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Best Educational Practices '86:

Educating Learners With *Severe* Handicaps

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The "best educational practice" statements and their accompanying indicators presented in the following pages were developed as products of a state-wide systems change project, funded by the Division of Innovation and Development, OSEP. This project was conceived with the primary purpose of improving the state-wide delivery of special education and related services to learners with severe handicaps and their parents. Ultimately the project will develop state-approved guidelines for implementing "best educational practices" for the education of learners with severe handicaps. Project staff, in conjunction with staff of the Special Education Unit of the State Department of Education have identified the following nine (9) "best educational practices":

Age-Appropriate Public School Placement

Integrated Delivery of Related Services

Social Integration

Transition Planning

Community-Based Training

Curricular Expectations

Systematic Data-Based Instruction

Home-School Partnership

Systematic Program Evaluation

These "best educational practices" and their accompanying quality indicators will be used first to assess the current educational practices and, then, as ba3e3 in the development of state-wide guidelines for improving the delivery of special education and related services. It is anticipated that the statements and indicators will undergo continuing revision, throughout the duration of the project.

INTEGRATED DELIVERY OF RELATED SERVICES

Related services as defined by PL 91-112 include physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech and language therapy, and psychoeducatlonal services. Some learners with severe handicaps need related services in order to achieve their educational objectives. Related services no longer can be confined to direct services offered by a therapist for a limited period of time each day or week. Instead they should be integrated into the learner's educational program. Learners with severe handicaps should receive related services (e.g. special positioning, mobility training, communication programming) <u>throughout</u> each school day from teachers (regular and special), classroom aides, non-handicapped peers, parents and other family members that have contact with the learner.

The traditional method of delivering related services is to remove the learner from the classroom and provide the special service in an isolated therapy room. An individual therapy session typically lasts from 10 to 30 minutes and occurs one to three times per week during the school year. For learners with severe handicaps, therapy sessions which occur infrequently are insufficient to effect significant behavior change, and are an inefficient use of specialist staff time.

An alternative to the traditional treatment approach which utilizes specialist 3taff time is the Integrated therapy model. In this model, the specialist takes on the role of training others, teaching teachers, instructional aides, parents, siblings and significant others, how to integrate therapeutic activities into regularly scheduled events in the school, home and community. By training persons in a variety of different roles to carry out needed programs, and by integrating these programs into naturally occuring events throughout every day, skill development *of* learners with severe handicaps can be maximized.

When necessary, direct therapy sessions should occur in the environment in which the skill will most often be used. This practice will minimize the need for skill generalization and will allow other staff members to learn how to better implement these programs in the therapist's absence.

Best practices for integrated delivery of related services include the following:

1. Related service providers should offer services in at least the following ways:

   a. direct service to students in natural environments including home and community settings, as needed;

   b. consultative services to special and regular educators, parents, and others with responsibility for each student.

2. Related service providers should be members of the IEP development team, whenever a learner is in need of their services.

3. Therapy goals should be integrated into a student's IEP and daily classroom, home, and community activities.

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AGE-APPROPRIATE PUBLIC SCHOOL PLACEMENT

All children with handicaps should enter kindergarten or first grade with their approximate age-mates. To use a handicapping condition as a criterion *for* educational placement of a student is not an acceptable practice within our public schools. It is no longer justifiable to place learners with severe handicaps into segregated "special" schools, "regional" special education programs, or special classrooms without clear documentation that the placements are in the "learners'" best interests. Should such placement occur, every opportunity must be afforded learners to socially interact with chronologically age-appropriate non-handicapped peers throughout the school day. IEPs must address remediation *of* the cause of segregated placement. There also must be clearly defined procedures *for* transitioning learners back to their regular classroom placements when those conditions that led to segregated placements no longer apply. At the very least, all learners should continue to be assigned to a chronologically age-appropriate regular classroom placement as a "home" room within their local public school, and the need for segregated placement should be formally evaluated at least annually.

Placement of learners with severe handicaps in segregated special education programs serves to effectively isolate them from their non-handicapped peers. For learners who live outside of the district hosting the program, it also creates special barriers to a number of preferred educational practices. For one, social integration activities carried out within the regional program fall to promote peer relationships and friendships between children with severe handicaps and other children from their own neighborhood. Second, transportation, travel time and physical distance become barriers to increasing parent involvement in their child's instructional program. Third, community-based training, which takes place in the host community does not prepare learners to function in their local home community. Finally, for those learners graduating from educational programs, activities designed to promote transition to adult services are conducted in the communities hosting the educational programs rather than the learners' home communities.

