How Can Schools Intervene to Support Differently-Abled Students in Response to COVID-19?

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Districts are creating new systems of schooling
Educators are working tirelessly
Families are compensating for reduced services
Students face reduced learning and resources
ACADEMIC SUPPORTS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

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This brief is one in a series aimed at providing K-12 education decision makers and advocates with an evidence base to ground discussions about how to best serve students during and following the novel coronavirus pandemic. Click here to learn more about the EdResearch for Recovery Project and view the set of COVID-19 response-and-recovery topic areas and practitioner-generated questions.

CENTRAL QUESTION

How can schools intervene to reduce learning gaps between students with disabilities and their peers, which have likely widened during school closures?

KEY INSIGHTS

Breaking Down the Issue

- All current federal guidance indicates that, even during COVID-19 stay-at-home orders, schools still need to provide students with disabilities an education that a) is individualized and b) ensures they make

Strategies to Consider

- Small-group or one-to-one intervention three to five times per week is a proven way to meet individualized needs.
- Many features of effective academic and behavioral interventions may still be

Strategies to Avoid

- Co-teaching, an approach where special educators support students with disabilities in the general education classroom, will likely be insufficient to meet students with disabilities’ current needs.

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Link
Our Charge: Summarize our best evidence
Our Recommendations:

1. Use universal screening
2. Prioritize targeted intervention, supported with routine progress monitoring
3. Deploy available personnel to meet goals 1 & 2
Ten Faulty Notions About Teaching and Learning That Hinder the Effectiveness of Special Education

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Cryptically held notions about teaching and learning influence and reflect the practice of many classroom teachers. This article discusses such notions that the author believes limit the effectiveness of special education by impeding the adoption of research-based instructional practices. Each notion is described, and then the author briefly discusses why or how it hinders effective instruction. Reasons why many educators subscribe to these faulty notions are suggested, and three recommendations that may increase the adoption of research-based teaching practices are offered.

Commonly held notions about teaching and learning are implicit in the daily practice of many special educators and by what teachers say when asked to describe what they do and why they do it (Chard & Kame'enui, 2000; Purnell & Clancy, 2004). Discussion of and debate regarding most of these notions have appeared frequently in the special education literature over the past decade, and many of the perspectives offered in this article have been well articulated by others (Dixon & Carr, 1992; D. Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994; Gersten, 1992; Kame'enui, 1994; Kauffman, 1993, 1998; Sasso, 2001; Stone, 1994). It is my hope that this discussion of the collective impact of these widely held ideas about teaching and learning will encourage special educators and their educ-

3. Research has produced a useful and reliable knowledge base for special education.
4. Research-based instructional tools are under-used in special education.

Students with Disabilities Have the Right to an Effective Education

The special educator's primary responsibilities are to design, implement, and evaluate instruction that helps students with disabilities acquire, generalize, and maintain knowledge and skills to improve the quality of their lives in school, home, community, and workplace settings. Special education is effective only to the extent that students with disabilities acquire and subsequently use knowledge and skills they did not have prior to instruction. What constitutes effective teaching in special education therefore cannot be evaluated in structural terms (i.e., by what it looks like). Instead, it must be evaluated by its outcome (i.e., the extent to which each student learned and used new knowledge and skills).

Instead of patient teachers, students with disabilities need teachers who are impatient

Why universal screening?

• The last year has likely increased risk for all students
• We need high-quality data on whether students are developing essential academic skills
• Universal screening would allow schools to collect data as soon as possible to target intervention for a broader range of students, beyond those diagnosed with disabilities

Note: Particularly during this time, some students may show initial difficulties but may respond to typical instruction without needing intervention.
What do we mean by *intervention*?

**Academic**
Provide explicit, systematic instruction in foundational skills in reading, writing, or math

**Behavior**
Use explicit, systematic instruction to teach socially and behaviorally appropriate skills

Selection of interventions should be driven by data on students’ individual needs
What do this look like in practice?

1. Research indicates that students should have access to small-group or one-on-one intervention 3 to 5 times per week
2. Intervention can occur in general education or special education
3. Schools should ensure that they select interventions with strong evidence
   • See NCII’s Academic and Behavioral Intervention Charts
4. Interventions should be supported with weekly progress monitoring
   • If weekly is too ambitious, some evidence that up to once every three weeks
   • See NCII’s Progress Monitoring Tool Charts
How can schools ensure they have the personnel to pull this off?

1. **Special educators’ time is precious.** If co-teaching is used, the goal should be to provide interventions in inclusive settings, not to simply provide differentiated instruction.

2. Special educators provide essential expertise on delivering interventions. To reduce burden on their time, they can supervise paraprofessionals or tutors delivering interventions...with high-quality training.

3. General educators can ensure they support students’ foundational skills in reading, math, and writing
To summarize, we need to keep focused on teaching and learning. Interventions are our most powerful tool for maximizing learning opportunities.

Thank You!

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