



Instructing Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities

District Leadership Forum

Dylan Desjardins

Research Associate

Matthew McCarthy

Research Manager

Olivia Rios

Senior Research Manager

LEGAL CAVEAT

EAB Global, Inc. ("EAB") has made efforts to verify the accuracy of the information it provides to members. This report relies on data obtained from many sources, however, and EAB cannot guarantee the accuracy of the information provided or any analysis based thereon. In addition, neither EAB nor any of its affiliates (each, an "EAB Organization") is in the business of giving legal, accounting, or other professional advice, and its reports should not be construed as professional advice. In particular, members should not rely on any legal commentary in this report as a basis for action, or assume that any tactics described herein would be permitted by applicable law or appropriate for a given member's situation. Members are advised to consult with appropriate professionals concerning legal, tax, or accounting issues, before implementing any of these tactics. No EAB Organization or any of its respective officers, directors, employees, or agents shall be liable for any claims, liabilities, or expenses relating to (a) any errors or omissions in this report, whether caused by any EAB organization, or any of their respective employees or agents, or sources or other third parties, (b) any recommendation by any EAB Organization, or (c) failure of member and its employees and agents to abide by the terms set forth herein.

EAB is a registered trademark of EAB Global, Inc. in the United States and other countries. Members are not permitted to use these trademarks, or any other trademark, product name, service name, trade name, and logo of any EAB Organization without prior written consent of EAB. Other trademarks, product names, service names, trade names, and logos used within these pages are the property of their respective holders. Use of other company trademarks, product names, service names, trade names, and logos or images of the same does not necessarily constitute (a) an endorsement by such company of an EAB Organization and its products and services, or (b) an endorsement of the company or its products or services by an EAB Organization. No EAB Organization is affiliated with any such company.

IMPORTANT: Please read the following.

EAB has prepared this report for the exclusive use of its members. Each member acknowledges and agrees that this report and the information contained herein (collectively, the "Report") are confidential and proprietary to EAB. By accepting delivery of this Report, each member agrees to abide by the terms as stated herein, including the following:

1. All right, title, and interest in and to this Report is owned by an EAB Organization. Except as stated herein, no right, license, permission, or interest of any kind in this Report is intended to be given, transferred to, or acquired by a member. Each member is authorized to use this Report only to the extent expressly authorized herein.
2. Each member shall not sell, license, republish, distribute, or post online or otherwise this Report, in part or in whole. Each member shall not disseminate or permit the use of, and shall take reasonable precautions to prevent such dissemination or use of, this Report by (a) any of its employees and agents (except as stated below), or (b) any third party.
3. Each member may make this Report available solely to those of its employees and agents who (a) are registered for the workshop or membership program of which this Report is a part, (b) require access to this Report in order to learn from the information described herein, and (c) agree not to disclose this Report to other employees or agents or any third party. Each member shall use, and shall ensure that its employees and agents use, this Report for its internal use only. Each member may make a limited number of copies, solely as adequate for use by its employees and agents in accordance with the terms herein.
4. Each member shall not remove from this Report any confidential markings, copyright notices, and/or other similar indicia herein.
5. Each member is responsible for any breach of its obligations as stated herein by any of its employees or agents.
6. If a member is unwilling to abide by any of the foregoing obligations, then such member shall promptly return this Report and all copies thereof to EAB.

Table of Contents

1) Executive Overview	4
Key Observations	4
2) Structure of Special Education Programs	5
Overview	5
3) Curriculum and Instruction	7
Selecting Curricular Resources	7
Evaluation	9
Instructional Strategies	10
4) Professional Development.....	14
Schedule and Attendance	14
Content and Delivery	16
5) Research Methodology	18
Project Challenge	18
Project Sources	18
Research Parameters	19
6) Appendix A: List of Curricular Resources.....	20
7) Appendix B: Sample Professional Development Calendar.....	21

1) Executive Overview

Key Observations

Classroom structure for students with significant cognitive disabilities varies by district and student. **District B, District D, and District E** operate self-contained classrooms for students with significant cognitive disabilities at all school levels, though students receive instruction in general education classrooms when it is the least restrictive environment. **District F** does not use self-contained classrooms and instead may pull students with disabilities out of their general education classroom for instruction. At profiled districts, daily routine and classroom structure may vary among students with disabilities depending on age, severity of disability, and IEP goals.

Use curricular resources and offer professional development that align with state standards to improve performance on state assessments. To receive information on which curricular resources align with state standards and support students with disabilities, contacts at profiled districts reach out to external consultants, other districts, and parents of students with disabilities. Staff tasked with selecting curricular resources also ask vendors to explain how their resources align with state standards and district needs. For example, administrators at **District D** sent two representatives to a conference that vendors attended and provided the representatives with a list of questions to ask vendors. Further, the DLM website offers [professional development modules](#) to help teachers prepare students for the DLM.

Use curricular resources that visually appeal to students and connect to daily activities to engage students with disabilities with material. Contacts at profiled districts mention [Attainment Company](#), [Boardmaker](#), and [Read Well](#) as curricular resources that provide students with engaging visual cues (e.g., books with pictures). Administrators at **District B** and **District D** encourage teachers to include activities in lesson plans that relate to their students' lives (e.g., counting money). Contacts explain that incorporating these activities helps students engage with abstract material.

