Special Education High-Leverage Practices

HLPs are divided into categories: Collaboration, Assessment, Behavior, Instruction

1. Collaborate with professionals to increase student success within the general education curriculum. Collaboration with teachers, paraprofessionals and support staff is necessary to support students' learning toward measurable outcomes and to facilitate students' social and emotional well-being across all school environments and instructional settings (e.g., co-taught). Collaboration with individuals or teams requires the use of effective collaboration skills (e.g., sharing ideas, active listening, questioning, problem-solving) to develop and adjust instructional or behavioral plans based on student data, and the coordination of expectations, responsibilities, and resources to maximize student learning.

2. Organize and facilitate effective meetings with professionals and families. Teachers lead and participate in a range of meetings (e.g., meetings with families, IEPs, instructional planning) with the purpose of identifying clear measurable student outcomes and instructional/behavioral plans that support these outcomes. They develop a meeting agenda, allocate time to meet the goals of the agenda and lead in ways that encourage consensus building through positive verbal and non-verbal communication, encouraging the sharing of multiple perspectives, active listening, and soliciting feedback.

3. Collaborate with families to support student learning and secure needed services. Teachers collaborate with families about their child's needs, goals, program, and progress over time and assure they are informed about their rights as well as special education processes (e.g., IEPs). Teachers should respectfully and effectively communicate considering the background, socioeconomic status, language and culture of the family. Teachers also collaborate to advocate for resources to help students meet instructional, behavioral, social, and transition goals. In building positive relationships with students, teachers encourage students to self-advocate, with the goal of fostering self-determination over time. They also work with families to self-advocate and support their child's learning.

4. Develop a comprehensive learner profile that is used to monitor student progress and plan instruction. To develop a comprehensive learner profile, special education teachers must use a variety of assessment measures that are sensitive to language and culture, to: (a) analyze and describe students' strengths and needs and (b) analyze their school-based learning environments to determine potential supports and barriers to their academic progress. Teachers must collect, aggregate, and interpret data from multiple sources (informal and formal

observations, work samples, curriculum based measures, FBA, school file, analysis of curriculum, information from families, and other data sources). This information is used to create instructional supports that improve the student's learning outcomes.

5. Communicates assessment information with stakeholders to collaboratively design educational programs. Special education teachers must interpret assessment information for stakeholders including other professionals, families, and students themselves, and involve them in the assessment and goal development process. Special educators must understand each assessment's purpose, help key stakeholders understand how culture and language influence interpretation of data generated, and be able to use data to collaboratively develop an individualized education plan that includes: goals that are standards based, appropriate accommodations and modifications, and fair grading practices.

6. Uses assessment continuously to design, evaluate, and adjust instruction that is responsive to students' needs. Once special education teachers develop instructional goals, they are expected to design, evaluate, and make ongoing adjustments to students' instructional programs based on information generated from the learner profile. Once instruction and other supports are designed and implemented, special education teachers must have the skill to manage and engage in ongoing data collection using curriculum-based measures, informal classroom assessments, observations of student performance and behavior, and discussions with key stakeholders (students, families, and other professionals). These data sources are used to adjust instruction to ensure students' continuing educational progress.

7. Establish a consistent, organized, and respectful learning environment. Teachers should establish developmentally and culturally appropriate expectations, routines and procedures within their classrooms that are positively stated and explicitly taught across the school year. When students demonstrate mastery and follow established rules and routines, teachers should provide developmentally appropriate specific performance feedback in meaningful and caring ways. By establishing, following, and reinforcing expectations of all students within the classroom, teachers will reduce the potential for challenging behavior and increase student engagement While establishing learning environments, teachers should build mutually respectful relationships with students and engage them in setting the classroom climate (e.g., rules and routines) to increase student motivation.

8. Provide appropriate rates of positive and constructive feedback to guide students' learning and behavior. The purpose of feedback is to guide student learning and behavior, and increase student motivation, engagement, and independence, leading to improved student learning and behavior. Effective feedback must be strategically delivered and goal directed, i.e., 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, non=verbal, or written, and should be timely, contingent, genuine, meaningful, and developmentally appropriate. Similar to formative assessment, the teacher provides on=going feedback until the learner reaches the established learning goal.

9. Teach social behaviors. Teachers should explicitly teach appropriate interpersonal and self-management skills aligning lessons with classroom and school-wide expectations for student behavior. Prior to teaching, teachers should determine if the problem behavior is related to a skill deficit or if it is a performance problem. Skill deficits should be taught until mastery is achieved; performance problems should initially be taught, then emphasis should shift to prompting the student to use the skill and insuring the "appropriate" behavior accesses the same or a similar outcome.

