



June 2014

### **Special Education Field Advisory**

**From:** James P. DeLorenzo

**Subject:** The Role of the Committee on Special Education in Relation to the Common Core Learning Standards

The purpose of this memorandum is to reiterate New York State (NYS) policy for the development and implementation of individualized education programs (IEPs) for students with disabilities in consideration of the general education curriculum. There is increased rigor in the learning standards for NYS students. This means that, for all students, teachers are expected to teach and students are expected to learn higher level critical thinking. In order for students with disabilities to meet these high academic standards and demonstrate their knowledge and skills, it is essential that their instruction must incorporate specially designed instruction.

While all students can benefit from scaffolds, differentiated instruction and universal design for learning, students with disabilities require specially designed instruction. Specially designed instruction means adapting, as appropriate to the needs of a student with a disability, the content, methodology or delivery of instruction to address the unique needs that result from the student's disability. Therefore, IEPs must be developed in consideration of the standards students are expected to meet and lesson planning for each class must specifically address the needs of students with disabilities.

### **ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

**The Committee on Special Education (CSE), school administrators and each student with a disability's general education and special education teachers have important roles to ensure students with disabilities reach the State's learning standards.**

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To ensure students with disabilities have access to participate and progress in the general curriculum, schools are expected to:

1. develop and implement an IEP which includes annual goals based on information about a student's strengths, needs and present levels of

performance. Goals should be aligned with and chosen to facilitate the student's attainment of chronological grade-level academic standards;

2. ensure that recommended supports and services are provided within the least restrictive environment to meet a student's needs and to assist the student to be successful in the general education curriculum to meet grade level standards; and
3. ensure that teachers, including special education teachers and support personnel, are knowledgeable about the curriculum the school is using to implement the new standards and are prepared and qualified to deliver high-quality, evidence-based specially designed instruction and support services.

## **IEPs ALIGNED TO THE STANDARDS**

**In a standards-based IEP, the CSE has incorporated State content standards in its development. Standards-based IEPs are a best practice to create high expectations for students with disabilities.**

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It is the responsibility of the CSE to recommend goals and services in a student's IEP that will assist the student to be involved and progress in the general education curriculum and to ensure that consideration of the student's progress in meeting those goals is considered in IEP reviews. This means that members of the CSE will need to consider both the State's learning standards as well as the school-based instructional curriculum, which must be aligned to the State's learning standards. CSE members need to know the expectations of the general education classroom for the corresponding grade of the student both in terms of what learning (i.e., knowledge and skills) is expected (general curriculum) as well as how the students are expected to access and demonstrate what they have learned. This information will assist the CSE in determining if the student needs adaptations, accommodations or modifications<sup>1</sup> to the general curriculum for all or part of his/her learning. This is one reason it is essential that the student's general education teacher(s) participate in CSE meetings and that the school district representative be knowledgeable about the general education curriculum.

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<sup>1</sup> **Accommodations** mean changes in instruction and assessment that allows a student to gain access to content and/or complete assigned tasks. Accommodations allow students with disabilities to pursue the same course of study as other students. Examples of accommodations include, but are not limited to, teacher-provided notes/outlines, extra time to complete assignments, the use of a computer to complete assignments, a peer note-taker, the use of wider lined paper for written tasks, highlighted text, and the use of spell-checker. The terms 'accommodation' and 'modification' are very different (see definition of modification below). Accommodations determined necessary are based on an individual child's needs related to his/her disability and 'levels the playing field for students' (i.e., give them an equal opportunity). Accommodations may change "how" a student learns, but do not reduce learning expectations nor change "what" the student will learn. In contrast, **modifications** change "what" is learned and the content of the grade-specific curriculum, thereby, reducing learning expectations.

To develop IEPs that are aligned to the standards (sometimes called “Standards-based IEPs), the CSE should take the following steps:

1. Review the content (i.e., the expectations for what the student will learn) as well as how the student will be expected to demonstrate his/her knowledge and skills in the content areas.
2. Identify the strengths and challenges for the student in relation to those expectations in the present levels of performance section of the IEP.
3. Identify how a student’s needs are linked to the general curriculum. Identify areas that will have the greatest impact on the student’s progress in the curriculum (e.g., a student’s difficulty with visual processing may affect graphing skills required to achieve the math standards).
4. Unpack the standards and identify the goals that the student will be expected to achieve in one year and, when appropriate, short-term instructional objectives or benchmarks that are the intermediate steps to reach those annual goals. Standard-based goals do not mean that goals and objectives in a student’s IEP are a restatement of a standard or a curriculum goal in a specific content area, but rather they are statements that reflect the necessary learning that will lead to attainment of the standards. Goals should be chosen to accelerate a student’s ability to progress in the general education curriculum.
5. Identify the special education services, including the adaptations, accommodations, or modifications to the general curriculum, and/or instructional environment and materials, as needed by the student to reach those standards.