Structure professional development opportunities to maximize teachers' attendance and minimize disruption to special education programs. Scheduled professional development meetings for all special education staff during the school year require the district to hire substitutes to instruct students with significant cognitive disabilities, which can disrupt instruction. Some profiled districts offer professional development for groups of staff at different times (e.g., a separate professional development meeting for speech language pathologists) to mitigate disruption to special education programs. **District A** and **District B** hold professional development meetings during the summer. Contacts report that summer meetings allow for more extensive training, and District B pays a stipend to special education teachers to encourage attendance. However, contacts note that summer meetings may exclude new staff who arrive at the district immediately before the school year begins.

2) Structure of Special Education Programs

Overview

Classroom Structure and Approach to Instruction Vary by Profiled District and by Student

Special education program structure varies among profiled districts. For example, **District F** does not maintain self-contained classrooms for students with significant support needs. Instead, special education staff pull students out of class for periods of time for instruction. Conversely, other profiled districts (e.g., **District B**, **District E**) operate self-contained classrooms to instruct students with significant cognitive disabilities.

Contacts at most profiled districts also emphasize that classroom structure, curricular resources, and instructional strategies vary by student because teachers tailor instruction to students' needs. For example, services for students with disabilities who require some support during the school day differ from services for students with no independence. Contacts at District F note that special education teachers determine the optimal learning environment for students based on their individualized education program (IEP).

District E also varies staffing structure for students with disabilities based on their age. Special education administrators assign one paraprofessional to support students at the middle school level. At the high-school level, every paraprofessional supports multiple students with disabilities. Contacts explain that administrators hope this increase in the student to paraprofessional ratio over time prepares students with disabilities for greater independence after they graduate.

Classroom Structure for Students with Disabilities at Profiled Districts

Self-Contained Classrooms	General Education Classrooms
<p>District B: The district operates several self-contained classrooms at the elementary-school level. At the secondary-school level, the district offers one academic track for autistic students, which administrators designed to ensure students earn a diploma. The district operates two additional classrooms at the secondary-school level for students with varying levels of cognitive impairment.</p> <p>District D: District administrators operate self-contained classrooms for students with disabilities called development education classrooms. In these classrooms, students receive reading, writing, and math instruction and practice life skills.</p> <p>District E: District administrators operate self-contained classrooms for students with disabilities ages eight to 21. At the middle-school level, teachers structure classrooms to allow students to work individually or in groups, depending on students' needs.</p>	<p>District F: While the district assigns students with disabilities to general education classrooms, contacts note that special education teachers pull students out of the classroom for instruction, most frequently for English and math.</p>

Consider Integrating Students with Disabilities into General Education Classrooms to Maximize Inclusion

All profiled districts include students with significant disabilities in the general education classroom, unless that classroom environment prevents satisfactory educational opportunities. At most profiled districts, the amount of time students spend in general education classrooms varies by age.

Examples of Inclusive Programming at Profiled Districts



General Education Classrooms

At **District F**, special education staff modify lesson plans to support students with disabilities in general education classrooms. For example, in a general education classroom practicing reading, students with disabilities may read the same text as their peers but focus on a different skill (e.g., word identification).



Elective Classrooms

Many profiled districts integrate students with disabilities into elective classes (e.g., physical education, music). Specifically, **District D** operates a buddy program. The program pairs students with disabilities with peer tutors who accompany them to some elective classes. Contacts at **District D** note that students with disabilities frequently accompany students in general education classrooms to elective courses in elementary school but that this occurs less frequently at the secondary school level.



Field Trips

Contacts report that students with disabilities at **District B** frequently attend field trips (e.g., visiting a history museum) with their peers. In addition to fostering relationships among students with disabilities and their peers, field trips help students connect classroom lessons to the real world.

3) Curriculum and Instruction

Selecting Curricular Resources

Form a Task Force to Research and Select Curricular Resources

Most profiled districts establish task forces to choose curricular resources (e.g., written and online materials, lesson plans) for students with disabilities.

Task Forces at *District D* and *District F*



Composition

The task force at **District D** included special education teachers from the pre-K, elementary, and secondary levels, as well as a speech language pathologist and the district's special education coordinator.

Special education teachers and other district staff comprised the task force at **District F**.



Process Timeline

The task force at **District F** met for over six months before reaching a decision on which curricular resources to recommend to the director of special education.



Frequency of Review

Administrators at **District D** assembled a task force in 2008 to review curricular resources for the special education department. Contacts note that administrators hope to launch a review of the current curriculum during the 2019-2020 school year.



Some Profiled Districts Allow Special Education Teachers to Decide Which Curricular Resources to Use

Contacts at **District E** report that special education teachers typically choose which curricular resources to use with students based on their disability and IEP. However, contacts note that district administrators may advocate for teachers to use particular curricular resources. At **District F**, special education teachers can send a proposal form to the director of special education to request funding to purchase new curricular resources to use with students.

Solicit Experts and Parents for Feedback on Curricular Resources to Inform Selection Decisions

As part of the process to research curricular resources, task forces at profiled districts consult with experts and stakeholders.

Task Force Partners in Curricular Resource Selection



External Consultants

The task force at **District B** worked with an external consultant (i.e., Sharon Azar) to select curriculum. District administrators at **District A** worked with a nearby university to create a review of curricular resources which they used to compile evidence on each resource.



Other Districts

Special education staff at **District A** spoke with contacts at other districts about their experiences with multiple vendors and curricular resources.



Parent Advisory Committees

Administrators at **District B** sought feedback on their curriculum selection process from a special education advisory committee, which includes parents of children with significant cognitive disabilities.

