



A Look at Instruction

Teaching students with disabilities is a strategic, flexible, and recursive process. Effective special education teachers use content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and data on student learning to design, deliver, and evaluate instruction. They base their instruction and support for students with disabilities on the best available evidence combined with their judgment and knowledge of individual student needs. Teachers value diverse perspectives and incorporate knowledge about students' backgrounds, culture, and language in their instructional decisions.

High-leverage practices 11–22 are related to instruction. A brief description of each follows. [Note: The practices are applicable to *all* teachers who work with students with disabilities.]

- **Identify and prioritize long- and short-term learning goals (HLP11).** Effective special education teachers prioritize what is most important for students to learn by providing meaningful access to and success in the general education curriculum and other contextually relevant curricula. Teachers use grade-level standards, assessment data and learning progressions, students' prior knowledge, and individualized education program (IEP) goals and benchmarks to make decisions about what to emphasize, and then develop long- and short-term goals accordingly. They understand essential curriculum components, identify essential prerequisites and foundations, and assess student performance in relation to these components.
- **Systematically design instruction toward a specific learning goal (HLP12).** Effective special education teachers help students develop

important concepts and skills that provide the foundation for more complex learning. Teachers sequence lessons that build on each other and they activate students' prior knowledge and show how each lesson "fits" with previous ones. They make connections explicit in both planning and delivery. During planning, teachers carefully consider learning goals, determine what is involved in reaching the goals, and allocate time accordingly. Ongoing changes (e.g., pacing, examples) occur throughout the sequence based on student performance.

- **Adapt curriculum tasks and materials for specific learning goals (HLP13).** Effective special education teachers assess individual student needs and adapt curriculum materials and tasks so that students can meet instructional goals. Teachers select materials and tasks based on student needs; use relevant technology; and make modifications by highlighting relevant information, changing task directions, and decreasing the amount of material. Teachers make strategic decisions on content coverage (i.e.,

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.



essential curriculum elements), meaningfulness of tasks to meet stated goals, and criteria for student success.

- **Teach cognitive and metacognitive strategies to support learning and independence** (HLP14). Effective special education teachers explicitly teach cognitive and metacognitive processing strategies to support memory, attention, and self-regulation of learning. Learning involves not only understanding content but also using cognitive processes to solve problems, regulate attention, organize thoughts and materials, and monitor one's own thinking. Self-regulation and metacognitive strategy instruction are integrated into lessons on academic content through modeling and explicit instruction. Students learn to monitor and evaluate their performance in relation to explicit goals and make necessary adjustments to improve learning.
- **Provide scaffolded supports** (HLP15). Scaffolded supports provide temporary assistance for students so that they can successfully complete tasks that they cannot yet do independently and with a high rate of success. Effective special education teachers select powerful visual, verbal, and written supports; carefully calibrate them to students' performance and understanding in relation to learning tasks; use them flexibly; evaluate their effectiveness; and gradually remove them once they are no longer needed. Some scaffolded supports are planned prior to lessons, and some are provided responsively during instruction.
- **Use explicit instruction** (HLP16). Effective special education teachers make content, skills, and concepts explicit by showing and telling students



Effective teachers use strategies to promote active student engagement.

what to do or think while solving problems, enacting strategies, completing tasks, and classifying concepts. Teachers use explicit instruction when students are learning new material and complex concepts and skills. They strategically choose examples, non-examples, and language to facilitate student understanding, anticipate common misconceptions, highlight essential content, and remove distracting information. They model and scaffold steps or processes that students need in order to understand content and concepts, apply skills, and complete tasks successfully and independently.

- **Use flexible grouping** (HLP17). Effective special education teachers assign students to homogeneous and heterogeneous groups based on explicit learning goals, monitor peer interactions, and provide positive and corrective feedback to support productive learning. Teachers use small learning groups to accommodate learning differences, promote in-depth academic-related interactions, and teach students to work collaboratively. They choose tasks that require collaboration, issue directives that promote productive and autonomous group interactions, and embed strategies that maximize learning opportunities and equalize participation. Teachers promote simultaneous interactions, use procedures to hold students accountable for collective and individual learning, and monitor and sustain group performance through proximity and positive feedback.
- **Use strategies to promote active student engagement** (HLP18). Active student engagement is critical to academic success. Effective special education teachers use a variety of instructional strategies that result in active student responding. Teachers must initially build positive student-teacher relationships to foster engagement and motivate reluctant learners. They promote engagement by connecting learning to students' lives (e.g., knowing students' academic and cultural backgrounds) and using a variety of teacher-led (e.g., choral responding and response cards), peer-assisted (e.g., cooperative learning and peer tutoring), student-regulated (e.g., self-management), and technology-supported strategies that research has shown result in increased student engagement. They monitor student engagement and provide positive and constructive feedback to sustain performance.



