech-language disorders).

5. There is no cure for a learning disability, but students learn to compensate for weaker areas with specific strategies that allow them to highlight and maximize their strengths (e.g., using graphic organizers to help with written expressions, mnemonics to assist with memory weaknesses, step-by-step approaches to learn more difficult mathematical procedures to solve word problems, multisensory approaches to learn to decode words, using a digital recorder to take notes, having spell-check to correct errors, using other accessible instructional materials ranging from text-to-speech tools to read and process written language to an AutoSummarize tool to highlight the key points in a longer reference page accessed online).

6. As per IDEA (the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act), students with learning disabilities do not include those with learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, of intellectual disability, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage.

7. Local educational agencies do not exclusively look at a discrepancy between intellectual ability and achievement to determine an LD diagnosis, but are also permitted and encouraged to keep track of student performances in response to research-based interventions and alternative procedures before an individualized education program (IEP) is generated, which is part of response to intervention (RTI).

8. Appropriate accommodations and modifications are applicable for both instruction and assessments and are usually IEP driven, but never constant, since the idea is to promote learning, not learned helplessness.

9. All staff needs to be privy to the strategies that best help students (e.g., paraprofessionals, bus drivers, lunchroom aides, co-teachers, art, physical education, music teachers, and more).

10. Create self-regulated learners from the early grades and onward who are aware of their current levels and the necessary supports needed to increase their skills.

Students With an Intellectual Disability

1. Students learn, but in different ways (e.g., concrete presentations, step-by-step approaches that offer opportunities for additional repetition and practice, modeling, more opportunities for success).

2. More assistance with different approaches is required with social interactions, communications, self-help, and adaptive daily living skills (e.g., using iPads to interact with others, convey needs, or communicate responses).

3. Investigate critical early interventions (National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities, 2012).

4. Different levels of support are related to the degree of intellectual disability, or ID (e.g., self-contained vs. inclusive classroom).

5. As with other disabilities, students with intellectual disabilities need access to the general education (GE) curriculum with progress monitored and appropriate supports in place within inclusive environments, if that is determined to be the LRE.

6. Establish transitional plans that address academic and functional achievements (National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities, 2010).

7. Discover and connect to students' strengths, interests, and abilities.

8. Monitor progress toward reaching IEP goals.

9. Provide a structured peer-support system within the class and school with age-level peers who help students with ID to sharpen academic, social, and communicative skills.

10. Offer feedback on student progress strategies by establishing ongoing home communications.

Educators need to be aware of the basic disability legislation to provide appropriate services. According to federal legislation, specifically IDEA, the general education classroom is considered to be the first option of placement as the LRE for students who have a disability that affects their educational performance. An evaluation determines if a disability is present and, if so, the placement recommended. If the LRE is determined to be the general education classroom, then appropriate supplementary aids and related services each child

needs must be present. IDEA provides services and protections for approximately 6.6 million students in the United States, which is about 13% of total student enrollment. Infants and toddlers under 3 years of age who experience developmental delays in cognitive, physical, communication, social or emotional, and adaptive development or have a diagnosed physical or mental condition that has a high probability of resulting in a developmental delay are also eligible for early intervention services. The 13 IDEA categories include the following ones for children aged 3 through 21. They can be better remembered by teachers with this 13-word acronymic sentence: *All very determined students deserve infinitely more opportunities than schools have ever offered.*

A utism

V isual impairment (including blindness)

D eafness

S pecific learning disability

D eafness-blindness

I ntellectual disability

M ultiple disabilities

O ther health impairment

T raumatic brain injury

S peech and language impairment

H earing impairment

E motional disturbance

O rthopedic impairment

An inclusive classroom is an appropriate setting for a student with a disability if the general education classroom, with the necessary supports and related services, is determined to meet that child's needs. It is often stated that special education is a service, not a place. Even though students may be eligible to receive services under an IDEA classification such as one of the 13 listed, it does not mean that stagnation is ever an option. There also need to be plans to think about reducing services, once students gain skills and can perform tasks and skills independently. Scaffolding is important, but so is fading out services if they are no longer appropriate ones. If students learn to be overly dependent, then that learned helplessness becomes an obstacle to future achievements as an independent and productive adult. If the obverse is true and services need to be increased, then that would be appropriate as well. Decisions should be based not on politics, preferences, or traditions, but on each student's diverse and individualized needs.

