Challenges in Evaluating Special Education Teachers: Linking Teacher Effectiveness to Student Outcomes

Urban Special Education Leadership Collaborative
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Overview

A Review and Discussion of
• National Teacher Evaluation Efforts
• Challenges in Evaluating Special Educators
• Examples of Practice
• Potential Considerations

A shift in emphasis to:
- Teacher Effectiveness
- Student Growth
Learning Targets

Seeks to build the capacity of participants to

• Articulate the challenges identified with evaluating special education teachers through value-added and other measures of teacher evaluation.

• Actively participate in the creation or redesign of teacher evaluation models that support the development of strong, valid and reliable teacher evaluation policies and practices that recognize and promote the unique contribution of special education teachers.
Beyond Highly Qualified...A Major Shift

- **FROM** tracking teacher qualifications, which are at best, weak indicators of teacher effectiveness (Goe, 2007; Harris, 2009)
  - Experience matters, but only for the first five years
  - Teacher’s subject matter knowledge appears to contribute significantly to math achievement but not in other subjects
Beyond Highly Qualified...A Major Shift

➢ TO linking teachers with their student’s achievement to determine teacher effectiveness

• Value-added research shows that teachers vary greatly in their contributions to student achievement and teacher effectiveness is the most influential school-based factor in student achievement (Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2002; Sanders & Horn, 1998; Sanders & Rivers, 1996).
The research and data are clear—teacher quality is the single most important variable impacting student achievement (Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2005; Rockoff, 2004).

“Everything else—educational standards, testing, class size, greater accountability is background… (U)ltimately, the success of U.S. public education depends upon the skills of the 3.1 million teachers managing classrooms in elementary and secondary schools around the country” (Gordon, Kane, and Staiger, 2006).
The Push To Refocus

Research, Papers, and National Efforts
- *So Long, Lake Wobegone* (2009) - Center for American Progress

All teachers are rated as good or great. Because of this…
- Excellent performance goes unnoticed
- Typical goes without support to improve further
- Chronically low performing goes unaddressed

Results of Teacher Evaluation have little/no impact on HR decisions
- Retention, promotion, placement, compensation, professional development, tenure, etc.
Attention Mounts

Policy

• State Fiscal Stabilization Funds (4 assurances, Great teachers/leaders)
  ▪ LEA’s might use SFSF money to “[establish] fair and reliable evaluation systems that provide feedback, help educators improve, and ensure that poor performers are dismissed”

• Race to the Top (4 assurances) went further ..
  ▪ (D)(2) Improving teacher and principal effectiveness based on performance (58 points)

• Teacher Incentive Funds/State Improvement Grants
• ESEA Reauthorization Recommendations
Educator effectiveness priorities in the Race to the Top Fund include the following:

- Differentiating teacher and principal effectiveness based on performance.
- Compensating and promoting teachers based on effectiveness.
- Providing effective support to teachers and principals.
- Ensuring the equitable distribution of effective teachers and principals.
Federal and State Theory of Action

- Improved Evaluation System
- Improved Educator Quality
- Improved Student Outcomes
Thoughts and Experience

If you were to observe an highly effective teacher what might you see or hear?
Sense of Urgency

- States (with RTTT, SIG dollars, and/or statutory requirements) feel an increased urgency to design comprehensive teacher evaluation systems.
- Few teacher evaluation systems/models address the unique challenges in accurately measuring achievement growth for students with disabilities and connecting that growth to teacher effects.
- Few teacher evaluation systems take into account the specific roles and responsibilities of special educators.
Persistent Challenges in Special Education

- Persistent achievement gap for students with disabilities
- Issues with teacher retention, recruitment, and attrition (McLesky & Billingsley, 2008)
- Special education positions are left vacant or filled with uncertified personnel (Billingsley, Fall, & Williams, 2006; Boe & Cook, 2006)
- A limited use of evidenced-based practices (Reschly, Holdheide, Smart, & Oliver, 2007; Walsh, Glaser, & Wilcox, 2006)
Formidable content & pedagogical demands

Diverse & increasing caseloads (Carlson et al., 2002; McLeskey et al., 2004)

Special education teachers often have little input into co-teaching and collaborative instruction & a general lack of clarity about roles (Gehrke & Murri, 2006)
Impact on Special Educators

Should special educators be included in the accountability mandates?

Should special educators be included in performance-based compensation systems?