Based upon normal curve statistics, one would expect no more than one out of a hundred learners in any rural Vermont school to have a severe handicap. Clustering of learners in special education classes upsets thl3 natural proportion of children in need of more intensive special educational services in any one school. This over-concentration of learners with *severe* handicaps makes effective integration much more difficult.

Finally, special classroom teachers typically have little opportunity to interact with regular education staff and non-handicapped children. It is especially difficult to integrate several learners with severe handicaps into several different age-appropriate regular classrooms and appropriate support programs such as music, art and physical education, when teachers and administrators view segregated special educators and their learners as "outsiders."

For all of the reasons discussed above, placement of learners with severe handicaps into chronologically age-appropriate classrooms within their local public school is in the best interest of all learners (with and without handicaps), their teachers and their parents. As a best practice age-appropriate placement has several major components:

1. All learners (including those with severe handicaps) should have primary placement in an age-appropriate regular classroom;

2. The learner's regular classroom teacher should be a member of the IEP planning team;

3. All learners in need of social skill training should have regular structured opportunities for social interaction with age-appropriate peers;

4. A written district policy related to procedures for out-of-regular classroom placement should be available to parents, teachers, special educators and school administrators;

5. For those learner's placed out-of-their assigned regular classroom for a portion of the school day:

   a. All learners should have access to age-appropriate peers throughout the school day;

   b. All learners should have the opportunity to attend "specials" (e.g., music, art, physical education) with their age-appropriate non-handicapped peers;

6. For those learners in full-time special class placements:

   a. The IEP's of learners in segregated placements should address the identified cause of such placement;

   b. All learners in segregated placements should have a transition plan for returning to their regular classroom;

   c. All learners in segregated placements should have access to their home, local public school, and home community environments as educational sites for functional skill training.

BEST PRACTICE INDICATORS: AGE-APPROPRIATE PUBLIC SCHOOL PLACEMENT

1. Learner's primary placement is in an age-appropriate regular classroom in the local school ....YES   NO

2. The learner's regular classroom teacher participates on IEP planning team ....YES   NO

3. There is a written district policy describing procedures for out-of-regular classroom special education placement..YES   NO

For those learners placed out of their assigned regular age-appropriate classroom for a portion of the school day:

4. The learner's IEP includes social integration objectives..YES   NO

5. Current IEP addresses remediation of identified cause for segregated placement...................................YES   NO

6. The learner has access to non-handicapped age-appropriate peers throughout the school day...........................YES   NO

7. The learner has the opportunity to attend "specials" (e.g., music, art, physical education) with age-appropriate non-handicapped peers....................YES   NO

8. The learner in need of social skills training (as documented in the IEP) has regular structured opportunities for social interaction with age-appropriate non-handicapped peers....................YES   NO

9. There is a written Transition Plan for return to the regular class...YES   NO

10. Continued need for segregated placement is evaluated annually..YES   NO

OVERALL BEST PRACTICE SCORE: AGE-APPROPRIATE PUBLIC SCHOOL PLACEMENT

NOT IMPLEMENTED		PARTIALLY IMPLEMENTED		TOTALLY IMPLEMENTED
1	2	3	4	5

The LEA has a written policy statement supporting age-appropriate public school placement........................YES   NO

BEST PRACTICE INDICATORS: INTEGRATED DELIVERY OF RELATED
SERVICES

Related services personnel participate in IEP
development whenever a learner is in need of their
services. . . . . .YES   NO

When the need is identified within the IEP for
direct services provided by a therapist, they are
delivered within appropriate settings. .YES   NO

Services are delivered by appropriate related
services personnel in a consultative format,
with training, follow-up and regular monitoring of
programs. . . . . .YES   NO

. Parents and other family members have the opportunity
for related services consultation, training and
follow-up to maximize the learner's development
throughout the day. . . . . .YES   NO

The learner's IEP and instructional programs indicate
the integration of therapy goals into every day
classroom, home and community activities. . . . . .YES   NO

OVERALL BEST PRACTICE SCORE: DELIVERY OF RELATED SERVICES

NOT IMPLEMENTED		PARTIALLY IMPLEMENTED		TOTALLY IMPLEMENTED
1		3	1	5

e LEA has a written policy for the integrated delivery
related services to learners with severe handicaps. . . . . . . .YES   NO

SOCIAL INTEGRATION

Learners with severe handicaps should have access to the
same environments as nonhandicapped peers of similar
chronological age. A primary goal of social integration
should be to increase the numlmr of integrated community and
school environments in which learners with severe handicaps
can participate .