Although each state and district within that state may choose to vary the required IEP layout, Figure 1.1 offers a sample IEP form from the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) that contains the essential IEP elements considered by educators and families as they formulate a student's IEP together.

Figure 1.1 Sample Individualized Education Program Form

Individualized Education Program

The Individualized Education Program (IEP) is a written document that is developed for each eligible child with a disability. The Part B regulations specify, at 34 CFR §§300.320–300.328, the procedures that school districts must follow to develop, review, and revise the IEP for each child. The document below sets out the IEP content that those regulations require.

A statement of the child's present levels of academic achievement and functional performance, including:

- How the child's disability affects the child's involvement and progress in the general education curriculum (i.e., the same curriculum as for nondisabled children) or for preschool children, as appropriate, how the disability affects the child's participation in appropriate activities. [34 CFR §300.320(a)(1)]

A statement of measurable annual goals, including academic and functional goals designed to:

- Meet the child's needs that result from the child's disability to enable the child to be involved in and make progress in the general education curriculum. [34 CFR §300.320(a)(2)(i)(A)]

- Meet each of the child's other educational needs that result from the child's disability. [34 CFR §300.320(a)(2)(i)(B)]

For children with disabilities who take alternate assessments aligned to alternate achievement standards (in addition to the annual goals), a description of benchmarks or short-term objectives. [34 CFR §300.320(a)(2)(ii)]

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A description of:

- How the child's progress toward meeting the annual goals will be measured. [34 CFR §300.320(a)(3)(i)]

- When periodic reports on the progress the child is making toward meeting the annual goals will be provided, such as through the use of quarterly or other periodic reports, concurrent with the issuance of report cards. [34 CFR §300.320(a)(3)(ii)]

A statement of the special education and related services and supplementary aids and services, based on peer-reviewed research to the extent practicable, to be provided to the child, or on behalf of the child, and a statement of the program modifications or supports for school personnel that will be provided to enable the child:

- To advance appropriately toward attaining the annual goals. [34 CFR §300.320(a)(4)(i)]

- To be involved in and make progress in the general education curriculum and to participate in extracurricular and other nonacademic activities. [34 CFR §300.320(a)(4)(ii)]

- To be educated and participate with other children with disabilities and nondisabled children in extracurricular and other nonacademic activities. [34 CFR §300.320(a)(4)(iii)]

An explanation of the extent, if any, to which the child will not participate with nondisabled children in the regular classroom and in extracurricular and other nonacademic activities. [34 CFR §300.320(a)(5)]

(Continued)

Figure 1.1 (Continued)

A statement of any individual appropriate accommodations that are necessary to measure the academic achievement and functional performance of the child on State and districtwide assessments. [34 CFR §300.320(a)(6)(i)]

If the IEP Team determines that the child must take an alternate assessment instead of a particular regular State or districtwide assessment of student achievement, a statement of why:

- The child cannot participate in the regular assessment. [34 CFR §300.320(a)(6)(ii)(A)]

- The particular alternate assessment selected is appropriate for the child. [34 CFR §300.320(a)(6)(ii)(B)]

The projected date for the beginning of the services and modifications and the anticipated frequency, location, and duration of special education and related services and supplementary aids and services and modifications and supports. [34 CFR §300.320(a)(7)]

Service, Aid or Modification	Frequency	Location	Beginning Date	Duration

TRANSITION SERVICES

Beginning not later than the first IEP to be in effect <u>when the child turns 16, or younger if determined appropriate by the IEP Team</u>, and updated annually thereafter, the IEP must include:

- Appropriate measurable postsecondary goals based upon age-appropriate transition assessments related to training, education, employment, and where appropriate, independent living skills. [34 CFR §300.320(b)(1)]

- The transition services (including courses of study) needed to assist the child in reaching those goals. [34 CFR §300.320(b)(2)]