• **IF SO, we need to**
  • identify the special challenges in evaluating special educators so that they can be included in a fair and accurate manner
  • define roles and responsibilities in special education
  • determine where evaluation systems fit and/or need to be differentiated for special educators
What do you know?

Turn to someone at your table. Share anything you know about what is going on with teacher evaluation in your state/district – with specific emphasis on how special education teachers are evaluated.
Thoughts

Given what you currently know, is there a need to differentiate the educator evaluation process for special educators?

• In measuring student growth?
• In assessing educator competencies?
Purpose

- 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 districts and states.

The Inquiry

- Review of policy/literature
- Survey inquiry
- Series of interviews with state- and district-level practitioners and researchers
- Data collection period: December 2009–April 2010

- Designed in collaboration with Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) and national experts
- State and local survey
- Respondent pool: state and local directors (identified within CEC’s Council of Administrators of special education listserv)

1,143 total respondents
Modification of Evaluation Processes for Special Educators

Among the local administrators, 81% reported that contractual agreement prevented modification in the evaluation process.
Opinions Regarding Special Education Teacher Evaluation

- **Special educator use of evidence-based strategies should be a component of the evaluation process.**
  - Strongly Agree or Agree: 92%

- **Special educators should be evaluated using the same evaluation process as that of general education teachers.**
  - Neither Agree nor Disagree: 32%

- **Special educators are required to have knowledge, skills, and expertise that general education teachers are not.**
  - Strongly Agree or Agree: 84%
Policy Requirements

- Increasing effective and highly effective teachers
  - number and/or percentage
  - retention and equitable distribution

- Method for determining and identifying effective and highly effective teachers
  - must include **multiple measures**
  - Effectiveness evaluated, in significant part, on the basis of student growth
  - supplemental measures may include, e.g. multiple observation based instruments
Measures of teacher effectiveness

• Evidence of growth in student learning and competency
  ▪ Standardized tests, pre/post tests in untested subjects
  ▪ Student performance (art, music, etc.)
  ▪ Curriculum-based tests given in a standardized manner
  ▪ Classroom-based tests such as DIBELS

• Evidence of instructional quality
  ▪ Classroom observations
  ▪ Lesson plans, assignments, and student work

• Other evidence (varies, based on local values)
  ▪ Administrator/supervisor reports
  ▪ Surveys of students and/or parents
  ▪ An “evidence binder” created & presented by the teacher
Evaluated in “Significant Part” by Student Growth: Legislative Actions

• Rhode Island: 51% of teacher evaluation be based on student achievement growth; RIDE decides measures
• New York: recently decided that 40% of teacher evaluation must be based on student learning growth, including 20% standardized test scores
• Louisiana H.B. 1033: Student academic growth to count for 50% of a teacher’s evaluation
• Tennessee First to the Top Act of 2010: Enacted a framework for teacher and principal evaluations with 50% based on student achievement
Student growth should **not** be a factor in the evaluation of special educators.

- General agreement that growth needs to be a component
- Significant challenges surface when determining **HOW** it can be done in a **FAIR** and **ACCURATE** manner and with limited **RESOURCES**
Opinions Regarding Use of Student Achievement for Special Educators

- **Achievement gains should be a component.**
  - Strongly Agree or Agree: 73%
  - Agree: 26%
  - Neither Agree nor Disagree: 10%
  - Disagree: 0%
  - Strongly Disagree: 1%

- **Standardized test scores should be a component.**
  - Strongly Agree or Agree: 60%
  - Agree: 21%
  - Neither Agree nor Disagree: 31%
  - Disagree: 0%
  - Strongly Disagree: 0%

- **Progress on the IEP should be a component.**
  - Strongly Agree or Agree: 73%
  - Agree: 36%
  - Neither Agree nor Disagree: 13%
  - Disagree: 0%
  - Strongly Disagree: 0%
Measuring Contributions to Student Learning Growth for...

