



# Success for all Students in the General Education Classroom

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A Guide for Inclusive Practices

Presented by The Maryland State Department of Education

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## Introduction

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**In the state of Maryland, and nationwide, the majority of students with disabilities ages five (kindergarten) to 21 are educated alongside their non-disabled peers for all or most of their instructional day (Maryland State Department of Education, 2022). Inclusive schools provide access to equitable outcomes for all students. Decades of research shows that intentional inclusion of students with disabilities alongside their non-disabled peers leads to:**

- Stronger rates of reading and mathematics performance
- Higher rates of attendance
- Higher rates of high school graduation
- Higher rates of post-secondary school enrollment
- Decreased behavioral concerns
- Higher rates of employment and independent living into adulthood

Research also shows significant academic benefits for non-disabled students who are educated alongside their peers with disabilities. As noted by the Schoolwide Integrated Framework for Transformation (SWIFT), “Schools implementing a schoolwide model of equity-based inclusive education demonstrated larger student growth on annual state reading and math assessments relative to students attending comparable schools.” (Choi, Meisenheimer, McCart, & Sailor, 2016). These benefits are not limited to the inclusion of students with so-called “mild” disabilities. A recent policy statement from the U.S. Department of Education (2023) notes that “children with disabilities, including those with the most significant disabilities and the highest needs, can make significant developmental and learning progress in inclusive settings.”

Despite the significant, research-backed benefits of inclusion, the data shows that Maryland has room to grow when it comes to inclusive practices. While 74% of Maryland’s students with disabilities spend 80% or more of their day alongside their non-disabled peers, over 20% of students with disabilities spend much of or most of their time (between 0% – 79%) in separate classrooms from their non-disabled peers. Over 5% of students with disabilities are educated in schools entirely separate from their non-disabled peers, with no opportunity to engage with their peers during the school day.

There are many complex factors that lead to the separation of students with disabilities from their peers. One of the most complex factors at play is a mindset that only special education teachers are equipped to work with students with disabilities. This idea overlooks the wealth of knowledge, both academic and social-emotional, that general education teachers possess, and the disservice caused when students with disabilities do not have access to that knowledge. Students with learning disabilities are an invaluable part of the fabric of their local schools and deserve to learn authentically from all educators who can help them grow.

While access to general education teachers is critical for students with disabilities, it must be acknowledged that general education teachers (that is, teachers certified in content areas without an additional certification in special education) often receive significantly less training in specialized instruction and inclusive practices than their special education counterparts. While special educators are an invaluable learning resource for their peers, their schedules do not typically allow these teachers

to develop and provide special education training for their peers. Meanwhile, when general educators develop their own learning, they typically need to focus their resources on content-area classes that will lead to continued state certification.

This guide, *Success for all Students in the General Education Classroom: A Guide for Inclusive Practices*<sup>1</sup>, seeks to serve as a practical, digestible learning resource for general and special educators. The guide is divided into specialized instructional practices, content area strategies, tips on reading Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and 504 plans, practical considerations for arts integrations, and best practices for working with Twice Exceptional or dually impacted populations. The guide is intended for teachers to process at a self-selected pace. Teachers looking to expand their knowledge base of overall instructional practices may choose to start with the first section, “Common Myths and Misconceptions,” and then read the guide to its conclusion. Alternatively, a math teacher looking to develop specialized instructional practices in their core content area may want to start with the math tables in “Content Area Resources.” There is no wrong way to use this guide. Teachers and administrators are encouraged to use this guide, and the articles sourced within it, as one of many steps on their journey towards building inclusive environments for all students.

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<sup>1</sup> Credit and thanks to Michelle R. Davis of the Education Advocacy Coalition (EAC) for the title name.

## Common Myths and Misconceptions about Inclusive Practices

There are many common myths and misconceptions about the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education environment. Too often these beliefs find their way into instructional practices impacting service delivery models, perceptions, and outcomes for students. Learning differences and disabilities are often treated as a problem or burden rather than an extension of diversity. To address this challenge the following **MythBusters** related to **Universal Design for Learning**, **Differentiated Instruction**, **Multi-tiered System of Support**, and **Specially Designed Instruction** are provided to support continued understanding and advocacy.

### MYTHBUSTERS

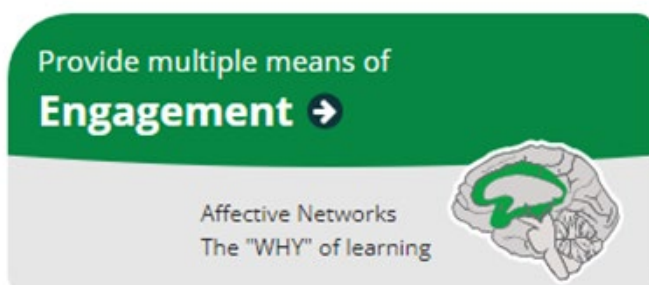
Myth	Reality
<b>Universal Design for Learning (UDL)</b> is simply good teaching.	The term “good teaching” has no specific or agreed-upon definition. However, the UDL framework is well-defined and based on research.
<b>Differentiated Instruction means less rigor for weaker students.</b>	Differentiated instruction involves teaching in a manner that meets students' diverse needs and interests using varied course content, activities, and assessments. Differentiated instruction distinctively emphasizes instructional methods to promote learning for students entering a course with different readiness for, interest in, and ways of engaging with course learning based on their prior learning experiences. <a href="#">Shareefa, M. et al. (2019). “Differentiated Instruction: Definition and Challenging Factors Perceived by Teachers.” Proceedings of the 3rd International Conference on Special Education (ICSE 2019).</a>
Students with disabilities can only receive <b>Specially Designed Instruction (SDI)</b> from a special educator or related service provider.	Any teacher or staff member can provide SDI. IEP service minutes include SDI provided by special education staff in any environment and SDI provided in general education settings by paraeducators, general education teachers, or other staff members, as appropriate.
<b>Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS)</b> is the same as <b>Response to Intervention (RTI)</b> .	MTSS is a more comprehensive model than RTI's academic interventions and includes academic, social, emotional, and behavioral supports.
To do <b>UDL</b> , you must use technology.	The goal of UDL is learner agency that is purposeful and reflective, resourceful and authentic, strategic and action oriented. UDL provides a means of access to information, creativity, and natural engagement that the use of non-tech, low-tech, or high-tech options may enhance. <a href="#">The UDL Guidelines (cast.org)</a>

Myth	Reality
Students with significant disabilities do better when <b>SDI</b> is provided in separate classrooms.	Research studies have found that school achievement and quality post-school outcomes are positively correlated with the amount of time students with disabilities spend in a general education classroom – regardless of the severity of their disabilities. <a href="#">The Post-High School Outcomes of Young Adults with Disabilities up to 6 Years After High School. Key Findings from the National Longitudinal Transition Study 2 (NLTS2) (ed.gov)</a>
<b>MTSS</b> is a regular step in the special education identification process.	MTSS is a preventative model of support for all students. The implementation of an MTSS framework integrates data and instruction within a multi-level prevention system designed to maximize student achievement and support students' social, emotional, and behavioral needs from a strengths-based perspective.
Providing <b>SDI</b> in the general education classroom is disruptive to the instruction of non-disabled students.	Adapting the content, methodology, and delivery of instruction to meet the needs of students with disabilities often results in an increased focus on meeting the specific needs of other learners in the class.
<b>Differentiated Instruction</b> only works on paper, not in a real classroom.	Differentiated instruction is the recognition that diverse classrooms contain students with different needs, and teachers must be responsive to those needs to provide targeted instructional support based on data analysis and reflection.
Students receiving <b>SDI</b> do not have to meet the same learning standards as their non-disabled peers.	All students receiving SDI have IEPs that are aligned to grade-level learning standards. SDI ensures access to the general curriculum so that the student with a disability can meet the same educational standards that apply to each student within the local education agency.

## Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a framework developed by the Center for Applied Technology (CAST) to create and implement lessons inclusive of flexible goals, methods, materials, and assessments that support learning for all students. The UDL Guidelines are a tool supporting the UDL framework. The UDL Guidelines are used by educators, curriculum developers, researchers, parents, and anyone else who wants to implement the UDL framework in a learning environment. These guidelines offer a set of concrete suggestions that can be applied to any discipline or domain to ensure that all learners can access and participate in meaningful, challenging learning opportunities. The aim of UDL is to change the design of the learning environment rather than changing the learner. When learning environments are intentionally designed to reduce barriers, all learners can engage in rigorous, meaningful learning. See [How Universal Design for Learning helps students merge onto the 'learning expressway'](#). (Gobir, 2023)

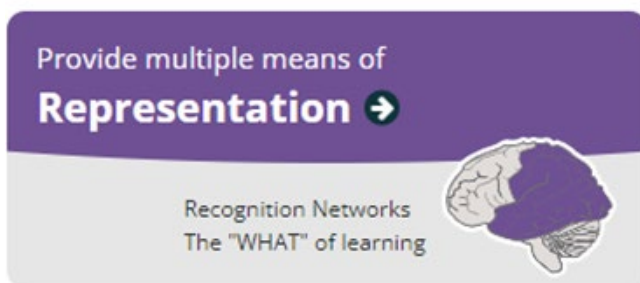
The **UDL Guidelines** are organized according to three principles of UDL: **Engagement** (the “why” of learning), **Representation** (the “what” of learning), and **Action and Expression** (the “how” of learning). When planning instruction with a UDL perspective it is important to consider the following:



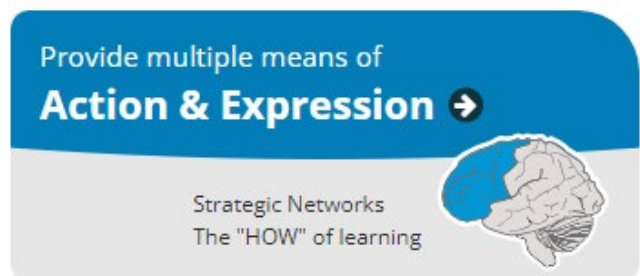
### Think about how learners will engage with the lesson.

- Will there be opportunities to regulate their learning?
- Will there be opportunities to sustain their effort and motivation?
- Will there be opportunities to engage and interest all learners?



**Think about how information is presented to learners.**

- Will the information help all learners reach higher levels of understanding?
- Will the information presented include options for clarifying understanding of symbols and expressions?
- Will the information presented help all learners to identify what needs to be learned?

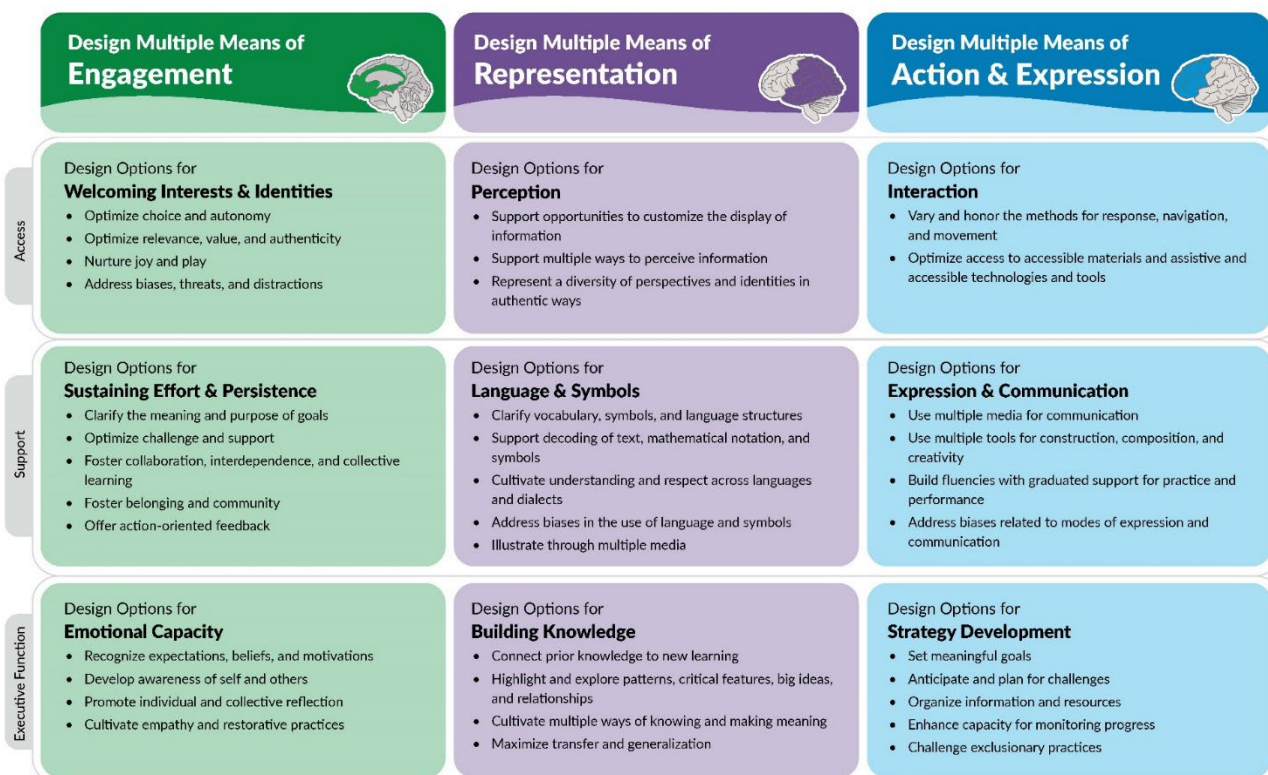
**Think about how learners are expected to act and express themselves.**

- Will the activity help all learners act strategically with purpose and reason?
- Will the activity help all learners express themselves confidently?
- Will the activity provide all learners options to physically respond?

The [CAST website](#) provides a digital version of the [UDL Guidelines 3.0](#) with an option to drill down by UDL principle and checkpoint with recommended strategies identified for each. See UDL Guidelines → [Engagement](#) → [Representation](#) → [Action and Expression](#)

## The Universal Design for Learning Guidelines

The goal of UDL is **learner agency** that is purposeful & reflective, resourceful & authentic, strategic & action-oriented.



udlguidelines.cast.org © CAST, Inc. 2024  
Suggested Citation: CAST (2024). Universal Design for Learning Guidelines version 3.0 [graphic organizer]. Lynnfield, MA: Author.

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Gobnir, N. (2023). *How Universal Design for Learning Helps Students Merge Onto the 'Learning Expressway'*. KQED. <https://www.kqed.org/mindshift/61731/how-universal-design-for-learning-helps-students-merge-onto-the-learning-expressway>

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## Differentiated Instruction

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Differentiated instruction is an instructional process that offers learners multiple ways of taking in and expressing their learning. Differentiated instruction is grounded in the understanding that students differ in their readiness to learn, based on age, language, life experiences, aptitudes, interests, and other factors.

Informed instructional decisions are the product of careful planning and groundwork. When planning for differentiated instruction one collects data, explores various scenarios, and decides how to best utilize resources. This reflective planning process identifies key considerations for differentiation:

- Am I willing to teach in whatever way is necessary for my students to learn best, even if the approach does not match my preferences?
- Do I use data-driven decision-making to maximize my students' learning and developmental growth?
- Do I use a strengths-based approach to adapt my instruction to meet the learners' needs?
- Is my classroom organized to promote my students' learning by providing opportunities for self-advocacy, and the tools to do so?
- Do I self-analyze and reflect on the effectiveness of my instruction and assessments as a means of improving outcomes for my students?

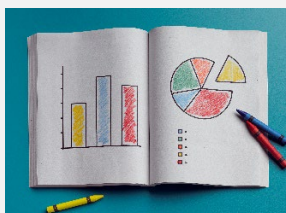
Learn more about [Using Differentiation to Challenge All Students](#).

## INSTRUCTIONAL METHODS

Instructional methods for differentiation tend to fall within these categories popularized by Dr. Carol Ann Tomlinson; *Content, Process, Product, Affect, and Learning Environment*.

### CONTENT

What the student should know, understand, and be able to do relative to core skills and content knowledge



**Concept-Based Instruction:** moving from basic facts to “Big Picture” concepts (e.g., The 5E Teaching Model)

**Scaffolding:** systematically building on students’ experience and knowledge as they learn new skills using direct instruction

**Visual Notetaking Organizers:** structures to visually organize concepts or demonstrate understanding of student learning using text and visuals

### PROCESS

How the student learns the core skills and content knowledge – activities designed to help the student make sense of or take ownership of the content



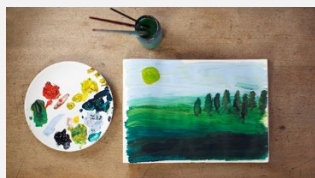
**Project-Based Learning:** students gain knowledge and skills by engaging in real-world applications

**Flexible Grouping:** offering opportunities for students to work in fluid groups based on readiness, interest, or targeted skills

**Personal Agendas:** an organizational structure or checklist that identifies specific steps to follow for task completion, may include visuals or graphics

### PRODUCT

How the student demonstrates and extends what has been learned; evidence of understanding



**Learning Menus:** providing students with four to six options of producing a final product to demonstrate content understanding

**Bloom’s Taxonomy:** a hierarchy of cognitive processes for demonstrating thinking and knowledge, moving from simple to complex

**New Forms of Expression:** authentic products demonstrating student learning using alternate formats of presentation (e.g., written, visual, oral, or kinesthetic)

### AFFECT

How the student feels and the social-emotional factors that influence learning



**Building Identity and Agency:**

sharing and modeling experiences that promote appropriate levels of challenge and perseverance

**Student Input and Leadership:** offering opportunities to work with others rather than for; student perspective and input

## LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

How the classroom is configured to provide the best opportunities for student learning



**Class Norms:** establishing expectations within the class environment (e.g., learning attitudes, behavior, productive teamwork, and/or communication)

**Movement and Space:** structuring activities for purposeful movement within an accommodating space/room arrangement

**Ready Resources:** displaying high-quality work samples with rubrics to define expectations; hint cards, word walls or process charts, labeled areas within the class for designated work products or activities

## REFERENCES

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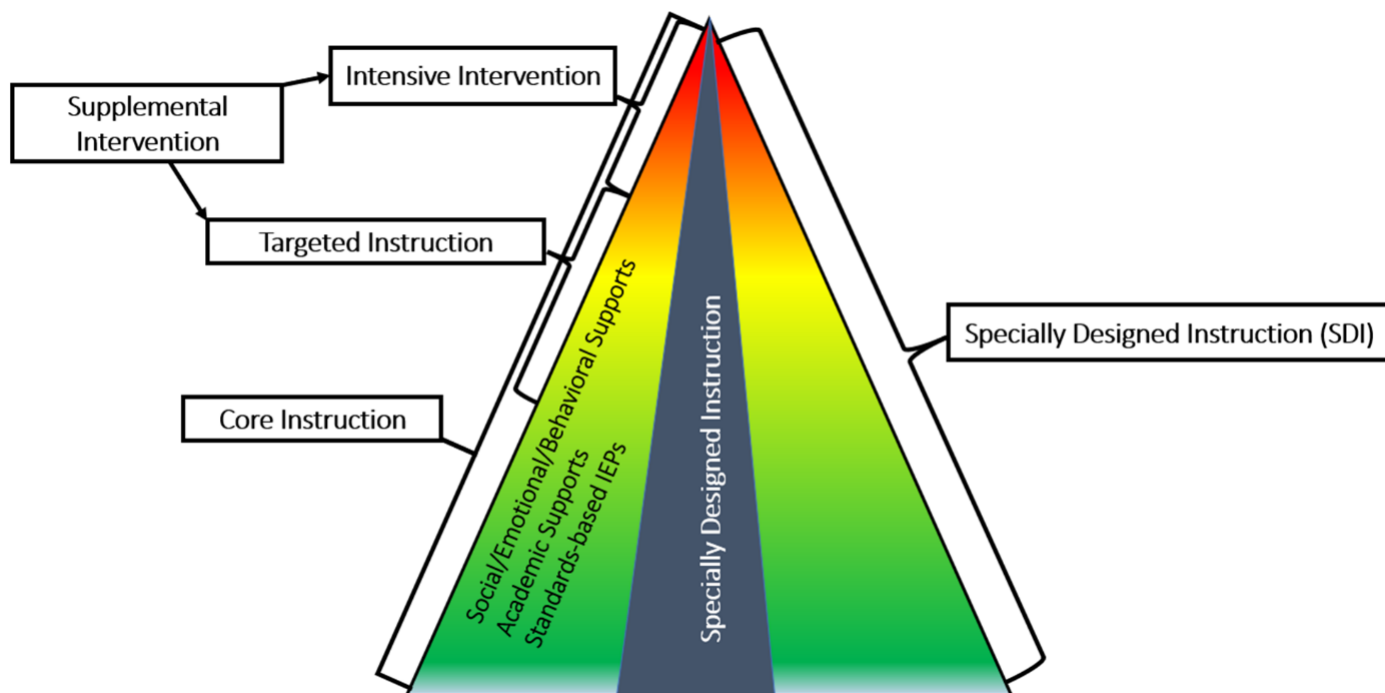
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## Multi-tiered System of Support (MTSS)

According to the [Every Student Succeeds Act](#) (ESSA, 2015), a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) is “a comprehensive continuum of evidence-based, systemic practices to support a rapid response to student's needs, with regular observation to facilitate data-based instructional decision making.” This strengths-based framework recognizes that all students have diverse academic, behavioral, social, or emotional needs. MTSS is designed to help school personnel identify struggling students early and intervene quickly using data and instruction to maximize student outcomes.



Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE). 2019. *A Guide for Implementing Specially Designed Instruction within an Integrated Tiered System of Support*. DRAFT. MSDE.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF A MULTI-TIERED SYSTEM OF SUPPORT

A **multi-tiered system of support** is comprised of four essential components:

- **Screening** to identify students at risk for poor learning outcomes.
- **Progress monitoring** using reliable tools to assess performance and improvement.
- **Data-based decision-making** to inform instruction.
- **Leveled systems of support or prevention.**

An effective MTSS includes a rigorous curriculum aligned to State standards and delivered through engaging, universally designed, culturally sustaining, evidence-based instructional and assessment practices. The MTSS process is problem-solving oriented, allowing students to move between tiers based on need, not specific designations or identified disabilities. It is crucial to note that Specially Designed Instruction (SDI), as reflected in a standards-based IEP for students with disabilities, is provided in each tier of support, as appropriate. In practice, MTSS focuses on foundational skills in collaboration with standards with an emphasis on:

- **Instructional methods and strategies** that are universally designed (i.e., to determine accessibility and engagement) with a lens of equitable access (i.e., materials are free of bias).
- **Instructional goals and resources** used at all three tiers are reviewed and assessed for their alignment with standards (grade level, access, or entry points).
- **Instructional materials** across all three tiers exhibit a clear sequence of target skills and knowledge (i.e., vertically, and horizontally aligned), evidence of efficacy, and include engaging content and inclusive design (Center on Multi-Tiered System of Supports).

### TIER 1

- **Core instructional support** is provided to **all students** through the general education environment. Core programming at Tier 1 includes academic, social, emotional, and behavioral curriculum, instruction, and supports aligned to grade-level standards and student needs. Tier 1 instruction is the first level of prevention in the MTSS framework with an emphasis on evidence-based practices. For additional information see [Essential Features of Tier 1](#).

### TIER 2

- **Targeted instructional support** is provided to **some students** who need additional support beyond Tier 1 using validated intervention programs. Tier 2 support is provided in small groups, either within or outside of the general education classroom featuring standardized academic, social, emotional, and behavioral supports in addition to the core curriculum. Tier 2 interventions and supports are delivered with fidelity at an appropriate duration and frequency to ensure students have increased opportunities for practice and corrective feedback. For additional information see 10 Essential Features of Tier 2.

### TIER 3

- **Intensive intervention that is intensified and individualized based on severe and persistent learning and/or social-emotional needs.** It is important to note that **this intensive intervention is not synonymous with special education or SDI**. Intensive intervention is a data-driven process characterized by increased intensity and individualization of support. Interventions are individualized, based on detailed diagnostic assessments, to meet each

student's unique needs. The frequency of intervention is high, with more frequent sessions, often daily, to accelerate learning and close significant gaps. The goal of Tier 3 is to provide the most intensive level of support to help students make significant progress, ideally reducing the need for long-term intensive intervention. For additional information see Essential Features of Tier 3 .

These tiers work together within the MTSS framework to ensure that all students receive the appropriate level of support based on their individual needs, to achieve academic and behavioral success for every student.