Transition Services (Including Courses of Study)

RIGHTS THAT TRANSFER AT AGE OF MAJORITY

- Beginning not later than one year before the child reaches the age of majority under State law, the IEP must include a statement that the child has been informed of the child's rights under Part B of the IDEA, if any, that will, consistent with 34 CFR §300.520, transfer to the child on reaching the age of majority. [34 CFR §300.320(c)]

As each snowflake is unique, so is each student, whether he or she is educated within an inclusive classroom or a self-contained setting. The needs of students on the special education continuum and within the general education classroom are heterogeneous ones. Even though students share a classification, they also share a commonality of diversity. As an example, students with autism are referred to as being on a spectrum since they display a wide variety of characteristics that include learning, communicative, behavioral, emotional, sensory, and social needs; accordingly, educators will need a variety of strategies. Activity schedules help with transition issues (Banda, Grimmett, & Hart, 2009). Strategies also include picture exchange communication systems, social stories, discrete trial training, explicit instruction, and other visual supports (Ryan, Hughes, Katsiyannis, McDaniel, & Sprinkle, 2011). This also includes capitalizing on student strengths, improving eye contact, helping students display social reciprocity, and finding ways to increase attention to areas outside focused interests. Continually researching available technology is also important, such as infusing a program such as *GoTalk* or *TouchChat* if the student uses an iPad instead of his or her natural voice to communicate.

COMMUNICATING THE STUDENT SPECTRUM TO YOUR STAFF

The rainbow of student characteristics needs to be acknowledged and matched with a continuum of services. Students with a specific learning disability (SLD) comprise a category under IDEA, but these learners are individual students who can be excellent readers, mathematicians, and writers who exhibit a combination of stronger and weaker skills with numeracy, literacy, organization, perceptual skills, and more. A student with a reading difference such as dyslexia does not automatically earn the additional label of dysgraphia or dyscalculia or any combination of assumed learning skills or weaknesses.

A student with an intellectual disability may have weaker expressive skills, but stronger receptive language skills that need to be honored and capitalized on. Some students need additional time to practice and recall information learned due to memory weaknesses (Nolet & McLaughlin, 2005) or additional verbal cues to generalize concepts learned from one situation to the next. Students who are deaf may use sign language, lip reading, oral language, and/ or total communication, while some students and their families prefer one mode of communication to another. A student with ADHD may exhibit one or all of the traits of inattentiveness, impulsivity, and hyperactivity. Students with emotional differences have internalizing and more passive behaviors such as depression or externalizing behaviors with more acting out, anger, or aggression displayed. Students with the label of Other Health Impairment (OHI) are a diverse group who may have attention issues, medical or physical concerns, and other characteristics. A student with a traumatic brain injury (TBI) may have mild, moderate, or severe implications with varying degrees of concentration, attention, thinking, motor impairments, or fatigue evidenced. A student with a visual impairment may be partially sighted, have low vision, or be totally

blind, thereby requiring a combination of supports and services. Each and every inclusive classroom therefore presents students who have a spectrum of stronger and weaker skills, whether students are classified as gifted, twice exceptional, or one of the 13 disability categories under IDEA.

Overall, students who learn within inclusive classrooms share similar disability labels, but educators and staff need to view each student as an individual who possesses a unique personality with a spectrum of needs. In addition, the students who are peers of students with disabilities need to be sensitive to their classmates who have differing skills and levels. Students with classifications also need to realize that it is not always about them, but they too coexist within that classroom, sharing teachers' and teacher assistants' attention. No one student trumps the other one or justifies sacrificing instructional time since he or she possesses a lower or higher level of learning or behavioral needs. Teachers need to honor students' IEP requirements, but they also honor the integrity of each learner. Diversity exists within each group, whether one belongs to a theater club, a gym, a teacher's union, or a book club. Leaders help students, educators, and families understand and propagate this point to assist all students in growing up to be caring and productive adults who are able to capitalize on one another's uniqueness without judging one or the other as better or inferior. All students are worthy of life's fruitful experiences as adults.