- Teachers in tested subjects
- Teachers of non-tested subjects (e.g., social studies, K-2, art, drama, band)
- Teachers of certain student populations and/or situations in which standardized test scores are not available or utilized
  - Teachers of students assessed on alternate assessments
  - Smaller teacher caseloads for some student groups (e.g., students with disabilities, English language learners).
Tested Subjects

- Challenges in Using Growth Models for Special Educators & SWD
  - A research-derived value-added model for special educators does not exist
  - Student learning trajectory
  - Students assessed with accommodations
  - Small student samples commonly associated with special education caseloads
  - Student mobility
Non-tested Subjects
Range of State and District Approaches

- Rigorous new measures
- Existing measures
- Student learning objectives
- Portfolios/products/performance/projects
- School-wide or team-based value-added

Measures must be rigorous, between two points in time, and comparable across classrooms.
## Measuring Teachers’ Contributions to Student Learning Growth: A Summary of Current Models

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subject &amp; grade alike team models</td>
<td>Teachers meet in grade-specific and/or subject-specific teams to consider and agree on appropriate measures that they will all use to determine their individual contributions to student learning growth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre- and post-tests model</td>
<td>Identify or create pre- and post-tests for every grade and subject.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student learning objectives</td>
<td>Teachers assess students at beginning of year and set objectives, then assess again at end of year; principal or designee works with teacher, determines success.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School-wide value-added</td>
<td>Teachers in tested subjects &amp; grades receive their own value-added score; <em>all other teachers get the school-wide average</em>.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Considerations

- **Establishing and Maintaining Rigor**
  - What assurances will the state employ to ensure rigor?
  - How will states ensure the goals are measurable, aligned to the state standards, and assessed using a quality measure (with fidelity!)?

- **Valid and Reliable Measures**
  - **Teacher A**: Uses a rigorous measure, develops high-level student goals, and assesses student achievement against the state standards
  - **Teacher B**: Develops a teacher-made assessment which may or may not be aligned to state standards and due to lack of standardization, outcomes are suspect
Considerations for Students with Disabilities

- Inclusion in goal setting process
- Appropriateness of measures
- Determining a years worth of growth
  - Need to collect and analyze data over time
  - Teacher competencies
  - Students functioning at lower levels
- Comparability
  - Individualized goals
  - Determining quality
A Forum of State Special Education and Teacher Effectiveness Experts and Researchers

• Using Student Growth to Evaluate Educators of Students With Disabilities: Issues, Challenges, and Next Steps
  - To gather experts and practitioners to discuss how to develop procedures to measure growth of students with disabilities for purposes of teacher evaluation that are:
    - technically sound
    - fair to all constituents
    - consistent with current educator effectiveness policy
Differentiation

With your state’s teacher evaluation framework or model, does the state allow for any type of differentiation for the measurement of academic growth for students with disabilities?

- Yes (TN, AZ, NC) 33%
- No (GA, PA, MI) 33%
- Has not been fully determined (WI, NC, CO) 33%
Does your state include standardized assessment results for students with disabilities in value-added/growth modeling for determining teacher effectiveness?

- Yes (MD, WI) 11.1%
- Not using value-added/growth modeling as part of teacher evaluation (NC) 22.2%
- Considering doing so but concerned about measurement issues (AZ, CO, TN, PA, GA) 11.1%
- Don't Know (SC) 55.6%
Is your state considering providing school-wide or team value-added scores for teachers in non-tested subjects?

- Yes (NC, AZ, MD, TN, WI)
- No (GA)
- Has not been fully determined (PA, SC, CO)
How does your state plan to measure growth for students with disabilities in non-tested subjects?

- Combination of Student Learning Objectives and "other measures" (CO, SC, WI, GA) - 44%
- Has not yet been fully determined (NC, AZ, MD, TN, PA) - 56%
How does your state intend to measure growth of students with disabilities who participate in the alternate assessment?

- Alternate Assessment Results (SC) 11%
- Other Measures (NC) 11%
- Not Fully Determined (AZ, CO, MD, TN, WI, PA, GA) 78%
The Challenge: Determining How to Attribute Learning Gains to Teachers

• Should teachers be held to the same level of accountability if a student
  - Is only in classroom for a portion of the year?
  - Has a high rate of school absences?
  - Fails to complete assessments that will be used for determining teachers’ contribution to student growth?

• Which teacher should be held accountable in a co-teaching situation?
  - Various co-teaching models make it difficult to evaluate teachers

• Involve teachers in the problem solving process!
Opinions Regarding Attribution in Co-teaching Setting

- Both teachers held accountable for all students: 85% Strongly Agree or Agree
- Special educators in a co-teaching role held accountable for all students: 75% Strongly Agree or Agree
- Special educators in a co-teaching role held accountable for students with disabilities only: 13% Strongly Agree or Agree

Has your state determined how student growth will be attributed to teachers in co-teaching situations?