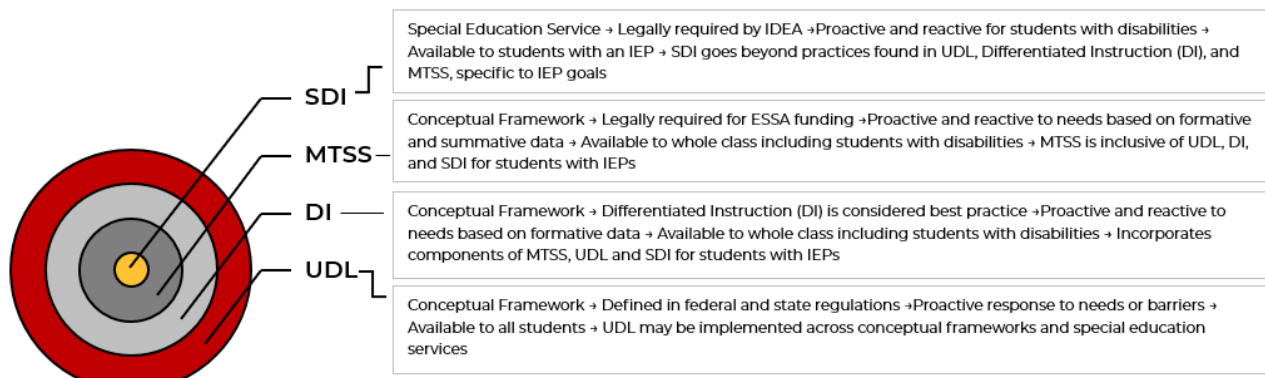
## REFERENCES

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<https://mtss4success.org/essential-components/multi-level-prevention-system>



## Specially Designed Instruction (SDI)

### SPECIALLY DESIGNED INSTRUCTION IN CONTEXT



Children and youth who are identified as having a disability and eligible for special education services must, according to federal law, be provided with a “Free Appropriate Public Education” (FAPE) through special education and related services, supplementary aids and services, and program modifications and supports for personnel (34 CFR §300.101), and COMAR 13A.05.01). Each public agency must ensure that to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, are educated with children who are nondisabled; and special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular education environment occurs only if the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be satisfactorily achieved (34 CFR §300.114(a)(1)(2)).

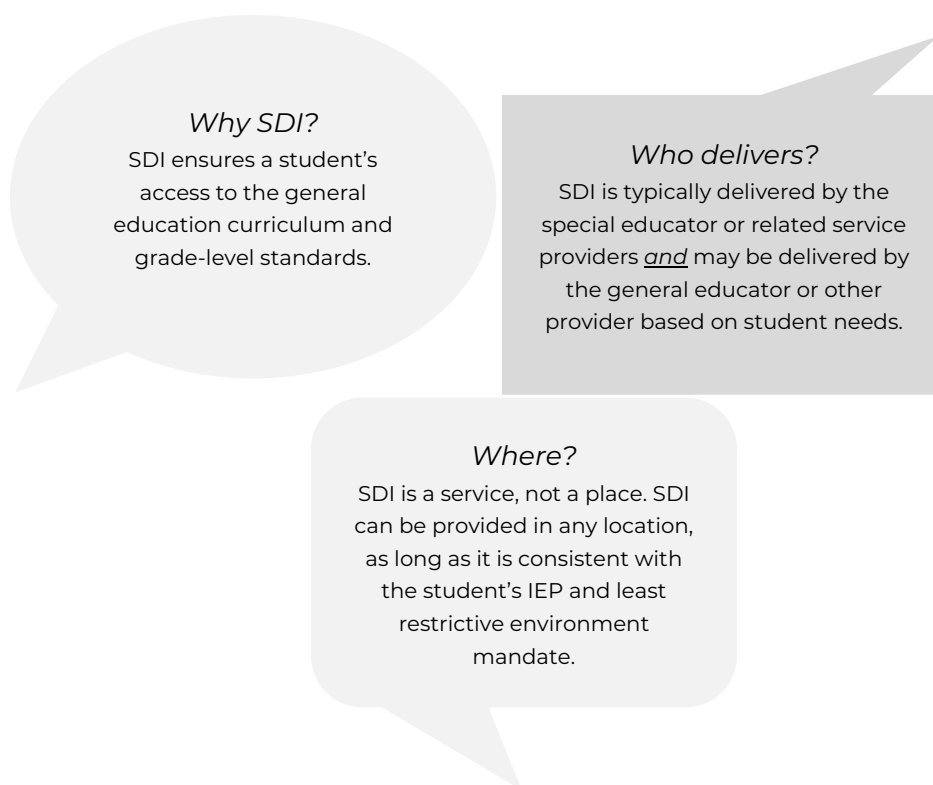
Both federal and state regulations define special education services as specially designed instruction: “the adaptation of content, methodology, or delivery of instruction to address the unique needs of a student with a disability and to ensure access to the general curriculum so that the student can meet the educational standards that apply to each student within the jurisdiction of the public agency.” (34 CFR §300.39(b)(3) and COMAR 13A.05.01.03 B (71 and 72)).

All students with disabilities must have an Individualized Education Program (IEP) that is appropriate for their needs and is “reasonably calculated to enable a child to make progress,” and “every child should have the chance to meet challenging objectives” (Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District RE-1, 2017). The IEP defines the services needed so that students can achieve annual IEP goals; as well as access and make progress in the general education curriculum based on the State’s academic content standards for the grade in which the student is enrolled. The IEP is co-developed, co-implemented, and co-evaluated during the IEP team process. The IEP provides a written description of the special education and related services for a student with a disability; developed, reviewed, and revised by the student’s IEP team annually.

All Maryland students are expected to meet rigorous expectations as defined by the Maryland College and Career Ready Standards (MCCRS) and implemented through appropriately designed SDI at the system, school, and classroom levels. Most students with disabilities are expected to demonstrate mastery of the general education standards through participation in the general assessment and have the opportunity to earn a high school diploma. A small number of students with the most significant

cognitive disabilities cannot demonstrate their learning and progress on the standard assessment. For these students, learning is assessed according to alternate academic achievement standards (AAAS). The AAAS are measures of attainment of the skills that reflect reduced complexity, breadth, and/or depth as compared to the general standards. The skills measured through the alternate academic achievement standards are derived from the grade-level MCCRS and Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS); and do not represent a separate set of standards. To learn more about the AAAS see [Guidance for IEP Teams Working with Students with the Most Significant Cognitive Disabilities: Assessment and Eligibility for the Alternate Framework](#).

General and special educators, along with other service providers, collaborate on the design and delivery of SDI. This evidence-based iterative process uses individual progress monitoring data to make decisions about adaptations to instructional delivery, content, and methodology.



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## **GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR SDI**

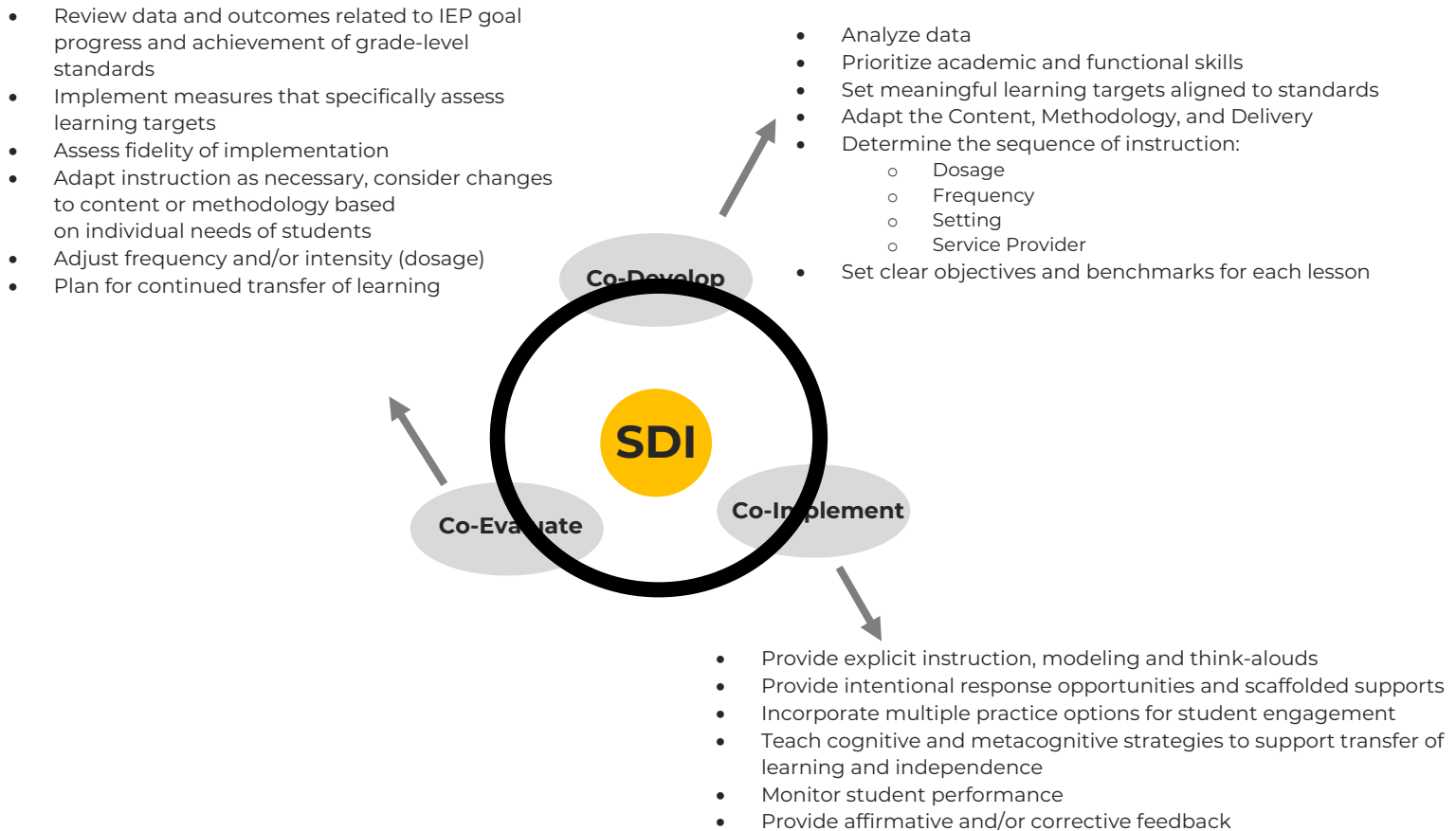
The decision-making process for SDI is focused on defining the aspects of instruction that are special or intentional. The following guiding questions can help facilitate the instructional planning process.

- Is the instruction different from the typical general education practices of UDL or Differentiated Instruction?
- Is it explicit instruction rather than a tool or accommodation?
- Does it address the student's unique learning needs as indicated in the IEP?
- Does the instruction enable access to and progress toward grade-level standards?
- Is the instruction directly related to an IEP goal and is data being collected for progress monitoring?
- Is it growing a skill that will be transferrable or generalizable?
- Is it designed to build independence?

## **DELIVERING SDI**

SDI is described as intentional, structured, and customized instruction for the individual student with an IEP. Educators work together, using information from the IEP and knowledge of the grade-level standards to adapt daily instruction and intervention to facilitate access and progress in the general education curriculum in addition to achievement of IEP goals and objectives.

When delivering specially designed instruction for students with disabilities, educators should consider the following three-phase cycle for individual, small-group, or whole-group instruction:



## EVIDENCE-BASED SDI AND HIGH LEVERAGED PRACTICES

### Systematic prompting and feedback toward a specific goal

- [Specific lesson targets](#) (HLP #12)
- Advanced organizers
- [Content presented visually](#) (IRIS Center, 2017)
- Logical sequencing
- [Teach social behavior](#) (HLP #9)

### Self-regulation support for learning and behavior

- Instruction focused on executive function and goal-setting skills
- [Self-monitoring, personal agendas, visual schedules](#) (NCLII, 2018)
- Text interaction strategies
- [Conduct functional behavior assessment for the development of student behavior supports](#) (HLP #10)

**Peer-assisted instruction; reciprocal teaching/learning**

- Social Networking
- Peer coaching/tutoring ([PALS](#))
- Role Reversal Tutoring

**Scaffolded supports**

- Temporary supports calibrated to the student's current level with fading and removal for independence
- Concrete-Representation-Abstract (CRA)
- [Visual cues and representations](#) (IRIS Center, 2017)
- [Adapt curriculum tasks and materials for specific learning goals](#) (HLP #15)

**Explicit Instruction**

- [Modeling using visual and verbal supports](#) (HLP #16)
- Intentional choice of examples
- Removal of distracting information
- Massed and distributed independent practice

**Modified schema-based instruction**

- [Systematically taught problem structures supporting working memory, language, reading, and/or numeracy](#) (HLP #12)
- [Intentional opportunities for practice with feedback](#) (HLP #22)

**Learning and communication accessibility**

- [Video self-modeling](#) (Merrill, A., & Risch, J. (2014). Implementation and Effectiveness of Using Video Self-Modeling with Students with ASD. The Reporter,19(6))
- [Augmentative or alternative communication \(AAC\) systems](#) (TIES Center, Creative Commons on YouTube, February 2023)
  - TIP#17: What is Communicative Competence for and with AAC Users? (TIES Center, April 2021)
  - TIP #28: Social Support for AAC Users (TIES Center, September 2022)
- [Assistive Technology](#) (Center for Parent Information & Resources, March 2024)
  - What Do Teachers Need to Know About Instructional Technology? (Progress Center, August 2021)
  - Stories from the Classroom: Finding the “Just Right” Assistive Technology (Progress Center, August 2021)

- Assistive Technology (Parents' Place of Maryland, 2024)
- Computer-aided instruction for cognitive skills

**Positive and constructive feedback to guide student learning and behavior**

- Teaching error identification skills
- [Relating feedback to goals](#) (HLP #8)
- Providing feedback as questioning

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## Reviewing Student Information on IEPs and Section 504 Plans

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### THE INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAM (IEP)

The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) requires that all staff members working with a student be knowledgeable of the contents of their IEP. To meet this obligation successfully, it is imperative that any school staff working with a student (including but not limited to administrators, teachers, paraeducators, and related service providers) are given appropriate time and planning support to read and implement student IEPs. These legal documents outline instructional needs, any specific activities that have been assigned to the staff member and their classroom, and what, if any, accommodations, modifications, and/or services school staff should be implementing.

This section of the guide will explain the core components related to the development of a student's IEP. Understanding each component's composition will be the foundation for creating an inclusive learning environment where all students can succeed. The section will conclude with a comparison of the IEP versus a Section 504 plan; both plans provide students with disabilities access to instruction but have different eligibility requirements and are protected under different sections of the law.

### ELIGIBILITY

A student is found eligible as having a disability under IDEA if the IEP team determines that the student:

- Has one of fourteen educational disabilities, outlined under the federal [statute](#);
- That this disability adversely impacts their access to and progress in their education;
- **And** as a result, the student requires specialized instruction.

While identification of an educational disability is a required as a part of the eligibility process for special education services, all decisions about services and supports in the IEP are determined by individual student need, and never by label. When a student is determined eligible for services, the IEP team will determine what areas are impacted by their disability. These areas may include, but are not limited to, academic, health, physical, and behavioral needs. Understanding a student's disability and the areas affected by the disability is the first step in a teacher's understanding of, and provision for, the learning needs of the student. The eligibility and impact sections of a student's IEP provide staff working with the student a better understanding of the impact that a student's disability has on their instructional need within the educational setting.

For more information regarding disabilities recognized under IDEA, refer to [The 13 Disability Categories Under IDEA](#) (Rawe, 2024).

## **PRESENT LEVELS OF ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AND FUNCTIONAL PERFORMANCE (PLAAFP)**

The PLAAFP is a critical component of the IEP for students with disabilities. This section provides a comprehensive summary of assessment findings that integrates information from multiple sources to provide a thorough description of the student's strengths and needs as a learner, current demonstration of skills relative to grade-level standards and/or age-appropriate expectations, instructional grade-level trend data, and intervention history. It is the driving force behind the development of the IEP.

In addition to the assessment summaries, the PLAAFP also provides information related to parental input, identifies the student's strengths, interests, attributes, and personal accomplishments, and summarizes how the student's disability impacts their involvement in the general education curriculum. The PLAAFP section of the IEP provides teachers with a clear understanding of the student's strengths and needs as a learner in their classroom. This allows teachers to meet the unique learning needs of the student.

For more information regarding the Present Levels, refer to The Center for Parent Information and Resources: [Present Levels Component of the IEP](#) (Center for Parent Information and Resources, 2024).

## **SECONDARY TRANSITION**

The Secondary Transition Plan provides a tailored roadmap for students with disabilities to reach their post-school goals. In Maryland, a secondary transition plan is a required part of any IEP for a student who will be fourteen years old over the life of that IEP. So, if a student has an IEP meeting in October but will turn 14 in November, that IEP must include a transition plan. A transition plan includes measurable postsecondary goals based upon age-appropriate transition assessments related to training, education, employment, and where appropriate, independent living skills. It also identifies the transition services and activities, including courses of study, needed to assist the student in reaching their postsecondary goals. Transition plans should be designed to help a student transition successfully from school to further education/training, employment, and/or independent living.

Understanding the Transition Plan within a student's IEP is vital for teachers because it outlines the strategies and goals for preparing the student for life after high school. This plan helps teachers support the student in developing the necessary skills and accessing resources to transition smoothly into adulthood, whether that transition includes further education, employment, or independent living. By being aware of the Transition Plan, teachers can align their instruction and support to help the student achieve their post-secondary goals, ensuring they are adequately prepared for life beyond the classroom.

The Secondary Transition Plan can be found under the "Special Considerations and Accommodations" portion of the IEP. For additional information, see page four of the [Maryland Secondary Transition Planning Guide](#) (Maryland State Department of Education, 2019).

## **SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS AND ACCOMMODATIONS**

Special Considerations in the IEP refers to specific factors or circumstances that may impact a student's educational needs, learning environment, or the provision of special education and related services. These considerations help ensure that the IEP is comprehensive, individualized, and responsive to the unique needs of each student. In Maryland, the communication needs of the student, and assistive technology devices and services required for the student, must be addressed in this section. If a



student's behavior impedes their learning to the extent that the student requires a Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP) it will be noted in this section of the IEP.

The Special Considerations section of the IEP also houses the following:

**Instructional and assessment accommodations** are practices or procedures that provide a student with a disability equitable access during instruction and assessments in the areas of accessibility, presentation, response, and timing. Accommodations do not reduce learning expectations. Accommodations include changes to instruction (such as materials, content enhancements, and tasks) that change how a student learns, in addition to changes in how students demonstrate their learning. Accommodations also includes adaptations to the learning or assessment environment, such reduced distractions or specialized equipment or furniture. Accommodations do not change the content of what the student is learning or being assessed on. Accommodations may include assistive technology devices and services. Accommodations must be specific and appropriate to meet the needs of the student as defined in the PLAAFP.

To learn more about the differences between accommodations and modifications, see the National Center on Educational Outcome's [The Basics of Accommodations and Modifications](#) (2024).

**Supplementary Aids, Services, Program Modifications, and Supports** are key components of specially designed instruction that enable students with disabilities to access and participate in their least restrictive environment. This section of the IEP describes a wide variety of changes to instructional materials and delivery, student responses, the classroom and school environment. This section also outlines actions adults in the school setting should take to support the student's engagement and progress. Also included in this section of the IEP are consultative services, training (for both the student and school staff), and other supports that enable school staff to meet the student's educational needs.

Additional information can be found in the [Maryland IEP Process Guide](#) (Maryland State Department of Education, 2024).

## GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Annual IEP goals and their accompanying objectives and benchmarks define the focus of the specially designed instruction that the student will receive to enable them to make progress in the general education curriculum. Annual IEP goals serve as the primary framework outlining the specific skills or behaviors the student is expected to master within a one-year period. These goals are developed to address the underlying skill deficits that prevent the student from meeting grade-level standards, with an emphasis on the skills that are more critical to future success and/or underlie multiple standards. IEP objectives, on the other hand, are incremental steps designed to support these goals by delineating clear milestones or actions leading towards the desired outcome. Customized to address each student's individual needs, strengths, and areas for growth, these goals and objectives are reasonably calculated to enable the student to meet grade-level standards and promote effective academic, social, behavioral, and functional development.

For additional information regarding Goals and Objectives see page 13 of the [Parent Information Series: The Individualized Education Program](#) (Maryland State Department of Education, 2023).

## SERVICES

IEP services are tailored to each student's individual needs, providing the necessary supports and interventions to help them succeed academically, socially, and behaviorally in the educational setting. IEP services can be provided by a general educator, special educator, certified paraeducator (under the supervision of a special or general educator), and/or related service provider. The IEP will outline who is specifically responsible for delivering services. Reviewing the discussion of services in the IEP can help practitioners to gain an understanding of what the service is intended to look like; co-planning between school staff with content knowledge and special education knowledge can help to further effective implementation of services for students with disabilities.

The services section of the IEP will also note if specially designed instruction will take place inside or outside of general education. This distinction is important in understanding a student's Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). As Parents' Place of Maryland, Maryland's Parent Training and Information Center, notes, "LRE is a term that simply means being in a general education classroom where students with and without disabilities are learning together." For more information about LRE, reference Parents' Place of Maryland's [Least Restrictive Environment](#) fact sheet (2023).

The [Maryland IEP Process Guide](#) (Maryland State Department of Education, 2024) contains valuable information about the selection of services. For more information regarding services and supports, visit the [IRIS Center](#) (IRIS Center, 2024).

## SECTION 504 PLANS

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is a federal antidiscrimination law that prohibits agencies and organizations that receive federal funds from discriminating against an individual based on disability status. Students who attend public school are covered by this law. Section 504 requires that schools make reasonable accommodations that allow students access to and participation in their educational program and activities. Section 504 Plans will identify the student's documented disabling condition, the required accommodations, and any services the student may require. Much like an IEP, these plans are updated at least annually by school-based teams, including the student, their teachers, and their parents or guardians. Section 504 Plans are not IEPs, however the same time and care should be taken to ensure that 504 plans are incorporated into a lesson just as purposefully as IEPs. Section 504 Plans do not provide SDI but are designed to provide access to allow the student to participate in the activity. Unlike an IEP, progress on goals is not a component of a Section 504 Plan.

The Parents' Place of Maryland has a helpful fact sheet, [IDEA vs. Section 504](#) (2023), that outlines the differences between these two sections of the law with a lens on student impact. For more information specific to Section 504, visit [Protecting Students with Disabilities Section 504](#) (U.S. Department of Education, 2024).

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## Understanding Disability Categories

To be eligible for Special Education services under the federal and State law, a student must be identified with an educational disability defined in the legislation, have adverse impact from that disability, and require specialized instruction in order to participate and make progress in the curriculum<sup>2</sup>. A multidisciplinary team of educators and other professionals with expertise related to disability and the student's areas of need (e.g., speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists, audiologists, school psychologists) conduct assessments (as needed) and review multiple sources of information to determine if the student meets the eligibility criteria.

**“If you have known one student with [a particular label], you have known ONE STUDENT with [that label]”**

Brenda Smith Myles

Knowing what disability a student who has an IEP has been identified with can help teachers begin the process of developing appropriate adaptations and supports to enable the student to be successful in the classroom. HOWEVER, teachers should be careful not to make assumptions based on the disability label. There is great variability among students with the same identification. What teachers need to understand to support students is how the disability affects this individual student. The “impact statement” within the IEP begins to answer this question, and the entire IEP reflects the multidisciplinary team's determination of the supports and services the student requires to address the impact of the disability on their learning.

### A Word About Words

Words have a powerful impact on people's feelings and perceptions. For groups of people in society who have historically been underserved or marginalized, claiming identity through language and asserting preferences for terminology is a major step to empowerment. That being said, any group is composed of individuals who may have different preferences and priorities.

Within the disability community, approaches to labels and terminology vary. For many years, advocates (including many parents and educators and some people with disabilities) promoted a “person first” approach to language that deemphasized the disability (“child with Autism,” “students with special needs.”) Many disabled individuals have explained they view disability as a neutral or positive part of their identity and prefer terms like “Autistic person” or “Deaf students.” Most reject euphemisms like “differently abled” and “special needs,” affirming that disability is not a “bad word” and that the need for access, participation, or opportunity are not “special” but are basic human needs.

