High-Leverage Practices in Special Education

A Look at Assessment

Assessment plays a foundational role in special education. Effective special educators understand that students with disabilities are complex learners who have unique needs that exist alongside their strengths. This requires knowledge about assessment and skills to use and interpret data; it also requires knowledge and skills to use informal assessments to develop students' individualized education programs (IEPs), design and evaluate instruction, and monitor student progress.

Effective teachers are knowledgeable about how context, culture, language, and poverty might influence student performance. They use this knowledge when navigating conversations with families and other stakeholders, and when choosing appropriate assessments given a student's profile.

High-leverage practices 4–6 are related to assessment. A brief description of each follows. [*Note:* The practices are applicable to *all* teachers who work with students with disabilities.]

- **Use multiple sources of information to develop a comprehensive understanding of a student's strengths and needs** (HLP4). Special educators compile a comprehensive learner profile by using a variety of assessment measures and other sources (information from parents, general educators, and other stakeholders) that are sensitive to language and culture. They use this information to analyze and describe students' strengths and needs and analyze school-based learning environments to determine potential supports and barriers to students' academic progress. Effective teachers collect, aggregate, and interpret data from multiple sources—informal and formal observations, work samples, curriculum-based measures, functional behavior assessment, school files, analysis of curriculum, information from families, and other data sources—to create an individualized profile of the student's strengths and needs.

- **Interpret and communicate assessment information with stakeholders to collaboratively design and implement educational programs** (HLP5). Teachers interpret assessment information for stakeholders (other professionals, families, and students) and involve them in the assessment, goal development, and goal implementation process. To do this, special educators must understand each assessment's purpose, help key stakeholders understand how culture and language influence the interpretation of the data generated, and use data to collaboratively develop and implement IEP and transition plans that are aligned with student needs. Such plans should include standards-based, appropriate accommodations and modifications, and fair grading practices.

High-Leverage Practices

The twenty-two high-leverage practices for special education are designed to serve as a road map for guiding teacher preparation, professional development, and/or current self-assessment. To make the practices more understandable and easier to use, they are organized around four intertwined areas of practice—collaboration, assessment, social/emotional/behavioral, and instruction.

- **Use student assessment data, analyze instructional practices, and make necessary adjustments that improve student outcomes** (HLP6). After special education teachers develop instructional goals, they evaluate and make ongoing adjustments to students' instructional programs. Once instruction and other supports are designed and implemented, special education teachers have the skills to manage and engage in ongoing data collection using curriculum-based measures, informal classroom assessments, observations of student academic performance and behavior, self-assessment of classroom instruction, and discussions with key stakeholders (students, families, and other professionals). Teachers study their practice to improve student learning, validate reasoned hypotheses about salient instructional features, and enhance instructional decision making. They retain, reuse, and extend practices that improve student learning and adjust or discard those that do not.

Deepen Your Knowledge of Assessment High-Leverage Practices

Effective instruction for students with disabilities depends on teachers who are adept at using assessment data to inform, guide, evaluate, and adjust instruction. Data and other assessment information—such as a student's educational, cultural, and language experiences—are used by special education teachers, sometimes in collaboration with other stakeholders, to determine what a student knows regarding a content area; to guide instructional planning and delivery; and to determine whether instruction is effective. The Council for Exceptional Children has resources that extend your understanding of

Effective teachers use a variety of assessment measures to create individual profiles of students' strengths and needs.

assessment high-leverage practices and help you apply that understanding to educational settings.

● ● ● ●

High-Leverage Practices in Special Education— Assessment Research Syntheses

https://highleveragepractices.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Assessmentfinal.pdf

The document reviews research for each of the assessment high-leverage practices. Learn more about what research and policy tell us about the assessment practices, such as the following examples:

- Effective special education teachers develop learner profiles that delineate students' strengths and needs, describe how culture and language might be influencing a student's performance, contain information about students' instructional environments, and show how students are responding to instruction.