- Yes (GA) 11%
- No (NC, AZ, CO, MD, TN, WI, PA) 78%
- Don't Know (SC) 11%
Forum Outcomes

• Beginning of the journey
  • Additional gatherings
  • Considerations document for states and districts
    • Current Practice (e.g. SLOs)
    • Identify challenges
    • Identify existing research to guide efforts
    • Identify needed areas of research
    • Identify potential considerations
Measures of teacher effectiveness

- Evidence of growth in student learning and competency
  - Standardized tests, pre/post tests in untested subjects
  - Student performance (art, music, etc.)
  - Curriculum-based tests given in a standardized manner
  - Classroom-based tests such as DIBELS

- Evidence of instructional quality
  - Classroom observations
  - Lesson plans, assignments, and student work

- Other evidence (varies, based on local values)
  - Administrator/supervisor reports
  - Surveys of students and/or parents
  - An “evidence binder” created & presented by the teacher
What We Value

• Evidence of Instructional Quality
  - Classroom observations
  - Classroom artifacts & portfolios
    - Lesson plans
    - Work Samples
    - Student assessments
  - Other evidence (parent/student surveys)

✓ Represent what teaching candidates are expected to learn and demonstrate
✓ Align to teaching standards (e.g. INTASC, CEC)
✓ Developed collaboratively with content experts and practitioners
✓ Explicit rubric detailing competencies and performance levels
✓ Can be used to guide professional learning
Observation Protocols

51% Align to the state’s professional teaching standards.

26% Didn’t know.

"Our evaluation tool was developed in the district over 40 years ago."

"Our current evaluation system is outdated and applied to nothing."

85% Use the same observation instrument as that of general education teachers.

12% Use a modified or different observation instrument.
Discussion Activity

- List the competencies teachers need to be effective
- Identify those that educators of students with disabilities would need to be effective
- List any missing special educators’ competencies
  - Hint: Consider teachers of students with significant cognitive disabilities and/or secondary special educators
Meeting the needs of “diverse” learners may not attend to the following:

- Special skills (individualized education program [IEP] facilitation, collaboration, secondary transition, social and behavioral interventions, compliance with legal mandates)
- Evidence-based instructional methods (direct/explicit instruction, scientifically based reading instruction, learning strategy instruction)
Special Educators: Determining our Role

Consultant, Expert, and/or Instructional Provider?
Special Educators: Determining our Role

• Consultant or Expert
  - Problem Solving Techniques (e.g. differentiated instruction, behavioral consultation) may be effective. But is it intensive enough to be effective for students with significant learning problems?
  - Who at the building level will instruct these students? Who will be the experts?
  - These teachers need training so they are capable of working intensively, methodically, knowledgably, inventively.

Doug Fuchs, Vanderbilt University, OSEP Project Director Meeting 2010
Services for Students with Intensive Needs

• For students with intensive needs (e.g. blind/visually impaired, deaf/hard of hearing, autistic, severe emotional disabilities, severe cognitive disabilities)

- General Core Curriculum
- Expanded Core Curriculum
- Access

Doug Fuchs, Vanderbilt University, OSEP Project Director Meeting 2010
Access and Expanded Curriculum

- Compensatory or functional academic skills, including communication modes
- Orientation and mobility
- Social interaction skills
- Independent living skills
- Recreation and leisure skills
- Career education
- Use of assistive technology
- Visual efficiency skills
- Self determination

Diane Ryndak, University of Florida, OSEP Project Director Meeting 2010
Post School Outcomes?

• Beyond academic outcomes
  ▪ What about post school outcomes?
    - Independent Living
    - Competitive Employment
    - Participation in Post Secondary Education
    - Self-advocacy & Self-Determination

Diane Ryndak, University of Florida, OSEP Project Director, Meeting 2010
Measuring Effective Co-Teaching

• Should effective co-teaching practices be a factor in teacher evaluation?

• Would using the general observation rubric suffice?

• Are there other ways to measure effective co-teaching practices?
Given what you currently know, is there a need to differentiate the educator evaluation process for special educators?