When possible, determine and respect the preferences of the individual person.

Each of the 14 disability categories is defined by federal and state law. Definitions may be found in [COMAR 13A.05.01.03](#):

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<sup>2</sup> A student who has a diagnosed disability that does not impact their education in such a way that they require special education services may still be eligible for accommodations under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Category	Definition	Areas often impacted
Specific Learning Disability (SLD)	Difficulties in understanding, processing, and/or producing spoken or written language or mathematical calculations not caused by sensory, motor, or cognitive disabilities. Includes but is not limited to dyslexia, dyscalculia, and dysgraphia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reading (including decoding, fluency, and/or and comprehension)</li> <li>• Spelling</li> <li>• Executive functioning (such as working memory and organization)</li> <li>• Listening comprehension (for some students)</li> <li>• Math calculations and problem-solving</li> </ul>
Other Health Impairment (OHI)	A medical condition that impacts a student's alertness, stamina, or strength in a way that impacts educational performance. Examples include Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), epilepsy, sickle cell anemia, and diabetes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attention and focus</li> <li>• Energy levels</li> <li>• Attendance</li> <li>• Executive functioning</li> </ul>
Speech-Language Impairment (SLI)	<p>Disorders of articulation (pronunciation), receptive language (understanding others' speech*), expressive language (conveying one's message), fluency (e.g., stuttering), voice (e.g., pitch and loudness of speech) or a combination of these.</p> <p>*may also include impairment of signed language in students who use a signed language primarily</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Following directions</li> <li>• Comprehension of academic content</li> <li>• Spoken and written expression</li> <li>• Social interactions</li> <li>• Behavior (due to frustration, especially in young children)</li> </ul>

Category	Definition	Areas often impacted
Autism	Differences in language and communication, social interaction, behaviors, and interests, and/or responses to sensory stimuli	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding and using language</li> <li>• Seeking or avoiding certain sensory experiences (e.g., sounds, light, movements, textures)</li> <li>• Attention and executive functioning</li> <li>• Response to changes in schedule and routine</li> <li>• Social interactions</li> </ul>
Emotional Disability (ED)	Persistent and significant issues of mood, social relationships, and/or behavior that interfere with learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peer interactions</li> <li>• Relationships with adults</li> <li>• Participation in learning and other activities</li> <li>• Attendance</li> </ul>
Intellectual Disability (ID)	Significantly below average cognitive ability and difficulty with adaptive skills (the ability to function independently at an age-expected level)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acquiring and retaining new information and skills</li> <li>• Rate of learning</li> <li>• Applying skills to new contexts and tasks</li> <li>• Processing and response time</li> <li>• Independence and self-management</li> </ul>

Category	Definition	Areas often impacted
Visual Impairment (including Blindness) <sup>3</sup>	Limitations in the ability to perceive and/or utilize visual information that are not corrected by glasses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to information through text and other media (may use alternative format such as Braille, large print, and/or audio)</li> <li>• Development of background knowledge</li> <li>• Access to learning activities presented visually</li> <li>• Social interactions due to reduced access to social cues and feedback</li> </ul>
Deafness	Partial or total absence of hearing, impacting the ability to understand and use spoken language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication may include another language (like ASL) or modality (like Cued Speech)</li> <li>• Reading development</li> <li>• Development of background knowledge</li> <li>• Social interaction (due to communication barriers)</li> </ul>
Hearing Impairment <sup>4</sup>	Inability to hear some tones or levels of sound which impacts communication and access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication, especially in difficult listening environments</li> <li>• Reading development</li> <li>• Development of background knowledge</li> <li>• Social interaction (due to communication barriers)</li> </ul>

<sup>3</sup> Many people prefer the language “Blind or Low-Vision” to the terminology used in the law.

<sup>4</sup> Many people prefer the term “Hard of Hearing” or an all-encompassing use of the word Deaf to the terminology used in the law.

Category	Definition	Areas often impacted
DeafBlindness	Combined visual and hearing limitations, resulting in complex challenges in communication and access to the environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Language and communication</li> <li>• Access to information and experiences</li> <li>• Skill development</li> <li>• Social interaction (due to communication barriers)</li> </ul>
Orthopedic Impairment (OI)	Significant physical disability caused by congenital condition, illness, or injury that limits motor function in a way that impacts education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to and engagement with learning tools, materials, and activities</li> <li>• Independence in the learning environment</li> <li>• Written expression and other typical means of demonstrating learning</li> </ul>
Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)	Cognitive, sensory, motor, or language impairments caused by head injury that occurs after birth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cognitive processing, including memory and processing speed</li> <li>• Acquisition of knowledge and skills</li> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Attention and executive functioning</li> <li>• Self-regulation</li> </ul>
Multiple Disabilities	Co-occurrence of two or more of the above conditions which interact to create complex and/or unique needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Development of knowledge and skills</li> <li>• Independence and self-management</li> </ul>



Category	Definition	Areas often impacted
Developmental Delay (DD)	In a child under the age of eight, a delay of at least 25% in one or more developmental areas or the presence of a pattern of atypical development that is likely to lead to delay	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Development of emergent academic skills (e.g., reading, numeracy)</li><li>• Active and appropriate participation in classroom routines and activities</li><li>• Independence and self-management</li><li>• Social interactions and relationships</li></ul>

## Creating a Positive School Climate

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### INTRODUCTION

Creating a positive school climate is crucial for the success and well-being of all students. Classrooms and schools should be designed to provide a supportive and enriching environment for all students with diverse learning needs, including those with disabilities. For this to happen, it is essential to foster an atmosphere that is inclusive, respectful, and supportive of all students. There are various strategies and approaches that can be employed to create a positive school climate in the classroom with a focus on building a sense of community, promoting diversity and equity, and fostering a supportive learning environment.

### UNDERSTANDING INCLUSIVE EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS

Inclusive educational settings are spaces where students with disabilities learn alongside their non-disabled peers; all classrooms should be designed to be inclusive educational settings. The goal of inclusion is to create an environment where all students in a community are educated in a shared space that fosters belonging and acceptance. Inclusive educational settings often include students with a wide range of learning needs, including those with physical, cognitive, and emotional disabilities, as well as students who are Multilingual Learners or who come from diverse cultural backgrounds.

### BUILDING A CLASSROOM COMMUNITY

One of the key strategies for creating a positive school climate in an inclusive educational setting is to build a classroom community among students, teachers, and families. A positive classroom community can be fostered through various activities and initiatives, such as regular class meetings, collaborative projects, and inclusive school events. These activities can help students develop a sense of belonging and connectedness, which is essential for creating a positive and supportive learning environment. Additionally, involving families in the school community can help to create a sense of partnership and collaboration, which can further enhance the sense of community within the school.

### PROMOTING DIVERSITY AND EQUITY

Schools bring together students with a wide range of abilities, backgrounds, and experiences. It is essential to promote diversity and equity within the classroom and to celebrate the unique strengths and contributions of every student. Teachers can promote diversity and equity by incorporating diverse perspectives and experiences into the curriculum, providing opportunities for students to share their own stories and experiences, and fostering a culture of respect and acceptance. Additionally, it is important to address issues of bias and discrimination and to create a classroom environment that is inclusive and welcoming for all students.

### FOSTERING A SUPPORTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT FOR ALL STUDENTS

Creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment is essential for the success of all students. Teachers can foster such an environment by providing individualized support and accommodations for students with diverse learning needs, promoting positive behavior and social skills, and fostering a culture of acceptance and understanding. It is important for teachers to create a classroom environment that is physically and emotionally safe, where all students feel valued and supported. Additionally, teachers can collaborate with support staff, such as special education teachers and paraprofessionals, to ensure that all students receive the support and resources they need to succeed.

## PRIORITIZING COLLABORATION AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Creating a positive school climate in an inclusive educational setting requires collaboration and ongoing professional development for teachers and staff. Collaboration among teachers, support staff, and administrators is essential for ensuring that the needs of all students are met and for creating a cohesive and supportive learning environment. Additionally, ongoing professional development can help teachers and staff grow the knowledge and skills they need to effectively support students with diverse learning needs and to create an inclusive and supportive classroom environment. Professional development opportunities can include training on inclusive teaching strategies, behavior management techniques, and understanding the needs of students with disabilities.

Creating a positive school climate is essential for the success and well-being of all students. By building a sense of community, promoting diversity and equity, fostering a supportive and inclusive learning environment, and engaging in collaboration and professional development, teachers and staff can create an environment where all students feel valued, supported, and empowered to succeed. It is essential for educators and school communities to prioritize the creation of positive and inclusive environments in inclusive educational settings, as this can have a profound impact on the academic, social, and emotional outcomes of all students.

Creating Communities of Belonging for Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities Everyone wants to be valued and have a sense of belonging in their community. The need for valued belonging is true for students in a school community as well. Although belonging is equally important for all students, students with significant cognitive disabilities are less likely to experience a deep sense of belonging in their school community.

The TIES (Teams Intervening Effectively to Ensure Success) Center's "Creating Communities of Belonging for Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities" outlines ten dimensions of belonging. These dimensions are designed to help schools create inclusive environments where every student feels valued and included. The ten dimensions are:

**Being Present:** Ensuring students are physically present in inclusive settings.

**Being Invited:** Actively inviting students to participate in all activities.

**Being Welcomed:** Creating a welcoming atmosphere for all students.

**Being Known:** Recognizing and appreciating each student's unique identity.

**Being Accepted:** Fostering an environment where differences are accepted and celebrated.

**Being Supported:** Providing the necessary support for students to succeed.

**Being Befriended:** Encouraging friendships and social connections.

**Being Needed:** Valuing the contributions of all students.

**Being Involved:** Ensuring students are actively involved in the school community.

**Being Valued:** Recognizing and valuing each student's presence and contributions.

These dimensions provide a comprehensive framework for schools to create a sense of belonging for students with significant cognitive disabilities. By focusing on these areas, schools can work towards more inclusive and supportive educational environments.

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# Strategies for Creating a Positive School Climate in an Inclusive Educational Setting

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## 1. ENGAGE ALL STUDENTS

Engaging all students in the classroom is crucial to promoting success. When every student feels included and valued, they are more likely to participate actively in their learning and achieve their full potential. By creating a supportive and inclusive environment, teachers can help students develop a sense of belonging and motivation to succeed.

### **Acknowledge each student; offer daily positive greetings.**

By recognizing and valuing each individual, teachers create a sense of belonging and importance for their students. This simple act can have a profound impact on a student's self-esteem and motivation to learn. Offering daily positive greetings sets the tone for a positive learning environment. Using encouraging and inclusive language when interacting with students is also essential. Words have power, and using positive and encouraging language can build confidence and foster a supportive relationship between teacher and student.

### **Check-in each day and throughout the day with prompts focused on the positive.**

By taking the time to connect with students on a personal level, educators not only build strong relationships but also create a safe space for them to share their thoughts and feelings. This daily check-in allows educators to gauge how students are feeling and address any concerns they may have before they escalate. By focusing on the positive aspects of their lives, educators can help instill a sense of gratitude and optimism in their students. This practice can lead to improved mental health, increased self-esteem, and better overall academic performance.

### **Show interest in building strong, caring relationships and be intentional about it; build belonging; show that students matter.**

By showing genuine interest and being intentional about fostering connections, educators can build a sense of belonging and demonstrate that students truly matter. This approach not only enhances academic success, but also promotes emotional well-being.

### **Structure/promote engagement of students with peers.**

Establish a collaborative culture of inclusion and respect that welcomes all students. Creating a structured and engaging environment for students to interact with their peers is essential for fostering collaboration, communication, and critical thinking skills. By implementing strategies such as group projects, peer tutoring, and collaborative learning activities, educators can promote meaningful engagement among students.

- Group projects allow students to work together towards a common goal, encouraging teamwork and building problem-solving skills.
- Peer tutoring provides an opportunity for students to learn from each other and build confidence in their abilities.
- Collaborative learning activities encourage active participation and help students develop a deeper understanding of the material through discussion and debate.

Promoting engagement with peers not only enhances social skills but also improves academic performance. Students are more likely to retain information when they are actively involved in the learning process and have the opportunity to share ideas with their classmates. By structuring opportunities for peer interaction, educators can create a supportive and dynamic learning environment that benefits all students.

**Offer voice and choice in the classroom, whenever possible.**

When students are given the opportunity to make decisions about their own learning, they feel empowered and motivated to succeed. By sharing power with students, teachers can foster a sense of ownership and responsibility among their learners. Allowing students to have a say in their education not only increases their engagement but also helps them develop important skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making. When students feel valued and engaged, they are more likely to take ownership of their learning and strive for success.

**Promote self-care and mental wellness.**

It's important to create a supportive environment that encourages students to prioritize their mental health. By incorporating self-care practices into the curriculum and daily routines, educators can help students develop healthy coping mechanisms and resilience. Encouraging open communication about mental health issues and providing resources for support can also make a significant impact on student well-being. Teaching mindfulness techniques, stress management strategies, and the importance of self-care can empower students to take control of their mental wellness.

**Ensure ongoing contact with students and their families through routine phone calls home.**

By making phone calls home and checking in with parents regularly, educators can build strong relationships that benefit both the student and the school community. Phone calls provide a personal touch that cannot be replicated through emails or text messages. They allow for open communication, feedback, and the opportunity to address any concerns or issues that may arise. By reaching out to parents, teachers can gain valuable insights into their students' lives outside of school, which can help tailor instruction to meet individual needs. Regular check-ins with parents demonstrate a commitment to collaboration and partnership in supporting student success. It shows that educators value parental involvement and are dedicated to working together towards common goals. For phone calls to be a successful form of communication, it is essential to begin contact on a positive note; the first time that a family hears from a teacher should not be when their student has engaged in a negative behavior. Prioritizing calling families at the start of the school year or semester is an invaluable tool in building relationships.

## **2. TEACHING STRATEGIES**

**Teach, remind, and prompt students on rules and expectations of learning.**

Teaching students about the rules and expectations of learning helps to set clear boundaries and guidelines for behavior in the classroom. This allows students to know what is acceptable and unacceptable, promoting a positive learning environment. Reminding students of these rules on a regular basis reinforces their importance and helps to keep them at the forefront of students' minds. This constant reinforcement helps to ensure that students are consistently following the rules and meeting expectations. Prompting students when they may be straying from the rules or expectations

serves as a gentle reminder to refocus their attention on their academic responsibilities. By gently guiding students back on track, teachers help them stay accountable for their actions.

**Prioritize social-emotional skill building and coping strategies.**

Social-emotional learning not only enhances students' ability to understand and manage their own emotions but also improves their capacity to empathize with others and build positive relationships. This leads to a more inclusive and supportive school environment where all students feel valued and respected.

**Model expectations in a calm, confident and deliberate manner.**

When educators approach situations with calmness, they are better able to think rationally and make informed decisions. This practice benefits both educators themselves and those who look to them for guidance.

**Engage in culturally responsive teaching practices and strategies.**

Culturally responsive teaching practices and strategies are essential in creating an inclusive and supportive learning environment for all students. By engaging in these practices, educators can better understand and respect the diverse backgrounds and experiences of their students.

One key aspect of culturally responsive teaching is recognizing and valuing the cultural identities of students. This involves incorporating diverse perspectives, experiences, and examples into the curriculum to make it more relevant and relatable to all learners. Additionally, educators should strive to create a safe space where students feel comfortable expressing themselves and sharing their unique cultural backgrounds.

**Differentiate supports based on need.**

One way to differentiate support for students is through personalized learning plans. These plans should consider a student's strengths, weaknesses, and learning styles, allowing teachers to tailor instruction to meet their specific needs. For example, a student who struggles with reading may benefit from extra support in phonics or comprehension strategies. While personal learning plans may be used for all students in a classroom, if being used for a student with a 504 or an IEP they should complement those plans rather than replace them.

Additionally, providing access to resources such as tutoring or counseling services can help students overcome challenges and thrive in the classroom. By offering a range of supports tailored to individual needs, educators can create an inclusive learning environment where all students can succeed.

**Use relationship mapping to track interactions with students and identify those who need additional support.**

Relationship mapping is a valuable tool for educators to track interactions with students and identify those who may need additional support. By visually mapping out the connections between students and teachers, it becomes easier to see patterns of engagement and communication. This can help educators pinpoint which students may be falling through the cracks or struggling academically or emotionally.

Relationship Mapping in a classroom is a strategy designed to ensure that every student has a positive and stable connection with at least one adult in the school. Here's how it typically works:

- **Identification:** School staff members identify students who do not currently have a positive relationship with any adult in the school. This is often done through private meetings where staff discuss the needs of each student.
- **Assignment:** Students identified as lacking positive connections are paired with a supportive adult mentor within the school. This mentor could be a teacher, counselor, sports coach, or any other staff member.
- **Support and Monitoring:** Throughout the school year, mentors support their assigned students, helping them navigate academic and personal challenges. School administrators regularly check in with staff to monitor the progress of these relationships.
- **Review and Adjustment:** At the end of the year, staff convene to review the effectiveness of the relationship mapping strategy and discuss any necessary adjustments for the future.

This approach helps create a supportive environment where students feel connected and valued, which can lead to reduced bullying, lower drop-out rates, and improved social-emotional capacities.

To learn more about relationship mapping, visit:

[Harvard's Relationship Mapping Strategies](#)

[How To Guide for Relationship Mapping](#)

[Student Relationship Mapping 101](#)

### 3. BEING RESPONSIVE TO ALL STUDENTS

**Refer students, including students who have experienced known trauma, to school-based counselors and outside support services before disciplinary referrals.**

It is important that teachers and administrators address the unique needs of students who have experienced trauma. When a student exhibits behavior that may warrant disciplinary action, it is crucial to consider the underlying reasons for their actions. By referring students, including those who have experienced known trauma, to school-based counselors and outside support services before resorting to disciplinary referrals, they are provided with the necessary resources and assistance to address their emotional needs. These professionals are trained to help students process their experiences, develop coping strategies, and build resilience.

**Build strong relationships as behavior management.**

One key aspect of effective behavior management is building strong relationships with students. When teachers take the time to get to know their students on a personal level, they can better understand their individual needs and motivations. This allows teachers to tailor their approach to each student, providing them with the support they need to thrive academically. When students feel supported and understood, they are more likely to exhibit positive behaviors and engage in learning activities. By implementing strategies such as clear expectations, consistent consequences, and positive reinforcement, teachers can create a safe and structured environment that promotes student success.



**Respond consistently to student behavior.**

Consistency is key when it comes to responding to student behavior in the classroom. It is important for educators to establish clear expectations and consequences for both positive and negative behaviors. By consistently enforcing these rules, students will know what is expected of them and understand the consequences of their actions.

When responding to student behavior, it is crucial for teachers to remain calm and composed. Reacting emotionally can escalate a situation and make it more difficult to address effectively. Instead, teachers should address the behavior calmly and objectively, focusing on finding a solution rather than assigning blame.

Consistent responses also help create a sense of fairness in the classroom. When students see that rules are consistently enforced for all students, they are more likely to respect those rules themselves.

**4. UNDERSTANDING BEHAVIOR AS COMMUNICATION**

Behavior is often viewed through a punitive lens, where misbehavior is met with consequences rather than understanding. When behavior is considered a form of communication, it leads to an understanding that behavior is often a response to their environment. When students exhibit challenging behaviors, they may be expressing unmet needs, frustration, or a lack of understanding. If a student who disrupts a class is struggling with the material, feeling overwhelmed, or seeking attention, then by recognizing these behaviors as forms of communication, this allows teachers and administrators to respond more effectively and compassionately. This shift in perspective encourages educators to ask critical questions: What is this behavior trying to tell me? How can I address the underlying issue rather than just the behavior itself?

**The Role of Adults in Understanding Student Needs**

It is the responsibility of adults—teachers, administrators, and support staff—to decode the messages behind student behaviors. This requires a shift from a reactive to a proactive approach in addressing student needs. Educators must cultivate an understanding of the diverse backgrounds and experiences that shape student behavior. Factors such as socioeconomic status, family dynamics, mental health, and cultural background can significantly influence how students express themselves. By taking the time to understand these factors, educators can create a more inclusive and supportive learning environment. This understanding also involves recognizing the unique strengths and challenges each student brings to the classroom, which can inform tailored interventions and support strategies.

**Empowering Students Through Choice and Autonomy**

Empowering students by providing them with choices and a sense of autonomy can significantly impact their behavior and engagement. When students feel they have a voice in their education, they are more likely to take ownership of their learning and exhibit positive behaviors. This can be achieved through differentiated instruction, where educators tailor their teaching methods to accommodate diverse learning styles and preferences. Additionally, allowing students to have a say in classroom rules and expectations can foster a sense of community and responsibility. This participatory approach not only enhances student engagement but also cultivates critical thinking and decision-making skills, preparing students for future challenges.

**Addressing Unmet Needs**

Prioritizing student needs is essential in fostering an effective learning environment. Understanding that behavior is a form of communication underscores the importance of interpreting students' actions within the context of their experiences and challenges. When students exhibit disruptive or disengaged behaviors, it is crucial to recognize that these manifestations often signal unmet needs rather than mere defiance or lack of interest. By adopting this perspective, educators can shift their focus from punitive measures to supportive interventions that address the root causes of such behaviors. It is important to recognize that a classroom teacher alone cannot address all of a student's unmet needs, nor are they expected to; rather, this perspective encourages a reframing of how student behavior is typically understood by school-based staff.

The assertion that "students do well if they have the skills to meet the expectation" further highlights the necessity for adults to cultivate an empathetic understanding of individual student circumstances. When students struggle academically or behaviorally, it is not indicative of their capabilities but rather a reflection of barriers or personal challenges they may be facing. Educators can engage in active listening and observation to uncover these underlying issues, in order to equip themselves with the knowledge needed to provide individualized support. This approach can foster resilience and encourages positive engagement from learners.

### **Professional Development for Educators**

To effectively implement a student-focused approach that recognizes behavior as communication, educators must engage in ongoing professional development. Training in areas such as trauma-informed practices, social-emotional learning, and culturally responsive teaching can equip educators with the tools they need to understand and support their students effectively. Also, fostering a culture of collaboration among educators can facilitate sharing best practices and strategies for addressing student behavior. Professional learning communities can serve as platforms for educators to reflect on their practices, share successes and challenges, and collectively develop innovative solutions to meet student needs.

Establishing inclusive learning environments that prioritize social emotional learning alongside academic achievement can help students to thrive. Research shows that recognizing behavior as communication and addressing individual needs effectively can ultimately enhance student learning outcomes.

### **Challenging Behaviors and Unmet Needs**

Dr. Ross Greene has extensively researched the concept of behavior as communication and its impact on student achievement. His work emphasizes that challenging behaviors in children are often a result of unmet needs or difficulties in meeting certain expectations. Key points from his research include:

1. **Collaborative and Proactive Solutions (CPS) Model:** Dr. Greene developed the CPS model, which focuses on understanding the underlying issues causing challenging behaviors rather than simply trying to modify the behavior through rewards and punishments. The model encourages collaborative problem-solving between adults and children.
2. **Unmet Expectations:** According to Dr. Greene, challenging behaviors occur when the demands placed on a child exceed their capacity to respond adaptively. These behaviors are a form of communication, signaling that the child is struggling to meet certain expectations.

3. **Skill Deficits:** The CPS model identifies specific skills that a child may be lacking, such as flexibility, frustration tolerance, and problem-solving. By addressing these skill deficits, adults can help children better manage their behaviors.
4. **Non-Punitive Approach:** Dr. Greene advocates for a non-punitive, non-adversarial approach to managing challenging behaviors. This approach reduces conflict, enhances relationships, and improves communication between adults and children.
5. **Empathy and Understanding:** A key component of Dr. Greene's research is the emphasis on empathy. By understanding the child's perspective and working together to solve problems, adults can foster a more supportive and effective learning environment.

For more information on Dr. Greene's work with Behavior as Communication, visit:

[What Works and What Doesn't for Behaviorally Challenged Students](#)

[Collaborative and Proactive Solutions Model](#)

## 5. SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING

Social-emotional learning (SEL) has emerged as an essential component of education, particularly in the context of a generation that is increasingly engaging with technology and social media from a young age. The pervasive influence of screens on childhood experiences necessitates a heightened focus on SEL to ensure that students develop the necessary skills for emotional regulation, empathy, and interpersonal relationships. With children spending significant portions of their day online, they are often deprived of authentic social interactions that foster emotional intelligence. Consequently, this digital landscape can lead to feelings of isolation and anxiety, underscoring the urgent need for educational institutions to prioritize SEL initiatives.

