

20 Big Ideas

Increasing the Achievement of Students with Disabilities

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1. There is only one way to consistently increase the achievement and learning of students with disabilities across a school or a district.
2. We must provide GREAT instruction.
3. GREAT instruction is the solution. It is the only solution and it will always be the solution. Federal and state laws, rules and regulations will continue to change, but GREAT instruction is the power that we, as educators, hold to increase the learning for our students.
4. GREAT instruction is:
 - a. **G**uided by the performance standards
 - b. **R**igorous with research-based practices
 - c. **E**ngaging and exciting
 - d. **A**ssessed continuously to provide further instruction
 - e. **T**ailored through flexible groups
5. Across the country, roughly 63% of students with disabilities spend at least 80% of their school day in general education classes. Another 20% of students spend at least 40% of their school day in general education classes. Therefore, if we are going to increase the achievement and learning of our students with disabilities, we must provide GREAT instruction in every class across the school and district.
6. GREAT instruction is not only the solution for students with disabilities. It will increase the achievement of many students from various groups: those with disabilities, those from economically disadvantaged situations, students who are learning English as a second language, and those students who do not qualify for a specific subgroup, but still struggle in school. In fact, GREAT instruction will help all students!
7. Each element of the GREAT instruction acronym (outlined above) must be operationalized across the school or district. Leaders and teachers must get together to develop consensus on what each of those elements “looks like” throughout the school day. Those consistent expectations set the foundations for effective implementation of GREAT instruction.
8. Under the heading of Research-based Practices, students with disabilities need two layers of instruction: powerful Tier 1 instruction and effective specially designed instruction.
9. If a school or district’s faculty and staff consistently implements the following 5 components across every classroom, they will provide powerful Tier 1 instruction. They should provide:
 - a. Instruction involving the 5 Domains of Reading
 - b. The recommendations of the National Mathematics Advisory Panel
 - c. Literacy instruction across the curriculum
 - d. The recommendations of Dr. John Hattie in *Visible Learning for Teachers: Maximizing Impact on Learning*.
 - e. The recommendations in *Classroom Instruction that Works: Research-based Strategies for Increasing Student Achievement 2nd Edition* by Ceri Dean, Elizabeth Hubbell, Howard Pitler, and Bj Stone (1st edition by Marzano, Pickering & Pollock).

10. If those elements are implemented with great fidelity consistently, then a school/district provides outstanding Tier 1 instruction.
11. All teachers, including special education teachers, must have great facility and expertise in those elements of effective Tier 1 instruction.
12. Students with disabilities must also participate in effective specially designed instruction. In fact, “special education” has been defined as “specially designed instruction” since the first federal special education law was passed in 1975 (Education for All Handicapped Children Act).
13. Even though *specially designed instruction* has been discussed consistently for decades, the idea is very ambiguous. At the beginning of the school year, we provide special education teachers with their caseloads (up to 26 students in Georgia), piles of IEPs, eligibility reports and psychological reports and ask them to provide *specially designed instruction* for each student. Frankly, it is virtually impossible for an interrelated teacher to have expertise in all of the disability categories, various diagnoses that often accompany disabilities, their nuances for different students, and the instructional needs of each student.
14. We must provide more clarity. Instead of requiring each teacher to be responsible for constructing specially designed instruction for each student, what if we developed a list of instructional practices that are **needed** by the overwhelming majority of students with disabilities? Could that be the foundation for *specially designed instruction* in a school or district?
15. If most students need many more attempts and much more targeted feedback than their peers to learn the same skills, shouldn't *drastically increasing practice turns and feedback* be a component of specially designed instruction? If most students need explicit instruction in building background knowledge and in content related terminology, shouldn't *providing effective vocabulary instruction* be a component of specially designed instruction?
16. Each district should build a list of instructional practices that build the foundation of specially designed instruction in their school district. They should be implemented in addition to effective Tier 1 instruction in all content areas. One proposed list includes:
 - a. Drastically increasing student practice turns and feedback
 - b. Providing highly organized and sequential explicit instruction with modelling, guided practice with feedback and independent practice
 - c. Implementing explicit and embedded vocabulary instruction
 - d. Implementing fill-the-gap interventions
 - e. Incorporating metacognitive instruction
 - f. Facilitating effective behavioral systems
17. Those instructional practices should be embedded into math classes. According to the National Mathematics Advisory Panel, students with disabilities (and other low achievement math students) benefit from:
 - a. Providing explicit systematic, highly organized instruction in which:
 - i. Teachers provide clear models and demonstrations
 - ii. Students participate in extensive practice during their attempts
 - iii. Teachers model thinking aloud
 - iv. Students think aloud and ask lots of questions
18. Many students with disabilities need co-teaching classes. The co-teaching experience for students should be drastically different than a class that is led by only one adult. Students should experience instruction that cannot be accomplished with only one teacher in the classroom.

19. Co-teaching should include both teachers leading small group instruction at the same time. There can also be student independent or student collaborative groups. Any model that includes large group instruction should be minimized. Also, the small groups should never include the *special education group* and the *other group*. Both teachers are responsible for teaching all students in their flexible groups.
20. What instructional practices should be seen in co-teaching classes where each teacher is leading small instructional groups? Both teachers should implement the list of effective Tier 1 instructional practices along with the list of specially designed instructional practices described above.