There are no prerequisite skills learners with severe
handicaps must acquire to minimally participate in
integrated school and community environments. To minimally
participate, the learners need only be physically present in
the environments with other non-handicapped persons to allow
opportunities for interaction to occur. In Vermont, learners
with severe handicaps live in communities in their natural
homes, foster homes or group homes. They are educated in
integrated public schools, with a growing number being
educated in local community schools in regular classroom and
resource room settings. It is no longer valid to exclude
learners with severe handicaps from any community setting
because of deficits in their skills or because of the nature
and severity of their handicaps.

There are two basic approaches for increasing participation
of learners with severe handicaps in integrated school and
community settings. Either the environment can be adapted
to the current capabilities of learners, or the learners'
abilities to participate can be enhanced. Changing the
behavior of learners to facilitate integration usually
involves teaching language and social skills. The
environmental modification approach does not focus on
changing the behavior of the learner but on changing the
environment to accommodate the learner through such
activities as: teaching non-handicapped persons how to
interact with learners who may be nonverbal or severely
motorically impaired; teaching persons in the environment to
be more accepting of atypical behaviors; structuring the
environment to encourage interactions between individuals
with and without handicaps; changing the skill requirements
of school and community activities; and, providing extra
supervision or assistance for the learner.

Social integration efforts often have focused upon changing
the behavior of learners with severe handicaps. Although
learners with severe handicaps can learn and should be
taught behaviors which facilitate integration, focusing only
upon changing their behavior puts them at an unnecessary
disadvantage. Many of the behaviors believed to be
prerequisites to social integration are difficult to teach
and take a long time for learners with severe handicaps to

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acquire. Focusing integration efforts upon modifying the environment, and upon teaching nonhandicapped persons how to interact with learners with severe handicaps, should result in immediate benefits. To maximize effectiveness, social integration efforts should emphasize both changing the behavior *of* learners and changing environments to accommodate learners.

In order to increase and continue to maintain the different age-appropriate integrated community environments in which learners with severe handicaps participate, current and future community environments appropriate for each individual learner must be identified. Factors which facilitate and inhibit minimal participation in each identified environment then should be determined and addressed. Parent Interview techniques, such as parent inventories, may be U3ed to identify environments and need for environmental adaptations. Ecological analysis then may be used to identify appropriate environmental adaptations.

The educators role in facilitating community integration should be that of a trainer/advocate. Trainer/advocates not only provide training to learners with severe handicaps, but also offer Information and training to individuals in the community to enhance social integration outside the school.

BEST PRACTICE INDICATORS: SOCIAL INTEGRATION

1. A number of current and future age-appropriate integrated school and community environments have been Identified *for* each individual learner........YES NO

2. Ecological analyses are used to identify barriers and facilitators to participation in identified 3chool and community environments......................YES SO

3. A plan for increasing participation in identified age-appropriate school and community environments should be reflected in the IEP...........................YES NO

1. Learners with severe handicaps have opportunities to interact with age-appropriate peers and other community members within identified school and community environments......................................YES N0

5. The learner's teacher functions as a trainer/advocate to age-appropriate non-handicapped peers, other teachers, and community members..........................YES NO

OVERALL BEST PRACTICE SCORE: SOCIAL INTEGRATION

NOT IMPLEMENTED	PARTIALLY IMPLEMENTED	TOTALLY IMPLEMENTED
1 2	3	1 5

The LEA has a written policy statement addressing social integration of learners with severe handicaps..YES NO

TRANSITION PLANNING

Learners with severe handicaps, like their non-handicapped peers, are now experiencing movement from one learning environment to another. They are moving through preschool, elementary school, middle *or* junior high school, and high school learning environments into a variety of vocational and residential options within the community. This is something that was atypical when learners with severe handicaps were educated in non-public settings. This movement across learning environments has led to an increasing number *of* learners with severe handicaps participating in a variety of chronological age-appropriate school and non-school settings. In order to assure successful transition of learners with severe handicaps from one environment to the next, a planning process involving appropriate persons from both old and new environments must be established .