Research has consistently demonstrated that effective SEL programs contribute positively to students' academic performance and overall well-being. By equipping students with tools to navigate their emotions and build resilience, these programs create a foundation for healthier relationships both in-person and online. As educators attempt to bridge the gap between traditional learning environments and the demands posed by digital interactions, it becomes imperative to integrate SEL into curricula comprehensively. This integration not only aids in addressing mental health concerns but also cultivates a supportive school climate conducive to learning.

With an unprecedented shift in how children experience their formative years—largely mediated by screens—it is critical that educational stakeholders recognize the importance of social-emotional learning. By investing more resources into SEL frameworks and training educators accordingly, schools can better prepare students for the complexities of modern life while fostering their emotional growth. The urgency surrounding this issue cannot be overstated; it is time to act decisively in prioritizing social-emotional development within our educational systems.

For more SEL resources please visit the [Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning \(CASEL\)](#).

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## Classroom Systems

### EFFECTIVE SUPPORTIVE CLASSROOM PRACTICE #1

#### Physical classroom environment

<b>Description</b>	A classroom is physically designed to meet the needs of all students.
<b>Strategy 1</b>	Design the physical classroom with safety in mind that will allow for instructional and restorative activities.
<b>Strategy 2</b>	Arrange desks and chairs to ensure safety and support. For example, desks may need to be arranged depending on the lesson's learning objective (for example, independent work versus circle time).
<b>Strategy 3</b>	Post visuals that provide reminders about the behavioral expectations and the classroom practices and routines.
<b>Rationale</b>	<b>Teachers can create a classroom that keeps all students emotionally and physically safe and prevents instances of unexpected behaviors by strategically planning the arrangement of the physical environment.</b>

### EFFECTIVE SUPPORTIVE CLASSROOM PRACTICE #2:

#### Classroom routines that focus on personal safety

<b>Description</b>	Classroom routines are developed to address the physical and emotional needs of all students, and a plan is in place to teach the classroom routines to all students.
<b>Strategy 1</b>	Establish predictable patterns and activities. Promote smooth operation of classroom arrivals and dismissal, following patterns for transitions, and requesting help and completion of work.
<b>Strategy 2</b>	Outline the steps for completing specific activities. Teach routines and procedures directly such as hand washing and walking in a single file line.
<b>Strategy 3</b>	Create routines and procedures for transitions such as before or after lunch and the beginning and the end of the day.
<b>Rationale</b>	<b>Establishing classroom routines will require teaching and re-teaching of the procedures. When clear routines are in place and consistently used, students are more likely to follow the rules, remain engaged with learning, and be less likely to demonstrate unexpected behavior.</b>

**EFFECTIVE SUPPORTIVE CLASSROOM PRACTICE #3:****Post, define and teach three to five positive school wide/classroom expectations**

<b>Description</b>	Three to five positive school-wide/classroom expectations are posted, defined, and explicitly taught.
<b>Strategy 1</b>	If a school is implementing a multi-tiered behavioral framework, such as a school-wide adoption of standardized behavioral expectations or core values, three to five of these expectations should be posted within the individual classroom and held up as classroom expectations. This creates a consistency of expectations across the school setting.
<b>Strategy 2</b>	Teach expectations using examples and non-examples and include opportunities to practice and receive feedback.
<b>Strategy 3</b>	Involve students in defining expectations within classroom routines, especially at the secondary level.
<b>Rationale</b>	<b>Teaching rules and routines to students at the beginning of the year and enforcing them consistently across time increases student academic achievement and task engagement.</b>

**EFFECTIVE SUPPORTIVE CLASSROOM PRACTICE #4:**

**Active supervision and proximity: active supervision practices that are used in a preventive manner to keep students safe and adhering to the expectations of the school**

<b>Description</b>	A process for monitoring the classroom, or any school setting, that incorporates moving, scanning, and interacting frequently with students.
<b>Strategy 1</b>	Visual Scanning: Scan and focus on the entire classroom to ensure that students are physically and emotionally safe.
<b>Strategy 2</b>	<p>Moving: continuous movement, proximity.</p> <p>While monitoring students, move around the classroom. Interact with students and observe behaviors of individuals and the group. Scan the entire selected area while moving around all corners of that area.</p>
<b>Strategy 3</b>	<p>Interacting with verbal communication respectfully, including any pre-corrections, <u>noncontingent attention</u>, and specific verbal feedback.</p> <p>Briefly interact with students: ask how they are doing, comment, or inquire about their interests; show genuine interest in their responses. This strategy provides an opportunity to connect briefly with several students at once.</p>
<b>Rationale</b>	<b>Combining prompts or pre-correction with active supervision is effective across a variety of classroom and non-classroom settings.</b>

**EFFECTIVE SUPPORTIVE CLASSROOM PRACTICE #5**

**Engaging Students and providing opportunities to respond; opportunities to respond are varied and are provided at high rates**

<b>Description</b>	A teacher's behavior that requests or solicits a student response by either asking a question or using a response system.
<b>Strategy 1</b>	Individual or small group questioning. Use a response pattern to make sure that all students are called on and allowed to respond in a way that they feel valued and accepted.
<b>Strategy 2</b>	Group responding. All students in a class respond in unison to a teacher question.
<b>Strategy 3</b>	Nonverbal responses. Response cards, student response systems, and guided notes will give students a way to demonstrate their learning progress.
<b>Rationale</b>	<b>Increased rates of opportunities to respond will support student on-task behavior and will decrease the number of disruptive behaviors.</b>

**EFFECTIVE SUPPORTIVE CLASSROOM PRACTICE #6****Specific praise and other strategies are used to acknowledge behavior**

<b>Description</b>	Verbal statement that names the behavior explicitly and includes a statement that shows approval
<b>Strategy 1</b>	May be directed toward an individual or group.  Following a transition where students quietly listened to instructions, “You did a great job sitting quietly and listening for what to do next.”
<b>Strategy 2</b>	Praise should be provided soon after behavior, and be understandable, meaningful, and sincere. During teacher-directed instruction, a student raises their hand. The teacher says, “Thank you for raising your hand
<b>Strategy 3</b>	Deliver approximately five praise statements for every one corrective statement. Reinforcement should happen frequently and at a minimal ratio of five praise statements for every one correction
<b>Rationale</b>	<b>Contingent praise is associated with increases in a variety of behavioral and academic skills. Behavior-specific praise has an impact in both special and general education settings.</b>

**EFFECTIVE SUPPORTIVE CLASSROOM PRACTICE #7****Prompts, pre-corrections, and reminders are consistently given before a behavior might occur**

<b>Description</b>	Reminders are provided before a behavior is expected that describe what is expected
<b>Strategy 1</b>	Preventative strategies take place before the behavior response occurs. Before students begin seatwork, provide a reminder about how to access help and materials, if needed.
<b>Strategy 2</b>	The prompt is delivered by the teacher in a way that the student will understand, using clear language with minimal steps. For example, “Take a seat, open your classwork folder, and silently start your warm-up.”
<b>Strategy 3</b>	Specific and explicit: describe the expected behavior (and link to the appropriate expectation).
<b>Rationale</b>	<b>Delivering prompts and pre-corrections for appropriate behavior results in increases in improved behavior. Use prompts during transitions to new routines and for routines that are difficult for students to master.</b>



**EFFECTIVE SUPPORTIVE CLASSROOM PRACTICE #8**

The responses to misbehavior in the classroom are appropriate and systematic.

<b>Description</b>	An informative statement, typically provided by the teacher, given when an undesired behavior occurs, states the observed behavior, and tells the student exactly what they should do in the future.
<b>Strategy 1</b>	Delivered in a brief, concise, calm, and respectful manner, typically in private, that addresses the possible infraction and provides an opportunity for students to learn from the situation.
<b>Strategy 2</b>	Pair with specific contingent praise after the student engages in appropriate behavior that allows the classroom to remain a physically and emotionally safe environment.
<b>Strategy 3</b>	Disengage at the end of error correction and redirection— avoid “power struggles” that may escalate into situations where students may act out because of negative feelings.
<b>Rationale</b>	<b>Error corrections that are direct, immediate, and end with the student displaying the correct response are highly effective in decreasing undesired behaviors and increasing future success rates..</b>

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## Planning for Success

### COLLABORATION

All students benefit from a team of professionals working together, which includes educators, related service providers, and paraprofessionals collaborating in ways that promote meaningful learning and a sense of belonging for all students. This partnership between professionals for the explicit purpose of educating students with disabilities is a fundamental aspect of the federal IDEA legislation § 614 [d] [1] [B]; § 636 [a] [1]; § 653[b]; § 654 [a] [1] [C]. Collaborative relationships serve as the building blocks of both general education instruction and specially designed instruction (SDI) increasing the quality and effectiveness of daily instruction, providing opportunities to reach all learners, and growing the capacity of all providers. Schoolwide collaboration with effective collaborative teaming practices sets the stage for effective decisions, efficient implementation, and accurate assessment of instructional impact (Anrig, 2015).

**“Coming together is a beginning; Keeping together is progress; Working together is success.”**

Edward Everett Hale

#### Having a Shared Philosophy

- All students can learn.
- Appreciate and understand diverse learning styles/preferences.
- Classroom procedures are clear and consistent.
- Behavior is addressed proactively.
- Student input and choices are key.
- Parents play a role in the collaborative process.

#### Establishing Effective Communication

- Meet regularly to discuss, plan, and reflect on best practices.
- All members of the collaborative partnership are included in the decision-making process.
- Be active listeners to one another.
- Be respectful of others and their contributions.
- Accept mutual responsibility for successes and failures.

#### Maintaining Positive Attitudes

- Voice questions and concerns in a productive manner.
- Share constructive feedback.
- Be supportive of all collaborative partners.
- Show flexibility and acknowledge efforts.
- Share materials and resources.

**Clarifying Roles and Responsibilities**

- Agree on specific roles and responsibilities.
- Clearly outline the weekly schedule, objectives, and individual assignments.
- Share duties equitably whenever possible.
- Recognize that all collaborative team members are equally important to all students.

**Maximizing Effectiveness**

- Rely on each other for technical expertise, shared resources, and moral support.
- Know where to find and how to use other supports within the system as needed.
- Use a collaborative problem-solving process.
- Clearly state the problem, and brainstorm possible solutions.
- Develop and apply a plan to implement solutions: include established responsibilities, timeline, and location.
- Reflect on the outcomes: evaluate the effectiveness and modify as needed.

Adapted from:

Friend, M. (2019). *Co-teach! Building and sustaining effective classroom partnerships in inclusive schools* (3rd ed.). Marilyn Friend, Inc.

**GUIDED QUESTIONS FOR INSTRUCTIONAL PLANNING**

Time to collaborate during the school day is a critical element for successful inclusive instruction. Through the process of mapping out instruction, educators can reflect on the instructional objectives and necessary supports to help students achieve. This process is even more critical for co-teachers because there is a need to discuss the roles and contributions of each member of the team during the delivery of instruction. Co-planning should be an ongoing activity, preferably with specific, designated planning times. Alternative forms of collaboration such as electronic platforms, web-conferencing, phone, or email help facilitate regular communication and planning.

**Clarify the Learning Target:**

- What do the students need to know and be able to do (grade-level expectation)?
- What has been a challenge for students when this lesson was previously taught? Why was this difficult?
- What does the student data tell the team about learner needs?
- Are there accessibility concerns for students with disabilities?

**Choose IEP Goals to Address**

- Which IEP goals are most closely aligned with the curriculum?
- Are there other goals that can be addressed (i.e., behavioral or communication)?
- Are there students with similar needs?

**Adapt the Instructional Approach**

- How can pre-teaching, visual or kinesthetic input, small group instruction, explicit directions, chunking, or other alternative methods be incorporated?
- Is there a specific approach that will yield better skill generalization?
- Should the lesson be transformed for all or just a few?

**Address Access Skills or Challenges**

- Are there opportunities to address executive function gaps?
- What strategies can be put in place to promote greater independence?
- Are there UDL supports that will benefit all learners?
- What are the barriers to participation and engagement?

**Evaluation**

- What are the indicators of student learning?
- What formative or summative measures will be used to assess student learning?
- What are the measures used to assess student attainment of IEP goals?
- How will the assessment data be used to drive instruction?

Adapted from:

Beninghof, A. (2022). *Specially Designed Instruction: Increasing Success for Students with Disabilities*. Routledge.

**CO-TEACHING MODELS**

Co-teaching is a special education service delivery option for students who need a level of specially designed instruction that can appropriately be delivered in the general education classroom to allow the student to make meaningful progress in the general education curriculum.

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**Parallel Teaching**

Recommended Use: Frequent

- A heterogeneous class with learners divided into two groups.
- Educators have the same content learning objectives and teach simultaneously in the SAME room.
- Educators may use different learning processes to address learner needs (i.e., one group receives visual spatial content delivery, and one group uses hands-on learning experiences)
- Learner group size is reduced allowing for increased opportunities to share and receive support from an educator.
- Educators use formative assessment of student learning to drive instruction.

**Station Teaching**

Recommended Use: Frequent

- A heterogeneous class with learners divided into two to three groups.
- Educators co-plan the stations.
- Two educator-facilitated stations and an additional station structured for independent, paired, or cooperative learning.
- Each station functions independently from the others.
- Learners rotate to each station with opportunities to access core content and SDI alongside peers.
- Educators pre-teach or establish class norms for participation in station teaching.
- Educators may want to use a timer to ensure that both groups will be finishing at the same time.

**Alternative Teaching**

Recommended Use: Occasional

- A heterogeneous class with learners divided into two groups (large and small) based on a specific instructional purpose.
- Small group instruction focuses on the individual needs of all learners (pre-teaching core concepts, enrichment activities, or remediation).
- Instructional roles are equitable (both are viewed as instructional leads).
- Requires dual planning of time and content so there is no missed content.

## Team Teaching

Recommended Use: Occasional

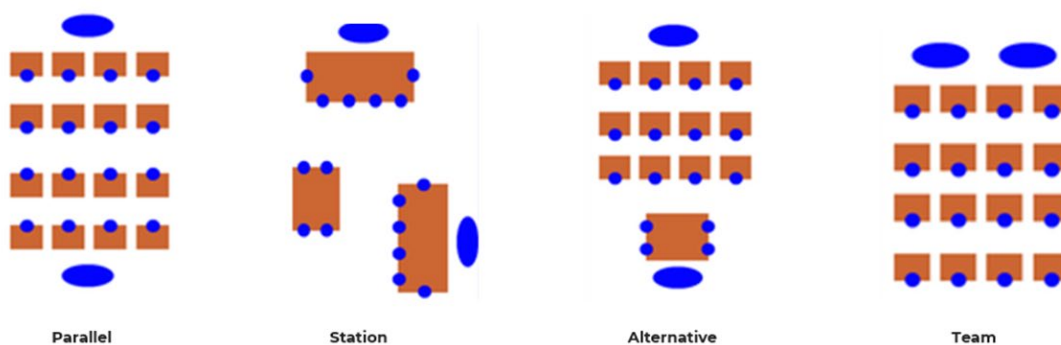
- Educators share leadership for teaching and modeling in a whole group learning environment.
- Educators co-plan the instruction and capitalize on expertise and instructional strategies.
- Models successful collaborative working relationships.
- Promotes engagement, questioning, and problem-solving process.
- Requires a careful balance of teacher-talk to ensure active student participation.

Adapted from:

Friend, M. (2019). *Co-teach! Building and sustaining effective classroom partnerships in inclusive schools* (3rd ed.). Marilyn Friend, Inc.

O'Connor, J.L. (2022). *Great Instruction Great Achievement for Students with Disabilities* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Council of Administrators of Special Education (CASE)

### Co-Teaching Graphic Representations



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## Specially Designed Instructional Practices by Content Area

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**Specially Designed Instruction (SDI)** is the adaptation of the content, method, or delivery of instruction to address the unique learning needs that result from a disability and to enable a learner to meet grade-level standards and to have meaningful access to and make progress in the curriculum. SDI should accelerate progress to narrow the achievement gap and include the evidence-based instructional strategies that have been shown to result in improved performance and learning of academic content through research. The adaptation of content lessons should be based on the individual characteristics of the learner, with considerations of the cognitive load in the teaching process and cognitive energy required in the learning process. The specially designed instruction components outlined in the content area sections below are an adaptation of the Mathematics Practice Profile designed by educators through the Maryland State Personnel Development Grant.

**Evidence-based SDI practices include:**

1. Systematic prompts and feedback
2. Self-regulation support for learning and behavior
3. Peer assisted instruction
4. Manipulative-based instructional sequences
5. Contextualized Instruction
6. Modified Schema-Based Instruction
7. Learning and communication accessibility

While the content-area sections can be read on their own, there is also benefit in reading through all content-area strategies. Cross-content planning is an effective, recognized, and time-tested method of effective instructional planning.

## EARLY CHILDHOOD

Young children with developmental delays and disabilities benefit academically, socially, and developmentally from opportunities to learn and play alongside their nondisabled peers. The U.S. Department of Education, in a 2023 [policy statement](#), affirms that “children with disabilities in inclusive settings experienced greater cognitive gains and communication development than children with disabilities who were in separate settings, with this being particularly apparent among children with more significant disabilities.” The department notes that high-quality early childhood programs “Provide services and supports to children with disabilities in early childhood programs with peers without disabilities, and within daily routines and learning and social activities.” The Council for Exceptional Children’s Division of Early Childhood (DEC) has developed and disseminated a set of Recommended Practices that create effective services for young children with disabilities and their families. The strategies highlighted below are drawn from the Recommended Practices.

Early Childhood Evidence-Based Practices	Aligned Teacher Actions
<p>1. <b>Teachers, related service providers, parents, and others collaborate to adapt the learning environment to promote access, engagement, independence, and learning for all children.</b> Effective early childhood environments are designed to promote exploration, interaction, engagement, and competence for all children. Thoughtful attention to universal design for learning principles and appropriate individualized adaptations, including assistive technology when appropriate, create a setting in which children with disabilities can thrive.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arrange space and materials so that all children, including those with mobility needs, can move around the room, participate in different areas, and access items.</li> <li>• Uses visual cues (such as feet cut outs to indicate a line, “stop” signs on learning centers not currently available, or carpet squares to indicate “spots” on the rug) to help children follow classroom routines.</li> <li>• Create a welcome and visually appealing environment while limiting visual clutter that may be distracting or overwhelming.</li> <li>• In consultation with team members (e.g., occupational therapy, physical therapy) acquire and use adaptive seating and equipment that allows children maximal independence and participation (e.g., lowering some hooks so a child in a wheelchair can hang their own backpack).</li> <li>• Select toys and materials (balls, puppets, simple board games) that encourage interaction and cooperative play among children.</li> </ul>



Early Childhood Evidence-Based Practices	Aligned Teacher Actions
<p>2. <b>Classroom routines and transitions are structured to promote communication, interaction, and success through the use of natural cues and individualized teaching strategies.</b></p> <p>Every part of children's day, including caregiving routines and transitions between activities, provides opportunities for learning. These activities can also be challenging for children with delays and disabilities if appropriate supports are not provided.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Use predictable cues, including familiar phrases, pictures, and/or objects, to signal transitions and remind children of expectations.</li><li>• Explicitly teach and reinforce appropriate behavior during transitions and routine activities (like preparing for dismissal, rest time, meals). Adapt routines for individual children as needed (e.g., calling a child who has difficulty staying still in line over last to minimize waiting).</li><li>• Build children's independence and communication skills in routine activities by using strategies like time delay (pausing before providing a prompt for behavior) and interrupted chaining (stopping in the middle of familiar sequence of activities and waiting for the child to ask for help or say what's next).</li></ul>

Early Childhood Evidence-Based Practices	Aligned Teacher Actions
<p>3. <b>Strategies for supporting communication and language development are used throughout the day by all adults in the classroom.</b></p> <p>Language and communication skills are a central area of need for many children requiring early childhood special education services. Strong receptive, expressive, and pragmatic language skills lay the foundation for social and academic success in kindergarten and beyond. Language-enhancing strategies can be effectively embedded into routines and play throughout the school day.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Build receptive vocabulary and background knowledge by explicitly teaching new words and concepts, reading a variety of fiction- and non-fiction books, and building on children's interest.</li><li>• Use modeling and expansion to help children learn to use longer and more complex language structures. For example, if the child says, "Go zoo," the teacher might respond "Oh! You went to the zoo yesterday with Mama! What did you see?" Modeling expanded and standards forms is more effective than "correcting" grammatical errors.</li><li>• Teach children repair strategies (repeating, trying a different word, showing) when they are not understood.</li><li>• Structure activities and environments to create "communication temptations" that require children to request and encourage them to comment (e.g., place some highly desirable items in view but out of reach so children have to ask, deliberately do something silly (like attempting to pour water without taking the lid off the container) to evoke verbal response.</li><li>• If the class includes children who use alternative and augmentative communication (signing, picture symbols, voice output devices), incorporate these methods into group activities and create opportunities for peers and adults to model by communicating using the child's method.</li></ul>

Early Childhood Evidence-Based Practices	Aligned Teacher Actions
<p>4. <b>Positive, proactive strategies are used to promote social-emotional development and appropriate behavior, with individualized support as needed.</b></p> <p>All preschoolers are just starting to learn how to be and act a school setting. Children with delays and disabilities may require additional instruction, adaptations, or other supports to have success.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Use consistent verbal and visual cues to teach and prompt expected behavior (e.g., a “line up” song, a class-wide picture schedule, a picture checklist that shows the steps for packing and unpacking).</li><li>• To support language processing, state expectations positively instead of negatively. (e.g., “Walking in the hall” is often more effective than “No running.”)</li><li>• Provide frequent and explicit positive feedback (specific praise, thumbs up, etc.) for appropriate behavior. Minimize responses to negative/inappropriate behavior, either ignoring and redirecting with minimal words and emotion. Look for opportunities to provide positive feedback as soon as possible after redirection/correction.</li><li>• Encourage autonomy, communication, and engagement by providing “controlled choices” (“Do you want to sit in the chair or on the carpet square?” “Would you like a crayon or a colored pencil”) as often as possible.</li><li>• For persistent challenging behavior, consult with other team members to understand the communication behind the behavior (how it is “working” for the child) and develop an individualized plan to address the need and teach the child more appropriate ways to get needs met.</li></ul>

## MATH

The evidence-based practices outlined below are an adaptation of the Mathematics Practice Profile designed by educators through the Maryland State Personnel Development Grant. This profile was designed to provide operational definitions for the components and practices based on research and required for sound implementation. Evidence-Based Mathematics Instruction forms the foundation of effective core Tier 1 instruction aligned with Maryland College and Career Ready Standards for Mathematics. Recent research in mathematics instruction and interventions has demonstrated success in raising the mathematics achievement level of students who are struggling or who have disabilities. The What Works Clearinghouse™ (WWC) in conjunction with an expert panel, distilled this contemporary mathematics intervention research into easily comprehensible and practical recommendations for teachers to use when teaching students in intervention settings, published in the [WWC practice guide](#). These are appropriate for students at risk for, or with, disabilities.

