



# High-Leverage Practices in Special Education

## Assessment

Assessment plays a foundational role in special education. Students with disabilities are complex learners who have unique needs that exist alongside their strengths. Effective special education teachers have to fully understand those strengths and needs. Thus, these teachers are knowledgeable regarding assessment and are skilled in using and interpreting data. This includes formal, standardized assessments that are used in identifying students for special education services, developing students' IEPs, and informing ongoing services. Formal assessments such as statewide exams also provide data regarding whether students with disabilities are achieving state content standards and how their academic progress compares to students without disabilities. Teachers are also knowledgeable about and skillful in using informal assessments, such as those used to evaluate students' academic,

behavioral, and functional strengths and needs. These assessments are used to develop students' IEPs, design and evaluate instruction, and monitor student progress. As reflective practitioners, special educators also continuously analyze the effect and effectiveness of their own instruction. Finally, these teachers are knowledgeable regarding how context, culture, language, and poverty might influence student performance; navigating conversations with families and other stakeholders; and choosing appropriate assessments given each student's profile. This is an especially important consideration, given the overrepresentation of culturally and linguistically diverse students and those from high poverty backgrounds in special education (see Linn & Hemmer, 2011; U.S. Department of Education, 2016; Zhang & Katsiyannis, 2002).



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<b>HLP4</b>	<b>Use multiple sources of information to develop a comprehensive understanding of a student’s strengths and needs.</b>
<p>To develop a deep understanding of a student’s learning needs, special educators compile a comprehensive learner profile through the use of a variety of assessment measures and other sources (e.g., information from parents, general educators, other stakeholders) that are sensitive to language and culture, to (a) analyze and describe students’ strengths and needs and (b) analyze the school-based learning environments to determine potential supports and barriers to students’ academic progress. Teachers should collect, aggregate, and interpret data from multiple sources (e.g., informal and formal observations, work samples, curriculum-based measures, functional behavior assessment [FBA], school files, analysis of curriculum, information from families, other data sources). This information is used to create an individualized profile of the student’s strengths and needs.</p>	

<b>HLP5</b>	<b>Interpret and communicate assessment information with stakeholders to collaboratively design and implement educational programs.</b>
<p>Teachers interpret assessment information for stakeholders (i.e., other professionals, families, students) and involve them in the assessment, goal development, and goal implementation process. Special educators must understand each assessment’s purpose, help key stakeholders understand how culture and language influence interpretation of data generated, and use data to collaboratively develop and implement individualized education and transition plans that include goals that are standards-based, appropriate accommodations and modifications, and fair grading practices, and transition goals that are aligned with student needs.</p>	



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<b>HLP6</b>	<b>Use student assessment data, analyze instructional practices, and make necessary adjustments that improve student outcomes.</b>
<p>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 skill 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 (i.e., students, families, other professionals). Teachers study their practice to improve student learning, validate reasoned hypotheses about salient instructional features, and enhance instructional decision making. Effective teachers retain, reuse, and extend practices that improve student learning and adjust or discard those that do not.</p>	