High-Leverage Practices for Students with Disabilities

for Students with Disabilities

Second Edition

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Background Basics & HLPs 2.0

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According to the National Center for Education Statistics' 2021-22 annual report (NCE https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/annualreports), 7.3 million students receive special education services in American public schools (15% of all students). The number of students requiring special education services is on the rise, as "only" 6.4 million students (13%) received services during the 2010-11 school year. Over 50% of these students are from minoritized racial groups (NCES). This is an enormous number of students entitled to an Individualized Education Program (IEP), corresponding services, and everything else that is required by law (e.g., annual meetings, eligibility testing, paperwork, etc.). In addition, the intersecting identities of students from a range of cultural, ethnic, and other backgrounds introduces essential variables for educators and schools to carefully consider and nurture when delivering services (Franco et al., 2023).

Of the 7.3 million students with disabilities, over 60% will spend more than 80% of each school day in the general education classroom. Many of these students have complex needs, such as autism spectrum disorders. For example, students with autism were only 1.5% of students with IEPs in 2000-01 (~96,000 students), compared to 12.2% of students with IEPs in 2021-22 (~890,600 students), (https://nces.ed.gov/FastFacts/display.asp?id=64). Therefore, general education teachers share joint responsibility with special educators for implementing the IEPs and addressing the instructional, behavioral, and cultural needs of millions of children each year. This responsibility has caused substantial difficulties for all educators, especially those without appropriate training and support.

Multiplying Issues Impacting Achievement and Outcomes for Students with Disabilities

Performance of students. At the start of the 2023-2024 school year, 44% of all public school students were functioning behind grade level in at least one subject area (Bielamowicz & Iaconelli, 2023). Another report noted large learning losses for students following the pandemic; however, observed losses were not equally distributed across communities in the nation (Fahle et al., 2023). The largest losses were observed in rural and urban areas where achievement was behind to begin with.

Despite learning loss during the pandemic, there has never been a time where students with disabilities on average performed as well as peers without disabilities on important measures of

INTRODUCTION

Culturally Inclusive Pedagogies and Practices, Intersectionality, and HLPs

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S ince the original development of the HLPs (McLeskey, 2017), cultural and societal changes in education have provided increased opportunities to support students and educators in a fuller way. That is, making more educator/student interactions more supportive while making school and classrooms more inclusive to the diverse needs of students. To better address the needs of students as complex individuals, understanding the multilayered identities, experiences, and cultures of each student should be incorporated into the goal of education alongside the academic, behavioral, social, and emotional needs.

As part of the process in advancing the HLPs to better support special educators who teach students with disabilities, policies and practices that can be considered culturally inclusive are essential. The considerations and actions related to culturally relevant, culturally responsive, and culturally sustaining teachings have garnered considerable attention, both positive and negative, in educational conversations. These conversations have led to

better support for students but have also led to misrepresentation of the terms and what they mean. While it is beyond the scope of this text to dispel all misconceptions around culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining teachings, we will provide context on their importance and infusion into HLPs. To that end, we briefly describe the progression of theoretical frameworks that focus on cultural sensitivities and provide guidance in infusing those sensitivities into each of the HLPs.

Culturally Inclusive Pedagogies and Practices

To better provide a way to encompass these concepts of cultural sensitivity, we introduce the term culturally inclusive pedagogies and practices (CIPP). CIPP are those theories and practices that have centered multiple layers of sociocultural diversity and understanding in the educational sphere. That is, considering the wholeness of context, content, and constructs (e.g., people,

CHAPTER THREE

Pillar and Embedded Practices for Collaboration with Professionals

Pillar HLP 1	Collaborate with professionals to increase student success.

Collaboration with general educators, paraeducators, and support staff is necessary to support students' learning toward measurable outcomes and to facilitate students' social and emotional well-being across all school environments and instructional settings (e.g., co-taught). Collaboration requires the use of effective collaboration behaviors (e.g., sharing ideas, active listening, questioning, planning, problem solving, negotiating) to develop and adjust instructional or behavioral plans based on student data, and the coordination of expectations, responsibilities, and resources to maximize student learning.

Embedded HLP 2	Organize and facilitate effective meetings with professionals and families.

Educators lead and participate in a range of meetings (e.g., meetings with families, individualized education program [IEP] teams, individualized family services plan [IFSP] teams, instructional planning) with the purpose of identifying clear, measurable student outcomes and developing behavioral plans using culturally inclusive pedagogies and practices that support these outcomes. They develop a meeting agenda, allocate time to meet the goals of the agenda, and lead in ways that encourage consensus building through positive verbal and nonverbal communication, encouraging the sharing of multiple perspectives, demonstrating active listening, and soliciting feedback.

CHAPTER FOUR

Pillar and Embedded Practices for Collaboration with Families

Pillar HLP 3	Collaborate with families to support student learning and secure needed services.