Math Evidence-Based Practices	Aligned Teacher Actions
<p>1. <b>Systematic and Explicit Instruction:</b> Providing systematic instruction during instruction to develop student understanding of mathematical ideas. The term systematic indicates that: (a) instructional elements intentionally build students' knowledge over time toward an identified learning outcome, (b) materials are designed to develop topics in an incremental and intentional way, and (c) instruction provided supports student learning.</p> <p><u>Additional Resources:</u></p> <p><a href="#">Explicit Instruction</a> (Archer &amp; Hughes)</p> <p><a href="#">Teaching Math with Examples</a> (Pershan)</p> <p><a href="#">Better Learning Through Structured Teaching</a> (Fisher &amp; Frey)</p> <p><a href="#">High Leverage Practices for Students with Disabilities</a></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clearly explains objectives from state standards for all students; supports individual students with IEPs to understand their mathematics-related IEP goals (e.g., math, self-regulation) and makes connections to prior learning</li> <li>Models a variety of strategies with clear explanations and planned examples of how to perform a mathematics skill</li> <li>Provides multiple opportunities for students to practice and receive mastery-oriented feedback, with consistent and deliberate instruction or supports to build student independence</li> <li>Elicits student responding from ALL students, consistently and frequently, for high- and low-level strategies, through active student engagement</li> <li>Provides multiple opportunities for immediate and specific feedback</li> <li>Provides frequent opportunities for all students to engage with lesson</li> <li>Consistently uses accessible numbers when introducing new concepts and skills to reduce cognitive load</li> <li>Reviews and integrates previously learned concepts and skills with instruction on new concepts and skills to promote maintenance and discrimination (e.g., through number routines, independent practice, centers)</li> </ul>

Math Evidence-Based Practices	Aligned Teacher Actions
<p>2. <b>Mathematical Language</b> (Oral, nonverbal, or written) Mathematical language is an academic language that conveys mathematical ideas. This includes vocabulary, terminology, and language structures used when thinking about, talking about, and writing about mathematics. Mathematical language conveys a more precise understanding of mathematics than the conversational or informal language used every day.</p> <p><u>Additional Resources:</u></p> <p><a href="#"><u>National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition – Integrating Language While Teaching Mathematics</u></a></p> <p><a href="#"><u>Principles for the Design of Mathematics Curricula: Promoting Language and Content Development</u></a> (Understanding Language &amp; Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning, and Equity at Stanford University)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Consistently uses precise and concise mathematical language</li><li>• Teaches and applies mathematical language in the context of instruction</li><li>• Provides opportunities for and supports all students to use mathematical language to effectively communicate reasoning and understanding of mathematical concepts (e.g., sentence starters, guiding questions, graphic organizers)</li></ul>

Math Evidence-Based Practices	Aligned Teacher Actions
<p><b>3. Representation</b></p> <p>Concrete and semi-concrete representations are part of core instructional programs. Students who struggle to learn mathematics need additional, focused instruction using representations to model mathematical ideas. Teachers choose representations carefully and connect them explicitly to abstract representations (mathematical notation) so that students can conceptualize the connection between the representations and the mathematics.</p> <p><u>Additional Resources:</u></p> <p><a href="#"><u>YouCubed – Visual Math Improves Math Performance</u></a> (Stanford Graduate School of Education)</p> <p><a href="#"><u>Using Visual Representations</u></a> (Institute of Education Sciences)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Intentionally and consistently uses a well-chosen set of concrete and semi-concrete representations that are aligned with the mathematical concept</li><li>• Uses and connects concrete and pictorial forms of representations to support explanations of abstract concepts, strategies, and procedures</li><li>• Explicitly teaches students to select and appropriately use representations to demonstrate their mathematical thinking</li><li>• Supports student independence in using a variety of representations</li></ul>

Math Evidence-Based Practices	Aligned Teacher Actions
<p data-bbox="201 260 646 953"><b>4. Number Lines</b> The number line is a unique mathematical representation that can concurrently represent all real numbers, including whole numbers and rational numbers, positive and negative numbers, and other sets of numbers. Number lines can be used to develop various mathematical understandings across several state standards. Consistent use of number lines can help students build understanding of the number system and improve their overall mathematics performance across a variety of mathematics content.</p> <p data-bbox="250 982 516 1014"><u>Additional Resources:</u></p> <p data-bbox="250 1043 548 1150"><u><a href="#">Learning to Think Mathematically with the Number Line</a></u></p> <p data-bbox="250 1180 630 1249"><u><a href="#">Teaching Number Line Skills to Visually Impaired Students</a></u></p> <p data-bbox="250 1278 558 1348"><u><a href="#">Number Line Continuum</a></u> (OGAP 2017)</p> <p data-bbox="250 1377 633 1556"><u><a href="#">Measuring Success: Integrating Number Lines Into Measurement Instruction for Students With Learning Disabilities</a></u></p> <p data-bbox="250 1585 630 1654"><u><a href="#">Fraction Number Line: An Evidence-Based Math Strategy</a></u></p>	<ul data-bbox="714 260 1398 800" style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Consistently incorporates the use of the number line (open and partitioned) as a thinking tool to teach concepts, strategies, and procedures</li><li>• Facilitates transition between open and partitioned number lines as appropriate</li><li>• Systematically teaches students to use the number line to demonstrate mathematical concepts, strategies, and procedures for both whole numbers and rational numbers</li><li>• Provides intentionally planned opportunities for students to use the number line to build and communicate understanding of numerical magnitude and operations</li></ul>

**5. Word Problems**

Learning to solve word problems is an important part of the elementary mathematics curriculum because word problems help students apply the mathematics they are learning, develop critical thinking skills, and begin to connect mathematics to a variety of scenarios or contexts. Becoming successful at applying mathematics through solving word problems can deepen students' understanding of grade-level content and set students up for success in advanced mathematics courses and the workforce.

To set up and solve word problems successfully, students need to read and understand the problem's narrative, determine what the problem is asking them to find, and identify one or more mathematical operations that will solve the problem. Students with or at risk for mathematics disabilities often have difficulty with one or more of these steps, which further impacts their ability to set up and solve problems correctly.

Additional Resources:

[Pirate Math Equation Quest by Powell](#)

[Solving Math Word Problems by Jitendra](#)

[Solving Ratio, Proportion, & Percent Problems Using Schema-based Instruction by Jitendra](#)

[Conceptual Model-based Problem Solving \(COMPS\) by Xin](#)

- Provides consistent and deliberate instruction on word problem structures (schemas) and matching reasonable solution methods to these structures
- Systematically teaches and reinforces context, vocabulary, and language within word problem solving instruction
- Frequently intermixes previously learned problem types with new problem types to promote discrimination and maintenance
- Ensures word problems contain realistic quantities for the situation, accurately represent the targeted problem structure (schema), and reflect a culturally and personally relevant real-world context for applying the mathematical concepts
- Reinforces representations that are explicitly connected to the context and quantities depicted in the problem
- Explicitly teaches and models a problem-solving routine that allows students to make sense of the context, the quantities, and their relationship within the word problem



Math Evidence-Based Practices	Aligned Teacher Actions
<p><b>6. Fluency-Building</b></p> <p>Procedural fluency is a critical component of mathematics proficiency. Students need to be able to apply knowledge of all operations (addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division) accurately and efficiently. This is not easy for students who experience difficulties in mathematics. Without such retrieval, students will struggle to follow their teachers' explanations of new mathematical ideas.</p> <p>Automatic retrieval gives students more mental energy to understand relatively complex mathematical tasks and flexibly apply strategies appropriately. Thus, building fluency in students is one (of many) important goals of intervention.</p> <p><u>Additional Resources:</u></p> <p><a href="#"><u>Fluency Without Fear: Research Evidence on the Best Ways to Learn Math Facts</u></a> (Boaler, J. January 28, 2015)</p> <p><a href="#"><u>Enriching Addition and Subtraction Fact Mastery Through Games</u></a> (Bay-Williams, J and Kling, G. November 2014)</p> <p><a href="#"><u>Math Fact Fluency: 60+ Games and Assessment Tools to Support Learning and Retention</u></a> (Bay-Williams, J and Kling, G. January 14, 2019)</p> <p><a href="#"><u>Math Fact Fluency Companion Website</u></a></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knows and uses the progression of fluency development to select learning activities appropriate for building fluency, including judiciously chosen timed activities</li> <li>• Adjusts and individualizes instructional strategies to move students from acquisition to fluency (based on current student performance)</li> <li>• Regularly provides opportunities to practice (e.g., timed activities, cooperative learning games) as one way to build fluency</li> <li>• Explicitly teaches and provides feedback on strategies to build fluency including modeling and providing feedback on efficient strategies to build fluency and automaticity (for example, using doubles, double +1, or combinations of 10 for addition facts)</li> <li>• Provide opportunities for students to track progress</li> </ul>

**LITERACY:**

Outlined below are evidence-based best practices for supporting students with literacy tasks. These practices can be used in any classroom of any content, whenever students are required to read and write. Evidence-based literacy instruction supports effective core Tier 1 instruction aligned with the Maryland College and Career Ready Standards for Reading/English Language Arts as well as the Disciplinary Literacy Standards for Reading in History/Social Studies and Reading in Science and Technical Subjects. Research in literacy instruction has demonstrated that using evidence-based practices such as those outlined below will help to raise the performance level of all students, but especially for those who are struggling or who have disabilities.

Literacy Evidence-Based Practices	Aligned Teacher Actions
<p>1. <b>Provide explicit instruction to support reading comprehension</b></p> <p>Comprehension of text occurs when students develop understanding and interpretation of what is read. Comprehension occurs when a series of subskills work together to create a strong mental model of the text for students. Some of these subskills include accessing background knowledge, understanding text structure, understanding sentence structure, using comprehension strategies flexibly, and monitoring understanding while reading. Instruction in all these subskills will strengthen text comprehension.</p> <p><u>Additional Resources:</u></p> <p><a href="#">Keys to Literacy</a></p> <p><a href="#">Seven Strategies to Teach Students Text Comprehension</a></p> <p><a href="#">Effective Instruction for Adolescent Struggling Readers</a></p> <p><a href="#">Sentence Structure: A Complete Guide</a></p> <p><a href="#">IES Practice Guide: Improving Reading Comprehension in Kindergarten Through 3rd Grade</a></p> <p><a href="#">IES Practice Guide: Foundational Skills to Support Reading for Understanding in Kindergarten Through 3rd Grades</a></p> <p><a href="#">IES Practice Guide: Providing Reading Interventions for Students in Grades 4-9</a></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prior to beginning a reading task, be sure that students are aware of their purpose for reading and can articulate what they are to learn from the text.</li> <li>• Build or activate students' background knowledge prior to reading through multiple modalities.</li> <li>• Structure brainstorming activities so that relevant knowledge is activated, and inaccurate knowledge is revised.</li> <li>• Provide advance study guides that feature the most important content from the text.</li> <li>• Provide a glossary of content-related terms.</li> <li>• Help students understand how the text is structured. (e.g., narrative, sequential order, cause and effect, problem and solution, comparison, description). Assist students with using the text structure to locate information.</li> <li>• Provide students with graphic organizers that match the text structure on which they can take notes. Model the note-taking process.</li> <li>• Provide students with partially completed graphic organizers, or support their note-taking in other ways such as through peer assistance.</li> <li>• Allow students to highlight or take notes directly on the text, if possible.</li> <li>• Chunk the material to be read so that smaller portions are read at a time.</li> <li>• Provide explicit instruction in using the comprehension strategies while reading (e.g., summarizing, predicting, clarifying confusion, inferencing, questioning, visualizing). Model these strategies through Think-Aloud activities. Then allow students to practice them with partners or in small groups before using them independently. (Gradual release model of instruction.)</li> <li>• Locate challenging sentences within the text and pre-teach them. Help the students deconstruct the difficult sentences and then paraphrase their meaning.</li> <li>• Ask students to orally paraphrase sections of the text before they read further. This can be done in partners or small groups.</li> <li>• Have students draw images to represent their understanding of the text.</li> <li>• Encourage the students to self-monitor their comprehension by having them pause periodically to either answer questions or to summarize what they have read so far.</li> <li>• Provide recorded/digital versions of the reading material, or allow the students to read with capable partners.</li> <li>• Provide opportunities for several re-readings of the same text.</li> <li>• Provide text on the same topic that is being studied but on a lower reading level. This lower-level text can be used to help students build background prior to reading the grade-level text, or, if necessary, it may be used in place of the grade-level text.</li> <li>• Allow students choice in how they will demonstrate their comprehension of the text (e.g., in writing, through drawing, through multi-media presentation, through speaking, through acting).</li> <li>• Provide opportunities for quality discussion of text. These discussions could occur with the whole class, in small groups, or with partners. Provide students with the questions ahead of time so that they come to the discussions prepared to participate.</li> </ul>

Literacy Evidence-Based Practices	Aligned Teacher Actions
<p>2. <b>Provide explicit instruction in vocabulary development</b></p> <p>Developing students' word knowledge is critical for both reading comprehension and for written expression. Instruction should actively involve students in learning word meanings and in considering the relationships among words.</p> <p><u><a href="#">Additional Resources:</a></u></p> <p><u><a href="#">Choosing Words to Teach</a></u></p> <p><u><a href="#">Target the Problem: Vocabulary</a></u></p> <p><u><a href="#">The Educator's Science of Reading Toolbox: Explicit Vocabulary Instruction to Build Equitable Access for All Learners</a></u></p> <p><u><a href="#">5 Vocabulary Games that Build Content Knowledge</a></u></p> <p><u><a href="#">Effective Instruction for Adolescent Struggling Readers</a></u></p> <p><u><a href="#">Keys to Literacy</a></u></p> <p><u><a href="#">IES Practice Guide: Providing Reading Interventions for Students in Grades 4-9</a></u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Select words from the text and/or content that are relevant and important to the unit of study. Ideal words for explicit vocabulary instruction are high frequency words that are important to the text/content, and the students will also encounter them again in other situations. (See <u><a href="#">Choosing Words to Teach.</a></u>)</li> <li>• Assist students with defining the words using student/class generated definitions rather than having them look up words in a dictionary or glossary.</li> <li>• Help students make connections among words such as identifying synonyms, antonyms, examples, and non-examples.</li> <li>• Have students sort vocabulary words into appropriate categories.</li> <li>• Provide the students with several exposures to the vocabulary words including having them hear the words in multiple contexts, repeating the words, using the words themselves orally and in writing, and illustrating and/or acting out the words.</li> <li>• Revisit previously learned words often.</li> <li>• Teach prefixes, roots, and suffixes, and provide students with practice in using this knowledge to define words.</li> <li>• Create a vocabulary wall in the classroom for the students to refer to throughout a unit of study.</li> <li>• Play vocabulary games.</li> </ul>

Literacy Evidence-Based Practices	Aligned Teacher Actions
<p>3. <b>Provide support in word recognition/decoding</b> Efficient word recognition skills are required for successful reading and writing. Students need to be able to sound out words based on phonics rules so that they can read words accurately and fluently enough to enable comprehension. Students also need to be able to spell words accurately to strengthen their written communication.</p> <p><u>Additional Resources:</u></p> <p><a href="#">Phonics and Word Recognition Instruction in Early Reading Programs: Guidelines for Children with Reading Disabilities</a></p> <p><a href="#">Target the Problem: Word Decoding and Phonics</a></p> <p><a href="#">How to Teach Students to Divide Words into Syllables</a></p> <p><a href="#">Effective Instruction for Adolescent Struggling Readers</a></p> <p><a href="#">IES Practice Guide: Foundational Skills to Support Reading for Understanding in Kindergarten Through 3rd Grades</a></p> <p><a href="#">IES Practice Guide: Providing Reading Interventions for Students in Grades 4-9</a></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have students repeat words and listen to see if they are hearing and pronouncing them properly. If not, provide immediate corrective feedback and then help them to hear and produce the individual sounds in the words (phonemes).</li> <li>• Reinforce word-recognition by helping students make sound-symbol connections when they are reading and/or writing.</li> <li>• Do not allow students to guess words as they are reading. Focus their attention on all the letters in the word and support them in sounding out the word.</li> <li>• Administer a phonics diagnostic survey to determine which decoding skills students have in place and which skills need reinforcement. Then, follow a logical scope and sequence to teach/reinforce the deficit skills.</li> <li>• Use flexible grouping strategies so that students who need support with decoding words can work on those skills in small groups.</li> <li>• Teach prefixes, roots, and suffixes, and provide students with practice in using this knowledge to decode words.</li> <li>• Teach syllable types, and the rules of syllabication. Then provide students with practice using this knowledge to decode multi-syllabic words. (See <a href="#">How to Teach Students to Divide Words into Syllables</a>.)</li> <li>• Chorally read sections of connected text to help students build their fluency. Focus on accuracy of word reading, appropriate reading rate, and appropriate expression while reading (prosody).</li> </ul>

Literacy Evidence-Based Practices	Aligned Teacher Actions
<p>4. <b>Provide explicit instruction in writing</b></p> <p>Effective writing relies on students having strong foundational skills (handwriting, spelling, capitalization, punctuation, sentence structure) as well as strong composition skills (understanding of topic, purpose, and audience; collecting and organizing ideas; drafting and revising). Instruction in all these subskills will strengthen the quality of writing.</p> <p><u>Additional Resources:</u></p> <p><a href="#">Prevention and Intervention of Writing Difficulties for Students with Learning Disabilities</a></p> <p><a href="#">What Teachers Can Do to Support Writers with Learning Disabilities</a></p> <p><a href="#">Sentence Structure: A Complete Guide</a></p> <p><a href="#">Keys to Literacy</a></p> <p><a href="#">IES Practice Guide: Teaching Elementary School Students to be Effective Writers</a></p> <p><a href="#">IES Practice Guide: Teaching Secondary Students to Write Effectively</a></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be sure that students know the task, purpose, and audience for all writing assignments. Have them orally share that information before they begin writing.</li> <li>• Brainstorm vocabulary that would be effective to use in a writing task prior to the students beginning to write. Allow students to refer to the list as they are writing, or require them to use certain words from the list in their composition.</li> <li>• Assist students with brainstorming ideas prior to writing.</li> <li>• Provide graphic organizers that allow students to collect and organize their ideas prior to writing.</li> <li>• Allow students to orally rehearse or record what they are going to write prior to committing their thoughts to paper or screen.</li> <li>• Provide models of quality writing and discuss what makes the writing effective.</li> <li>• Provide a rubric/checklist/list of success criteria to the students prior to their writing so that they know how their composition will be evaluated.</li> <li>• Support the students in setting goals for their writing.</li> <li>• Break down writing tasks into incremental steps. Provide feedback on each step, as appropriate.</li> <li>• Provide specific feedback on the writing that supports the students in effective revision.</li> <li>• Guide students through processes of effective peer sharing/revision.</li> <li>• Explicitly teach text and paragraph structure.</li> <li>• Explicitly teach sentence structure and variety.</li> <li>• Explicitly teach punctuation and capitalization rules.</li> <li>• Provide speech-to-text software, or allow students to dictate their ideas to a scribe who writes them down. The students can then still work to revise and edit their work.</li> <li>• Allow students to type their compositions and encourage the use of spelling and grammar checks.</li> <li>• Provide sentence stems, sentence frames, or paragraph frames to help students organize their thoughts and reduce the writing load.</li> </ul>

**SCIENCE:**

The educator actions outlined below leverage research, resources, and best practices to ensure that all Maryland students become scientifically literate individuals who are skilled, reflective, and empowered to make informed decisions that benefit themselves, their families, and their local and global communities within an increasingly complex and continually changing world. Ensuring access to science programming for all students is required by Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR) 13A.04.09.01, which states that each local education agency (LEA) shall:

- Provide in public schools an instructional program in science each year for all students in grades pre-kindergarten to 8; and
- Offer in public schools a science program in grades 9 to 12 which enables students to meet graduation requirements and to select science electives.

Beyond this, COMAR 13A.04.09.01 calls for science programs to provide for the diversity of student needs, abilities, and interests, and to include all the [Maryland Next Generation Science Standards](#) for all students. The Maryland Next Generation Science Standards are researched-based, three-dimensional standards which require students to make sense of scientific phenomena in the world around them by engaging in scientific practices and developing a scientific lens which makes connections across scientific domains.

This vision for inclusion of all students in science is supported by [A Framework for K-12 Science Education](#), which guided the development of the Maryland Next Generation Science Standards, and presented the vision that “science education should be to provide students with the background to systematically investigate issues related to their personal and community priorities” (National Research Council. 2012). The practices outlined below provide strategies for including all students in science, particularly students at risk for, or with, disabilities.

Content Evidence-Based Practices	Aligned Teacher Actions
<p>1. Systematic and Explicit Instruction: Systematic three-dimensional science instruction is fundamental to developing student sensemaking of scientific concepts and phenomena. The term systematic indicates that: (a) instructional elements intentionally build students' knowledge over time toward an identified learning outcome, (b) materials are designed to develop topics in an incremental and intentional way, and (c) instruction provided supports student learning.</p> <p><u>Additional Resources:</u>  <a href="#">Creating science learning experiences that support learners receiving special education services (STEM Teaching Tools, Practice Brief 59)</a>  <a href="#">Appendix D - "All Standards, All Students": Making the Next Generation Science Standards Accessible to All Students</a>  <a href="#">Appendix D: Case Studies</a></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reviews state standards prior to instruction to understand student end goals.</li> <li>• Reviews student IEPs and 504s to understand the specific needs of students in the classroom.</li> <li>• Supports individual students with IEPs and 504s to understand science connections to related individual goals (e.g., self-regulation).</li> <li>• Regularly communicates and/or co-plans with related service providers to ensure student needs are addressed.</li> <li>• Sets a purpose for learning. This could include clearly communicating* learning targets from state standards for all students; supporting individual students with IEPs and 504s to understand science connections to related IEP goals (e.g., self-regulation).</li> <li>• Models* a variety of sensemaking practices through a variety of modes of expression (e.g., asking questions and defining problems, developing and using models, constructing explanations and designing solutions).</li> <li>• Models* grade appropriate metacognition associated with the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) Crosscutting Concepts and highlights opportunities for making connections across science domains.</li> <li>• Provides regular and iterative grade appropriate opportunities for students to engage in independent and collaborative sensemaking through the NGSS Science and Engineering Practices</li> <li>• Utilizes and monitors multiple data sources to group students to facilitate collaborative sensemaking</li> <li>• Elicits student responses from ALL students in a variety of ways*, consistently and frequently.</li> <li>• Provides multiple opportunities for immediate and specific teacher-to-student and/or student-to-student feedback aligned to learning targets, as well as provides time for students to apply feedback.</li> <li>• Provides frequent and varied grade appropriate opportunities for all students to engage with the lesson.</li> <li>• Reviews and integrates previously learned concepts and skills with instruction on new concepts and skills to promote proficiency.</li> </ul>

*\*Including but is not limited to written, oral, pictorial, kinesthetic*



Content Evidence-Based Practices	Aligned Teacher Actions
<p>2. Inclusive Science Classroom Culture: An inclusive science classroom culture supports equitable access to science programming by addressing bias and perceptions about science, scientists, and scientific ability.</p> <p><u>Additional Resources:</u></p> <p><a href="#">The Nature of Science Identity and its Roles as the Driver of Student Choices (Vincent-Ruz, Schunn)</a></p> <p><a href="#">NASEM BOSE report Equity in K-12 STEM Education: Framing Decisions for the Future</a></p> <p><a href="#">Teaching Culturally and Ethnically Diverse Learners in the Science Classroom (Mensah)</a></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides varied and grade appropriate opportunities to explore and challenge perceptions about science, scientists, and scientific ability.</li> <li>• Engages students with diverse, empowering examples of scientific accomplishment that challenge adverse perceptions, storylines, and practices.</li> <li>• Facilitates variety of grade appropriate learning and reflection opportunities that cultivate students' positive science identities.</li> <li>• Creates a welcoming place in science for all students by allowing students' authentic "voice" and identity to be present, expressed, and valued in the learning process.</li> <li>• Highlights and celebrates individual student expression and demonstration of the NGSS Science and Engineering Practices.</li> </ul>
<p>3. Affirmation and Centering of Students: Instruction designed to encourage students to anchor their learning in individual experiences, backgrounds, communities, and cultural identities supports and furthers student development of scientific knowledge and skills.</p> <p><u>Additional Resources:</u></p> <p><a href="#">Funds of knowledge for teaching: Using a qualitative approach to connect homes and classrooms (Moll, Amanti, Neff, Gonzalez)</a></p> <p><a href="#">How to Create Identity-Affirming Opportunities in Science Lessons (STEM Teaching Tools, Supplemental File)</a></p> <p><a href="#">Authentic Science Experiences: Designing High School Science Learning to Reach all Students (NextGenScience, WestEd)</a></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communicates and involves students' families and community as appropriate.</li> <li>• Provides regular and intentional opportunities for students to share who they are and what they know, bringing their knowledge and experiences from a variety of contexts to their science learning.</li> <li>• Guides age appropriate independent and collaborative reflection within the context of the topic under study that affirms students' identities and experiences.</li> <li>• Engages students with various grade-appropriate tasks and phenomena that are relevant, meaningful, and reflecting the authenticity of how science is done in real-world contexts. Engages all students with a variety of grade appropriate tasks and phenomena that are relevant, meaningful, and reflect the authenticity of how science is done in real-world contexts.</li> </ul>

Content Evidence-Based Practices	Aligned Teacher Actions
<p>4. Incorporate Universal Design for Learning (UDL) Strategies into Science Education Programming:</p> <p><a href="#">Universal Design for Learning</a> (UDL) strategies provide students with multiple means of engagement, representation, and action and expression. These strategies help educators create opportunities for all students to succeed in the classroom.</p> <p><u>Additional Resources:</u></p> <p><a href="#">Making Science Labs Accessible to Students with Disabilities (Burgstahler)</a></p> <p><a href="#">Marino, M., C. Parsons, J. Brewer, and E. Vasquez. 2021. Students with disabilities in science/STEM. Zero Barriers in STEM Education Accessibility and Inclusion Workbook (Smithsonian Science Education Center)</a></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Utilizes UDL strategies during the curriculum selection and/or development process(es), and during classroom instruction</li> <li>• Engages students through multiple means, including providing:</li> <li>• Utilizes UDL strategies during the curriculum selection and/or development process(es), and during classroom instruction</li> <li>• Engages all students through multiple means, including providing:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Student choice of activity and/or strategy for sensemaking</li> <li>○ A variety of demands and resources associated with a task</li> <li>○ Self-regulation strategies that promote positive student scientific identities, collaboration, personal coping skills, and self-reflection</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Represents information in multiple formats and through multiple means, including providing:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Alternatives to visual and auditory information</li> <li>○ Support of student sensemaking of scientific phenomena in student terms (oral, written, or nonverbal), followed by support through building of vocabulary and mathematical processes, incorporation of structure(s), etc.</li> <li>○ Connections to student experience and background knowledge</li> <li>○ An emphasis on crosscutting concepts (e.g., patterns, cause and effect, structure and function, etc.)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Provides multiple means of acting as a scientist and expressing scientific ideas, including:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Optimizing access to materials, tools, and lab equipment</li> <li>○ Allowing for student sensemaking through multiple practices</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Iteratively building students' understanding of scientific phenomena</li> </ul>

Content Evidence-Based Practices	Aligned Teacher Actions
<p>5. Three-Dimensional Assessment and Feedback Assessing students in science requires three-dimensional assessments, which include disciplinary core ideas, science and engineering practices, and crosscutting concepts. Ensuring students have frequent informal and formal opportunities to display their understanding through informal and formal formative assessment is a critical piece of monitoring and supporting student sensemaking in science.</p> <p><u>Additional Resources:</u></p> <p><a href="#">Task Annotation Project in Science: Equity</a></p> <p><a href="#">How can assessments be designed to engage students in the range of science and engineering practices? (STEM Teaching Tools, Practice Brief 26)</a></p> <p><a href="#">Using 3D interim assessments to support coherence, equity, and a shared understanding of learning (STEM Teaching Tools, Practice Brief 65)</a></p> <p><a href="#">How to design assessments for emerging bilingual students (STEM Teaching Tools, Practice Brief 33)</a></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regularly communicates and/or co-plans with related service providers to ensure student needs are addressed.</li> <li>• Monitors student progress by providing frequent opportunities to demonstrate understanding* of learning targets through informal and formal assessments.</li> <li>• Ensures equitable assessment through the full range of grade appropriate NGSS Science and Engineering Practices elements.</li> <li>• Utilizes assessment data to provide grade appropriate and timely student feedback aligned to learning targets.</li> <li>• Tailors assessment target, frequency, delivery, and feedback modality to individual student needs</li> <li>• Ensures individual student accommodations are received during assessment.</li> <li>• Makes assessment relevant, authentic, and meaningful to all students.</li> <li>• Allows all students to make their thinking visible on the assessment*.</li> <li>• Encourages and supports multiple ways of knowing in the assessment design.</li> </ul>

\* Including but is not limited to written, oral, pictorial, kinesthetic

## SOCIAL STUDIES:

The Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR) 13A.04.08.01, Requirements for Social Studies Instructional Programs for Grades Prekindergarten – 12 states that, “each local education agency shall provide in public schools an instructional program in social studies each year for all students in grades prekindergarten – 8; and offer in public schools a social studies program in grades 9 – 12 which enables students to meet graduation requirements and to select social studies electives.”

