

CEC's Position on Special Education Teacher Evaluation

The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) recognizes the importance of special education teachers in the education of all children and youth. Special educators have always believed that children's individual learning needs should drive instruction; indeed, pedagogy is the heart of special education practice. One way to judge a special education teacher's knowledge and skill is through a thorough and valid teacher evaluation. High-quality evaluations that are rigorous, systematic, and developed collaboratively with special education teachers drive continuous improvement and excellence. The principles of good evaluation apply to all teachers. Thus, all teachers should be included in one evaluation system that is appropriately differentiated based on their professional role.

CEC believes that special education teacher evaluations are only effective if they are based on an accurate understanding of special education teachers' diverse roles, measure and support the effective use of evidence-based interventions and practices, include accurate and reliable indicators of special education teacher contributions to student growth, and promote teaching as a profession in order to address the persistent problem of special education teacher retention.

To provide the individualized, appropriate supports and services that children and youth with exceptionalities need, special education teachers deliver instruction in many different ways and through many approaches. In all cases, special education teachers work collaboratively with other professionals as well as families to ensure that children and youth receive the specialized instruction, supports, and accommodations outlined in their individual education plan. Due to the individualized nature of special education, the precise roles of special education teachers often vary depending on a student and school's needs. For example, a special education teacher may teach in a collaborative or co-teaching model where he or she shares responsibility with other teachers; may provide direct instruction for part or all of the day, one-on-one or in small groups; and/or may consult with other educators about the design of appropriate accommodations and modifications to curriculum and instruction. Moreover, some special education teachers provide essential services beyond instruction such as coaching, mentoring, and case management. One teacher may assume some or all of these roles depending on the needs of the children and youth they work with. Thus, to evaluate a special education teacher fairly and accurately, CEC believes an evaluation must clearly identify a special education teacher's role specific to individual students and set performance expectations based on the duties associated with those roles.

Special education teachers should be prepared for their roles in alignment with CEC's research-based standards outlined in *What Every Special Educator Must Know: Ethics, Standards and Guidelines*. These standards provide guidance to special education teachers in the use of evidence-based practices and interventions that inform instructional practice. Evaluations should measure and support the use of evidence-based interventions and practices and be consistent with CEC's professional standards.

CEC also believes evaluations should include evidence-based measures of a special education teacher's contribution to student learning. Student growth should be one of many indicators of special education teacher effectiveness within a comprehensive evaluation system. Evaluations based on student growth alone, however, cannot validly determine the effectiveness of a special education teacher. Furthermore, when measuring student growth, evaluations should not use a student's progress on their goals, objectives, or benchmarks on the individualized education program (IEP) as a measure of a special education teacher's contribution to student growth. Doing so may compromise the integrity of the IEP, shifting its focus from what is designed to be a child-centered document to the performance of the teacher. The development and implementation of an IEP, however, should be included in special education teachers' evaluations as this is a primary responsibility of their professional role.

In addition, teacher evaluation systems must be designed to support teachers and provide them with the tools they need to be successful throughout their career. The field of education faces ongoing challenges in the preparation, recruitment, and retention of special education teachers. Thus, teacher evaluation systems must be designed to align with professional development to enhance a teacher's knowledge and skills, support induction programs for early-career special education teachers, and identify strategies to support collaboration and improve working conditions.

While special education teachers are the focus of this Position, it is important to note that the evaluation of gifted education teachers must also adhere to these same tenets. Gifted education teachers provide individualized supports and services for children and youth who demonstrate high levels of aptitude or competence in one or more domains. As such, their professional role must be included in the creation of a teacher evaluation system in the same way, and using much of the same criteria, as special education teachers. In this Position, the term "special education teacher" is meant to include special and gifted education teachers.

Therefore, it is the position of CEC that a teacher evaluation system shall:

Include Fundamental Systemwide Components

- All educators must be included in one evaluation system that promotes an effective teaching and learning environment, encourages collaboration, and is appropriately differentiated to include and address each educator's individual role and performance standards.
 - Evaluation systems must be developed using research-based standards.
 - Evaluation systems must be implemented with fidelity and integrity.
 - Evaluation systems may include, but are not limited to, observations; evidence of a teacher's professional growth and contribution to the school and professional community; evidence of student work and learning; artifacts of practice; and surveys of a variety of individuals, including colleagues, parents, and students.
 - Evaluation systems must identify appropriate professional development opportunities for teachers based on the results of their evaluations.
 - Evaluation systems must support continuous improvement through the process of structured monitoring, intensive ongoing evaluation and coaching, and systemic professional development based on established research and best practice.
- Evaluation processes and all measures of teacher effectiveness must be open and transparent to the teacher being evaluated.
 - Evaluation systems must ensure the confidentiality of personally identifiable teacher evaluation results, including a process to support teacher due process rights and timely decision making in any due process action by an appropriate independent and objective authority.
 - Evaluation systems should be regularly examined in light of evolving research to ensure that they are based on current approaches and best practices.
 - Evaluation systems must be adequately funded.