“Effective special education teachers use content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and data on student learning to design, deliver, and evaluate instruction.”



- **Use assistive and instructional technologies** (HLP19). Effective special education teachers select and implement assistive and instructional technologies to support the needs of students with disabilities. They select and use augmentative and alternative communication devices and assistive and instructional technology products to promote student learning and independence. They evaluate new technology options given student needs; make informed instructional decisions grounded in evidence, professional wisdom, and students’ IEP goals; and advocate for administrative support in technology implementation. Teachers use a universal design for learning framework to select, design, implement, and evaluate important student outcomes.
- **Provide intensive instruction** (HLP20). Effective special education teachers match the intensity of instruction to the intensity of the student’s learning and behavioral challenges. Intensive instruction involves working with students with similar needs on a low number of high-priority, clearly defined skills or concepts critical to academic success. Teachers group students based on common learning needs; clearly define learning goals; and use systematic, explicit, and well-paced instruction. They frequently monitor students’ progress and adjust their instruction accordingly. Within intensive instruction, students have many opportunities to respond and receive immediate, corrective feedback with teachers and peers to practice what they are learning.
- **Teach students to maintain and generalize new learning across time and settings** (HLP21). Effective special education teachers employ techniques, such as using numerous examples, to

teach students to generalize and maintain newly acquired knowledge and skills. They promote maintenance by systematically using schedules of reinforcement, providing frequent material reviews, and teaching skills that are reinforced by the natural environment beyond the classroom. Students learn to use new knowledge and skills in places and situations other than the original learning environment and maintain their use in the absence of ongoing instruction.

- **Provide positive and constructive feedback to guide students’ learning and behavior** (HLP22). Effective special education teachers use feedback to guide student learning and behavior and increase student motivation, engagement, and independence, leading to improved student learning and behavior. Feedback should be goal directed and delivered strategically; feedback is most effective when the learner has a goal and the feedback informs the learner regarding areas needing improvement and ways to improve performance. Feedback may be verbal, nonverbal, or written, and should be timely, contingent, genuine, meaningful, age appropriate, and at rates commensurate with the task and phase of learning (e.g., acquisition, fluency, and maintenance). Teachers should provide ongoing feedback until learners reach their established learning goals.

Deepen Your Knowledge of Instruction High-Leverage Practices

Effective special education teachers plan and deliver well-designed instruction that is strategic and adaptable. Instruction should focus on learning goals, be

explicit and flexible, and incorporate various learning tools such as technology. The Council for Exceptional Children has resources to extend your understanding of instruction high-leverage practices and help you apply that understanding to educational settings.



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 was to discuss critical practice applications that would be most useful to teachers.

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

- “Identify and Prioritize Long- and Short-Term Learning Goals.” The chapter identifies considerations that influence the selection of learning goals. It also describes instructional and individualized priorities across academic content areas, along with a process for identifying instructional goals that are aligned with grade-level standards and individual needs.
- “Systematically Design Instruction Toward a Specific Learning Goal.” The chapter guides teachers in setting goals, prioritizing content, and sequencing instruction.
- “Adapt Curriculum Tasks and Materials for Specific Learning Goals.” The chapter describes various ways to make adaptations to curriculum tasks and materials. It also describes the design and implementation of content enhancements.
- “Teaching Cognitive and Metacognitive Strategies to Support Learning and Independence.” The chapter describes the reciprocal relationship between teachers and students in strategy

instruction. It also provides resources on strategy instruction.