Accommodating all learners in social studies instruction involves implementing a variety of strategies and approaches to address the diverse needs, abilities, and backgrounds of students. Moreover, differentiation promotes inclusive practices by recognizing and valuing the cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic diversity present in social studies classrooms across Maryland. Social studies content inherently reflects the richness and complexity of human experiences across time and space.

The Maryland State Social Studies Frameworks are rooted in the concept of inquiry. Inquiry-based social studies inherently differentiates instruction by providing a framework that accommodates the diverse needs, interests, and abilities of students while promoting deeper understanding and critical thinking skills. To learn about inquiry social studies instruction in Maryland please review [Maryland Social Studies Frameworks](#).

The following is a brief description of some of the effective ways to accommodate all learners in inquiry-based social studies instruction:

Social Studies Evidence-Based Practices	Aligned Teacher Actions
1. <b>Student-Centered Approach:</b> Inquiry-based social studies instruction shifts the focus from the teacher to the student, allowing learners to drive their own learning experiences.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Posing open-ended questions, presenting authentic problems, or investigating real-world issues, will give students the autonomy to explore topics that align with their interests, prior knowledge, and learning goals. This student-centered approach allows for personalized learning experiences tailored to individual needs and preferences.</li> </ul>
2. <b>Differentiated Support and Feedback:</b> Throughout the inquiry process, educators can provide differentiated support and feedback to meet the individual needs of students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Offering targeted guidance, scaffolding, and resources, teachers can support struggling learners and provide enrichment opportunities for advanced learners.</li> <li>Peer collaboration and peer feedback also play a crucial role in inquiry-based instruction, allowing students to learn from one another, exchange ideas, and provide support in a collaborative learning community.</li> </ul>

Social Studies Evidence-Based Practices	Aligned Teacher Actions
<p>3. <b>Scaffolded Instruction:</b> Provide structured support to help students build upon their existing knowledge and skills. Break down complex tasks into manageable steps, offer guided practice and modeling, and gradually release responsibility to foster independence. Use graphic organizers, outlines, and mnemonic devices to scaffold learning and promote comprehension.</p>	<p>Vary the context, tasks, and sources by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Having students complete the same task with different information sources.</li><li>• Having students use the same information source to complete different tasks or apply different processes.</li><li>• Having students use the same information source and process to complete different projects or products.</li></ul>
<p>4. <b>Authentic Assessment:</b> In inquiry-based social studies instruction, assessment is often embedded within the inquiry process itself, allowing students to demonstrate their understanding through authentic tasks, projects, or presentations, while also allowing educators to gather evidence of student growth and progress.</p>	<p>Authentic task creation should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Real world context</li><li>• Complexity and depth for all</li><li>• Multiple perspectives</li><li>• Application of Skills and Knowledge</li><li>• Feedback and Reflection</li></ul>

Social Studies Evidence-Based Practices	Aligned Teacher Actions
<p>5. <b>Flexible Learning Paths:</b> In inquiry-based social studies instruction, students are encouraged to pursue their own lines of inquiry and investigate topics at their own pace. This flexibility allows for differentiated learning paths, where students with varying readiness levels, learning styles, and interests can engage with the content in ways that are meaningful and relevant to them.</p>	<p>Provide flexible learning paths in social studies by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Choice of topics or themes</li> <li>• Differentiated assignments</li> <li>• Tiered activities</li> <li>• Flexible groupings</li> <li>• Differentiated instructional materials</li> <li>• Creating personalized learning paths based upon student strengths</li> </ul> <p>Advanced learners can delve deeper into complex issues, conduct independent research, or explore interdisciplinary connections, while struggling learners can receive additional support, scaffolding, or alternative resources to build foundational knowledge and skills.</p>
<p>6. <b>Culturally Responsive Teaching:</b> Incorporate diverse perspectives, voices, and experiences into the curriculum to reflect the cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic diversity of students.</p>	<p>Select instructional materials, literature, and primary sources that represent a range of cultures, identities, and historical narratives. Create a supportive and inclusive classroom environment that values and respects students' backgrounds and perspectives.</p>
<p>7. <b>Diverse Entry Points:</b> Inquiry-based instruction offers multiple entry points to content, allowing students to access and engage with the material through various means.</p>	<p>Present compelling questions, provocative images, primary sources, or multimedia resources, to appeal to different learning styles and preferences.</p> <p>Ensuring that all students have opportunities to participate and contribute to the inquiry process. This diversity of entry points accommodates the varied backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives of learners, promoting inclusivity and equity in the classroom.</p>

**ARTS EDUCATION:**

The Comprehensive Arts include instructional programs in dance, media arts, music, theatre, and visual art that align to content standards and maximize learning opportunities for all diverse learners, including students with disabilities, to take part in arts instruction at all grade bands and levels of rigor. [Maryland State Fine Arts Standards](#) are aligned with [National Core Arts Standards](#) and include the following four artistic domains: creating; performing/presenting/producing; responding; and connecting. The [Code of Maryland Regulations 13a.04.16.01](#) explicitly calls for the inclusion of students with disabilities within arts education instruction. Furthermore, [recent research](#) has shown that students enrolled in arts courses see improved attendance rates, and that improvement in attendance is even more pronounced for students with IEPs (Bowen & Kisida, 2021).

For more information about Comprehensive Arts Education within the state of Maryland, please review the [MSDE Comprehensive Arts Education website](#). The following chart discusses best practices common to all five COMAR-named arts disciplines for serving students with disabilities and suggested aligned teacher actions.

Comprehensive Arts Education Evidence-Based Practices	Aligned Teacher Actions
<p>1. <b>Integrating Adapted Materials into Comprehensive Arts Education Curricula and Instructional Resources</b></p> <p>Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR) Sec 13A.04.16.01 states that school systems must allot dedicated time in the instructional program aligned to the content standards set forth in §C of this regulation and must adhere to the UUDL principles to maximize learning opportunities for all diverse learners, including students with disabilities, students who are Multilingual learners and students who are gifted and talented. UDL shall guide local education agencies in the development of curriculum, instructional planning, instructional delivery, material selection, and assessment.</p> <p>Additional resources include:</p> <p><a href="#">VSA and Accessibility Department's Research &amp; Resources (Kennedy Center, 2024)</a></p> <p><a href="#">Preparing Students with Disabilities for Careers in the Arts (NEA, 2023)</a></p> <p><a href="#">Inclusive Education in the Art Room (Art of Education University, 2018)</a></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consult student IEPs to understand the specific needs of students in the classroom.</li> <li>• Review existing curricular and instructional materials for students with disabilities. Work in collaboration with other school professionals, including special education teachers and district leads, to create adaptive materials to ensure inclusion of all students in arts learning.</li> <li>• The educator or the local education agencies' curriculum writers should work in tandem to integrate these modifications and adaptations into the general Comprehensive Arts Education curriculum and instructional materials.</li> </ul>



Comprehensive Arts Education Evidence-Based Practices	Aligned Teacher Actions
<p><b>2. Promote the Prioritization of Student Voice and Choice</b></p> <p>High-quality Comprehensive Arts Education uses student-centered strategies. All students deserve to experience success in arts classrooms and to practice the skills to support, promote and protect their sense of autonomy and critical thinking as they engage in artistic endeavors. The process of making art not only supports the formation of one's own perspective but also gives students space to form and refine their own voice, and different arts disciplines provide distinct opportunities for students to learn to express themselves (<a href="#">American Academy of Arts &amp; Sciences</a>, retrieved 2024). Quality arts education environments not only allow students to exercise choice and ownership over their educational experiences but also allow them to do so in a variety of ways to support diverse learners. Modifying learning materials based on UDL guidelines and providing students with diverse methods of expression in classroom activities supports all diverse learners, including students with disabilities, to take part in youth voice and choice.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Jal Mehta, "<a href="#">Schools Already Have Good Learning, Just Not Where You Think</a>", <i>Education Week</i>, Feb. 8, 2017.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Find strategies to create an inclusive educational environment that supports both introverted and extroverted learners, allows students to take ownership over activities/classroom routines and strengthen their content knowledge through "no wrong answer"/interpretive prompts. Ex: think-pair-share to discuss an act of a play viewed in class; develop student-generated classroom norms; choose one of three techniques to create an art project.)</li> <li>Allow students to identify topics, genres, or artistic media of their choice to complete a given assignment. (Ex: Write a brief response about a modern dance choreographer sharing your favorite piece of theirs, key techniques used in the piece and its initial public response; Record and use a found sound from your kitchen to create a one- to two-minute recorded project).</li> <li>Provide alternatives in the requirements for physical response activities that include timing, speed, and range of motor actions required to interact with instructional materials.</li> <li>Select/create rubrics that support and prioritize student choice. Some options include analytic rubrics, holistic rubrics, and performance checklists.</li> </ul>

Comprehensive Arts Education Evidence-Based Practices	Aligned Teacher Actions
<p>3. <b>Incorporate Universal Design for Learning (UDL) Strategies into Comprehensive Arts Education Programming</b></p> <p>Universal Design for Learning (UDL) strategies provide students with multiple means of engagement, representation, and action and expression. These strategies help educators create opportunities for all students to succeed in the classroom.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Use UDL strategies in both the curricular development process as well as in the classroom.</li></ul>

## COMPREHENSIVE HEALTH EDUCATION

Comprehensive skills-based health education is a planned and sequential set of learning experiences designed for all students, including students with disabilities, to develop the skills needed to live healthy lives. The skills are analyzing influences, accessing valid and reliable resources, interpersonal communication, decision-making, goal setting, self-management, and advocacy. [Code of Maryland Regulations 13A.04.18.01](#) explicitly calls for the representation and inclusion of students with disabilities within health education instruction.

For more information about Comprehensive Health Education within the state of Maryland, please review the [Maryland Comprehensive Health Education Framework](#), the [Frequently Asked Questions Document](#), and the Maryland State Department of Education's [Comprehensive Skills-Based Health Education webpage](#). The following chart discusses best practices in comprehensive health education for serving students with disabilities and suggested aligned teacher actions.

Comprehensive Health Education Evidence-Based Practices	Aligned Teacher Actions
<p>1. <b>Integrating Adapted Materials into Comprehensive Health Education Curricula and Instructional Resources</b></p> <p><a href="#">Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR) 13A.04.18.01</a> states that Maryland family life and human sexuality instruction shall represent all students regardless of ability. As such, comprehensive health education curricula and instructional materials should be relevant and useful to all students, including those with disabilities. Incorporating these materials into classrooms can help learners of all abilities. For this reason, to reduce stigma, and to ensure that all students receive the same quality of instruction for comprehensive health education, educators should integrate adapted materials into curricula and instructional materials, rather than providing health education to students with disabilities separately from their peers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consult student IEPs to understand the specific needs of students in the classroom.</li> <li>Review existing curricular and instructional materials for students with disabilities. Though MSDE does not recommend or endorse any one curricula, popular resources used by local education agencies in Maryland include <a href="#">Attainment</a> Health Education Resources and <a href="#">Circles</a> Curriculum.</li> <li>If no satisfactory resources can be identified, create such materials in collaboration with other school professionals, using guidance from organizations such as the <a href="#">Centers for Disease Control and Prevention</a>, <a href="#">SHAPE America</a>, <a href="#">American School Health Association</a>, <a href="#">Answer</a>, or <a href="#">Advocates for Youth</a>.</li> <li>The educator or the local education agencies' curriculum writers should work in tandem to integrate these modifications and adaptations into the general comprehensive health education curriculum and instructional materials.</li> </ul>

Comprehensive Health Education Evidence-Based Practices	Aligned Teacher Actions
<p>2. <b>Promote the Prioritization of Student Voice and Choice</b></p> <p>Quality comprehensive Health Education uses student-centered strategies. All students deserve to experience success in the classroom and deserve to practice the skills to promote and protect their health. As such, student voices should direct the design of comprehensive health education classroom experiences. Students should also have the right to choose among activities and instructional options in order to prioritize and practice the health concepts and skills that are most useful and relevant to them.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allow students to identify topics that are interesting to them. For example, for an activity that practices the skill of advocacy for self and others, students should be able select a topic that is interesting to them, such as substance use.</li> <li>• Educators should not focus on topics that are out of date if they are not relevant to students. For example, it is not best practice for an educator to spend three weeks on cocaine use prevention if the data demonstrates that students in their community are not using cocaine.</li> <li>• Select <a href="#">rubrics</a> that best provide for student choice. Some options include analytic rubrics, holistic rubrics, and performance checklists.</li> </ul>
<p>3. <b>Incorporate Universal Design for Learning (UDL) Strategies into Comprehensive Health Education Programming</b></p> <p><a href="#">Universal Design for Learning (UDL)</a> strategies provide students with multiple means of engagement, representation, and action and expression. These strategies help educators create opportunities for all students to succeed in the classroom.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use UDLs in both the curricular development process as well as in the classroom.</li> </ul>

## PHYSICAL EDUCATION<sup>5</sup>

Physical education plays a critical role in educating the whole child as part of a well-rounded education. Like other academic courses of study, physical education is based on rigorous State and national standards that define what students should know and be able to do by the end of each grade. Physical education is unique to the school curriculum as it is the only program that provides students with opportunities to learn motor skills, develop fitness, and gain an understanding of the importance of physical activity. Students are provided an individualized and developmentally appropriate instructional program designed to develop physically literate individuals who have the knowledge, skills, and confidence to enjoy a lifetime of healthful physical activity.

Physical education is the only identified content area defined under special education in IDEA 2004. In accordance with 34 CFR §300.108(a), “general physical education services, specially designed if necessary, must be made available to every child with a disability receiving FAPE unless the public agency enrolls children without disabilities and does not provide physical education services to children without disabilities in the same grades.” This statement is essential when addressing students with disabilities in schools offering Pre-kindergarten programs and selecting the services to be provided in those schools.

### ADAPTED PHYSICAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS

All students with disabilities must be afforded the opportunity to participate in the general physical education program available to their peers without disabilities unless:

- The student needs a specially designed physical education program as outlined in their IEP.
- The following information will be used to determine the most appropriate least restrictive environment for the delivery of the physical education program:
  - Results of assessments
  - Psychomotor, cognitive, and affective factors that would impact the student’s ability to participate in general physical education successfully and safely

Decisions related to the most appropriate physical education environment must be based on each student’s abilities. Evaluation procedures must be comprehensive, and a team of experts, not just one person, must make decisions about the environment. These decisions must be reviewed at least once a year to determine if the student is appropriately placed and ready for a less restrictive environment and to update their goals and objectives.

**As a direct service defined under special education in IDEA 2004, adapted physical education may be a stand-alone service on the IEP.**

When the student achieves grade-level curricular benchmarks in all other areas of their instructional education, the adapted physical education teacher or physical education teacher will be the case manager. After it is determined that a student needs adapted physical education services, the adapted physical educator/consultant or physical educator will need to complete and maintain the student’s IEP. The local education agency will provide additional guidance on completing a student’s IEP. The

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.marylandpublicschools.org/about/Documents/DCAA/PE/MDAPEStateGuide.pdf>

Special Education department generally guides the procedures and processes. The main areas in which physical education is found on the IEP and which need to be completed annually are:

- Present Level of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance (PLAAFP)
- Supplementary Aids, Services, Program Modifications, and Supports
- Goals and Objectives
- Services/Delivery of Services

**According to federal law, the Adapted Physical Education (APE) teacher is a direct service provider, not a related service provider. This means that physical education needs to be provided by a qualified teacher to the student with a disability as part of the special education services that a child and family may receive. This is contrasted with physical therapy and occupational therapy, which are related services. These therapies are provided to the child with disabilities only if they need them to benefit from instruction.**

For more information on how to serve students with disabilities in physical education teachers and local education leaders should review MSDE's [Adapted Physical Education Guidebook](#).

## DIGITAL LEARNING AND SCHOOL LIBRARY MEDIA (DLSLM)

By integrating technology and digital resources into the school library media center and core content areas, educators can unlock a wealth of learning opportunities for all students, regardless of their abilities. This approach not only fosters inclusive environments but also stimulates engagement, encourages collaboration, and paves the way for academic success.

School library media centers foster an equitable, welcoming, and flexible space that encourages creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving to ensure college and career success. The Maryland State Department of Education's (MSDE) School Library Media Program provides leadership, coordination, and support services for implementing the [Maryland School Library Media Standards for Learners, Librarians, and Libraries](#).

Digital learning, which uses digital tools to facilitate teaching and learning, is a crucial element in modern education. It expands the reach and accessibility of educational content, allowing for personalized learning experiences that can be adapted to meet the diverse needs of students. Digital tools and resources should not be used in isolation; they should be thoughtfully integrated into classroom instruction to support student learning. The [Maryland Digital Learning Standards for Educators](#) and the [Maryland Digital Learning Standards for Students](#) emphasize the importance of competently integrating technology into curriculum and instruction. The Maryland Digital Learning Standards are excerpted, with non-substantial edits, from the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) Standards for Students and Educators copyright ©2016 (used with permissions). These standards guide educators in effectively employing digital resources to enhance student learning outcomes and ensure that digital learning is purposefully woven into educational practices.

A list of effective digital learning and school library media strategies is outlined below. These practices are tailored to the diverse needs of K-12 students, can be integrated into the school library media center or content areas, and are designed to create a more equitable learning environment where every student can succeed.

### DLSLM EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICES

**Universal Design for Learning (UDL):** [UDL](#) is a framework to improve and optimize teaching and learning for all people based on scientific insights into how humans learn. It involves providing multiple means of engagement, representation, and expression. UDL helps accommodate diverse learning preferences and needs, ensuring all students have equal opportunities to access and engage with library and digital resources. This could include offering books in various formats such as audiobooks, e-books, and large print.

**Accessible Content and Interfaces:** Ensuring digital content (like textbooks, videos, and online resources) and interfaces are accessible by adhering to MSDE's most recently adopted level of [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines](#). Accessible materials and user interfaces allow students to use assistive technologies such as screen readers and alternative input devices effectively, making independent learning more feasible. Educators can provide a wide range of accessible digital resources, including subscription databases, digital magazines, and online learning platforms that comply with accessibility standards. For more information, visit [MSDE's Accessibility Branch](#) page.

**Assistive Technologies:** To meet the needs of all students, assistive technology tools such as text-to-speech, speech-to-text, magnification software, and alternative input devices can be tailored to compensate for physical, sensory, or cognitive impairments. These tools can facilitate access to digital content and environments. For more information about the facts and myths of assistive technology tools, read [this article](#) published by the U.S. Department of Education.

**Professional Learning (PL) and Awareness:** Attend regular PL sessions on topics such as disability awareness, the use of assistive technologies, UDL, and inclusive service practices. Well-informed educators can better assist all students and ensure that the classroom and the school library media center are welcoming and supportive user environments.

## DIGITAL LEARNING EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICES

**Adaptive and Personalized Learning Software:** Tailor educational experiences to students' learning needs and provide appropriate challenges and supports to enhance learning outcomes. This includes using technology to provide differentiated instruction, including adaptive learning software that adjusts to a student's individual learning pace and style.

**Collaborative Tools That Support Accessibility:** Use collaborative resources such as interactive whiteboards, Google Apps, Microsoft Tools, or discussion forums that comply with accessibility standards. These tools help students engage in group work and discussions without barriers, promoting social interaction and collaboration skills. Students with visual impairments or fine motor difficulties can interact with digital content more easily using touchscreens or accessible input devices. Whiteboard software with customizable settings and magnification features can also support low-vision students.

**Personalized Digital Reading Platforms:** Utilize digital reading platforms with customizable features to support students, such as text-to-speech, adjustable font sizes, and highlighting tools. These platforms allow students to access a wide range of reading materials in formats that cater to their individual needs.

**Interactive Math Manipulatives:** Integrate interactive math manipulatives and simulations into lessons to enhance conceptual understanding and problem-solving skills. These tools enable students to explore mathematical concepts through hands-on experiences and visual representations.

**Augmented Reality (AR), Artificial Intelligence (AI), and Virtual Reality (VR):** Provide immersive and multisensory experiences, when appropriate, that can accommodate different learning styles and preferences. Students with autism or sensory processing disorders may benefit from virtual simulations that offer controlled and predictable learning environments. Educators need to familiarize themselves with their LEA policies regarding developmental and ethical considerations when utilizing these technologies and offer appropriate support and guidance to students.

**Virtual Labs, Simulations, and Experiments:** Incorporate virtual labs and interactive digital simulations into instruction to allow students to engage in hands-on experimentation and inquiry-based learning. These virtual environments provide all students with opportunities to conduct experiments, observe, and analyze data in accessible formats.

**Gamification:** Provide students with educational games that offer multiple pathways to success. Game mechanics like adaptive difficulty and immediate feedback support and motivate all students.



**Multimedia Presentations and Digital Storytelling:** Offer students opportunities to create multimedia presentations, allowing them to demonstrate their knowledge using multiple modalities. This can benefit students who may struggle with traditional written expression. Tools with built-in accessibility features, such as text-to-speech and alt-text support, can make digital storytelling more inclusive.

