

## STRATEGIC INTERVENTIONS FOR IMPROVING ACCESS

In recent years, there has been much discussion about strategies and methods that can improve access to the general education curriculum for students with disabilities. Through a review of literature and related research and discussions with administrators, practitioners, and families, **the strategies described in this handout are thought to positively impact upon the engagement of students with disabilities in the general education curriculum.** This list is not meant to be exhaustive nor do each of these strategies work for all students or classroom situations. These strategies are divided into five education areas in which decisions could be made that would adversely affect a student's access to the general education curriculum.

## IDENTIFICATION

Identification is the process in which children are identified as in need of special education services, and more specifically the types of services they need depending on their disability. Misidentification can occur when students from racial and ethnic minority groups are inappropriately recognized as students with a disability and are placed in special education settings that remove them from the general education curriculum. Learning goals established for these students may be based erroneously on the inappropriate diagnosis of a disability, as would be instructional methods and assessment techniques, thus, further pulling them from engagement in general education content and instructional and assessment methods.

### *Intervention Strategies:*

**Prereferral interventions** are school-based interventions that provide opportunities for educators and stakeholders to find assessment and instructional methods that positively impact students who are having difficulty in the general education setting. The goal is to implement interventions that will eliminate the need for a child to be referred for special education services. Examples of effective prereferral models include:

- **Teacher Assistance Teams (TAT)** is a prereferral strategy that focuses on supporting the general education teacher to develop and implement classroom and instructional supports for a student who is having academic, emotional or behavioral difficulties. The TAT is comprised of teachers, psychologists, specialists, and parents who meet regularly to discuss the child's situation, create an action plan, monitor its progress, and evaluate the impact of the intervention on student learning in the general education setting.
- **Skills Promoted through Arts, Reading, and Knowledge (SPARK)** addresses the cultural disconnects between ethnic minorities and the traditional curriculum. This creative arts, literacy-based curriculum, is geared to preschool children. It is useful for inclusive settings as it is easily adaptable to diverse learning needs. The SPARK curriculum consists of 25 units and requires about an hour a day of classroom time. This intervention has had a positive impact English Language Learners (ELLs).

- 
- **Prereferral Assessment Model (PAM)** is a systematic screening model for academic and behavior problems that utilizes a multiple gating process that consists of four main phases: two data gathering phases, designing a research-based intervention, and implementing the intervention. The purpose of the assessment is to identify students who may be in need of help because of academic and/or behavior problems. Peer comparison is used to determine how students' performances differ from one another. Each phase of the assessment process can be conducted rapidly. Intervention services can be provided within one to two weeks after the problem has been identified; therefore, hopefully preventing more significant academic/behavior problems from arising, thereby, ensuring that the student remains in the general education setting and is engaged in general education instruction, materials, and assessment.

### **Resources:**

The Disproportionate Representation of Racial and Ethnic Minorities in Special Education- models. EMSTAC product.

<http://www.emstac.org/registered/topics/disproportionality/models.htm>

SPARK website

<http://www.ed.uiuc.edu/sped/spark/>

100 Black Men of America

[http://www.100blackmen.org/100BMOA\\_PROGRAMS/wimberly/EduMainFrame.html](http://www.100blackmen.org/100BMOA_PROGRAMS/wimberly/EduMainFrame.html)

Facilitating Teacher Assistance Teams: Key Questions. NASSP Bulletin.

[http://www.nassp.org/news/bltn\\_tchr\\_asst901.html](http://www.nassp.org/news/bltn_tchr_asst901.html)

Determining Appropriate Referrals of English Language Learners to Special Education: A Self-Assessment Guide for Principals. NABE.

<http://www.ideapractices.org/resources/files/NABEGuide.pdf>

A Suggested Guide to the Special Education, Preferral Process for Bilingual Learners. Title VII M.O.D.E.L.S Project.

<http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/classroom/voices/aladjem.pdf>

## **PLACEMENT**

Placement refers to the nature of the special education services or program in which a child with a disability is placed. Examples include a general education classroom with additional supports, pullout services, or a self-contained classroom. While any of these educational settings can limit a child's access to the general education curriculum, statistics show that students with culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are disproportionately placed in more restrictive environments further inhibiting their participation and engagement in general education curriculum, goals, and instructional opportunities. The following strategies are examples of methods for ensuring fair and proper placement for students in need of special education services.

### **Intervention Strategies:**

**Grouping strategies** are a way to organize students into learning clusters that facilitate their engagement and participation in classroom content. Much research has been conducted using learning groups comprised of students of varying ages, achievement

---

levels, and disabilities (Vaughn). These organizational schemas positively impact upon student learning and minimize the necessity to pull the student out of a classroom setting to receive more intensive instructional interventions.