Some contacts report that they were unable to find curricular resources from vendors that met their needs. For example, special education teachers at **District E** typically use curricular resources developed by the district for math instruction. Contacts add that special education teachers use vendor-provided curricular resources when they believe these resources supplement in-house curriculum.

Require Vendors to Demonstrate How Curricular Resources Meet the Demand of District Administrators

Task forces at many profiled districts hold meetings with vendors of curricular resources to determine whether their products meet the district's needs. Most contacts emphasize the importance of using curricular resources with lesson plans that match state standards. However, contacts at several profiled districts note that district administrators perceive additional features of curricular resources as important because they help set goals and evaluate progress. For example, contacts at **District B** note that special education staff hoped to find curricular resources that included metrics to track student progress.

Special education staff at **District C** invited representatives from multiple vendors to present their product to district administrators. During these presentations, vendors shared data that demonstrated the value of their curricular resources, as well as what type of student they designed the product to support.

District D sent two district representatives to the [Council for Exceptional Children](#) conference to meet with different vendors and gather information about curricular resources. The district created a list of questions to ask each vendor before the two representatives traveled to the conference.

Considerations for Choosing a Vendor of Curricular Resources at Profiled Districts



Alignment with State Standards

Ask vendors to demonstrate knowledge of state standards and learning goals and explain how their product or curriculum aligns with these goals.



Alignment with Student Population

Ask vendors to explain which populations of students (e.g., autistic students, students with hearing difficulties) their product supports.



Tracking Component

Ask vendors whether their product includes built-in measures to assess student progress. If so, ask vendors how these assessments function.



Supporting Research

Ask vendors to present research that demonstrates how their product positively affects student success. Ask vendors how they gathered this research or data.

Evaluation

Use Multiple Assessments and Metrics to Holistically Evaluate Curriculum and Instruction

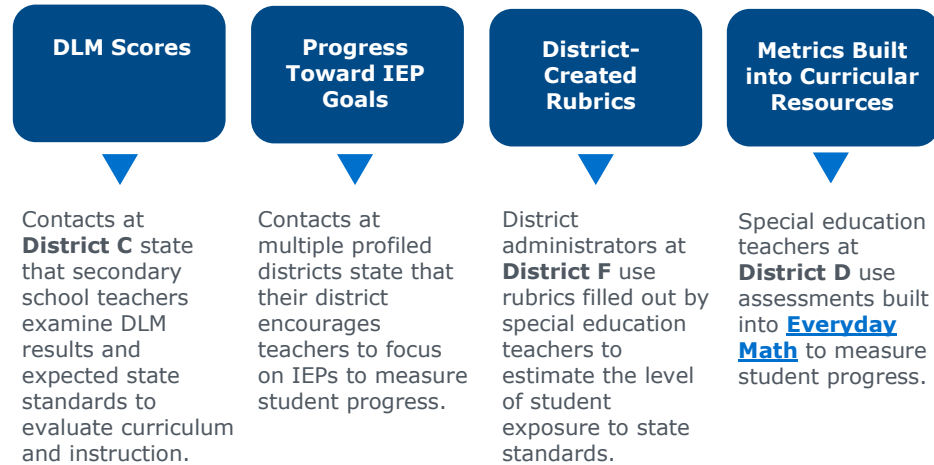
Most profiled districts examine Dynamic Learning Maps (DLM) scores as part of a holistic evaluation of curriculum and instruction. Contacts at **District C** note that special education teachers at the elementary school hold meetings and study groups to discuss the results of the DLM. Contacts also state that special education teachers analyze results of the DLM to determine subject areas in which students underperform.

Contacts at multiple profiled districts state that special education staff do not currently use the DLM as their main assessment of curricular or instructional effectiveness because their district transitioned to the DLM recently and the exam is administered infrequently. To complement the data provided by DLM scores, district administrators rely on multiple additional metrics to ensure students meet state learning goals. For example, contacts at District C and **District B** note that many district administrators examine student progress toward IEP goals, which include state learning goals, to evaluate the strength of the special education program (i.e., special education curriculum and instruction).

In addition to IEPs, districts use assessments built into curricular resources to evaluate strength of curriculum. **District A** uses the curricular resource [Unique Learning Systems](#) to guide instruction in several subject areas. Unique Learning Systems includes built in benchmarks (i.e., measures of progress on discrete skills, such as reading two syllable words) and checkpoints (i.e., measures of understanding of the current lesson). While District A recently began to use Unique Learning Systems, contacts believe the built-in assessment can function as a district-wide tool to assess how well the district teaches state learning standards.

Special education staff at **District F** created an in-house, district-wide assessment of student exposure to state learning standards. The rubric lists state standards and asks teachers to estimate the level of their students' exposure to these standards, with the minimal level being "no exposure." Special education teachers complete these rubrics each fall and spring for students of every grade level.

Methods to Evaluate Curriculum and Instruction at Profiled Districts



Examine IEPs to Determine Whether Poorly Written Learning Goals Limit Student Success

Contacts report that administrators at **District E** believed IEPs overly accommodated students, and unintentionally limited student capability to grow and achieve academically. The special education department launched a review process to examine the construction of IEP goals. Administrators interviewed staff and students to determine what accommodations seemed appropriate to each party. Administrators also compared progress toward IEP goals and other observational data (e.g., student time spent on tasks) to benchmark IEPs. As a result of the three-year review process, the district now requires special education staff to write IEP plans with an independence-focused annual goal (e.g., progress on independent study skills, emotional self-regulation).