- In measuring student growth?
- In assessing educator competencies?
## Same vs. Differentiated System

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pros</th>
<th>Cons</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Measurements and dimensions identical</td>
<td>Lack of focus on social and behavioral outcomes</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Difficult to measure progress for students on alternate standards</td>
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<td>Fails to measure other roles/responsibilities (e.g. IEP facilitation, paperwork &amp; timelines, collaboration with families, supervising paraprofessionals etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More simplistic</td>
<td>Could devalue the roles and responsibilities of special educators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Doesn’t encourage the use of evidence-based practices for students with disabilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>Not fair (e.g. poor general education instruction; limited role, fails to measure critical competencies; growth trajectory)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased Reliability</td>
<td>Evaluators may lack content/specialty knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of explicit criteria for specialty area teachers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
State/District Efforts To Determine Same vs. Differentiated System

• Focus groups of special educators
  ▪ Determine if current system can assess special education teacher effectiveness or a need to differentiate the system
  ▪ Identify the challenges within the current system
  ▪ Identify instructional strategies, roles and responsibilities unique to special educators
  ▪ Identify standard measures to assess student growth
  ▪ Continually assess the effectiveness of the measure
DC IMPACT System

• Uses multiple measures to evaluate teachers
  ▪ Individual Value-Added Student Achievement Data
  ▪ Teaching and Learning Framework
  ▪ Teacher-Assessed Student Achievement
  ▪ Commitment to the School Community
  ▪ School Value Added Scores Student Achievement Data

• System differentiated according to position
  ▪ Components
  ▪ Weight of each component
Washington DC IMPACT: Educator Groups

1. General Education Teachers with Individual Value-Added Student Achievement Data
2. General Education Teachers without Individual Value-Added Student Achievement Data
3. Special Education Teachers
4. Non-Itinerant English Language Learner (ELL) Teachers
5. Itinerant English Language Learner (ELL) Teachers
6. Shared Special Subject Teachers
7. Visiting Instruction Service Teachers
8. Student Support Professionals
9. Library Media Specialists
10. Counselors
11. School-Based Social Workers and Psychologists
12. Related Service Providers
13. Special Education Coordinators
14. Program Coordinators & Deans
15. Instructional Coaches
16. Mentor Teachers
17. Educational Aides
18. Office Staff
19. Custodial Staff
20. All Other School-Based Personnel
District of Columbia IMPACT

Special Education

- Individual Teacher Value-Added Scores
- Non-Value-Added Achievement 10%
- Teaching and Learning Framework 55%
- Commitment to the School 10%
- School Value-Added Scores 5%
- Core Professionalism
- Ordering Assessment Timeliness 10%
- IEP Timeliness 10%

Individualized Instruction Model
Student Support Professionals

Measures

- Student Support Professional Standards (10%)
- Commitment to the School (10%)
- School Value-Added Scores (10%)
- Professionalism (5%)
Special Education Teachers of Students with Autism

Measures

- Autism Teaching Standards: 45%
- Teacher-Assessed Student Achievement Data: 10%
- Applied Behavior Analysis for Autism Classrooms: 10%
- IEP Timeliness: 10%
- Ordering Assessment Timeliness: 10%
- Commitment to the School Community: 10%
- School Value-Added Achievement Data: 10%
- Core Professionalism: 5%
Therefore the teacher evaluation system should...

- be developed with teachers (including other stakeholders)
- establish a set of high and consistent expectations
- use multiple measures to determine teacher performance
- provide meaningful feedback
- measure teacher and student growth
- provide multiple opportunities for teachers to grow in their profession
- provide structured support to teachers
A Practical Guide to Designing Comprehensive Teacher Evaluation Systems

Across the nation, states and districts are in the process of building better teacher evaluation systems that not only identify highly effective teachers but also systematically provide data and feedback that can be used to improve teacher practice.

This site compiles key resources to support these efforts, found not only on the TQ Center website but other national websites as well. Key resources include the following:

- Our new downloadable guide: A Practical Guide to Designing Comprehensive Teacher Evaluation Systems
- Overviews of eight key components of teacher evaluation systems.
- Interactive guides to key questions to consider when designing teacher evaluation systems.
- Resources to support development.
- Selected links to our Teacher Evaluation Models in Practice website featuring expert panel reviews of real-life teacher evaluation systems. These include the following:
  - Reviews per key component of approaches taken in practice.
  - Resources per key component used by districts in practice.

http://www.tqsource.org/practicalGuide/
A Practical Guide to Designing Comprehensive Teacher Evaluation Systems

A Tool to Assist in the Development of Teacher Evaluation Systems

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The Devil is in the Details

- Teacher apprehension and opposition develop when the “system” is not viewed as fair and accurate.
- BFK•Link™
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