10. Conduct functional behavioral assessments to develop student behavior intervention plans. Creating individual behavior plans is a central role of all special educators. A key to successful plans is to conduct a functional behavioral assessment (FBA) anytime behavior is chronic and impedes learning. A comprehensive FBA results in a hypothesis about the function of the student's problem behavior. Once the function is determined, a Behavior Intervention Plan is developed that a) teaches the student a replacement behavior that can serve the same or similar function, b) alters the environment to make the replacement behavior more efficient and effective, and c) alters the environment to no longer allow the problem behavior to access the previous outcome.

11. Identify and prioritize long- and short-term learning goals. Teachers prioritize what is most important for students to learn by providing meaningful access to, and success in, the general education curriculum. Teachers use grade level standards, assessment data and learning progressions, students' prior knowledge, IEP goals and benchmarks to make decisions about what is most critical to emphasize, and develop long- and short-term goals accordingly. They understand essential curriculum components, identify critical prerequisites and foundations, and assess student performance in relation to these components.

12. Systematically design instruction toward a specific learning goal. Teachers help students to develop important concepts and skills that provide the foundation for more complex learning. Teachers sequence lessons that build off each other and make connections explicit in both planning and delivery. They activate students' prior knowledge and show how each lesson "fits" with previous ones. Planning involves careful consideration of learning goals, what is involved in reaching the goals, and allocating time accordingly. Ongoing changes (e.g., pacing, examples) occur throughout the sequence based on student performance.

13. Adapt curriculum tasks and materials for specific learning goals. 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/or modify independent work by highlighting relevant information, changing task directions, and decreasing amounts of material. Teachers make strategic decisions on content coverage (essential curriculum elements), meaningfulness of tasks to meet stated goals, and criteria for student success. They collect data on student learning to make educational decisions about selection of curriculum tasks and materials.

14. Use and explicitly teach strategies to support learning and independence. Teachers explicitly teach cognitive and metacognitive processing strategies to support memory, attention and self-regulation of learning. Learning involves not only understanding content but using cognitive processes to solve problems, regulate attention, organize thoughts and materials and monitor one's own thinking. Self-regulation and metacognitive strategy instruction is 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.

15. Scaffold instruction. Scaffolds are temporary supports provided to students so they can successfully complete tasks that they cannot yet do independently and with a high rate of success. Teachers select powerful physical, visual, verbal and/or written scaffolds, carefully calibrate them to students' needs in relation to learning tasks, use them flexibly, evaluate their effectiveness, and gradually remove them once students gain increased independence and understanding. Some scaffolds are planned prior to lessons and some occur as lessons unfold in response to student performance.

16. Use explicit instruction. Teachers make content, skills and concepts explicit by showing and telling students what to do or think while solving problems, enacting strategies, completing tasks, and/or classifying concepts. Teachers use explicit instruction when students are learning new material and/or complex concepts and skills. They strategically choose representations, examples and language to facilitate student understanding, anticipate common misconceptions, highlight essential content and remove distracting information. They overtly teach steps or processes needed to understand content and concepts, apply skills, and complete tasks successfully and independently.

17. Use flexible grouping. 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.

18. Use strategies to promote active student engagement. Teachers use a variety of instructional strategies that result in active student responding. Active student engagement is critical to academic success. 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 shown empirically to increase student engagement. They monitor student engagement and provide positive and constructive feedback to sustain performance.

19. Use assistive and instructional technologies. 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 the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework to select, design, implement, and evaluate important student outcomes.

20. Teach students to maintain and generalize new learning across time and settings. Effective teachers use specific techniques to teach students to generalize and maintain newly acquired knowledge and skills. They use numerous examples in design and delivery of instruction that require students to apply what they have learned in other settings. 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.

21. Provide intensive instruction. Intensive small group instruction involves working with students with similar needs on a small number of high priority, clearly defined skills and/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 regularly monitor students' progress and adjust their instruction accordingly. Within small groups, students have many opportunities to interact with teachers and peers to practice what they are learning.

22. Analyze instruction for the purpose of improving it. Effective teaching requires routine analysis of practice and its impact on important student outcomes. Practice can be analyzed at micro- (moment-to-moment) and macro-(month-to-month) levels, involve group and/or individual performance, and include formal and informal analyses. Effective teachers retain, reuse, and extend practices that improve student learning and adjust or discard those that do not. Teachers study their practice to improve student learning, validate reasoned hypotheses about salient instructional features, and enhance instructional decision-making.