**Resources:**

Instructional Grouping for Reading for Students with LD: Implications for Practice.  
[www.ldonline.org/ld\\_indepth/reading/instructional\\_grouping.html](http://www.ldonline.org/ld_indepth/reading/instructional_grouping.html)

The Effect of Instructional Grouping Format on the Reading Outcomes of Students with Disabilities: A Meta-Analytic Review.  
[www.nclld.org/research/osep\\_reading.cfm](http://www.nclld.org/research/osep_reading.cfm)

Marston, D. (1996). *A Comparison of Inclusion Only, Pull-Out Only, and Combined Service Models for Students with Mild Disabilities*. The Journal of Special Education.

Vaughn, S. (1998). Broken Promises: Reading Instruction in the Resource Room. Exceptional Children.

## INSTRUCTION

The ability of a student with a disability to access the general education curriculum can vary widely depending on school and district curriculum as well as classroom-based issues such as the degree to which a teacher is prepared to teach students with diverse learning styles and needs. It is often difficult for students of racial and ethnic backgrounds to fully access the general education curriculum because of cultural or linguistic incongruence with classroom content or instruction. Implementing specific instructional methods or interventions that are culturally relevant can help teachers more effectively teach and engage all and positively impact their learning.

**Intervention Strategies:**

**Culturally appropriate pedagogy** is a framework used to integrate diverse cultures into the overall academic program. This pedagogy forms the basis for multicultural education. The Education Alliance at Brown University has put together an extensive kit that brings together current research on human development and cultural diversity. It explores issues of diversity in education and recommends activities that are essential for schools and teachers who are committed to quality education for all students.

**Pre-existing knowledge** is a core concept of the Science of Learning and is shaped by social and cultural experience. Small differences in cultural knowledge can affect student learning. A well know example is the *Fish is a Fish* story (Lionni, 1970) where the fish's images of other animals are influenced by his knowledge of the distinguishing features of fish. In order to affectively engage students in learning new material, teachers need to be aware of a student's pre-existing knowledge so to help the child make the proper connections between what he already knows and the new content. Teachers should provide opportunities for students to activate their pre-existing knowledge when learning new concepts and also monitor how students integrate prior knowledge with new information.

**Learning Strategies** help students learn information and solve problems. These strategies engage the student through active learning. Examples of learning strategies include graphic organizers and mnemonic techniques that help students remember

---

information. For instance, students can be taught techniques for identifying prefixes, suffixes, and stems to help them decode unknown words. These strategies enable the student to apply their own cultural perceptions to the learning content.

**Peer Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS)** allows for students to interact through “coach/player” pairings in structured learning activities where they support each other through frequent verbal interaction and feedback. PALS is an effective instructional method for integrating students with disabilities, socially and academically, into the general education classroom. While originally developed for grades 2-6, the PALS program has been modified and is currently being implemented with students from kindergarten to secondary school level.

**Resources:**

Utley, C. and Obiakor, F. (2001). *Special Education, Multicultural Education, and School Reform*.

Selecting Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Materials: Suggestions for Service Providers. ERIC Digest. <http://www.ericfacility.net/ericdigests/ed431546.html>

The Diversity Kit: An Introductory Resources for Social Change in Education. The Education Alliance.  
<http://www.lab.brown.edu/tdl/index.shtml>

Six Promising Schoolwide Programs For Raising Student Achievement. American Federation of Teachers. <http://www.aft.org/edissues/whatworks/six/ck/>

Bransford, J.D., Brown, A.L., & Cocking, R.R. (Eds.). (1999). *How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, and School*.

Strategic research: A summary of Learning Strategies and related research. University of Kansas – Center for Research on Learning.  
<http://www.ku-crl.org/archives/2002/0602spot.html>

Mnemonics Information Brief. The Access Center Information Brief.  
[http://www.k8accesscenter.org/training\\_resources/curricular\\_materials.asp](http://www.k8accesscenter.org/training_resources/curricular_materials.asp)

Effective Teaching Practices and the Barriers Limiting their Use in Accessing the Curriculum  
<http://cast.org/ncac/index.cfm?i=1942>

Peer Assisted Learning Strategies. The Access Center Information Brief.  
[http://www.k8accesscenter.org/training\\_resources/curricular\\_materials.asp](http://www.k8accesscenter.org/training_resources/curricular_materials.asp)

## QUALITY PERSONNEL

Quality teachers are essential for helping students successfully access the general education curriculum. The number of highly trained educational professionals who understand the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse learners and the strategies for engaging them in the classroom are unfortunately too small. This lack of diversity in teaching staff coupled with insufficient cultural awareness and knowledge can greatly hinder access to the general education curriculum for students of culturally and diverse

---

backgrounds. Intervention strategies need to address both the pre-service and in-service activities.

***Intervention Strategies:***

**Pre-Service: Teacher Training Programs**

Recruitment of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds for teacher training programs needs to be undertaken. Currently, OSEP funds two projects, LASER and LAESE, which are working to increase the pre-service opportunities for students who are culturally and/or linguistically diverse. They also expect to enhance the capability of faculty and graduate students to conduct research that will benefit students from minority backgrounds. In addition, within teacher programs, course work needs to address the divergent cultures and ethnicities these teachers will encounter in their schools. This needs to occur for both general and special education preparation courses and for teachers of all backgrounds.