Identify the Complex Role of the Special Education Teacher

- Evaluations must clearly identify and be based on a special education teacher's specific role and responsibilities during a given school year.
- Evaluations must articulate clear performance expectations based on professional standards that are mutually agreed upon by the special education teacher and evaluator.
- Evaluations must take into account the population of children and youth and their range of exceptionalities that special education teachers instruct and support during a given school year.

- Evaluations must be conducted by evaluators with expertise related to evidence-based service delivery models and individualized teaching practices and interventions in special education. To support useful and meaningful feedback in the evaluation, evaluators must understand how, when, and why these practices are implemented and the specific roles and responsibilities of special education teachers.
- Evaluators, including principals and other school leaders, must be trained in effective evaluation practices that accurately reflect the roles and responsibilities of special education teachers and the children and youth they serve.
- Evaluation systems should support state, provincial, and local education agency efforts to develop and implement teacher-student data links, including, but not limited to, accurately defining the teacher of record and ensuring that special education teachers are accurately represented when they are in collaborative or co-teaching situations.

Measure the Use of Evidence-Based Practices

- Evaluations must be based on multiple reliable measures and indicators that support valid measurement of special education teacher effectiveness.
- Multiple indicators of special education teacher effectiveness may include, but are not limited to: IEP development and implementation, development of lesson plans, skill in providing access to the general education curriculum, classroom environment and management, identification and implementation of appropriate instructional strategies, measures of student growth that are a fair and accurate representation of both student growth and the special education teacher's contribution to that growth, progress monitoring and assessment, collaboration with colleagues and families, contributions to the school community, and participating in ongoing professional development.
- Evaluations should never be based solely on student growth. Any evaluation that includes indicators of student growth should include multiple measures of that growth and provide an assessment that considers a teacher's contribution to growth in developmental,

academic, behavioral, and functional domains.

- High-stakes personnel decisions, such as promotion, tenure, and compensation, should never be based solely on student growth or any other single indicator.
- Evaluations should not use a student's progress on their goals, objectives, and benchmarks in the IEP as a measure of a special education teacher's contribution to student growth.
- Statistical models that estimate a teacher's contribution to student growth, such as value-added models, should not be applied to any teacher until there is a general consensus among researchers that the model provides a valid estimate of a teacher's contribution to student growth.

Recognize the Professionalism of Special Education Teachers

- Special education teachers must be involved in the development, implementation, and evaluation of the teacher evaluation process.
- Evaluations must respect special education teachers' professional practice and provide them with constructive and actionable feedback, resources, and opportunities to assist in addressing any areas for professional development and lead to well-grounded personnel decisions.
- Special education teachers must have reasonable case loads and paperwork responsibilities; competitive salaries; benefits; access to resources; and positive working conditions, including collegial and administrative supports.
- Evaluations must identify, based on data from multiple measures and indicators, when teacher dismissal is appropriate.

Continually Incorporate Findings from Research

- Leaders of evaluation system reforms, including state education agencies, local education agencies, institutions of higher education, researchers, and policy makers, must collaborate to ensure that the development and implementation of evaluation systems are carried out in a

systematic, coordinated, and efficient manner.

- Research should identify reliable measures and indicators of student growth that can be validly used to evaluate special education teachers. Specifically, research must determine whether the measure/indicator supports valid assumptions about the growth of students with exceptionalities and whether that growth can be attributed to the special education teacher or is related to other outcome indicators.

- Policy makers and leaders should fund research that informs the use of statistical models that attribute student growth to educators who teach children and youth with exceptionalities and implement pilot programs that validate their use.
- Policy makers and leaders should consider the intended and unintended consequences of wide-scale implementation of teacher evaluation systems without more extensive research and development efforts that clearly link the evaluation system to improvements over time in the achievement of children and youth with exceptionalities.

Reference

Council for Exceptional Children 2012 Policy Manual; Section Four; Part 3; Page L-9.

Date Adopted

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