Instructional Strategies

Teach Lessons that Incorporate State Standards to Increase Student Familiarity with Material on State Assessments

Contacts emphasize that special education staff select curricular resources that incorporate state standards and meet the needs of students to mitigate the need to adapt curricular resources. Thus, contacts at profiled districts report that teachers often do not significantly adjust lesson or activity plans included in curricular resources.

For example, contacts at **District C** state that many of the curricular resources used by their teachers include sequences or guides that instruct the teacher on how to use them. Because vendors write these curricular resources for students with significant cognitive disabilities, teachers do not modify the lesson plans. However, contacts note

that because teachers know their students' abilities and needs, they may adapt or modify instruction of the content. For example, interaction during a lesson differs between a student with verbal ability and a student with a non-verbal communication system.

Contacts at **District B** and **District A** state that they see improving student progress toward state standards as important to improve student scores on state assessments. Contacts suggest that because the DLM measures student progress toward state standards, curricular resources that incorporate state standards and effectively teach that information to students may improve performance on the assessment.

Contacts at both districts state that the [Unique Learning Systems](#) curriculum is especially effective to instruct students with significant disabilities. Teachers at District B frequently use Unique Learning Systems, particularly in self-contained classrooms, and contacts note that its lessons align with material on the DLM. Contacts at District A note that both Unique Learning Systems and [Attainment Company](#) offer lesson plans that incorporate state standards. Contacts state that this incorporation helps administrators ensure special education teachers teach state standards.

The following sections discuss instructional strategies that contacts believe improve the academic success of students with disabilities. While contacts do not connect these strategies directly to DLM preparation or improving performance on the DLM, they believe these strategies help students with disabilities progress toward state standards.

Use Curriculum and Support Services that Improve Social Skills and Behavior to Create Positive Learning Environments

Contacts across profiled districts state that effective behavioral support and social instruction are essential for special education students. Contacts report that providing support in these areas improves social and emotional skills, which facilitates learning.

Contacts at **District A** note that special education staff provide consistent behavioral support because they perceive positive behavioral interactions as essential to learning. Similarly, **District B** and **District E** employ support staff (e.g., speech therapists, dynamic language pathologists) in classrooms for students with disabilities to moderate behavior and facilitate communication. Contacts at District B state that students demonstrate fewer behavioral outbursts when they can communicate effectively with educators.

Many profiled districts implement principles of Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA) into instruction for students with disabilities. District B and **District D** use the [STAR Program](#) in classrooms. This curriculum integrates principles of ABA to help students with disabilities develop interpersonal and functional skills. Contacts at profiled districts believe that the curriculum positively impacts student behavior and communicative ability. Contacts at District D emphasize the impact for non-verbal autistic students. At District B, board certified behavior analysts attend self-contained classrooms to teach the STAR and [LINKS](#) curriculum.

In addition to ABA, special education administrators at **District C** use the [TEACCH](#) methodology in special education programs. The TEACCH methodology asks administrators to consider five principles (i.e., physical structure, scheduling, work system, routine, and visual structure) to design effective structures for students with

disabilities.¹ Contacts suggest that these principles help establish stable learning environments that positively affect student learning.

Curriculum and Support Services that Contribute to Positive Learning Environments for Students with Disabilities

- Operate effective advanced behavioral analysis (ABA) programs
- Conduct effective Functional Behavior Assessments
- Use curriculum grounded in ABA to teach behavioral and functional skills
- Write realistic behavior plans
- Apply the [TEACCH Method](#)
- Involve board certified behavior analysts in self-contained classroom instruction

Use Assistive Technology to Engage Students with Disabilities in Learning

Most profiled districts use assistive technology to help students with disabilities respond to instruction during lessons and assess learning. Lessons for students with significant cognitive disabilities at **District F** often include technology with touch screens (e.g., iPads, laptops). Contacts explain that this technology helps students communicate with instructors.

Contacts at **District B** also note that teachers occasionally use paper resources (e.g., cue cards) to facilitate communication and engage students.

Contacts at **District B** add that technology is especially useful to instruct non-verbal students. Staff can program electronic devices before lessons to create opportunities for students to respond during the lesson (e.g., clickable answers related to questions in the lesson). For example, some teachers include learning comprehension questions after every section in a lesson.

Further, contacts at **District E** explain that some students with cognitive disabilities struggle to form and verbalize thoughts. Assistive technology programs often include icons, prompts, and word banks that students can move to create sentences or convey ideas that they may be otherwise unable to communicate. Assistive technology, such as [Clicker](#), can replace other forms of communication (e.g., writing by hand) that complicate the expression of ideas. Contacts at multiple profiled districts believe that the ability to engage with material through assistive technology increases students' confidence in their academic ability.

The following graphic provides an example of an instructional tactic that special education teachers at District B often use in conjunction with assistive technology.

¹ Autism Research Institute, "Structured Teaching- The TEACCH Method." Accessed February 20, 2019. https://www.autism.com/treating_TEACCH.

Errorless Response Exercise at *District B*



A special education teacher asks one student the same question about lesson material multiple times. The student typically uses an electronic device or cue cards to indicate their answer. The teacher continues to ask similar questions until the student answers accurately and consistently without assistance. Contacts believe that this repetition helps students understand material.