- Special education teachers play an important role in helping all members of the IEP team understand assessment data.

- Individual studies support the use of assessment data as part of a data-based decision-making framework to improve instruction for students with unique educational needs.

● ● ● ●

High-Leverage Practices in Special Education

www.pubs.cec.sped.org/p6255/

This book (2017) provides evidence-based information about the twenty-two high-leverage practices—including those for assessment—which can be used to understand the practices, as well as the rationale for using them. For each practice area, there is an overview and research synthesis, including reference lists and a glossary.

Educators will find it helpful to have all of the practices in one book when learning and planning next steps for implementation.

● ● ● ●

High Leverage Practices for Inclusive Classrooms

www.pubs.cec.sped.org/p6298/

High Leverage Practices for Inclusive Classrooms (2019) delves deep into the set of practices that are essential to effective teaching and fundamental to supporting

student learning. The book focuses primarily on Tiers 1 and 2 in a multi-tiered system of support, or work that occurs mostly with students in grades K–12 with mild disabilities in general education classrooms. For each high-leverage practice area there is an overall introduction, followed by a chapter for each of the high-leverage practices found in that area. The goal of the book was to discuss selected critical practice applications that would be most useful to teachers.

Three chapters provide educators with insights into what the high-leverage assessment practices look like in action. Vignettes and tips show how the practices can enhance teaching and learning. The assessment chapters address the following topics:

- "Using Multiple Sources of Information to Develop a Comprehensive Understanding of a Student's Strengths and Needs." The chapter provides teachers with an overview of the formal and informal assessments used in developing a comprehensive learner profile. It also describes additional sources of information that educators might use to develop a more comprehensive picture of a student's experience.

- "Interpreting and Communicating Assessment Information With Stakeholders to Collaboratively Design and Implement Educational Programs." The chapter focuses on strategies special educators can use to engage stakeholders more fully in interpreting assessment information and making decisions about students' IEPs. The chapter also considers the role and steps teachers can take to interpret and communicate data.

- "Using Student Assessment Data, Analyzing Instructional Practices, and Making Necessary Adjustments That Improve Student Outcomes." The chapter provides information regarding how to use data-based instruction. It describes how data-based instruction can be used to address students' academic and behavioral needs.

TEACHING Exceptional Children, Special Issue

See *www.highleveragepractices.org/resources/*

This special issue, "Putting High-Leverage Practices Into Special Education" (volume 50, number 4), features nine previously published articles that reflect and embody selected high-leverage practices. Kristin Sayeski, the issue editor, points out that while many articles published in *TEACHING Exceptional Children* could have been selected, the intent was to provide a sample of articles that serve as a springboard for discussion and instruction related to "how-to" guidance.

For the assessment practice area, one article was selected, "The Taxonomy of Intervention Intensity." The article addresses individualizing instruction by providing a framework for teachers to use to validate reasoned hypotheses about salient instructional features and enhance instructional decision making.

High-Leverage Practices in Special Education: Reference Guides

Order from the Council for Exceptional Children. See *www.highleveragepractices.org/resources/*

Effective teachers compile a comprehensive learner profile by using a variety of assessment measures and other sources that are sensitive to language and culture.

From National Professional Resources, these laminated quick-reference guides fold out to present strategies, tips, and resources. The guides cover the areas of high-leverage practices—collaboration, assessment, social/emotional/behavioral, and instruction. School leaders will find these excellent tools for helping teachers generalize their understanding of high-leverage practices with students.

Videos

High-Leverage Practices Video Series

www.highleveragepractices.org/videos/

This video series is designed to introduce and define the high-leverage practices. Each video includes a brief review of the research along with several brief segments showing general education and special education teachers implementing the practice. The video, *Welcome to Our New Series on High-Leverage Practices* (6:28 minutes), includes a discussion of the assessment area. [*Note:* Future videos are being developed that address specific high-leverage practices in the different areas, so check back often.]