

A Look at Collaboration

For special education teachers, constantly working with a wide range of people—other teachers, school staff, families, and caregivers—is more than part of the job description. Working and collaborating with these various groups is essential and ultimately provides many benefits for students. Implementing collaboration practices builds effective relationships and creates a better understanding of students' needs, which allows them to succeed.

High-leverage practices 1–3 are related to collaboration. A brief description of each follows. [Note: The practices are applicable to *all* teachers who work with students with disabilities.]

- **Collaborate with professionals to increase student success** (HLP1). Collaboration with general education teachers, paraprofessionals, and support staff is necessary to support students' learning and to facilitate students' social and emotional well-being across all school environments and instructional settings. Collaboration with individuals or teams requires interpersonal skills such as sharing ideas, active listening, questioning, planning, problem solving, and negotiating—to name a few. Through collaboration, effective special education teachers develop and adjust instructional and/or behavioral plans based on student data; they also coordinate expectations, responsibilities, and resources to maximize student learning.
- **Organize and facilitate effective meetings with professionals and families** (HLP2). Special education teachers lead and participate in a range of meetings with the purpose of identifying clear and measurable student outcomes.

They develop a meeting agenda, allocate time to meet the agenda goals, and lead in ways that encourage consensus building (e.g., demonstrating positive verbal and nonverbal communication, such as active listening, soliciting feedback, and inviting multiple perspectives).

- **Collaborate with families to support student learning and secure needed services** (HLP3). Special education teachers collaborate with families about individual children's needs, goals, programs, and progress over time. Teachers ensure that families are informed about their rights as well as about special education processes. Effective special education teachers respectfully and effectively communicate by considering such things as family background, socioeconomic status, language, culture, and family priorities. Teachers advocate for resources to help students meet instructional, behavioral, social, and transition goals. In building positive relationships with students, teachers encourage them to self-advocate, with the goal of fostering self-determination skills over time. Teachers also

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.



work with families to self-advocate and support their children's learning.

Deepen Your Knowledge of Collaboration High-Leverage Practices

Effective special education teachers collaborate and communicate with a wide range of professionals, families, and caregivers to ensure that educational programs and related services are effective and meeting the needs of each student with a disability. The Council for Exceptional Children has resources to extend your understanding of collaboration high-leverage practices and help you apply that understanding to educational settings.



The High-Leverage Practice in Special Education—Collaboration Research Syntheses

<https://highleveragepractices.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Collaborationfinal.pdf>

This document reviews research for the collaboration high-leverage practices. Learn more about what research and policy tell us about the collaboration practices, such as the following examples.

- Communication skills are key building blocks for collaboration.
- Teacher collaboration can positively affect student achievement when teachers work together to diagnose what they need to do, to plan and to teach interventions, and to evaluate their effectiveness.



Implementing high-leverage collaboration practices builds effective relationships and creates a better understanding of students' needs.

- Effective meetings are facilitated by building trust, communicating clearly, and listening carefully to others' concerns and opinions.
- When teachers and families effectively collaborate to set goals, students make more gains.



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 collaboration—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, for all practices in the area.

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 practice found in that area. The goal of the book is to discuss selected critical practice applications that are most useful to teachers.

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

- “Collaborating With Colleagues to Increase Student Success.” The chapter identifies the collaborative skills special educators should develop and refine. For a more focused look, the chapter



“Collaboration allows for varied expertise and perspectives about a student to be shared among those responsible for the student’s learning and well-being.”



applies those skills to co-teaching and working with paraprofessionals.

- “Leading Effective Meetings With Professionals and Families.” The chapter reviews effective practices for leading varied types of meetings and outlines guidelines for preparing, leading, and following up after meetings. The chapter focuses on processes for conducting instructional decision-making meetings, including individualized education program (IEP) team meetings.
- “Collaborate With Families to Support Student Learning and Secure Needed Services.” The chapter identifies effective family-professional partnerships and highlights practical communication strategies that can be used to build these partnerships. The chapter includes suggestions for individualizing communication strategies depending on each family’s preferences and needs.



TEACHING Exceptional Children

See www.highleveragepractices.org/resources/

This special issue (volume 50, number 4), “Putting High-Leverage Practices Into Special Education,” 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 collaboration practice area, two articles were selected.

The first article, “Developing Collaborative Partnerships With Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Families During the IEP Process,” describes how to facilitate culturally responsive IEP meetings. The article highlights skills related to high-leverage practice 2, such as the capacity to lead consensus-building meetings, demonstrate effective communication skills, and encourage multiple perspectives.

The second article, “Strategies for Helping Parents of Young Children Address Challenging Behaviors in the Home,” describes a family-centered approach for collaborating with families. The article highlights skills related to high-leverage practice 3, such as working with families to support their children’s learning.



High-Leverage Practices in Special Education: Reference Guides

Order from the Council for Exceptional Children

www.highleveragepractices.org/resources/

From National Professional Resources, these laminated quick-reference guides fold out to present strategies, tips, and resources. The four 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 Practice Video Series

www.highleveragepractices.org/videos/

This video series is designed to introduce and define 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 collaboration practice area. [Note: Future videos are being developed that address specific high-leverage practices in the different areas, so check back often.]



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Council for Exceptional Children | 2900 Crystal Drive, Suite 100
Arlington, VA 22202 | www.cec.sped.org

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