Prioritize Curricula That Include Visually Appealing Materials and Daily Activities

Contacts at profiled districts state that visually appealing resources (e.g., books with pictures or visual cues) help engage students with significant cognitive disabilities. Contacts at **District C** state that curricular resources from [Attainment Company](#) and [Boardmaker](#) include engaging visual cues. Contacts at **District F** state that the [Read Well](#) curricular resource (for elementary school students) includes many books that interest and appeal to students with disabilities. Contacts note that non-readers can use pictures in this resource to follow the narrative of texts or understand other aspects of the story (e.g., the story's setting).

Contacts at multiple profiled districts note that the curricular resource [News-2-You](#) includes interactive components that effectively engage students.

Contacts at **District B** and **District D** emphasize the importance of lessons that connect curricular materials and goals to daily activities for students with disabilities. This connection helps materialize abstract concepts, which contacts explain increases students' ability to engage with them. Further, contacts at District D cite curricular resources [Everyday Math](#) and [Reading Milestones](#) as especially useful because they reinforce both functional skills and academic skills.

Life Skills Related to Components of State Standards



Directions
Practice recognizing street and traffic signs to teach reading.



Finances
Use money and coins to build math skills.



Cooking
Organize cooking sessions to familiarize students with measuring.

4) Professional Development

Schedule and Attendance

Contacts at **District C** note that the district also shares resources with special education teachers via email to encourage learning outside scheduled professional development sessions.

Strategically Schedule Professional Development to Minimize Removing Teachers from Classes

To determine the frequency and timing of professional development opportunities, special education administrators at profiled districts consider the number of special education teachers who need to miss class to attend trainings and sessions. Contacts explain that the absence of teachers in classrooms disrupts special education instruction, and that districts do not maintain enough substitute teachers to manage the responsibilities of all special education teachers.

Administrators at **District C** hold two meetings during the school year for special education teachers who instruct students with significant needs to participate in trainings and development together. Contacts report that while most teachers attend trainings, the limited number of available substitutes occasionally inhibits some teachers from participating in professional development.

To avoid removing special education teachers from classes, administrators at **District A** schedule many professional development opportunities for teachers and paraprofessionals during the summer.

Appendix B contains a complete schedule of dates and topics for professional development at **District F** during the 2018-2019 school year. District F distributes professional development opportunities throughout the school year and offers multiple dates for some professional development sessions.

Consider Mandating Attendance or Offering Stipends to Increase Attendance at Professional Development Opportunities

Contacts at multiple profiled districts note that holding professional development opportunities during the summer adversely affects teachers' attendance. Contacts at **District B** explain that new staff typically do not arrive at the district until immediately before the school year begins. Consequently, contacts report that new staff often cannot attend professional development trainings during the summer.

Conversely, contacts at **District A** note that attendance of paraprofessionals at summer meetings is high. Despite overall high attendance, contacts express concern about the preparation of paraprofessionals who miss the trainings.

The following graphic displays professional development attendance policies at multiple profiled districts.

Strategies to Encourage Attendance at Profiled Districts

Offer Stipends

At **District B**, professional development during the school year is mandatory for teachers and teachers' assistants, while professional development during the summer is voluntary. However, contacts note that the district offers stipends to teachers who attend summer professional development opportunities. Contacts report high attendance at summer professional development opportunities.

Mandate Attendance at Short, Weekly Meetings

District D holds one-hour weekly trainings for special education staff. Contacts note that district staff expect all special education teachers and paraeducators to attend these trainings. Contacts report that related support staff (e.g., speech language pathologists, behavior analysts) attend when able and when they present material. All special education staff attend one day-long training before students arrive at the beginning of the year.

Adjust Attendance Policy by Type of Meeting

Staff at **District F** that support students with disabilities receive a learning plan that typically requires them to attend five trainings during the year. District staff email a calendar each month that lists that month's trainings. Contacts state that attendance varies based on whether the district mandates attendance, and on which group of students the district designed the training to support.

Hold Trainings for New Special Education Teachers Early in the Year to Familiarize Them with District Practices

Profiled districts offer professional development opportunities for new special education teachers early in the school year. Some of these sessions familiarize new special education teachers with fundamental aspects of special education instruction.



Pair New Special Education Teachers with Tenured Staff to Familiarize New Staff with District Policies and Priorities

District B operates a teacher mentorship program that pairs new special education teachers with tenured staff. Contacts at **District E** note the importance of ensuring special education teachers and staff collaborate with more experienced staff. Contacts state that all new special education staff ask peers with similar job functions for support.

Review State Standards and Curricular Resources with Special Education Teachers to Ensure Lesson Plans Align with State Assessments

At **District A**, administrators hold professional development trainings to teach special education teachers to instruct lessons based on [Unique Learning Systems](#) and [Attainment Company](#) curricular resources. Contacts believe that professional development trainings that emphasize instruction of lesson plans that incorporate state standards, teachers learn how to effectively teach according to state standards. Contacts report that because these curricular resources incorporate state standards, effective instruction or these curricular resources prepares students with disabilities for state assessments.

At District A, professional development trainings for special education staff frequently focus on how to plan lessons and instruction based on these curricular resources. Leaders of professional development sessions present state standards to special education teachers, as well as how these curricula connect to state standards. Leaders then provide examples of lessons for students with disabilities that integrate state standards into instruction and delivery. Leaders also demonstrate how to create lessons plans that focus on state standards. Contacts note that when the district changes curricular resources, they adjust professional development to train teachers on the new curriculum.

Additionally, a [Scoring Guide](#)² to the DLM produced by the Center for Literacy and Disability Studies of the Colorado Department of Education encourages educators to access free [professional development opportunities on the DLM website](#).³ The website offers modules for educators to help them prepare students for the DLM. The scoring guide states that the modules guide instruction to help improve students' skills and recommends that members of educational teams watch the modules to design instruction for the assessment.