The State’s Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS), available at <http://www.engageny.org/resource/new-york-state-p-12-common-core-learning-standards>, are statements of what students are expected to know or be able to do in each content area (such as reading, math) and at each grade level. The Career Development and Occupational Studies (CDOS) Learning Standards (<http://www.p12.nysed.gov/cte/cdlearn/>) are statements of what students are expected to know or be able to do in the areas of career development, universal foundation skills, integrated learning and career areas.

Standards-based IEP goals are **not simply restatements of the standards**; rather, standards-based annual goals identify the essential skills and knowledge that a student with a disability needs to acquire in order to master grade-level content standards. When properly implemented, standards-based IEPs provide students with the opportunity to receive specifically designed instruction that is linked to the general educational curriculum along with appropriate accommodations to support achievement of grade-level expectations.

When developing annual IEP goals, the CSE should first consider the student’s grade-level curriculum. Even though the student may not be functioning at grade level in a

specific content area, the student should be working toward meeting grade-level expectations and receiving grade-level content instruction. The National Association of State Directors of Special Education recommends a seven step process to develop standards-based IEPs. An adapted version of these seven steps is provided in Attachment 1. For additional guidance on IEP development, see <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/specialed/publications/iepguidance.htm>.

## **INTENTIONAL AND PURPOSEFUL PLANNING TO ADDRESS STUDENT NEEDS**

*Used as a framework for teaching, the CCLS and CDOS Learning Standards direct teachers on what to teach, not how to teach or how to reach all students. Teachers should be using the principles of universal design for learning in developing their lesson plans and differentiating instruction for all students. However, while scaffolds and supports provided through differentiated instruction are important for all students, students with disabilities will require more individualized accommodations and instruction to address their specific disability needs.*

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Access to the general education curriculum occurs when students with disabilities are actively engaged in learning the content and skills that define the general education curriculum. While each student's IEP should provide information for teachers to effectively provide accommodations, supports, and instruction to students with disabilities to address the needs of the student as they impact on the student's ability to participate and progress in the general education curriculum, IEPs do not prescribe specific instructional methodologies. In addition to supports and services (e.g., resource room, consultant teacher, etc.), special education must include specially designed instruction. As stated previously, specially designed instruction means adapting, as appropriate to the needs of a student with a disability, the content, methodology or delivery of instruction to address the unique needs that result from the student's disability.

The provision of specially designed instruction relies on classroom teachers to have intentionally and purposefully planned to match instruction to the needs of the students with disabilities in their classroom. Specific instructional approaches should be selected and utilized by classroom teachers, in combination with supplemental supports identified in the IEP, such as accommodations, accessible materials, assistive technology, and/or adaptive equipment, to compensate, remediate, or overcome the effects of the disability on the student and on his/her learning in the context of each lesson taught.

In considering and explicitly planning to address the needs of students with disabilities, teachers should identify needed supports, services, accommodations, teaching strategies, learning strategies, etc., that the student may need in each of the following areas.

- Content
- Materials
- Environment
- How learning will be measured

- How instruction should be provided

Special Education School Improvement Specialists (SEIS), Katy B. Weber<sup>2</sup> and Valerie Cole<sup>3</sup> of the State's Regional Special Education Technical Assistance Support Centers (RSE-TASC) were instrumental in creating a lesson planning tool, entitled ***Lesson Plan Template, Accessing the Common Core for Students with Disabilities***. This tool is designed to assist teachers of students with disabilities (which includes both general education and special education teachers) to adapt, as appropriate, the content, methodology and/or instructional approach and to provide the appropriate accommodations or modifications to meet the needs of each individual student with a disability in the context of general education curriculum instruction. This document specifically guides the teacher to plan in advance how he/she will, in consideration of the student's strengths and needs, address how the student's disability impact's the student's ability to participate and progress in the general education curriculum. This guide can be accessed at <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/specialed/commoncore/guidance-commoncore-template.htm>.

### **Resources for Parents of Students with Disabilities on IEP Development and Instruction toward the CCLS**

Many parents have asked questions about how NYS' adoption of the CCLS will affect their children who have disabilities. Many of these questions arise from a lack of understanding of what the standards are, concerns about how their own children are struggling with these new standards and how schools are providing needed supports for their children. NYSED's P-12: Office of Special Education, working with the Commissioner's Advisory Panel for Special Education Services and the Special Education Parent Centers, has developed a resource for parents to help them understand the CCLS, and to assist them to bring questions to teachers and CSEs. This resource can be found at <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/specialed/commoncore/instructionCCLS-parents-614.htm>. We encourage districts to print this document and share with parents of students with disabilities.

