TQ Center Research & Policy Brief:
Challenges in Evaluating Special Education Teachers and English Language Learner Specialists

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The Purpose

Survey information, combined with a targeted examination of state and district practices, is used to do the following:

- Identify the specific challenges in evaluating this population of teachers.
- Determine the current status of state policy and practice.
- Identify promising evaluation practices and instruments.
- Provide guidance and policy recommendations to regional comprehensive centers (RCCs) and state education agencies (SEAs).
The Problem

- Few new evaluation models have addressed the challenges associated with evaluating specialty area teachers, particularly the challenges in accurately measuring achievement growth for these students and connecting that growth to teacher effects.

- Much of the literature is related to teacher quality (e.g., experience, credentials, self-efficacy; see Blanton, Sindelar, & Correa, 2006; Carlson, Lee, & Schroll, 2004).

- The need to identify effective teaching and improve teaching practices remains.
The Investigation

- Review of policy/literature
- Survey inquiry
  - Designed with consultation from national experts
  - State and local survey: deliberately designed for special education administrators
  - Respondent pool (Council for Exceptional Children, Council of Administrators of Special Education, State Directors of Special Education, and ELL specialists)
  - Literature review and phone interviews with ELL specialists
- Series of interviews with state- and district-level practitioners and researchers
- Data collection period: December 2009–April 2010
State and Local Participation

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<tr>
<th>State Respondents</th>
<th>Local Respondents</th>
<th>Total Respondents</th>
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<td>36</td>
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State Involvement in Teacher Evaluation

State-Level Respondents Only

- 46.2% Yes
- 28.8% No
- 13.5% Don't Know
- 11.5% No, not yet, but Race to the Top will impact state involvement.

Don't Know

www.tqsource.org
Allowance for Different/Modified System for Special Educators

All Respondents

- Yes: 26.0%
- No: 71.9%
- Don't Know: 2.1%

81.4% of local respondents indicated that contractual agreements prevent modification.
Opinions Regarding Special Education Teacher Evaluation

- **Require specialized knowledge and skill:**
  - Strongly Disagree: 91.7%
  - Disagree: 8%
  - Neither Agree nor Disagree: 0%
  - Agree: 0%
  - Strongly Agree: 0%

- **Should be evaluated with the same process:**
  - Strongly Disagree: 8%
  - Disagree: 10%
  - Neither Agree nor Disagree: 20%
  - Agree: 30%
  - Strongly Agree: 20%

- **Use of evidence-based practices a component:**
  - Strongly Disagree: 91.7%
  - Disagree: 8%
  - Neither Agree nor Disagree: 0%
  - Agree: 0%
  - Strongly Agree: 0%
Meeting the needs of “diverse” learners may not attend to the special skills and evidence-based instructional methods for students with disabilities and ELLs.

- Direct/Explicit Instruction
- Scientifically Based Reading Instruction
- Learning Strategy Instruction
- Sociocultural Knowledge and Awareness

Language proficiency yields more than academic outcomes for students (Reeves, 2009).
Measurement Instruments

- Other
- Goal-Driven Professional...
- Parent/Family Teacher...
- Student Teacher Evaluations
- Self-Report Measures
- Teacher Portfolio
- Classroom Artifacts
- Observation Protocols
- Criterion Referenced/CBM
- Standardized Achievement Test

- Total
- Local
- State
Practical Example: District of Columbia IMPACT

- Individual Teacher Value-Added Scores
- Non-Value-Added Achievement
- Teaching and Learning Framework
- Commitment to the Community
- School Value-Added Scores
- Core Professionalism
Practical Example: District of Columbia IMPACT

**Special Education**

- Individual Teacher Value-Added Scores
- Non-Value-Added Achievement **10%**
- Teaching and Learning Framework **50%**
- Commitment to the Community **5%**
- School Value-Added Scores **5%**
- Core Professionalism
- IEP Quality Plan **15%**
- IEP Timeliness **15%**
Are special educators included in the use of student growth measures as an evaluation measurement?