See **Appendix B** for additional examples of professional development content.

Professional Development Materials on the DLM Website

- Online modules to support educators preparing students for the DLM
- Webinars designed to connect teachers working to provide instruction aligned with the DLM
- An open-source collection of texts for students with disabilities that incorporate state standards
- A page of frequently asked questions page about preparing students for the DLM

Use Instructional Coaches to Help Teachers Implement New Instructional Strategies

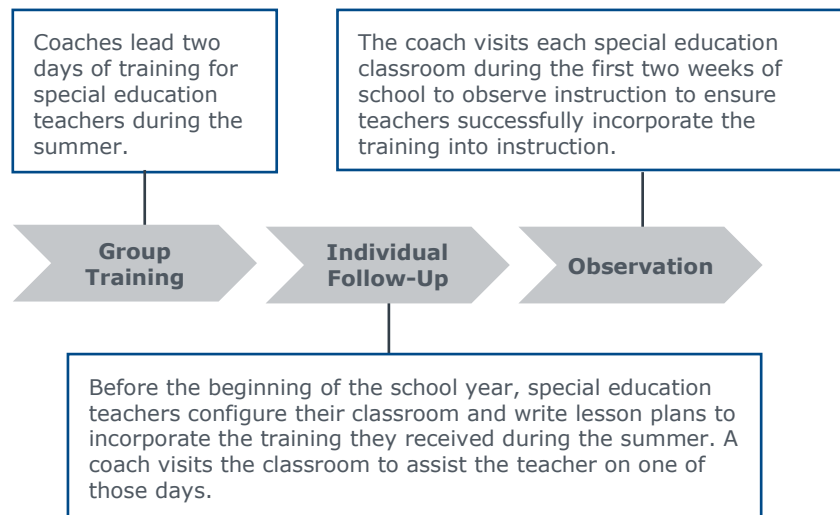
District B uses a model of professional development designed to ensure that staff incorporate new practices from training into special education classrooms. Contacts at District B note that when teachers struggle with a new instructional tactic, they may abandon the tactic and revert to their previous method of instruction. Administrators at the district created the training-coaching model to ensure that teachers receive guidance when they implement tactics in the classroom that they learned during professional development.

²Center for Learning and Disability Studies, "Dynamic Learning Maps Aligned K-3 Literacy Assessment-Colorado." Accessed February 20, 2019. https://www.cde.state.co.us/cdesped/cels_scoringguide.

³Dynamic Learning Maps, "Professional Development." Accessed February 20, 2019. <https://dynamiclearningmaps.org/professional-development>.

Trained coaches lead many professional development opportunities at District B. The graphic below illustrates how coaches work with teachers across multiple weeks to help them implement new instructional strategies in the classroom.

The Training-Coaching Model at *District B*

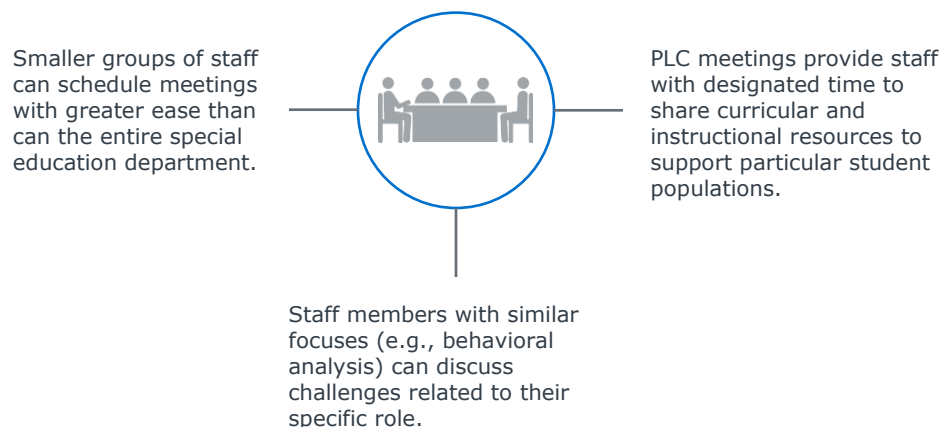


Encourage Meetings or Collaboration Among Staff with Similar Responsibilities to Increase Expertise

Multiple profiled districts mandate or encourage meetings among special education staff with similar job responsibilities. Teachers at **District F** who support students with significant needs maintain a professional learning community (PLC) to discuss strategies and practices to serve students. Attendance at PLC meetings is optional. Additionally, teachers at **District C** use PLC meetings to share curricular resources and instructional strategies with peers.

At **District E**, the entire staff of the special education department only meets once every other year. However, contacts report that staff with similar job functions (e.g., speech pathologists, special education teachers) often hold meetings together.

Benefits of PLC Meetings



5) Research Methodology

Project Challenge

Leadership at a member district approached the Forum with the following questions:

- What structure do contact districts use to provide instruction for students when the regular classroom is not the least restrictive environment?
- How do contact districts determine what curricular and instructional resources provided to special education teachers or coordinators?
- What evidence-based research do contact districts use to make curricular decisions for students with disabilities?
- How do contact districts adapt curriculum and instructional methods for students with significant disabilities?
- Which specific resources or instructional strategies do contact districts use to increase academic gains among students with significant disabilities?
- What data do contact districts collect to determine the effectiveness of instruction and the curriculum for students with disabilities?
- What professional development opportunities related to instruction do contact districts provide to special education teachers, and how often do teachers participate?
- What additional professional development opportunities do contact districts provide to special education teachers new to the field of special education or the district?