Educators collaborate with families, support student learning, and secure needed services. Educators maintain high expectations to collaborate with families in support of individual children's needs, goals, programs, and progress over time and to ensure that families are informed of and understand special education processes and their rights (e.g., evaluation, IEP meetings, procedural safeguards). Educators engage in reflexivity practices to address biases and meaningfully understand and maximize family priorities and relevant familial background information they wish to share such as linguistic practices, family culture, family structure, or familial educational experiences. Educators advocate for resources to help students meet instructional, behavioral, social, and transition goals. Educators effectively communicate with families to co-design home and community learning opportunities, advocate for their children, as well as students to become self-determined advocates in culturally-responsive inclusive ways.

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Putting It All Together

Collaboration is at the foundation of a comprehensive program for each student with a disability. Through collaboration, educators, families, specialized instructional support personnel, and paraeducators share their expertise with the goal of developing and providing an inclusive, coherent educational program to address each student's needs. Effective collaboration requires commitment among educators, leaders, and families. Each member of the team needs to understand the purpose of each collaborative meeting, believe their contributions are welcomed and valued, and use meeting time effectively to accomplish stated goals. Collaboration also requires specific logistical support, such as schedules and time necessary for collaboration to occur. In this section we outline examples of how effective collaboration is relevant to the integration and implementation of other high leverage practices across the domains (*Data-Driven Planning, Instruction in Behavior and Academics,* and *Intensify and Intervene as Needed*).

Data-Driven Planning

Collaboration is an important part of data-driven planning. For example, during IEP meetings, team members (e.g., educators, families, school psychologists, specialized instructional support personnel) share informal and formal assessment results (HLP 4, 5) to develop a comprehensive profile of each student's needs, also referred to as the student's present levels of academic and functional performance (PLAAFP). Collaboration with parents is an important part of assessment as they provide valuable input regarding their child's development and how they see their child's strengths and challenges. As team members collaborate, they also need to consider how intersectional factors may influence a student's learning. Considering the input of families and professionals makes it more likely that a range of factors that may impact a student's performance will be considered. Frequent, ongoing progress monitoring also requires collaboration as team members assess how well the student is progressing toward their specific goals and to determine when adjustments in instruction are needed (HLP 6).

Instruction in Behavior and Academics

Collaboration among professionals and families is also a key component of providing holistic support for students with problematic behaviors and/or those experiencing poor social and emotional adjustment. By working together, educators, family members, counselors, school psychologists, and other specialists can create a more inclusive and supportive learning environment that supports

CHAPTER FIVE

Pillar Practice for Data-Driven Planning

Pillar HLP 6	Use student assessment data, analyze instructional practices, and make necessary adjustments that improve student outcomes.
Effective educators use all data available to create instructional goals and plans. After instructional goals are developed, educators evaluate and make ongoing adjustments to students' instructional programs. Once instruction and other supports are designed and implemented, successful educators have the skill to manage and engage in ongoing data collection using curriculum-based measures, informal classroom assessments, observations of student academic performance and behavior, self-assessment of classroom instruction, and discussions with key invested partners (i.e., students, families, other professionals). Educators study their practice to improve student learning, validate reasoned hypotheses about salient instructional features, and enhance instructional decisions. Effective educators retain, reuse, and extend culturally inclusive practices that improve student outcomes and adjust or discard those that do not.	

CHAPTER SIX

Embedded Practices for Data-Driven Planning

The embedded HLPs in this section are necessary to support Pillar Practice HLP 6. For an educator to effectively use data to inform instruction to improve student outcomes, they first need to collect the appropriate assessment data from multiple sources to understand student strengths and needs (HLP 4). This data must then be interpreted and communicated in understandable ways to all key partners (HLP 5) before it can be used by the IEP team to make instructional decisions (HLP 6), identify and prioritize short and long-term learning goals (HLP 11) and systematically design instruction to meet those goals (HLP 12). Each of these HLPs works in a cyclical process to help support the implementation of the others and ultimately ensure educators are using data to drive instructional planning. In this chapter, a brief description of the embedded HLPs is provided; their critical features are highlighted along with connections to pillar HLP 6. The chapter also shares cultural considerations, examples in practice, research support, and resources to implement practices for each of the embedded HLPs.

> ### Updated HLP Framework
>
> Pillar HLP 6: Use student assessment data, analyze instructional practices and make necessary adjustments that improve student outcomes.
>
> Embedded HLP 4: Use multiple sources of information to develop a comprehensive understanding of a student's strengths and needs.
>
> Embedded HLP 5: Interpret and communicate assessment information to collaboratively design and implement educational programs.
>
> Embedded HLP 11: Identify and prioritize long- and short-term learning goals.
>
> Embedded HLP 12: Systematically design instruction toward a specific learning goal.
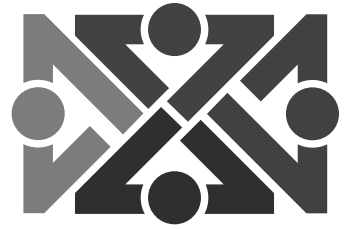
Putting It All Together

While *Data-Driven Planning* is a critical piece in meeting the needs of students with disabilities, no HLP works independently of others. *Data-Driven Planning* must be done with *Collaboration* and informs *Instruction in Behavior and Academics* and *Intensify and Intervene as Needed*. Together these domains work together for student success.