When a change occurs in the environment in which learners with severe handicaps participate, it cannot be assumed that they will automatically adjust," adapt, function appropriately, generalize skills, or transfer training to the new environment. By planning longitudinally for anticipated changes and preparing learners for entry into new environments, problems occurring during transition can be minimized. Necessary adaptations to the new environment can be planned and implemented in advance of the learner's anticipated arrival. Individualized Transition Plans are an integral part of the IEP of learners with severe handicaps. Individual Transition Plans address both moves from one school setting to -another and moves into post-school vocational, residential, and other community settings. Transition plans assist educators and parents in developing functional chronological age-appropriate preparatory educational curricula that facilitate skills which maximize independent and productive participation in least restrictive subsequent environments. "Best practices", then, require that the IEP process be expanded to include comprehensive, longitudinal planning for each learner's transl: ion to future school, work and living environments.

Equally important, is the need to transition learners from restrictive educational settings (e.g., self-contained classrooms) into less restrictive educational settings (e.g., regular classroom settings). Every learner placed in a .setting other than the regular classroom should have a transion plan for moving back to that setting as quickly as possible .

Transition planning for learners with severe handicaps must include the following:

1. A transition plan for major moves during each learners educational career (EEE to elementary school, elementary to high school, high school to adult services) should be developed and implemented well in advance of the actual move.

2. A transition plan should be developed and implemented for every learner placed in a restrictive educational environment that is directed towards the least restrictive environment (i.e., the regular classroom). This plan should be reviewed by appropriate IEP team members in both environments at least annually.

   Transition planning team members should at least include:
   a. current teacher
   b. next environment teacher (regular class teacher for transition to less restrictive environments)
   c. parent(s)/guardian(s)
   d. appropriate related services personnel
   e. district administrator

1. Transition plans must be written and signed by all team members indicating their approval of the plan.

5. Transition objectives must be included within the learner's current IEP. Specific criteria for movement to the less restrictive environment must be included in the objectives of learners currently in restrictive environments.

6. Regular follow-up and monitoring of transition activities are the responsibility of the planning tea- and should be clearly documented.

BEST PRACTICE INDICATORS: TRANSITION PLANNING

1. Learners have written plans for the transition
   from *one* educational setting to another. . . . . .YES NO

2. Learners placed within more restrictive educational
   settings have written transition plans for movement
   back to a less restrictive educational setting. . . . . .YES NO

3. The transition planning team includes: a) the learner's
   parents or guardian, b) the current teacher, c) a
   representative from the next environment,
   d) appropriate related services personnel,
   and e) a district administrator. . . . . .YES NO

4. Transition objectives are included in each learner's
   IEP with a precise timetable for implementation, review
   and follow-up by team members. . . . . .YES NO

5. The transition plan has been approved and signed by
   all team members including the learner's parent(s). . . . . . .YES NO

OVERALL BEST PRACTICE SCORE: TRANSITION PLANNING

| NOT | PARTIALLY | TOTALLY |
| IMPLEMENTED | IMPLEMENTED | IMPLEMENTED |

The LEA has a written policy for transition planning
for learners with *severe* handicaps. . . . . .YES   NO

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COMHUNITY-BASED TRAINING

There **is** a critical need to assure that the skills acquired
by learners with severe handicaps are used in home and
community settings.   In recent years the concept of
"community-based training" has been expanded to include a
broad range of educational experiences for learners with
severe handicaps of all ages.   The following have been
identified as significant components of community-based
training:

1. For a skill to be considered learned, it must be
   demonstrated in environments in which the skill is
   typically used. Generalization and maintenance must
   be demonstrated for every skill important enough to
   be included in the IEP. For example, if toileting
   is an IEP program, toileting should not be
   considered learned until it has been demonstrated
   that the learner can use a variety of bathrooms
   appropriately. This include: the bathroom as home,
   in the gym at school, in the restaurant that is
   frequented by the student's family, the babysitter's
   bathroom,   etc.   Thus,   one   component   of
   community-based training is "the generalization and
   maintenance of skills acquired in the classroom to
   natural settings in the community".