Project Sources

The Forum consulted the following sources for this report:

- EAB's internal and online research libraries (eab.com)
- Profiled districts' websites
- Autism Research Institute. "Structured Teaching- The TEACCH Method." Accessed February 20, 2019. https://www.autism.com/treating_TEACCH.
- Center for Learning and Disability Studies. "Dynamic Learning Maps Aligned K-3 Literacy Assessment-Colorado." Accessed February 20, 2019. https://www.cde.state.co.us/cdesped/cels_scoringguide.
- Dynamic Learning Maps. "Professional Development." Accessed February 20, 2019. <https://dynamiclearningmaps.org/professional-development>.

Research Parameters

The Forum interviewed administrators and special education staff involved in services for students with significant cognitive disabilities at profiled districts.

A Guide to Districts Profiled in this Brief

Institution	Location	Approximate Student Enrollment
District A	Mid-Atlantic	160,000
District B	West	48,000
District C	Mountain West	55,000
District D	West	5,000
District E	Northeast	4,500
District F	Mountain West	29,500

6) Appendix A: List of Curricular Resources

The following table lists curricular resources teachers use to instruct students with significant cognitive disabilities at profiled districts.

Institution	Curricular Resources
District A	Attainment Company Unique Learning Systems
District B	STAR Program (elementary) and LINKS Curriculum (secondary) Unique Learning Systems
District C	Attainment Company Boardmaker Unique Learning Systems
District D	Everyday Math Reading Milestones STAR Program
District E	News-2-You Clicker 6 Picture Exchange Communication System (non-readers) Boardmaker (non-readers) Edmark Reading Program Spire Number Worlds TouchMath
District F	Read Well (elementary) and LANGUAGE! (secondary) Reading Milestones Reading A-Z Number Worlds TouchMath News-2-You

7) Appendix B: Sample Professional Development Calendar

The following tables include professional development opportunities for the 2018-2019 school year at **District F**. Because the tables are based on a draft schedule provided by contacts at District F, some of the information is incomplete and some titles of courses are abbreviated. The district organizes professional development trainings by topic or by the type of staff expected to attend. Contacts note that staff at District F that support specific groups of students with disabilities receive a learning plan that generally requires them to complete five trainings throughout the year.

New Licensed Staff

New Licensed Staff				
Class	Date	Time	Required	Optional
Enrich Orientation	Aug. 6 <i>or</i> 7	8:30 – 11:30	X	
	Aug. 6 <i>or</i> 7	12:30 – 3:30		
	Aug. 8	8:30 – 11:30		
Orientation & IDEA / IEP Training	Aug. 10	8:00 – 4:00	X	
IDEA / IEP Training	Aug. 13	8:00 – 4:00	X	
Transition IEPs for Secondary Staff	Sept. 20	4:00 – 7:00	X	
CPI – Full Courses	Aug. 8	8:00 – 5:00	X	
Lifting / Transferring	Aug. 14 <i>or</i>	3:30 – 5:30	X	
	Aug. 15	4:00 – 6:00		
Teaching Skills for Behavior Success	July 31, Aug. 1, 2, & 3	8:00 – 4:00	X (New SED staff)	
VB / ABA	Sept. 4	4:00-7:00	X	
PROGRESS for New Teacher Administration	Sept. 13	4:00 – 6:00	X	
WIAT III	Sept. 10	4:00 – 7:00		X
Lexia Core 5	Sept. 27	4:15 – 6:15		X

Curriculum-Related Trainings

Curriculum-Related Trainings				
Class	Date	Time	Required	Optional
LETRS: Modules 1-3	July 30, 31, Aug. 6 & 7	8:00 – 4:00		X
LETRS: Modules 1-3	Sept. 25, 26, Nov. 7 & 8	8:00 – 4:00		X
LETRS: Modules 1-3	Jan. 29, 30, Feb. 27 & 28	8:00 – 4:00		X
LETRS: Modules 4-6	Dec. 5, 6 & Feb. 12	8:00 – 4:00		X
LETRS: Modules 4-6	March 12, 13 & May 8	8:00 – 4:00		X
Multisensory Reading (every other year)	2019	8:00 – 4:00		X
Co-Teaching	Nov. 5, 12 & 19	4:00 – 7:00		X
Dyslexia Training	Oct. 29	4:00 – 7:00		X
Math Navigator	-	8:00 – 4:00		X
Advantage Math	-	8:00 – 4:00		X
Math DIBELS	-	-		X
Multisensory Math	Feb. 6 & 13	4:00 – 7:00		X
Multisensory Writing	Oct. 2, Nov. 13, Dec. 10, Jan. 22, & March 11	4:15 – 6:15		X
AIMSweb TOT	-	-		X
CTOP Assessment Training	Sept. 19	4:15 – 6:45		X

Social/
Emotional/
Behavior-
Related
Trainings

Social/Emotional/Behavior				
Class	Date	Time	Required	Optional
Teaching Skills for Behavior Success	July 31, Aug. 1, 2 & 3	8:00 – 4:00	X	
Why Try	Per Site Request	TBD		X
Alternatives to Discipline	-	-		X
Principal SED PLC	-	-		X
Social Work PLC	-	8:00 – 9:30		X
Integrated Services Behavior Series	Sept. 10, Oct. 1, Nov. 5 & Dec. 3	4:00 – 6:30		X