**In-Service: Professional Development Activities**

Ensure that in-service professional development activities contain culturally appropriate training and information. Workshops should focus on the concerns and situations of specific racial and ethnic groups that exist in the community. It can be beneficial to both the parents and the staff to include parents in the process. Parents can help to teach staff about their family's culture, both increasing culturally awareness and building a relationship between staff and parents. Professional development approaches should consider teacher input both in terms of method and content. Research-based instructional practices should be included. In addition, there a number of organizations, such as the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, that provide professional development resources on numerous topics including multicultural education.

**Resources:**

Preparing Teachers for Multicultural Classrooms

<http://www.ncele.gwu.edu/miscpubs/jeilms/vol14/chisholm.htm>

Professional Development for Teachers in Culturally Diverse Schools. Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory.

[www.cal.org/ericcl/digest/profdvpt.html](http://www.cal.org/ericcl/digest/profdvpt.html)

Linking Academic Scholars to Educational Resources(LASER)

<http://www.coedu.usf.edu/LASER/>

Leadership, Alliance, and Excellence in Special Education Center (LAESE)

College of Education at University of Illinois at Chicago

[nrl@uic.edu](mailto:nrl@uic.edu); (312) 996-5650

American Federation of Teachers- Professional Development

<http://www.aft.org/edissues/teacherquality/Prodev.htm>

Center for Research on Teaching and Learning: whole section "For Multicultural Teaching" <http://www.crlt.umich.edu/>

ERIC Clearinghouse on Teaching and Teacher Education

---

<http://www.ericsp.org/>

Center for Multilingual, Multicultural Research – Teacher Education and Professional Development

[http://www-bcf.usc.edu/~cmmr/Teacher\\_Ed.html](http://www-bcf.usc.edu/~cmmr/Teacher_Ed.html)

Assessment Strategies for Professional Development Activities

<http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/miscpubs/eacwest/profdev/index.htm>

## **ASSESSMENT/ACCOUNTABILITY**

Current assessment tools and methods are not always sensitive to students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. For example, administering an assessment in English to ELLS does not properly measure the student's content learning. Inappropriate assessment tools and methods can lead to inaccurate results which can inhibit a child's ability to access the general education curriculum.

### ***Intervention Strategies:***

**Curriculum Based Assessment** uses the curriculum and day-to-day activities to monitor student progress. A common method is for a teacher to give the student brief timed tests and then they grade and graph them. This graph shows the teacher how well the student is doing longitudinally - and if a teacher notes her instructional strategies and when they were used - it is possible to determine if one particular intervention is working. CBM can include some decision rules too. For example, it can be determined that a student is making substantial progress and therefore the goal can be raised. CBA/CBM is individual, and it's results show how just one kid is doing - not how they're doing with respect to the class. It may be particularly useful in transition from resource room environment.

### ***Resources:***

The National Center on Educational Outcomes

<http://education.umn.edu/nceo/>

includes reports on:

A Summary of Research on the Effects of Test Accommodations: 1999 through 2001

<http://education.umn.edu/nceo/OnlinePubs/Technical34.htm>

A Self-Study Guide to Implementation of Inclusive Assessment and Accountability Systems: A Best Practice Approach

<http://education.umn.edu/nceo/OnlinePubs/workbook.pdf>

Curricular Based Assessment: Practical Applications for Data Driven Decisions. EMSTAC Product.

<http://www.emstac.org/registered/topics/cba/index.htm>

Intervention Central.

[www.lefthandlogic.com](http://www.lefthandlogic.com)

*Assessing bilingual students for placement and instruction.* ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education. <http://eric-web.tc.columbia.edu/digest/dig65.asp>

## CONCLUSION

We hope this information provides a starting point for readers to think about the educational areas whose circumstances can adversely impact upon a student's ability to engage in the general education curriculum. For students who are culturally and/or linguistically diverse, these issues become even more important to ensure that decisions do not lead to misidentification, inappropriate placement, poor instructional interventions, lack of qualified personnel, and inaccurate assessment techniques. The adverse consequences of these decisions can lead to the diminished participation of students in general education content and thereby, significantly inhibit their educational opportunities.

The Access Center is a national technical assistance center funded by the U. S. Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). Through our diverse TA methods we provide strategies and resources to improve access to the general education curriculum for students with disabilities at elementary and middle school levels. We define access as student participation, engagement, and learning through general education curricula accomplished through attention on learning goals, instructional methods, teaching materials, and assessment and accountability measures.

For additional information on strategies for access or other topics, please contact The Access Center at [accesscenter@air.org](mailto:accesscenter@air.org).

### **The Access Center: Improving Outcomes for All Students K-8**

Hosted at the American Institutes for Research

1000 Thomas Jefferson St. NW, Washington, DC 20007

Ph: 202-403-5000 TTY: 877-334-3499 Fax: 202-403-5001

e-mail: [accesscenter@air.org](mailto:accesscenter@air.org) website: [www.k8accesscenter.org](http://www.k8accesscenter.org)