2. For some skills (e.g., street crossing, grocery
   shopping) the demands required in community settings
   are extremely difficult to simulate in a school
   setting. In these cases, skills must be taught from
   entry level to mastery level in actual community
   settings.

3. Community-based training implies that skills are
   taught or generalized to settings that are
   frequented by learners with severe handicapped for
   this reason, the community in "community-based
   training" must be the learner's own home community .
   If skills are acquired in community setting: other
   than   the   local   setting,   demonstration of
   generalization to home community   settings   is
   essential .

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4. Family members *are* most likely the ones to accompany a learner in the community and, in many cases, will be the learner's "teachers". Therefore, the learner's family members should be directly involved in selecting community-based training objectives and training sites. They also should be encouraged and provided with the opportunity to be directly involved in assessing and training skills in home and community settings.

5. Community-based program development requires that ecological analyses of community settings be conducted to determine how accessible each setting is to individual learners with severe handicaps and to identify skill requirements specific to each setting. Ecological analysis is a preferred strategy for developing programs for instruction in natural environments.

BEST PRACTICE INDICATORS: COMMUNITY-BASED TRAINING

1. Learners have the opportunity to acquire specific skills within appropriate community settings when identified in the IEP . . . . YES   NO

2. There are opportunities for learners with severe handicaps to demonstrate generalization of those skills included in the IEP to home and community settings in which they typically occur . . . . YES   NO

3. Skills are taught and generalized to settings within the learner's own home and local community . . . . YES   NO

4. An ecological analysis approach is used to determine learner accessibility and setting specific 3kill requirements for each community-based training site . . . . YES   NO

5. The learner's family is involved in the selection of community-based training objectives and training site3 . . . . YES   NO

6. The learner's family has been given the opportunity to be involved in the assessment and training of specific skills in home and community settings . . . . YES   NO

OVERALL BEST PRACTICE SCORE: COMMUNITY-BASED TRAINING

NOT IMPLEMENTED		PARTIALLY IMPLEMENTED		TOTALLY IMPLEMENTED
1	2	3	1	5

The LEA has a written policy for community-based training activities . . . . YES   NO

CURRICULAR EXPECTATIONS

The primary goal of public school education should be to prepare students for their adult roles within our society. In order to achieve this goal for learners with severe handicaps, curricular expectations for them and their educational experiences from the time of entry into the educational system should be functional, cumulative and longitudinal in nature. Curricular expectations should always reflect demands of likely future environments, including adult life. As students progress from elementary through middle and secondary grades, there should be a planned increase in the proportion of time they spend in vocational and other nonschool training sites. In addition, there should be a system for annual monitoring of each student's progress from entry into school to exit into adult life. This monitoring system should include: (a) major skill clusters (e.g., grocery shopping, cooking), (b) environments and instructors through which skill clusters have been taught, (c) level of performance for each skill, and (d) any necessary adaptations.

A functional curriculum has two goals: (1) increasing the number of age-appropriate, integrated, current and future community environments in which a learner may participate; and (2) increasing a learner's level of independent participation in age-appropriate, integrated, current or future community environments. One or both of these conditions must be met for a curriculum to be considered functional.

Increasing the number of environments in which learners participate. There are no prerequisite skills which learners with severe handicaps must acquire to minimally participate in most integrated community environments. To minimally participate, a learner need only be physically present in an environment with access to non-handicapped persons. People are typically excluded from integrated community environments because of inappropriate social behaviors or excessive behavior, not because of skill deficits. Making excessive noise at a movie, or running around in a restaurant, are examples of behaviors which lead to exclusion of individuals without handicaps from integrated community environments. Behaviors performed by learners with severe handicaps that are likely to lead to exclusion from community environments need to be targeted for change to facilitate future participation.

To develop a functional program, each learner's accessible age-appropriate, integrated, current and future community environments must first be identified. Next, factors which inhibit and facilitate at least minimal participation should be determined and addressed. Unless at least minimum participation is achieved, more independent participation cannot be realized.