### **Resources for Technical Assistance and Professional Development**

- For additional professional development and technical assistance on IEP development and the provision of research-based specially designed instruction for students with disabilities, please contact the RSE-TASC in your region of the State. <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/specialed/techassist/rsetasc/locations.htm>
- For information and support for parents of students with disabilities, please contact the Special Education Parent Center in your region of the State. <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/specialed/techassist/parentcenters.htm>

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<sup>2</sup> Katy Weber is a SEIS, formerly with the Midwest RSE-TASC located at Monroe #1 BOCES, and currently working as a RSE-TASC SEIS with the Rochester City School District.

<sup>3</sup> Valerie Cole is an RSE-TASC SEIS with the Greater Southern Tier BOCES.

To ensure dissemination to appropriate individuals within a school district, I ask Superintendents to please share this memorandum with individuals such as Directors of Special Education, School Psychologists, CSE and Committee on Preschool Special Education Chairpersons, Guidance Counselors and Directors of Pupil Personnel and Parent Teacher Associations. Questions regarding this memorandum may be directed to the Special Education Policy Unit at (518) 473-2878 or your Special Education Quality Assurance Regional Associate at one of the following Regional Offices:

Central Region	(315) 428-4556
Eastern Region	(518) 486-6366
Hudson Valley Region	(518) 473-1185
Long Island Region	(631) 952-3352
New York City	(718) 722-4544
Western Region	(585) 344-2002
Nondistrict Unit	(518) 473-1185

Attachment

## **Steps to Creating Standards-Based Individualized Education Programs (IEPs)<sup>4</sup>**

The following highlights the major steps Committees on Special Education (CSEs) can follow to create IEPs developed in consideration of the State's learning standards or "standards-based IEPs". Questions the CSE may ask when following the steps include, but are not limited to:

**Step 1: Consider the grade-level content standards for the grade in which the student is enrolled or would be enrolled based on age.**

- What is the intent of the content standard?
- What is the content standard saying that the student must know and be able to do?

**Step 2: Examine classroom and student data to determine where the student is functioning in relation to the grade-level standards.**

- Has the student been taught content aligned with grade-level standards?
- Has the student been provided appropriate instructional scaffolding to attain grade-level expectations?
- Were the lessons and teaching materials used to teach the student aligned with State grade-level standards?
- Was the instruction evidence based?

**Step 3: Develop the present level of academic achievement and functional performances.**

Describe the individual strengths and needs of the student in relation to accessing and mastering the general curriculum.

- What do we know about the student's response to academic instruction (e.g., progress monitoring data)?
- What programs, accommodations (e.g., classroom and testing) and/or interventions have been successful with the student?
- What have we learned from previous IEPs and student data that can inform decision making?
- Are there assessment data (i.e., State, district and/or classroom) that can provide useful information for making decisions about the student's strengths and needs (e.g., patterns in the data)?

Consider the factors related to the student's disability and how they affect how the student learns and demonstrates what he or she knows.

- How does the student's disability affect participation and progress in the general curriculum?
- Is the student on track to achieve grade-level proficiency within a year?

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<sup>4</sup> Adapted from the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE): [http://nasdse.org/DesktopModules/DNNspot-Store/ProductFiles/36\\_a7f577f4-20c9-40bf-be79-54fb510f754f.pdf](http://nasdse.org/DesktopModules/DNNspot-Store/ProductFiles/36_a7f577f4-20c9-40bf-be79-54fb510f754f.pdf)

**Step 4: Develop measurable annual goals aligned with grade-level academic content standards.**

- What are the student's needs as identified in the present level of performance?
- Does the goal have a specific timeframe?
- What can the student reasonably be expected to accomplish in one school year?
- Are the conditions for meeting the goal addressed?
- How will the outcome of the goal be measured?

**Step 5: Assess and report the student's progress throughout the year.**

- How does the student demonstrate what he/she knows on classroom, district and State assessments?
- Are a variety of assessments used to measure progress?
- How will progress be reported to parents?

**Step 6: Identify specially designed instruction including accommodations and/or modifications needed to access and progress in the general education curriculum.**

- What specially designed instruction, including accommodations, has been used with the student and were they effective?
- Has the complexity of the material been changed in such a way that the content has been modified?

**Step 7: Determine the most appropriate assessment option.**

- What types of responses do the State assessments require?
- What are the administrative conditions of the assessment? (i.e., setting, delivery of instructions, time allotted, etc.)
- What accommodations are allowed on the assessment(s)?
- Are the accommodations approved for the assessment also used in the classroom?
- Has the student received standards-based, grade-level instruction?
- Was the instruction evidence based?
- What is the student's instructional level?
- How different is the student's instructional level from the level of typical peers?
- Can the student make progress toward grade-level standards in the same timeframe as typical peers?
- What can be learned from the student's previous State assessment results?