

## Introduction to the special issue: improving outcomes for students with exceptionalities in the general curriculum.

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### **Article:**

Good special education must be the hallmark of every community in the nation. (Cruickshank, 1985, pp. 579-580)

Beginning with Public Law 94-142 (see Education for All Handicapped Children Act [IDEA] of 1975, codified and amended as Individuals With Disabilities Education Act of 2000), a succession of legislative acts has had a powerful influence on public education (in this issue, Hardman & Dawson; see also Swanson & Stevenson, 2002). With the more recent enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 and the IDEA of 2004, there is an unwavering commitment to ensuring that students with disabilities have access to general education. These laws have substantially raised the proverbial bar as it relates to the quality of classroom instruction. Today, students with disabilities must not only receive an individualized education but also achieve prescribed academic standards. The question facing school personnel is how to accomplish this. The tremendous challenge associated with improving outcomes for students with disabilities has left many present-day general and special educators struggling to find a solution.

Answering the question of how to improve all students' learning is not easy. For that reason, the editors decided to devote two issues of *Preventing School Failure* to the topic. This issue offers readers alternatives to traditional approaches to curriculum and instruction, whereas the next issue will focus on ways to manage students' behavior effectively. For both issues, contributors critically discuss evidence-based practices that general and special educators could practice. In each article, the author or authors include a quick-reference table that contains tips on ways to use information that should produce positive outcomes for students with diverse learning needs.

Because federal policy leads educational change, this issue begins with an article by Mike Hardman and Shirley Dawson looking at how practitioners can make sense out of the myriad changes in policy. Hardman and Dawson discuss the impact of federal legislation and public policy on curriculum and instruction in the general-education classroom. They briefly review of the history of educational reform and explore the difficult policy issues currently facing school personnel. Pointing out that in the age of standards, accountability, and high-stakes testing, policy does matter, they offer a clear description of current mandates and how increased accessibility, accountability, and uses of research-based strategies affect daily classroom practices. Hardman and Dawson conclude by sharing thoughts about future policy issues. Their discussion will serve as a roadmap by which practitioners can negotiate the twists and turns emerging from recent federal legislation and public policy.

How can teachers adhere to new policy mandates while meeting the broad learning needs of students in their classrooms? Researchers and educators have discussed differentiated instruction, but they have not offered a lot of guidance about how to do it. With general and special education colleagues Madeleine Gregg and Edwin Ellis, Robert A. Gable and I offer a rationale for the use of differentiated instruction. On the basis of a careful

review of the accumulated literature, we developed the REACH blueprint as a guide to differentiating instruction for learners with broad learning needs. We also include a case study and a three-step plan for using the REACH blueprint in the real-world classroom.

Given the prominent role accountability has played in the standards-based reform movement, Pamela M. Stecker, Erica S. Lembke, and Anne Foegen examine the place of progress monitoring in meeting the increasingly diverse needs of students. These authors begin with a review of past-to-present approaches to student assessment. Then they offer curriculum-based measurement (CBM) as a framework to facilitate the monitoring of pupils' progress. Suggesting techniques such as oral reading fluency and maze fluency, they discuss practical ways in which general and special educators can use student-assessment data to make sound instructional decisions. Within the context of a case study, they illustrate how to use a five-step plan to make timely, data-based instructional decisions. Stecker, Lembke, and Foegen emphasize the value of CBM not only in monitoring student performance but also in evaluating the effectiveness of teacher instruction.

Another topic that relates to instruction of students with disabilities is coteaching. Many general and special education professionals have a marked ambivalence toward coteaching: Some love it and others hate it. In their article on cooperative teaching, Amanda Kloo and Naomi Zigmond review the research and the practice of coteaching. Drawing on that review, they redraft the familiar coteaching blueprint and offer a fresh perspective on how to maximize its effectiveness. Their innovative blueprint incorporates the mnemonics TEACH and SUPPORT to help coteachers collaborate in ways that support meaningful access and achieve extra benefit for students with broad learning needs in inclusive classrooms. They de-emphasize interactions between coteachers and instead focus on educators' grouping of students for instruction.

To avoid leaving secondary students with disabilities behind, Charlotte J. Boling and William H. Evans offer educators a blueprint for embedding reading instruction into differing content-area curricula. Based on the scaffolded reading experience, their blueprint includes practical techniques and strategies that adolescents can use before, during, and after reading to enhance comprehension and get greater meaning from print-based information. Realizing the importance of instructional scaffolding, Boling and Evans provide an organizational framework whereby the content-area teacher acts as a systematic guide to all students by stimulating their prior knowledge, helping them to make important connections, and maximizing their success in the classroom. Educators should find the examples that Boling and Evans weave throughout their article particularly helpful in trying to guarantee students with disabilities access to the general secondary education curriculum.

Seeking to bridge the gap between research and practice and to ensure a voice for professionals at the school-district, building, and classroom levels, we include an article by Grace Meo of the Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST). CAST devotes itself to discovering ways for educators to make education accessible and rewarding to all students. CAST personnel use research, professional development, policy, publications, and products to disseminate information. In her article, Meo shares techniques for educators to translate principles of universally designed curriculum into daily classroom practice. To do so, she uses a composite case illustration based on CAST's recent work with 12 high school content teachers and special educators. Meo describes how, during an 18-month professional development project, CAST personnel worked alongside classroom teachers to reduce curriculum barriers and increase all students' achievement of content standards by universal design for learning (UDL), the PAL technique, and research-based reading comprehension strategies. Last, Meo describes how educators can cut the prescribed curriculum to accommodate the needs of individual students.

Also for the practitioner, the Tips for Teaching section aims at helping secondary-level teachers improve the reading skills of students who are culturally and linguistically diverse. Like Boling and Evans, Kathleen McQuiston, Doris O'Shea, and Michelle McCollin focus on ways to help older students who struggle in reading to experience academic success. Whereas Boling and Evans offer a blueprint for improving secondary-level students' reading comprehension, McQuiston and colleagues provide various direct and explicit instructional strategies for teaching phonological awareness and decoding skills. Educators will find the tips and

corresponding examples especially useful as they try to incorporate the developmentally appropriate and culturally responsive strategies into their secondary classrooms.

As the name of the journal implies, the executive board of Preventing School Failure is dedicated to meeting the learning and behavioral needs of children and adolescents in diverse educational settings. In this first part of the special-issue series, the spotlight will be on curriculum and instruction. Contributors have drafted blueprints--with mnemonics such as PAL, TEACH, SUPPORT, and REACH--and offer sound instructional tips to help educators close the achievement gap for students with disabilities. The authors have written with the hope of changing the world--at least the world of general and special education.

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