Increased independent participation. Increasing independent participation in community environments emphasizes teaching learners new behaviors. Teaching learners behaviors which increase independent participation in integrated community environments has been referred to as functional skill training. There are literally thousands of skills which may increase independent functioning, thus procedures are needed for prioritizing skills to be taught. One procedure for prioritizing skills is to select for immediate instruction those skills the learner needs most frequently to participate in identified age-appropriate, current and future community environments.

Ecological analysis is a procedure for identifying functional skills. It involves observing non-handicapped people to determine what they do in a specified environment, and what skills are required of them to perform these activities. Activities which occur in many environments, and those skills required to perform the activities, can then be given priority for assessment and instruction.

Skill sequences which progress from simple to complex skill performance (e.g., developmental sequences) and curricula derived from them are also common bases for selecting and sequencing skills to be taught. This is particularly true in motor, cognition, language, and functional academic skill areas which involve a cumulative building of skills. Ecological analysis should be used to identify functional skills (e.g., reading pictoral recipes), and developmental skill sequence may be used to identify sequences of behaviors which culminates in performance of a more complex skill.

In some cases, it may currently be physically impossible for a learner to perform a certain skill. This situation requires adapting how the learner performs the skill. The functional skills some learners with severe handicaps use to achieve success, may vary significantly from the skills people without handicaps typically use to perform the same activities.

Many skills may be difficult to teach or take a long time for a learner with severe handicaps to learn. To maximize the opportunity for learners with severe handicaps to attain maximum independence in adulthood: (a) curricula should be longitudinal in nature, (b) instruction in important life skills should be initiated far in advance of when the skills

are needed, and, (c) all domains of adult life (e.g, domestic living, community living, vocational, and recreation/leisure) are represented within curricular expectations. Further, learners' progress through curricular expectations should be systematically monitored throughout the learners' school year3.

To be functional, objectives must be selected on one *or* both of the following criteria:

> Criterion 1 : attainment of the objective will increase the number of age appropriate current and future environments in which the learner with severe handicaps can successfully participate;

> Criterion 2 : attainment of the objective increases independent participation of the learner with severe handicaps in age-appropriate current and future environments.

The following may be used as indicators of the functionality of curricula used to develop IEP objectives.

> a) Use of parent inventories (or similar interview procedures) and ecological analyses to identify current and future integrated community environments for each individual learner with severe handicaps.

> b) Use of ecological analyses to determine activities and skills typically performed in identified integrated environments.

> c) Use of settings, tasks and materials to teach, maintain and generalize learners' skills which are the same as those used by age-equivalent non-handicapped peers in integrated community environments.

> d) Conditions and criteria for goals and objectives in the IEP should Include skill performance in the natural environment. The natural environment refers to the location(s) where the learner is most likely to need to perform a select skill.

> e) Provide learners with a variety of opportunities to observe, learn and practice age-appropriate behaviors within identified current and future integrated community environments.

1. The program has curricula or curriculum guidelines which include longitudinal skill sequences which progress from zero skills to adult functioning in such areas as communication and community living . . . . YES

2. All domains (community living, domestic living, vocational, recreation/leisure) of adult life are represented within the learner's IEP . . . . , ... YES

3. A number *of* current and future age-appropriate integrated environments which are accessible to the learner have been identified . . . . YES

4. Ecological analyses are used to determine activities and skill requirements within identified age-appropriate current and future environments . . . . YES

5. Criteria for selecting program objectives include increasing the number of age-appropriate current and future environments that will become accessible to the learner upon attainment of the objectives . . . .

6. Criteria for selecting program objectives include the expected increase in the learner's independence in age-appropriate current and future integrated environments . . . . .YES

7. Settings, tasks and materials used to teach, maintain and generalize skills of learners are selected to match those found in identified age-appropriate current and future environments . . . . YES

8. Conditions and criteria for goals and objectives in the IEP should include skill performance in the natural environment . . . . YES

9. There is a system for longitudinal monitoring of progress through curricular expectations . . . . YES

OVERALL BEST PRACTICE SCORE: CURRICULAR EXPECTATIONS

NOT IMPLEMENTED	PARTIALLY IMPLEMENTED	TOTALLY IMPLEMENTED

The LEA has a written policy statement addressing curricular expectations for learners with severe handicaps YE5

major goal of instructional programs for learners with severe handicaps is to teach them to respond to naturally occurring cues in natural environments. It cannot be assumed that learning will occur merely by exposing the learners to tasks or instructional settings. Educators must systematically plan for skill acquisition, as well as, maintenance and generalization of newly acquired skills to the learner's home and community environments.