**Feedback and Assessment Tools:** Implement digital tools that provide immediate and personalized feedback. Allow for assessment accommodations such as extended time or alternative formats. Immediate feedback can help students monitor their progress and adjust their learning strategies in real time.

## INTEGRATING TECHNOLOGY INTO A LESSON: TEACHER CONSIDERATIONS

When planning a lesson with digital learning that meets the needs of all students, teachers can follow these structured actions:

- **Identify Learning Objectives:** Clearly define what students should know or be able to do by the end of the lesson. This helps in selecting appropriate digital tools that align with these goals.
- **Assess Student Needs:** Understand the diverse needs of students in the classroom. This might involve reviewing IEPs or 504 plans to tailor lesson plans that accommodate all learners.
- **Incorporate Universal Design for Learning (UDL) Principles:** Apply UDL principles to provide multiple means of engagement, representation, and action/expression.
- **Choose Appropriate Technology and Digital Resources:** Identify accessible digital tools and resources that enhance learning opportunities for all students. Selected technologies should offer multiple means of representation, expression, and engagement.
- **Plan for Differentiation:** Design activities that can be easily differentiated regarding difficulty, pace, or learning modality. Technology can help provide different pathways for students to learn and demonstrate their understanding.
- **Create Collaborative Opportunities:** Use digital tools to foster collaboration among students. Confirm that the collaborative tools provide opportunities for equitable participation.
- **Prepare Materials and Resources:** Ensure all materials and online resources are accessible. This includes checking that text can be read by screen readers, videos have captions, and images have alt-text descriptions.
- **Test the Technology:** Check all digital resources and devices before the lesson to ensure they work as intended and are accessible to all students. Address any technical issues to prevent disruptions during the lesson.
- **Provide Clear Instructions:** Develop clear, concise instructions and demonstrations on how to use the digital tools. Consider providing these directions in multiple formats (e.g., written, oral, or video tutorial).
- **Monitor and Adjust During the Lesson:** Observe how students interact with the digital tools as the lesson progresses and adjust as needed to ensure all students are engaged and fully participate.

- **Gather Data or Feedback and Reflect:** Collect feedback from students about their experiences with digital tools and evaluate the data to ensure that the selected digital resources enhance student learning. Reflect on what worked and what could be improved to enhance future lessons.

## SCHOOL LIBRARY MEDIA EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICES

- **Flexible Learning Spaces:** Design library spaces that are flexible and accommodate various learning activities. This includes areas for group work, individual study, and spaces equipped with technology that supports collaborative learning. Flexible spaces and furniture ensure that students with physical disabilities or sensory impairments can participate fully in all library activities.
- **Sensory-Friendly Spaces:** Create sensory-friendly library spaces that accommodate all students. Designate quiet areas with low lighting and comfortable seating options and provide sensory tools such as noise-canceling headphones and fidget toys to help students regulate their sensory input.
- **Collaborative Projects:** Facilitate collaborative projects integrating library resources and digital tools to support all students in various core content areas. Encourage teamwork, communication, and problem-solving skills through group research projects, digital storytelling activities, and multimedia presentations.
- **Online Research and Inquiry-Based Learning:** Provide students with access to online resources, databases, and multimedia tools. Ensure alternative formats for accessing information are available to all students. Offer instructional lessons or classes specifically designed to develop information literacy skills. Personalized lessons address students' unique needs, enhancing their ability to locate, evaluate, and use information effectively.
- **Inclusive Programming and Events:** Plan and implement library programs and events that celebrate diversity, promote inclusion, and address the needs of students with disabilities. Events such as story times with sign language interpreters, makerspace family nights, sensory-friendly movie nights, or workshops on using assistive technology promote social inclusion and allow all students to participate in school library media hosted activities.

## LESSON AND PROGRAM PLANNING: SCHOOL LIBRARY MEDIA CONSIDERATIONS

To plan inclusive instruction for students, a school library media specialist can follow these steps to ensure that all learners have effective and equitable access to resources and instruction:

- **Assess Student Needs:** Identify the specific needs and accommodations required by all students. This could involve collaborating with general and special education teachers and speaking directly with students about their preferences.
- **Select Appropriate Resources:** Choose materials that are accessible to all students. This includes books in various formats, such as large print, braille, audiobooks, and digital texts compatible with screen readers.
- **Utilize Assistive Technology:** Incorporate assistive technology tools that can aid learning, such as text-to-speech software, magnifiers, or adjustable workstations. Ensure that digital resources and the school library media websites are accessible.

- **Design Inclusive Programs:** Plan school library media programs and lessons that accommodate students of all abilities. This could include sign language interpreters, ensuring physical accessibility, and creating quiet, sensory-friendly learning environments as needed.
- **Modify Instructional Practices:** Adapt teaching methods to be inclusive. This might involve using visual aids, providing written and oral instructions, and allowing for different forms of student response in activities.
- **Collaborate with Educators:** Work closely with other educators to align library resources and instructional strategies with classroom learning objectives and to ensure consistency in support across the school environment.
- **Gather Data or Feedback:** Regularly collect feedback from students, teachers, and parents about the effectiveness of the school library media center resources and programs in meeting the needs of all learners. Use this feedback to make ongoing adjustments to improve inclusivity.
- **Review and Improve:** Continually assess the school library media center's offerings and make improvements based on feedback and evolving best practices in educational inclusivity.

Inclusive digital learning environments and school library media centers allow all students to engage meaningfully with curriculum content, collaborate with peers, and develop essential skills for success in the digital age. By incorporating inclusive practices into digital learning experiences and inclusive library programming, educators can create environments where learners feel valued, supported, and empowered to achieve their full potential. For more information, visit the [Digital Learning and School Library Media Branch](#) page on the Maryland Department of Education website.

## Related Services

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Inclusion refers to integrating students with disabilities with their peers into general education and community settings. Within the scope of related services, inclusion is a social justice issue because it ensures that all children and youth with disabilities have a right to live, learn, play, and work alongside their typical peers.

Although inclusion has previously been considered the physical presence of a student within a general education setting, acceptance, participation, and achievement of students within that setting are the true markers of inclusion (Farrell, 2004).

### **OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY**

Occupational therapy practitioners serve an important role in promoting inclusion of children and youth with disabilities by integrating services at the universal, targeted, or intensive levels of intervention. In order to help support successful inclusion of children and youth with disabilities in general education and community contexts, it is critical that occupational therapy practitioners skillfully integrate services.

Integrated service delivery involves providing occupational therapy in the child's or youth's natural environments (e.g., bus, classroom, playground, cafeteria, recreational settings), and emphasizing nonintrusive methods and common goals (Bazyk, Goodman, Michaud, Papp, & Hawkins, 2009).

Occupational therapy practitioners support students with disabilities in the general education classroom by engaging in three key practices: 1) Increasing teachers' ability to implement therapy strategies throughout the day (Silverman, 2011); 2) Enhancing educational continuity for students with disabilities who receive occupational therapy (Bazyk & Cahill, 2014); and 3) Modeling therapy strategies in the classroom setting.

Inclusive practices can be offered by occupational therapy practitioners in a variety of settings:

Home	<p>Support development of self-advocacy skills by coaching parents on routine-based strategies.</p> <p>This increases family participation in playgroups and community outings.</p>
School	<p>Educate administrators and staff on the difference between school-based and clinic-based occupational therapy.</p> <p>Work collaboratively with the educational team to adapt, modify, and provide accommodations within the natural setting (e.g., classrooms, cafeteria, playground, hallways, bathrooms, coatroom) to enable students with disabilities to participate in academic and non-academic activities to their fullest capacity. For example, an occupational therapist may support a student with sensory needs navigate the school environment.</p>
Community	<p>Bridge school and community integrated services by addressing the student's IEP.</p> <p>Build partnerships with businesses so students have opportunities for integrated community activities. This prepares students as they transition towards independent living.</p> <p>Consult on creating universally designed museums, theaters, parks, and playgrounds to attract all families.</p> <p>Consult on creating sustainable designs that benefit all in multiple ways: environmentally, socially, and economically.</p>

## SCHOOL COUNSELORS

School counselors encourage and support all students' academic, career and social/emotional development through school counseling programs. School counselors are committed to helping all students realize their potential and meet or exceed academic standards with consideration for both the strengths and needs resulting from a student's disability.

School counselors may support students with disabilities by:

- Offering classroom lessons, individual and/or group counseling that are culturally responsive and inclusive of the accommodations provided to students with disabilities.
- Providing short-term, goal-focused counseling in instances where it is appropriate to include these strategies as a part of the IEP or 504 plan.
- Encouraging family involvement in the educational process.
- Consulting and collaborating with staff and families to understand the background of a student and understanding the accommodations and modifications needed to assist the student.
- Advocating for students with disabilities in the school and in the community.

- Contributing to the school's multidisciplinary team within the scope and practice of the school counseling program.
- Identifying students who may need to be assessed to determine special education or 504 plan eligibility.
- Collaborating with other related student support professionals (e.g., school psychologists, physical therapists, occupational therapists, special education staff, speech, and language pathologists) in the delivery of services.
- Providing assistance with developing academic, transition and postsecondary plans for students with IEPs and 504 plans as appropriate. School counselors provide a vital perspective in the secondary transition process, and it is a best practice to ensure they are invited to the IEP and 504 meetings.

## SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS

School Psychologists are uniquely qualified to work alongside educators, parents, and building leaders to ensure students with disabilities are meaningfully included in their grade-level general education classroom (Farrell, 2004; Vincent & Morrison, 2022). The National Association of School Psychologists highlights the rationale for the inclusive practices of School Psychologists through the following domains:

Domain	Focus/Purpose
Data-Based Decision Making	<p>School Psychologists use multiple, direct measures of student skill acquisition and fluency gains to identify the areas of strength and targets for specially designed instruction (Jimerson et al., 2004).</p> <p>School Psychologists can use direct measures of student skills (e.g., curriculum-based measurement, classroom observation) and indirect measures (e.g., teacher report, parent report) to support educational planning for students with disabilities using a strength-based assessment approach.</p>
Consultation and Collaboration	<p>School Psychologists use consultation and collaboration to promote the use of evidence-based practices at the individual, classroom, school, or systems-level (NASP, 2020a). School Psychologists can be a valuable part of that support to teachers of students with disabilities by providing consultation on the implementation of behavioral management strategies and instructional supports and the use of progress monitoring. Similarly, School Psychologists improve outcomes for students with significant disabilities by consulting with caregivers to identify feasible and effective strategies in the home and community to increase access to inclusive settings outside of school.</p>

Domain	Focus/Purpose
Academic Interventions and Instructional Supports	<p>School Psychologists are knowledgeable of biological, cultural, and social influences on academic skills and understand theories of human learning, cognitive, and developmental processes (NASP, 2020a). This foundational knowledge informs their selection and use of assessment and data collection and supports evidence-based instructional strategies. Identifying an individual student's current skill level is essential for providing well-matched, quality instruction and evidence-based academic interventions.</p> <p>This is particularly true for students with cognitive disabilities whose abilities could be underestimated.</p>
Mental and Behavioral Health Services and Interventions	<p>School Psychologists are knowledgeable of biological, cultural, and social influences on behavior and mental health, impacting learning, social skills, and adaptive skills (NASP, 2020a). Challenging behavior can often be a barrier to inclusion for students with disabilities. Students with disabilities may demonstrate inappropriate behaviors to communicate their wants and needs, particularly when a student is not provided with appropriate strategies/interventions. School Psychologists can address challenging behaviors by conducting a Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA) to discern the communicative intent (i.e., behavioral function) of the challenging behavior and teach the student alternative, functional behaviors to use in the classroom setting.</p> <p>An example of teaching functional behaviors is the use of functional communication training, an evidence-based intervention in which the student is taught a communication strategy, such as a verbalization, gesture, sign, or use of an augmentative communication system, to access a want or need that is functionally equivalent to the challenging behavior (Durand &amp; Moskowitz, 2015).</p> <p>Understanding and recognizing mental health concerns for students with disabilities is also an essential skill for a School Psychologist.</p>
School-wide Practices to Promote Learning	<p>School Psychologists apply their knowledge of systems theory and implementation science to promote evidence-based, school-wide practices to improve learning, positive behavior, and mental health (NASP, 2020a). School Psychologists work collaboratively with other professionals in the school to strengthen the multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) needed to create safe and supportive schools for all learners. A positive, preventive approach to meeting students' needs school-wide sets the expectations for how school staff and students engage with students with significant cognitive disabilities.</p>

Domain	Focus/Purpose
Services To Promote Safe and Supportive Schools	School Psychologists have a vital role in championing a multi-tiered system of evidence-based supports to promote preventive and responsive services that enhance learning, mental and behavioral health, and psychological and physical safety of all students (NASP, 2020a). School Psychologists can ensure collaborative efforts around bullying prevention, suicide prevention, school completion, and crisis response for all students, including students with disabilities.
Family, School, and Community Collaboration	School Psychologists are often the best suited in the school to coordinate communication and collaboration amongst all caregivers of a child with complex needs to ensure consistency of care and maximize supports available in all settings. This is particularly important for students with disabilities who often need additional supports from therapists, behavior specialists, and health care professionals in home and community settings. Coordination of care across caregivers, school, and community providers is essential.
Equitable Practices for Diverse Student Populations	<p>Equitable practices for diverse student populations, respect for diversity in development and learning, and advocacy for social justice are foundational to effective school psychological service delivery. School Psychologists ensure that students with disabilities receive what they need to access general and special educational opportunities while addressing occasions in which students are excluded unnecessarily from everyday experiences available to other students.</p> <p>School Psychologists are vigilant to guard against the under- and over-identification of students for special education services based on gender, race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. Using multiple, direct measures to assess student performance over time considering ecological factors within an MTSS framework is key to ensuring fairness in eligibility and placement decision making.</p>
Research and Evidenced-Based Practices	School Psychologists evaluate and apply research to inform school-based practices as a foundation of their service delivery. An extensive research base exists to guide teachers and school teams in planning for the quality inclusion of students with disabilities. The School Psychologist provides the team with information on current research related to inclusive practices and ensures school practices align with evidence-based instruction and intervention. School Psychologists support these efforts by continually collecting and reviewing data to evaluate inclusive practices at individual, group, and/or systems levels.



**SOCIAL WORK/PUPIL PERSONNEL WORKERS:**

School Social Workers are trained mental health professionals with a degree in social work who provide services related to a person's social, emotional, and life adjustment to school and/or society. School Social Workers are the link between the home, school, and community in providing direct as well as indirect services to students, families, and school personnel to promote and support students' academic and social success (School Social Work Association of America, 2020).

Social workers prioritize and generalize these key tasks in an inclusive environment:

- Working with those problems in a child's living situation that affect the child's adjustment in school (home, school, and community).
- Preparing a social or developmental history on a child with a disability.
- Counseling (group, individual and/or family).
- Mobilizing family, school, and community resources to enable the child to learn as effectively as possible in his or her educational program
- Assisting in developing positive behavioral intervention strategies.
- Providing school staff trainings on how to make schools and classrooms effective for diverse student populations.
- The specialists of the school psycho-social service have the responsibility to counsel the parents on the importance of continuation of the further education of their children with disabilities based on their abilities and potential.
- Conducting research related to the needs of children with disabilities to support or to identify and share "best practices" among schools.
- Assessing the aspects of social functioning of the children with disabilities and giving the necessary orientations to improve it.
- Supporting the teacher to draft the IEP, to create an acceptance climate in class/school, follow up their performance, work with parents, etc.

**SPEECH LANGUAGE PATHOLOGIST**

Speech challenges encompass a range of communication disorders that affect a child's ability to articulate sounds, understand language, and communicate effectively. The impact of speech challenges on a child's learning and social development should not be underestimated. Difficulties in communication can lead to frustration, low self-esteem, and social isolation (Palmer, et al, 2016). Additionally, children with speech challenges may struggle to express themselves academically, participate in classroom discussions, and form meaningful relationships with their peers (Hobson, et al, 2022).

**Promoting Inclusive Education for Children with Speech Challenges****Tier 1: Creating a supportive classroom environment is crucial for fostering the success of children with speech challenges.**

Educating teachers and classmates about speech challenges is the first step towards building empathy and understanding.

**Tier 2: Collaborating with Speech Language Pathologists (SLPs).**

Speech Language Pathologists (SLPs) are trained professionals who specialize in diagnosing and treating communication disorders. By building a partnership between SLPs, teachers, and parents, SLPs can provide valuable strategies and techniques that can be implemented in the classroom to support the child's speech and language development (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 2010). SLPs provide intervention that is appropriate to the age and learning needs of each individual student and is selected through an evidence-based decision-making process.

**Strategies for Supporting Children with Speech Challenges (Brandel, 2020).**

- Enhancing communication skills is a key aspect of supporting children with speech challenges.
- Encouraging expressive and receptive language development through activities and exercises can help improve the student's communication abilities.
- Implementing speech therapy techniques in the classroom, such as articulation drills and phonological awareness exercises, can also be beneficial.
- Providing opportunities for practice and reinforcement, such as role-playing and group discussions, can further enhance students' communication skills.
- Building social-emotional skills is equally important for children with speech challenges.
- Promoting self-confidence and self-advocacy can empower students to express themselves and seek support when needed.
- Fostering positive peer interactions and friendships can help students feel included and accepted by their classmates.
- Addressing emotional challenges related to speech difficulties, such as anxiety or frustration, can contribute to the student's overall well-being and academic success.
- Providing resources and support for parents, such as workshops or online resources, can help them better understand the child's needs and learn strategies to support their communication development at home.
- Collaborating with parents to reinforce speech and language skills at home can also enhance the child's progress.
- Encouraging open communication and partnership with parents ensures that everyone is working together to support the child's success.

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## Paraprofessionals and Adult Support

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A primary responsibility of general and special educators is to instruct students in both academic content and the process of internalizing the learning strategies outlined in their IEP. In inclusive general education classrooms, paraprofessionals frequently support the development and improvement of these skills for learners who struggle, speak another language, or have a disability. A paraprofessional may be assigned to a whole class to support the teacher in general, including assisting with instruction, preparing materials for lessons, or assisting with data collection on learner responses to instruction. A paraprofessional may also be assigned to support one or more learners who require additional assistance for learning, personal care, or positive social-behavioral engagement. Expectations relative to roles and responsibilities must be communicated by certified teachers.

It is important to note that paraprofessionals work under direct supervision and with the guidance of certified educators. Paraprofessionals should be involved and engaged in the lesson planning and implementation process in collaboration with certified educators. Some ways to support paraprofessionals include the provision of:

- Professional development strategies and skills to fully support the student, while maximizing the student's grade-level academic engagement, independence, and peer relationships.
- Written guidelines about communication with families including when, how, and to what extent specific information can be shared.
- Scheduling support, guidance related to one-to-one instruction, small group instruction, and whole group instruction.
- Explicit training on how to best support individual student needs, including access to the IEP snapshot and/or the FBA and BIP.
- Processes and procedures of data collection and progress monitoring.
- Alternatives to side-by-side support with an emphasis on fading direct supports.
- Coaching and feedback to improve skills.

### COLLABORATION AND COMMUNICATION FOR PARAPROFESSIONALS

Clear paraprofessional roles and responsibilities as well as an understanding of a paraprofessional's perspective specific to their assignment is critical to effective classroom and learner support plans. Predetermined methods for communication and scheduled opportunities for collaboration can be established by determining the purpose, method, frequency, and structure of communication.

#### **Purpose: What is the goal or intent of our communication?**

- Debriefing the day
- Sharing an update
- Planning for upcoming instruction
- Discussing the progress of individual student(s)

**Method: What is the best method of communication?**

- Shared documents (i.e., Google Docs, online lesson planner, SharePoint)
- Face-to-face meeting
- Virtual Meeting
- Text or Email

**Frequency: How often should we communicate?**

- Daily: 5 to 15 minutes
- Weekly: 30 minutes
- Bi-weekly: 45 minutes

**Structure: What is needed to strategically accomplish our purpose?**

- Agenda with clearly defined items and approximate time limits
- Specific information or data necessary for planning
- Designated meeting location without distraction
- Coverage or use of time when students do not need direct supervision

**LEVELS OF SUPPORT FOR PARAPROFESSIONALS**

Under ESSA, paraprofessionals provide teaching support and must have a high school diploma (or its equivalent) and also meet one of these requirements:

- Finished two years of study at a college or technical school; or
- Hold at least an associate degree; or
- Demonstrate through a formal state or local academic assessment (i.e., The ParaPro Assessment) knowledge of, and the ability to assist in, reading, writing, and mathematics instruction.

Paraprofessionals complete numerous tasks in the classroom by assisting the teacher and students with the understanding that paraprofessionals supplement education through a support plan that fades as students increase their capacity and independence, academically or behaviorally. These methods should be evidence-based strategies provided by the teacher and typically outlined in a student's IEP.

Confidentiality is one of the most crucial aspects of the paraprofessional's responsibilities. Like teachers and administrators, paraprofessionals must maintain confidentiality of student information as dictated by federal, state, and local regulations. Such details related to specific students, service delivery or disability, the results of formal and informal assessments, social and behavioral actions, performance goals, and/or information about the student's family matters are only shared with personnel responsible for the design, preparation, and delivery of SDI/special education services. Information regarding students with disabilities and SDI programs should not be shared in the lunchroom, staff room, office areas, or out in the community.

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**PARAPROFESSIONALS' SUPPORT ACROSS SCHOOL/LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS**

The following information represents the types of support and services that paraprofessionals may provide. Specific supports may require additional training to implement with fidelity. Paraprofessionals always work under the direct supervision and guidance of certified educators.

**Instruction**

- Follows schedule and implements plans designed by the teacher(s).
- Implements student IEP goals, accommodations, and modifications as directed by the teacher(s).
- Provides direct assistance to student(s) to facilitate independent participation in the least restrictive environment.
- Leads small groups and implements instructional strategies as directed by the teacher(s).
- Administers assessments under the direction of the teacher(s).

**Behavioral and Social Support**

- Implements Behavior Intervention Plans (BIPs) and related strategies under teacher(s) direction.
- Facilitates appropriate social interactions between students.
- Collects data on class behavior as designated by the teacher(s).

**Communication**

- Communicates with case managers, teachers, and related service providers regarding student progress.
- Follows established protocols for communicating with the parent. Written correspondence is reviewed before sending.

**Personal Care**

- Supports students with physical disabilities including, but not limited to, lifting, transferring, and mobility challenges.
- Supports students with adaptive skills such as self-care, feeding, and toileting.

**Clerical**

- Prepares instructional materials based on a model and/or detailed instructions provided by the teacher(s).
- Assists with the organization of student work samples and materials, as directed by the teacher(s).
- Assists with tracking student attendance, checking homework or other assignments, and participates in lesson preparation.

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## Secondary Transition Planning and College and Career Readiness (CCR)

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Educational planning and the delivery of quality instruction to prepare students to meet their post-school outcomes is the responsibility of all school personnel, including the teacher. For students with an IEP, College and Career Readiness (CCR) preparation and Secondary Transition (ST) planning go hand in hand as part of the student's overall educational preparation.

### WHAT IS SECONDARY TRANSITION?

Secondary Transition is an ongoing process of preparing students with disabilities for life after high school. It is a collaborative effort that involves the student, family, school staff, and community members. In Maryland, formal Secondary Transition planning begins at age 14 or sooner, if deemed appropriate by an IEP team. A Secondary Transition Plan is written to move the student from school to achievement of their postsecondary employment, education or training, and independent living goals. Each component of the plan serves a specific purpose in the preparation for attainment of these goals. Through an assessment process, the student's interests, preferences, and post-secondary goals are identified. A Course of Study that aligns with their College and Career Pathway is identified. Annual IEP goals that support post-secondary goals and academic achievement are written. Transition activities and services are identified. This process is reviewed annually to ensure that the student's most current desired post-school outcomes are addressed through the IEP and their academic planning. Educators working with students should be familiar with the components of the plan so that they can braid components of this plan into their daily work with the student.

