

Success with the Common Core Learning Standards: General Guidelines for Students with Disabilities

Since the spring of 2010, New York City has implemented significant special education reforms to ensure appropriate referrals for special education evaluations and services, and to support teaching students with disabilities in their least restrictive environment. Based on five guiding principles, schools are developing more inclusive educational programming options for students with disabilities in order to improve student outcomes, soon to be based on the Common Core Learning Standards. As the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School assert, “These common standards provide a historic opportunity to improve access to rigorous academic content standards for students with disabilities.” (Common Core State Standards Initiative, <http://www.corestandards.org/the-standards>, Retrieved August 15, 2011).

Guiding Principles of the NYC’s Special Education Reform

1. Every school should educate and embrace the overwhelming majority of students with disabilities. A cohort of students with low-incidence disabilities or highly specialized needs will continue to be clustered in specialized instructional programs in community and/or specialized schools.
2. Hold all schools and students with disabilities accountable for goals that are standards-based. IEPs should reflect New York State learning standards and emphasize long-term educational outcomes.
3. All schools should have the curricular, instructional, and scheduling flexibility needed to meet the diverse needs of students with disabilities with accountability outcomes.
4. School accountability measures, funding formulas, and enrollment policies and practices will be aligned with the foregoing principles.
5. Schools must be active partners with parents of students with disabilities.

Access to the Common Core Learning Standards

In order to better facilitate the successful use of the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) with students with disabilities, the Division is focused on applying the framework of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) to the CCLS-aligned tasks. UDL is a set of principles that places accessibility at the forefront, rather than retrofitted at the end, after students experience predictable barriers. UDL assumes variance in the manner in which students learn, rather than questioning whether students can learn. As Rose and Meyer (2002) of CAST suggest, through the lens of UDL, “Learners cannot be reduced to simple categories such as ‘disabled’ or ‘bright.’” Rather, students are educated as unique individuals, each with particular strengths and weaknesses. The ultimate goals for all students are the same, but the paths to the goals vary. The leaders of the Common Core State Standards Initiative recognize the heterogeneity of students with disabilities and insist that they are held to equally high standards and prepared for college and careers.

A student’s Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or 504 Plan is the blueprint intended to guide all work towards maximizing each student’s potential and minimizing the impact of disability for the student (Hehir, 2002). The development of individualized goals and accommodations are integral to success on CCLS-aligned tasks. Here are two examples of how a student’s IEP or 504 Plan might be implemented:

- A student with ADHD might require that a long-term project due in one month be divided into shorter-term assignments due once a week for four weeks. Shorter-term due dates could help any child to build their organizational skills. Additionally, task checklists, graphic organizers and periodic peer review or teacher conferencing would scaffold support by providing progress monitoring.
- An adolescent student with dyslexia or with an intellectual disability may read Shakespeare with an audio version and use speech-to-text software to develop her essay in order to have access to the same academic standards as her peers. Speech-to-text software, such as Dragon Naturally Speaking is a technology opening up new avenues for writing. Audio would not preclude her from receiving reading instruction, but her need for reading instruction should not preclude her from accessing complex literature.

In both of these examples, not only are the students with the disabilities provided access, but other students in the class can benefit as well, making these interventions universally accessible. There will be a small group of students with disabilities, those with the most significant intellectual disabilities for example, that will require more substantial supports for meaningful access to occur. According to the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State Schools, such “supports and accommodations should ensure that students receive access to multiple means of learning and opportunities to demonstrate knowledge, but retain the rigor and high expectations of the Common Core State Standards” (Common Core State Standards Initiative, <http://www.corestandards.org/the-standards>, Retrieved August 15, 2011).

In general, schools should:

- Plan lessons using information from the student’s IEP that is aligned with the CCLS using the UDL framework. This includes, but is not limited to:
 - Anticipating potential barriers to learning and planning for student success
 - Providing accommodations to meet individual student needs
 - Using assistive technology where appropriate
- Take steps to ensure that a student’s IEP is implemented, including but not limited to:
 - Providing copies of the student’s IEP, as appropriate*
 - Identifying staff who will be responsible to provide the recommended services, accommodations, program modifications and supports in accordance with the IEP
 - Designating an individual who is knowledgeable about the student's disability and program to inform staff of their IEP responsibilities
 - Planning how resources and materials necessary to implement the IEP will be obtained (e.g., instructional materials in alternative formats; assistive technology devices ordered)
 - Arranging, as appropriate, for testing accommodations
 - Determining how coordination with other agencies, if appropriate, will occur (*Guide to Quality Individualized Education Program (IEP) Development and Implementation*, <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/specialed/publications/iepguidance.htm>, Retrieved August 15, 2011).
- Develop systems to support the success of students with disabilities. This includes, but is not limited to the use of:
 - Inquiry Teams
 - Pupil Personnel Team Meetings
 - Common planning time
 - Ongoing professional development that includes application of research-based practices
 - Inter-visitations

Please use the one-page UDL suggestions found with each task in the Common Core Library as a starting point for planning with all students in mind. We have also developed additional supports for each task that we hope you find helpful. We must ensure that all students have access to the Common Core Learning Standards in

order to make sure that these bright young people have all the advantages we can offer for their successful future in the college or career of their choice, and as independent adults.

* Please refer to Chapter 408 – *Providing Copies of the Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) for Students with Disabilities* for detailed information. <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/specialed/publications/policy/chap408final.pdf>.