Many learners with severe handicaps learn skills at an extremely slow pace or perform skills in an inconsistent manner. Systematic analysis of an instructional program is often the only way to determine its effectiveness and what changes are necessary to assure continued progress on IEP objectives.

Learners with severe handicaps are often provided direct instruction by individuals other than certified special educators. In many special education classrooms, learners are provided a large proportion of instruction by instructional aides. Increasingly, non-handicapped peers, community volunteers, and family members are providing direct instruction to learners with severe handicaps. The special education teacher must assume the role of manager of the learning environment to assure that each learner's instructional programs are reliably and effectively administered by those providing direct instruction. The teacher needs a system for managing and monitoring each learner's educational progress.

Systematic data-based instruction has been demonstrated to be an effective model for educating learners with severe handicaps. The following are required components of a systematic data-based instructional approach:

1. Instructional objectives are written with specified conditions, observable and measurable behaviors and acquisition and mastery criteria.

2. Written instructional sequences are specified beginning at the learner's entry level and continuing through the functional use of the skill in natural settings (mastery).

c.
(rei...
d. possible
terms,
e. correction procedure
response,
f. an appropriate data sheet for .
g. directions on how to record ea...
response on a data sheet,
h. a summary sheet for determining studen...
progress (e.g. a graph).

4. Instructional changes are based upon the learner's progress (data-based decisions).

5. Instructional changes are made in a systematic manner (only one change at a time in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the change).

6. Reliability checks are taken periodically on every instructional program to assure proper implementation by instructional personnel and to assure that data accurately reflect the learner's behaviors.

7. A written schedule is maintained and followed to assure that all instructional programs are implemented each day and that the teacher knows where (and with whom) the learner is at all times.

8. A written schedule is maintained for providing feedback and training to direct instructional staff.

IEP. Parents' current and future goals for their children should be taken into account when designing instructional programs. Prior to the more formal IEP meeting many teachers employ a parent inventory or a similar type interview process for this purpose. Involving parents from the very beginning helps to assure their support for and the appropriateness of their children's educational programs in the future.

2. Every educational program serving learners with severe handicaps should have a clearly delineated system for regularly communicating with the learners' parents. This communication system should be mutually agreed upon by parents and teachers. Communication may take place in a log book that travels daily between the parents and the teacher, weekly telephone calls, or notes between home and school describing special achievements.

3. The school should have a system for providing parents of learners with severe handicaps with information regarding available community resources which may be useful to and supportive of the family specifically. Teachers or guidance personnel should have a method for assisting parents to: (a) identify and assess their need for existing community resources, and, (b) gain access to the appropriate contact person within each desired community group or agency.

4. Parents of learners with severe handicaps should be given the opportunity to observe and participate in their children's instructional programs in the classroom, home and community. The need to actively program for skill generalization and maintenance in home and community environments necessitates the active involvement of parents and other family members in the instructional process.

BEST PRACTICE INDICATORS: HOME-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP

1. The learner's parents and other family members have frequent opportunities to visit the classroom and interact with the teacher and other school staff.....................................YES   NO

2. There is an established system for parent/teacher communication between the school and home.................YES   NO

3. There is an established system for providing parents with information about available and useful community resources...YES   NO

4. The learner's parents and other family members have the opportunity to participate in a parent inventory or similar parent interview process............YES   NO

5. Learners' IEPs and written instructional programs reflect concerns expressed by parents choosing to participate in the parent interview process...YES   NO

6. The learner's family has the opportunity to be involved in the selection of community-based objectives and training sites.............................YES   NO

7. The learner's family has the opportunity to be directly involved in teaching and maintaining skills in the home and community initially taught in the school-based program...............................YES   NO

OVERALL BEST PRACTICE SCORE: HOME-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP

NOT IMPLEMENTED		PARTIALLY IMPLEMENTED		TOTALLY IMPLEMENTED
1	2	3	4	5

The LEA has a written policy statement with regard to the home-school partnership...............................YES   NO

SYSTEMATIC PROGRAM EVALUATION

Educational programs serving learners with severe handicaps need to be evaluated on a regular basis. Vermont has adopted the Johnson-Gadberry model (Johnson & Gadberry, 1981) as a means of standardizing program definition across the entire state. This model identifies the following components that define or shape special education programs:

1. Programmatic Philosophy - A written statement of program philosophy and beliefs that provides a standard for the development, implementation and evaluation of all aspects of the program.