For additional information regarding Secondary Transition planning in Maryland visit:

[Parent Information Series: Secondary Transition](#) (*Parent Information Series Secondary Transition Planning* 2023)

[Secondary Transition Planning Guide for Individuals with Disabilities](#) (*Secondary Transition Planning Guide for Individuals with Disabilities* 2019)

### ESSENTIAL COMPONENTS OF THE SECONDARY TRANSITION PLAN

#### Transition Assessments

Age-appropriate transition assessments are the foundation of the secondary transition process and help the student learn about themselves, their interests, preferences, and goals. Formal and informal assessments from multiple settings and sources, including the family and community, are used to identify measurable postsecondary goals. Assessment results provide the student, parents, and other members of the IEP team with information about how the student is currently functioning, and the skills and services needed to achieve their goals. The data is used to develop a comprehensive IEP and a meaningful transition plan to support students in achieving their postsecondary goals.

Knowing the student's future goals, interests, and preferences in the areas of employment, education/training and independent living empowers educators to provide more personalized and effective instruction and support, ultimately helping students succeed academically and in their future endeavors.



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## Postsecondary Goals

Postsecondary goals are measurable goals that identify the student's vision of what they will do after high school in the areas of postsecondary employment, education or training, and if appropriate, independent living. IEP teams discuss postsecondary goals with the student and family at a minimum each year at the annual IEP meeting. Measurable post-secondary goals are required by [IDEA Section 1414 \(d\) \(1\) \(A\) \(i\) \(VIII\)](#) (*Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Section 1414 (d) (1) (a) (I) (VIII) 2019*).

## Course of Study

A course of study includes all the classes and community experiences the student will complete to achieve their postsecondary goals. Everyone working with the student must help identify a course of study aligned with their postsecondary goals. The IEP team should ensure participation in courses and experiences that support progress toward the student's goals. The connection between the student's postsecondary goals and the course of study should be clear.

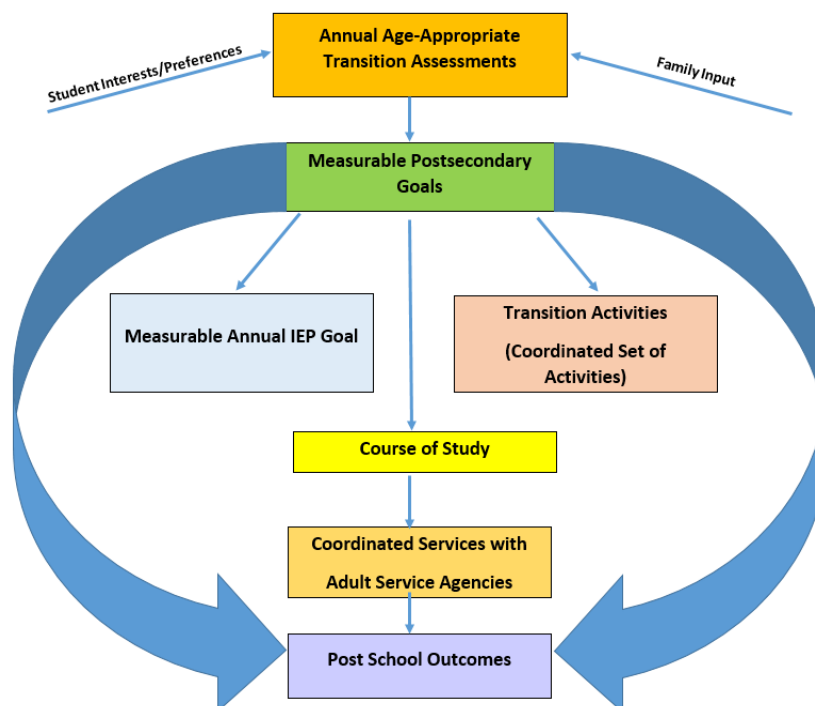
## Secondary Transition Activities/Services

Secondary transition activities are designed to improve the student's academic and functional skills to help them achieve their post-school goals. These activities are specially designed for the student based on their strengths, preferences, interests, and needs. They may include instruction, related services, community experiences, employment development and independent living skill development. Thoughtful development and implementation of transition activities create the steps that the student will take from setting to achieving their goals. For additional guidance on Transition Services and requirements, reference [A Transition Guide to Postsecondary Education and Employment for Students and Youth With Disabilities](#) (*A Transition Guide to Postsecondary Education and Employment for Students with Disabilities 2020*).

## Annual IEP Goals

The annual IEP goals are developed and written to help the student build the knowledge, skills, and/or behaviors needed to achieve their postsecondary goals. The annual IEP goals and transition activities work together to create a student-centered IEP. The successful completion of the goals and activities leads to the achievement of meaningful postsecondary outcomes.

## Secondary Transition Planning Process



General educators who are familiar with their students' transition plans can tailor instruction, accommodations, and supports to better meet their unique needs and facilitate their progress toward their post-school goals. This can be accomplished by incorporating secondary transition services and activities into daily instruction.

### HOW DOES SECONDARY TRANSITION PLANNING SUPPORT CCR?

For a student to meet the CCR Standard<sup>6</sup>, they have one of two options:

**Option 1:** Students can meet the CCR Standard by demonstrating both Academic Success and Math Mastery. Academic Success is achieved by earning a High School Grade Point Average (GPA) of 3.00 or higher. Math Mastery may be achieved by either earning a final course grade of A, B, or C in Algebra I, OR alternatively by scoring Proficient or above on the Algebra I Maryland Comprehensive Assessment Program (MCAP) assessment.

**Option 2:** Students can meet the CCR Standard by scoring Proficient or above on BOTH the English 10 MCAP assessment AND the Algebra I MCAP assessment.

<sup>6</sup> In Maryland, approximately ten percent of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities are assessed according to Alternate Academic Achievement Standards. These standards are themselves derived from the English Language Arts, Math, and Science Standards, but reduced in depth, breadth, and complexity. Students who are assessed according to the Alternate Academic Achievement Standards do not take MCAP, and as such may not have full access to CCR attainment.

For a student with an IEP, the specialized instruction, supports, and services outlined in their IEPs should help the student to meet Academic Success and Math Mastery or achieve Proficient or above on both the English 10 and Algebra I MCAP assessments. A strategically crafted Course of Study that identifies appropriate coursework over the student's education career will be critical in the student's overall academic and post-school success. Just like a team would discuss a student's progress towards grade-level academic attainment, a student's IEP meeting should also include a discussion of their progress toward CCR attainment. Aside from the student, the classroom teacher is one of the most essential voices in this discussion, as they can most accurately speak to how the student's daily course of instruction is setting them up for post-secondary success.

For additional information regarding CCR attainment, visit [Blueprint for Maryland's Future](#) (*Blueprint Pillar 3: College and Career Readiness*, 2022).

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## Equitable Supports for Gifted and Talented Children: Twice Exceptional Learners

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Students who are classified as Twice-Exceptional Learners are commonly identified as having a documented disability such as a Specific Learning Disability, Autism, ADHD, emotional disability, orthopedic, speech, communication, hearing or vision impairment, or other physical or intellectual disability, while simultaneously demonstrating exceptionally high or atypical talent, skills and abilities in one or more academic, artistic or social areas (Davidson Institute, 2021). The National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) estimates that approximately 6% of students receiving special education services are also academically gifted, although they may not have been identified.

### GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS AND OBSERVABLE BEHAVIORS OF TWICE EXCEPTIONAL LEARNERS:

Exceptional students have variable learning profiles, no student is exactly like another, however, the following information may be used as a guide of general characteristics of the twice exceptional student population:

Twice-exceptional students often learn or develop skills “asynchronously,” meaning they may demonstrate advanced abilities in one subject or area but may experience delays or difficulty in other development areas, academics, or executive functioning. Their school experience may be characterized by significant strengths and significant challenges in their learning.

“Twice-exceptional, also known as 2e, students exhibit significant characteristics of both giftedness and disability” (Kaufman, 2018). These students may have difficulty reading but readily share advanced concepts and theories of topics of significant personal interest. For example, they may struggle with reading written text but can discuss in detail multiple theories about a topic and may be able to show evidence to support their thinking. They may struggle in specific subjects but may demonstrate innovative and creative problem-solving skills or creative ideas or may demonstrate excellent leadership skills in academic or social settings.

Twice-exceptional (2e) learners may demonstrate a wide range of abilities, therefore, when preparing to meet these students' academic and social needs, it is essential that educators and caregivers collaborate and lend careful and simultaneous considerations to the student's disabilities and their gifts, strengths, and possible additional emotional supports, observing how these elements work together. To develop a complete profile of the student's learning needs, it is equally important to observe the students learning behaviors holistically, as the disability, gifts, and talents may mask each other, making it difficult to recognize and address them. Masking refers to the dynamic that a student's disability may be more noticeable than their gifts and talents or conversely, the gifts and talents may be more noticeable than the disability. It also can be observed in inconsistent performance on tasks and assessments (Townend et al., 2024).

**Twice-exceptional children may exhibit characteristics that include:**

- Experiencing high levels of frustration and anxiety; may appear to lack motivation; may resist taking academic or intellectual risks.
- Experiencing difficulty in focusing, especially during lectures, reviewing material they have already mastered, or during long bouts of inactivity.
- Demonstrating intense focus and attention when the subject is of interest.
- Impulsive behavior and difficulty managing emotional responses; may use humor to deflect, make fun of others, or to avoid consequences.
- Incongruent maturity levels, relative to age, cognitive ability, and behavior.
- Significant learning challenges in specific content areas, while demonstrating advanced knowledge in others.
- Difficulties with social interactions and social awareness.
- Weak executive functioning skills displayed as disorganization, difficulty with time or task management, and perseverance.
- Significant variability in verbal and written communication.
- Atypical critical thinking and problem-solving skills.
- Behavioral problems related to stress, boredom, and undiagnosed learning disabilities including auditory or visual processing disorders.
- Requiring intense teacher support, or by contrast, highly independent depending on area of need.
- May demonstrate unusual and creative imagination.

## COMPARATIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF GIFTED STUDENTS AND GIFTED STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Common Gifted Characteristics	Common Characteristics of Gifted with Disabilities
Able to learn and retain information quickly with less repetition.	May process new learning and information slowly, requiring support and compensatory strategies.
Demonstrates learning and development at an advanced rate above same age peers in one or more areas of talent.	May have learning delays due to Specific Learning Disability (SLD) or cognitive processing.
May complete assignments and tasks quickly, with little assistance or guidance.	Some students, especially those with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), may have difficulty with organizational and social skills.
Gifted children may experience levels of asynchrony (developing one or more skill or talent faster than another). The child may develop cognitively at an advanced level, but not socially. (Cross, 2021)	The asynchrony may be more extreme.
May concentrate intensely for extended periods.	May have Attention Deficit difficulties but can sustain intense concentration for extended periods on tasks and topics that interest them.

### Student Scenarios / Examples:

- A student may have strong creative and critical thinking skills, strong vocabulary, and deep background knowledge, but demonstrates significant difficulty in writing.
- A student has deep and extensive knowledge about “climate change” (or other specific topic of interest), is able to find research and discuss facts about the topic but struggles with completing and organizing related tasks.
- A third-grade student may read at an 8th grade level, but may have difficulty spelling and writing.
- A student may demonstrate mental mathematical abilities and conceptual awareness beyond his or her age and grade but struggle with showing work.
- A student may show a deep understanding of scientific knowledge and ability but struggle to work successfully in a group or partner situation.

**Additional Observable Evidence and Alternative Assessments:**

- Differential Ability Scales-II (DAS-II)
- Student Portfolios, passion projects
- Student and caregiver interview

**RECOMMENDATIONS, INTERVENTION AND SUPPORT**

Twice Exceptional students qualify for specialized and individualized learning plans, similarly to students who only need support with a disability. There are two landmark legal cases that specifically obligate schools and LEAs to comply with a child's IEP and to offer an IEP that is reasonably developed to enable a child to make progress that is "most appropriate in light of their circumstance." Summarily, the case of *Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District*, supports the Twice Exceptional student being provided with an IEP that offers them the services that support their gifted and advanced abilities, in addition to providing interventions and supports for their disabilities. In fact, failing to identify, plan for, and provide appropriate services for 2e students is negligent and harmful (Jacobs, 2020).

Students may benefit from:

- Counseling and positive relationships with a mentor or teacher
- Formal identification, accommodations, and services for the disability
- Varied learning experience involving student choice and "hands-on" learning experiences
- Lessons created with the Universal Design Learning Model
- Multiple data sources for gifted programming identification
- Consulting with families and caregivers about student behavior, performance and progress
- Culturally relevant pedagogical and assessment methods
- Explicit instruction in the disability area
  - Enhanced, enriched, and expanded opportunities to develop gifts and talents
  - Project Based Learning experiences
  - Cooperative Learning
  - Collaborative advocacy between parents and educators (Skolnick, 2023)

Additionally, students with multiple learning exceptions experience more success when they are provided with a mentor, and enriched or advanced learning opportunities, that develops their interests and talents, building their confidence, and supporting their learning and emotional needs.

Parents can also support their 2e child by providing opportunities in their passion areas to encourage developing their strengths and interests and to give them opportunities for success. [SENG](#) (Supporting the Emotional Needs of the Gifted) is an organization that supports 2e students and their families through their learning journeys with resources, professional development, and networking.

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# Supports for Overidentified and Underidentified Populations

The overidentification of multilingual learners (ML) as needing special education services can stem from various factors. Language barriers can sometimes be misconstrued as learning disabilities, leading to misdiagnosis or overidentification. Cultural variations in learning styles and educational expectations may not always align with conventional assessment criteria, contributing to misinterpretations of MLs' abilities. Standardized assessments may not accurately capture the skills and knowledge of MLs, resulting in their underperformance and potential misidentification for special education services. Educators might lack sufficient training in recognizing the differences between language acquisition challenges and learning disabilities, leading to overidentification.

## MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS: LEARNING ACQUISITION VS. LEARNING DISABILITY

Learning Acquisition Challenges		Learning Disability Challenges	
Examples	Non-Examples	Examples	Non-Examples
A student who recently immigrated to an English-speaking country may experience difficulty understanding complex academic language due to limited English proficiency.	A student born and raised in an English-speaking household who exhibits advanced English language skills appropriate for their age level.	A student who consistently struggles with reading fluency, comprehension, and decoding despite receiving targeted literacy interventions and support.	A student who demonstrates age-appropriate reading skills and comprehension but may occasionally encounter difficulties with complex texts.
A preschooler who has a smaller vocabulary size compared to their peers may struggle to express themselves verbally but demonstrates age-appropriate comprehension of language.	A preschooler who demonstrates difficulty comprehending and producing speech, exhibiting delays in both expressive and receptive language skills.	A student who exhibits difficulty with mathematical concepts, such as understanding number sense or solving mathematical problems, despite receiving instruction and support.	A student who occasionally makes computational errors but demonstrates a solid understanding of mathematical concepts and problem-solving strategies.

Learning Acquisition Challenges		Learning Disability Challenges	
Examples	Non-Examples	Examples	Non-Examples
A bilingual student who speaks Spanish at home and is learning English in school may initially face challenges with vocabulary and grammar in English but shows progress over time.	A bilingual student who exhibits persistent difficulty with language skills in both their native language and the language of instruction, despite adequate exposure and support.	A student who struggles with executive functioning skills, such as organization, time management, and task completion, impacting their academic performance across subjects.	A student who may occasionally forget to turn in assignments but demonstrates overall effective executive functioning skills in managing tasks and responsibilities.

Moreover, multilingual learners often come from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, which can intersect with language barriers, further complicating accurate identification of learning needs.

When examining the overidentification of multilingual learners for special education services, it is crucial to recognize the significant role that trauma and poverty can play in this phenomenon. Trauma and poverty can intersect with language barriers and cultural differences, exacerbating the challenges faced by multilingual learners and potentially leading to their misidentification for special education services.

## TRAUMA AND POVERTY

Trauma and poverty intersect with language barriers and cultural differences, complicating the identification process for multilingual learners. Traumatic experiences, such as displacement, war, violence, or discrimination, can manifest in various ways, including emotional distress, cognitive difficulties, and behavioral challenges. Educators may misinterpret these manifestations as signs of a learning disability, leading to the overidentification of multilingual learners for special education services. Similarly, multilingual learners from low-income backgrounds face socioeconomic barriers that impact their overall well-being and academic success. Chronic stress, inadequate nutrition, limited access to healthcare, and unstable housing can exacerbate challenges faced by multilingual learners, making it difficult for educators to differentiate between the effects of poverty and indicators of a learning disability. Cultural variations in learning styles and educational expectations may contribute to misinterpretations of multilingual learners' abilities. Additionally, standardized assessments often fail to accurately capture the skills and knowledge of multilingual learners, leading to their underperformance and potential misidentification for special education services.

## INTERSECTIONALITY

The intersection of trauma, poverty, language barriers, and cultural differences creates complex challenges in accurately identifying the needs of multilingual learners. Those who have experienced trauma or come from low-income backgrounds may struggle with language barriers that affect their ability to communicate and access educational resources. Cultural differences in learning styles and expectations may clash with conventional assessment criteria, leading to further misunderstandings of their abilities. Educators must be aware of these intersecting factors and adopt trauma-informed, culturally responsive approaches to effectively support multilingual learners. By addressing underlying issues such as trauma and poverty, and by providing targeted interventions, educators can create inclusive learning environments that promote equity and excellence for all multilingual learners.

Trauma-informed, culturally responsive approaches include, but are not limited to:

- **Culturally Sensitive Environment:** Creating a classroom or educational environment that respects and reflects the cultural backgrounds and identities of students.
- **Building Trusting Relationships:** Prioritizing the establishment of trusting relationships between educators and students by demonstrating empathy, active listening, and understanding of students' cultural backgrounds and personal experiences.
- **Understanding Cultural Norms and Values:** Educators familiarize themselves with the cultural norms, values, and communication styles of the communities they serve.
- **Trauma-Informed Practices:** Implementing trauma-informed practices that recognize the prevalence and impact of trauma on students' academic and socio-emotional well-being.
- **Collaborative Decision-Making:** Involving students, families, and community members in decision-making processes related to education.
- **Culturally Responsive Pedagogy:** Adapting teaching strategies, instructional materials, and assessment methods to reflect the cultural backgrounds, languages, and learning styles of students.
- **Community Partnerships:** Collaborating with community organizations, cultural leaders, and mental health professionals to provide comprehensive support services for students and families affected by trauma.
- **Self-Reflection and Professional Development:** Engaging in ongoing self-reflection and professional development to deepen educators' understanding of cultural competence, trauma-informed care, and equity in education.

## RESOURCES AND CONSIDERATIONS

**Understanding Identification:** Resources such as the World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) Focus Bulletin and the Minnesota Department of Education's English Learner Disability Resource offer insights into best practices for accurate identification. Understanding identification includes but is not limited to: exploring the complexities of identifying MLs with learning disabilities, highlighting the detrimental effects of overidentification and under identification, and utilizing resources such as the WIDA Focus Bulletin and the Minnesota Department of Education's English Learner Disability Resource.

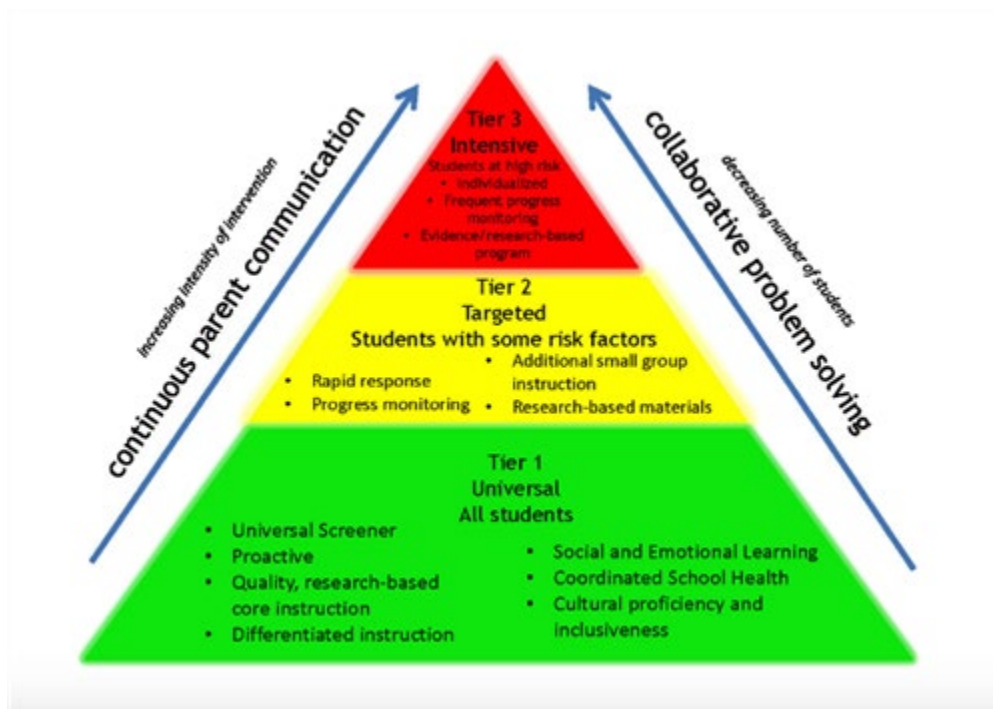
- Conducting comprehensive assessments that consider language proficiency, academic achievement, cognitive abilities, and social-emotional development.
- Implementing a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) framework to monitor MLs' progress and provide targeted interventions.
- Utilizing dynamic assessment techniques that assess a ML's ability to learn when provided with appropriate scaffolding and support. Examples include, but are not limited to:
  - Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD): Assessing a multilingual learner's ability to learn by identifying tasks that they can accomplish with assistance, indicating their potential for learning when provided with appropriate scaffolding and support.
  - Scaffolded Instruction: Providing varying levels of support and guidance to multilingual learners during learning tasks to assess their ability to apply new knowledge or skills with assistance.
  - Think-Aloud Protocol: Asking multilingual learners to verbalize their thought process while completing a task, allowing educators to assess their problem-solving strategies and understanding of concepts.
  - Peer Collaboration: Facilitating collaborative learning experiences where multilingual learners work together to complete a task, allowing educators to observe their ability to communicate, collaborate, and apply knowledge in a social context.
  - Performance-Based Assessment: Designing assessment tasks that require multilingual learners to demonstrate their understanding or skills through real-world applications, such as presentations, projects, or performances, while providing necessary support and feedback.
- Engaging in collaborative data review meetings with educators, specialists, and parents to analyze assessment data and make informed decisions.
- Providing professional development opportunities for educators to enhance their understanding of the differences between language difficulties and learning disabilities.

**Resource Sharing:**

- Distributing copies of the WIDA Focus Bulletin to educators, administrators, and support staff involved in serving multilingual learners with learning disabilities.
- Sharing links to online resources, such as the Minnesota Department of Education's English Learner Disability Resource, through email newsletters or professional learning communities.
- Hosting workshops or training sessions to introduce educators to the available resources and demonstrate how to integrate them into instructional practices.
- Creating a centralized online repository where educators can access and download relevant materials, including assessment tools, instructional strategies, and accommodations.
- Establishing peer mentoring or coaching programs where experienced educators can share their expertise and best practices with colleagues.

**Practical Application:** Offer guidance on decision-making points when referring for a special education evaluation.

- Utilize decision-making frameworks, such as the "Response to Intervention" (RTI) model. This provides a multi-tier approach to the early identification and support of MLs with learning and behavior needs. Note that multilingual learners and students with disabilities can be served at all tiers of the RTI; RTI is not a prerequisite or precursor to the IEP process.



- Conducting regular progress monitoring assessments to track MLs' growth and adjust interventions as needed.
- Providing ongoing professional development opportunities for educators on implementing evidence-based instructional strategies for multilingual learners with learning disabilities.

- Implementing UUDL principles to create inclusive learning environments that accommodate the diverse needs of all multilingual learners, including multilingual learners with learning disabilities.

**Multifaceted Approach Needed:**

- Provide training for **Culturally Responsive Teaching**: Educators should receive training to recognize and accommodate cultural and linguistic diversity in the classroom.
- Offer language support services.
- Conduct individualized assessments that consider MLs' linguistic and cultural backgrounds to ensure fair and accurate evaluation of their abilities.
- Foster collaboration and communication between English Language Development (ELD) and special education teachers to help identify and address multilingual learners' needs more effectively.

This abstract draws upon resources from WIDA (World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment) and the Minnesota Department of Education to address the challenges of overidentification and under identification of multilingual learners (MLs) in special education services. Practical solutions and strategies derived from research and best practices outlined in the WIDA Focus Bulletin and the Minnesota Department of Education's English Learner Disability Resource are incorporated to guide educators in accurately identifying and supporting MLs with learning disabilities.

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