Autism &
ILS Staff

Autism & ILS				
Class	Date	Time	Required	Optional
VB / ABA	Sept. 4	4:00 - 7:00	X	
VB / ABA Module Training	-	-	-	-
PROGRESS	Sept. 13	4:00 – 6:00	X	
ILS PLC	Sept. 11, Oct. 16, Dec. 4, Jan. 8, Feb. 12 & April 16	4:00 – 6:30		X
Autism PLC	Sept. 11, Oct. 16, Dec. 4, Jan. 8, Feb. 12 & April 16	4:00 – 6:30		X
DLM Assessment New Administrators	-	4:00 – 6:00	X	
Co-Alt Assessment New Administrators	Feb. 4	4:00 – 6:00	x	
DLM/CoALT Assessment	Feb. 14 OR 19	4:00 – 6:00	X	

Specialized Service Professionals

Specialized Service Professionals				
Class	Date	Time	Required	Optional
SSP Dept Mtgs (SLP, OT, PT)	Aug. 21, Sept. 19, Oct. 25, Nov. 15, Dec. 18, Jan. 23, Feb. 21, March 26, April 23 & May 22	2:00 – 4:00	X	
SSP Dept Mtgs (Psych)	Aug. 21, sept. 19, Oct. 25, Nov. 15, Dec. 18, Jan. 23, Feb. 21, March 26, April 23 & May 22	1:30 – 3:30		X
Vision PLC	1x Month	-		X
Professional Practice Issues for SLP	-	-		X
Social Work PLC	-	8:00 – 9:30		X
Community Collaboration	-	2:00 – 4:00		X
New SSP Evaluation Process Training	Aug. 24	1:00 – 3:00	X	

IEP/Assessment-Related Trainings

IEP/Assessment				
Class	Date	Time	Required	Optional
attend one Enrich Orientation (new staff)	Aug. 6 or 7 Aug. 6 or 7 Or Aug. 8	8:30 – 11:30 12:30 – 3:30 8:30 – 11:30	X	
IDEA (new staff)	Aug. 10 Aug. 13	8:00 – 4:00	X	
IEP Alignment (new staff)	Aug. 30 <i>or</i> Sept. 6	4:00 – 7:00	X	
IDEA – Transition IEPs (new secondary staff)	Sept. 20	4:00 – 7:00	X	
Enrich IEP Reps Updates #1	Oct. 23 OR 24	4:00 – 6:00	X	
Enrich IEP Reps Updates #2	Jan. 23 OR 24	4:00 – 6:00	X	
Enrich IEP Reps Updates #3	April 23 OR 24	4:00 – 6:00	X	
WIAT III	Sept. 10	4:00 – 7:00		X
CTOP Assessment Training	Sept. 19	4:15 – 6:15		
Lexia Core 5	Sept. 27	4:15 – 6:15		X

Transition-Related Trainings

Transition				
Class	Date	Time	Required	Optional
IEP Transition IEPs (new staff, secondary only)	Sept. 20	4:00-7:00	X	
Transition Series	Spring	4:00-7:00		X
Post HS PLC	-	4:00-6:00		X

Other Trainings

Other Trainings				
Class	Date	Time	Required	Optional
Quarterly Meetings	Sept. 24, Nov. 27, Jan. 31 & March 28	4:00 – 5:30		X
Quarterly Reps Orientation	Sept. 24	3:15 – 3:45 OR 5:30 – 6:00	X	
D/HH PLC	-	4:00 – 6:30		X
Autism PLC	Sept. 11, Oct. 16, Dec. 4, Jan. 8, Feb. 12 & April 16	4:00 – 6:30		X
ILS PLC	Sept. 11, Oct. 16, Dec. 4, Jan. 8, Feb. 12 & April 16	4:00 – 6:30		X
Vision PLC	-	-		X
New Admin Evaluation Training	Aug. 24	10:00 – 12:00	X	
Executive Function & Emotional Regulation	-	-		X
SLP Professional Practice Issues	-	-		X

Early Childhood-Related Trainings

Early Childhood				
Class	Date	Time	Required	Optional
ECSE IEP Alignment	Aug. 13	12:00- 4:00	X	
Enrich Support	-	-		
VB / ABA Modules	4x	2.5 hours		X
ECSE PLC	-	8:00 – 10:00		X

Family Focus-Related Trainings

Family Focus				
Class	Date	Time	Required	Optional
SEAC Meetings	-	6:00 – 7:30		X
Parent Trainings	-	6:00 – 7:30		X
Transition Series	Fall & Spring	-		X

Classified Staff

Classified Staff				
Class	Date	Time	Required	Optional
Teaching Skills for Behavior Success	July 31, Aug. 1, 2, & 3	8:00 – 4:00	X (Extensive SED only)	X
VB / ABA	Sept. 4	4:00 – 7:00	X (new Autism & ILS only)	
Lifting / Transferring	Aug. 14 <i>or</i> Aug. 15	3:30 - 5:30 4:00-6:00	X (new Autism & ILS only)	
CPI	Aug. 8	8:00 – 5:00	X	
New Para Orientation	Aug. 16	10:00 – 11:00 <i>or</i> 11:00 -12:00	X	
Classified Academy	Oct. 19, April 12, Feb. 21	8:30 – 11:00, 1:00 – 3:30 8:30 – 11:00, 1:00 – 3:30 4:00-6:30	Oct. 19 and April 12	Feb. 21