- “Provide Scaffolded Supports.” The chapter describes principles to guide scaffolded support and suggests ways teachers can use dialogue or interactions with students as scaffolded support.
- “Use Explicit Instruction.” The chapter describes explicit instruction and lists key instructional elements that make instruction explicit. It also provides examples of how explicit instruction looks in practice.
- “Use Flexible Grouping.” The chapter describes the rationale and purposes served by small instructional groups, including mixed-ability groups using cooperative learning structures. Steps are given for implementing these groups in instruction.
- “Use Strategies to Promote Active Student Engagement.” The chapter describes how to implement selected strategies such as choral responding and response cards.
- “Use Assistive and Instructional Technologies.” The chapter outlines the steps for making instructional decisions for adopting assistive and instructional technologies. It also describes how a universal design for learning framework can be used to integrate technologies into instruction.
- “Provide Intensive Instruction.” The chapter focuses on data-based individualization as a strategy for delivering intensive instruction.
- “Teach Students to Maintain and Generalize New Learning Across Time and Settings.” The chapter describes techniques for maintaining and generalizing behavior, along with suggestions



Effective special education teachers plan and deliver well-designed instruction that is strategic and adaptable.

for measuring and collecting data on student success.

- “Providing Positive and Corrective Feedback.” The chapter describes how to use positive and corrective feedback to increase student learning and promote student self-regulation.



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 instruction—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 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.



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

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

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



Effective instruction focuses on learning goals, is explicit and flexible, and incorporates various learning tools.

- Intervention research points to the importance of well-thought-out instructional focus areas.
- Cognitive strategy instruction and metacognitive strategy instruction can help students become more self-directed and independent learners.
- Explicit instruction is a set of teacher behaviors that have been shown repeatedly to have a positive impact on student achievement, especially for those who are struggling to learn.
- Students with disabilities may benefit when they have access to assistive technology devices and services, and when teachers use instructional technology to support their unique needs.
- Effective instructional feedback has a positive influence on learning and achievement.



TEACHING Exceptional Children

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 instruction practice area, four articles were selected.

- “Research-Based Tips for Enhancing Literacy Instruction for Children and Adolescents With Intellectual Disability” describes an instructional planning tool to help educators identify and prioritize learning goals.
- “FIX: A Strategic Approach to Writing and Revision for Students With Learning Disabilities” details a metacognitive routine that helps students manage the revision process.
- “Whole-Group Response Strategies to Promote Student Engagement in Inclusive Classrooms” delineates specific guidelines for checking for understanding and responding to students’ needs.
- “Using Explicit and Systematic Instruction to Support Working Memory” presents several examples of how to apply the explicit cycle of instruction to

provide support for students who have working memory challenges.



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 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 in Special Education 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. Currently, the following videos related to instruction are available:

- *Welcome to Our New Series on High-Leverage Practices* (6:28 minutes) (includes a discussion of the instruction practice area)



Sessions on high-leverage practices in special education often are included at CEC professional development events, including the CEC Convention.

- *High-Leverage Practices #8 and #22: Provide Positive and Constructive Feedback to Guide Students' Learning and Behavior* (20:04 minutes)
- *High-Leverage Practice #12: Systematically Design Instruction Towards Learning Goals* (17:27 minutes)
- *High-Leverage Practices #16: Use Explicit Instruction* (18:52 minutes)
- *High-Leverage Practice #18: Use Strategies to Promote Active Student Engagement* (17:34 minutes)

[Note: Future videos are being developed that address specific high-leverage practices in the different areas, so check back often.]



© 2019 by Council for Exceptional Children & CEEDAR Center
Council for Exceptional Children | 2900 Crystal Drive, Suite 100
Arlington, VA 22202 | www.cec.sped.org

Reference: Council for Exceptional Children & CEEDAR Center. (2019). *Introducing high-leverage practices in special education: A professional development guide for school leaders*. Arlington, VA: Council for Exceptional Children & CEEDAR Center. www.highleveragepractices.org.

Permission is granted to reproduce/adapt this guide with acknowledgment. Warger, Eavy & Associates developed the guide.

The guide was supported from funds provided by the CEEDAR Center (Collaboration for Effective Educator Development, Accountability, and Reform) cooperative grant (H325AI20003) supported by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) of the U.S. Department of Education (DOE). Dr. David Guardino served as the project officer. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the positions or policies of the DOE. No official endorsement by the DOE of any product, commodity, service, or enterprise mentioned in this document is intended or should be inferred.