- 40.8% Yes, for all special education teachers
- 43.2% Yes, only for teachers meeting inclusion criteria
- 11.2% No
- 4.8% Don't Know
Opinions Regarding Use of Student Achievement for Special Educators

- Achievement gains should be a component.
- Standardized test scores should be a component.
- Progress on the IEP should be a component.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree
Student Growth Measures

- Practical Example: Austin Independent School District, Texas
  - Student Learning Objectives
    - One targeted toward classroom performance
    - One targeted toward particular skills or subgroups of students

- Practical Example: Norwell Public Schools, Massachusetts
  - Progress on the individualized education program (IEP) factored into evaluation of special educators

- Both districts heavily dependent on teacher training and support
Observation Protocols

- Alabama Department of Education’s Professional Education Personnel Evaluation Program
  - Slightly modified for the following:
    - Specialty area systems (speech paths, library specialist)
    - Teachers of students with significant cognitive disabilities
      - Competencies added in certain areas (e.g., classroom is expanded to include community settings, and academic content is expanded to include functional life skills.)

- SIOP (Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol) in use for professional development (Echevarria, Short, & Powers, 2008)
Opinions Regarding Evaluators

Evaluators of special educators should receive special training.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree Nor Disagree

Evaluators of special educators should have experience in special education.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree Nor Disagree
Promising Practices

➢ Toledo’s Peer Assistance and Review (PAR)

➢ Case Study: Norwell Public Schools, Massachusetts
  • All teachers are evaluated using the same instrument.
  • Two formative assessments are conducted:
    ▪ One with principal
    ▪ One with special education administrator
  • Each evaluator focuses on expertise areas.
  • Both work collaboratively to develop summative evaluation.
Opinions Regarding Attribution in Coteaching Setting

- Special educators in a coteaching role held accountable for students with disabilities only:
  - Strongly Disagree
  - Disagree
  - Neither Disagree or Agree
  - Agree
  - Strongly Agree

- Special educators in a coteaching role held accountable for all students:
  - Strongly Disagree
  - Disagree
  - Neither Disagree or Agree
  - Agree
  - Strongly Agree

- Both teachers held accountable for all students:
  - Strongly Disagree
  - Disagree
  - Neither Disagree or Agree
  - Agree
  - Strongly Agree
Coteaching Promising Practices

- Value-Added Example – Olentangy Local Schools, Ohio
  - Teachers review and correct data by accounting for shared instruction/coteaching by linking teachers to students and determining level of attribution collaboratively.

- Non-Value-Added Example – Edison Elementary, Denver, Colorado
  - Student growth objectives are established by teachers.
  - General education teachers develop student growth objectives and are held accountable for all students, regardless of disability status.
Recommendations

- Include special education and ELL administrators when revamping/designing evaluation frameworks.
- Identify a common framework that defines effective teaching for all teachers, differentiating for special educators and ELL specialists as appropriate.
- Integrate evidence-based practices for students with disabilities and ELLs into evaluation models.
- Improve data quality.
Recommendations

- Establish a culture of collaboration, trust, and empowerment in which clear expectations of performance are explicitly stated and expected.

- In addition to or, in some situations, in the absence of appropriate standardized assessment data, incorporate other reliable evidence of teachers’ contributions to student learning into the teacher evaluation system such as progress toward accomplishing IEP objectives and student learning objectives across broad academic and behavioral domains.
Recommendations

- Ensure that evaluator training includes explicit training for evaluators of special educators and ELL specialists and/or consider establishing a model of peer-to-peer observations or a model in which evaluators are matched to specific disciplines.

- Support research in determining means to construct and validate value-added scores for teachers working on alternative standards.

- Consider modifying existing statute/policy to allow for modification in the evaluation of educators.
Recommendations

- Offer a checklist or rubric that offers selection criteria for evaluation models that includes specific standards for special educators and ELL specialists.
- Collaborate with teacher preparation programs to ensure that evidence-based practices are incorporated into teacher preparation coursework and professional development activities.


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