2. Overall Program Policies - Written policies for the translation of the program philosophy into the goals and objectives that guide the delivery of services within the special education programs. Program policies include a written description of the service delivery system and the various options available within the program.

3. Overall Program Planning and Coordination - A written description of the planning process used by the program to develop, implement and evaluate program components #5 - #16 below.

4. Student Assessment: Program Eligibility and Educational Program Planning - A written description of the individual student referral, assessment, evaluation and determination of eligibility process used by the program, and how that process is translated into student IEP objectives.

5. Program Content - Written descriptions of the rationale for curriculum selection and the curriculum used within each program option.

6. Method - Written policy statements for social integration, age-appropriate functional skill development, community-based training, data-based instructional programming, parent involvement, integrated related services, transition planning for learners changing environments, and a written instructional program for every IEP objective of each learner served within the various program options.

7. Staff - Organizational charts, certification requirements and job descriptions of all program personnel.

8. Physical Plant Requirements - A written description of the physical facilities used by each program option and proximity to regular education programs for same chronological-aged peers.

9. Parent Involvement - A written plan for providing parents opportunities for becoming active partners in the education of their children and procedures for assuring regular periodic communication between the school and home.

10. Staff Development - A written plan for staff development that includes methods for the continuing needs assessment, training, monitoring and supervision of program staff to assure implementation of best educational practices.

11. Interagency and Advocacy Group Interaction - Identification and written descriptions of collaborative efforts with advocacy groups and state agencies to provide related services, protection and advocacy and transition planning for program participants.

12. Transportation - Written policies related to transportation of students to and from the program, and within the community when appropriate.

13. Instructional Resources - A listing of currently available instructional resources, how they may be accessed by program staff, and a written process for identifying and acquiring additional resources.

14. Community Relations and Involvement - A written plan for disseminating program related information to the community and encouraging community involvement within the program.

15. Fiscal Resources - A written description of the budgeting process used by the program to obtain and allocate resources.

16. Component Policies and Procedures - Special written policies and procedures required for successful operation of the model components #5 - #16.

17. Total Program Evaluation - Written plan for regular systematic program evaluation of each program component using quality indicators.

Evaluation should be an ongoing process that actively involves the entire program staff. An internal review of each of the Johnson-Gadberry program definition components should be conducted at least annually. The purpose of this annual evaluation is to provide program staff and administrators critical information concerning the achievement of program goals, program effectiveness including learner progress, discrepancies needing remediation, directions for future program change, and program impact upon learners, their families and the community.

In addition to the annual internal review by program staff, there should also be a periodic external evaluation of the program conducted by parents, a representative from the SEA, and one or more educational professionals recognized for their knowledge and expertise with regard to current best educational practices, national trends, and relevant laws concerning the education of learners with severe handicaps. A periodic external evaluation allows for a comparison of program standards which have been developed internally with broader regional, state and national standards, trends and best practices. It provides the staff with a unique opportunity to improve their current practices and to move in new directions.

BEST PRACTICE INDICATORS: SYSTEMATIC PROGRAM EVALUATION

1. The program has written definitions for each of the components of the Johnson-Gadberry program definition model...YES NO

2. The entire program staff is actively involved in program evaluation efforts...........................YES NO

3. There is a formal process for annual program review by program staff.........................YES NO

4. The annual review examines achievement of program goals including learner progress and program impact upon learners, their families, and the community.........YES NO

5. The written results of the annual review noting strengths and weaknesses and recommendations for correcting deficiencies are disseminated to parents, program staff and appropriate SEA staff.........YES NO

6. There is a written plan and formal process established for conducting a periodic outside evaluation of the program by qualified professionals................YES NO

OVERALL BEST PRACTICE SCORE: SYSTEMATIC PROGRAM EVALUATION

NOT IMPLEMENTED		PARTIALLY IMPLEMENTED		TOTALLY IMPLEMENTED
1	2	3	4	5

The LEA has a written policy statement for the conduct of systematic program evaluation......................YES NO

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