Collaboration

Similar to designing logically sequenced lessons where instruction starts with less complex knowledge and similar skills are first taught separately, novice educators, or those new to the HLPs may think they must master one before the others. However, these HLPs are implemented at the same time as part of a process that supports one another. In data-driven planning, collecting multiple sources of data (HLP 4) must be done in collaboration with colleagues (Pillar Practice HLP 1) and families (Pillar Practice HLP 3) in a culturally inclusive way. Yes, special and general educators may bring to the table different strengths in interpreting and explaining assessment data (HLP 5), but together, these colleagues provide a more holistic interpretation of assessment results. Additionally, students and families are critical partners for understanding the family cultural context. All of these are important for HLP 4, as well as the formal and informal data collected. Not only do all these data provide needed information

for long- and short-term goal setting (HLP 11) they also provide the information to develop systematically designed instruction (HLP 12).

Instruction in Behavior and Academics & Intensify and Intervene as Needed

Once instructional segments are planned, the link to other HLPs is just beginning. Using the data-driven planning cycle, effective educators assess, analyze, communicate, and take action for culturally inclusive pedagogy and practice (CIPP) for student growth. Data informs what explicit instruction is needed (Pillar Practice HLP 16), the adaptations (HLP 13) that will be needed and which elements of the content or skill need to be scaffolded (HLP 15). Likewise, data provides the basis for decisions about which flexible grouping (HLP 17) options to use, and if students are able to generalize and maintain (HLP 21) learning across time and setting. Informal observation (HLP 4) is data that informs the positive and constructive feedback (HLP 8 and 22) that educators provide students to guide their learning. The continuous data (Pillar Practice HLP 6) helps educators to know how to intensify instruction (Pillar Practice HLP 20) or individualize functional based support plans (HLP 10). *Data-Driven Planning* is connected to all instructional decisions.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Pillar Practices for Instruction in Behavior and Academics

HLP 16: Use Explicit Instruction is a key Pillar Practice for this domain. As demonstrated below, this HLP is the key for student learning success across grade levels and content areas, particularly when implemented in concert with the previously mentioned HLPs from domains 1 and 2, and those included in Domain 3: *Instruction in Behavior and Academics*. Use of explicit instruction is also core to practices associated with the next domain addressed in this book, *Intensify and Intervene as Needed*. The next key Pillar Practice is **HLP 7**: Establish a Consistent, Organized, and Responsive Learning Environment. All students, but especially those with disabilities, need stable, predictable, and organized learning spaces. In other words, if chaos reigns, learning is highly unlikely. HLP 7 is foundational for teachers to deliver quality instruction leading to the success of all learners (McClesky, 2017). As experts considered the role of explicit instruction and the creation of organized learning environments and their relationships to the other HLPs from the original instruction and behavior domains, it became clear there should be two groupings of Embedded Practices existing in support of these Pillar Practices: 1) **What to Teach** (Chapter 8), and 2) **How to Teach** (Chapter 9).

The distinction between what to teach and how to teach advances the notion that students with disabilities do not only need to master content, but also need to learn new ways to process and learn information. Educators utilize a range of practices to achieve this aim, and often must transfer or equip students with new skills to perform learning tasks. The practices grouped under the *What to Teach* heading are: **HLP 9**: Teach Social Behaviors, **HLP 14**: Teach Cognitive and Metacognitive Strategies to Support Learning and Independence, and **HLP 21**: Teach Students to Maintain and Generalize New Learning Across Time and Settings. Educators also use a range of practices to provide the best instructional opportunities to ensure that all students meet high academic and behavioral standards. The practices grouped under the *How to Teach* heading are: **HLP 13**: Adapt Curriculum Tasks and Materials for Specific Learning Goals, **HLP 15**: Provide Scaffolded Supports, **HLP 17**: Use Flexible Grouping, **HLP 18**: Use Strategies to Promote Active Student Engagement, **HLP 19**: Use Assistive and Instructional Technologies, and **HLPs 8 and 22:** Provide Positive and Constructive Feedback to Guide Students' Learning (HLP 22) and Behavior (HLP 8).

Embedded HLPs for Instruction in Behavior and Academics: What to Teach

Providing explicit instruction (HLP 16) is a gateway to teaching behaviors and expectations to students necessary to create an organized, consistent, and responsive learning environment (HLP 7). Mastery of these two Pillar Practices is essential for all teachers, regardless of grade level or content area. In addition, these practices are not solely for students with disabilities – they are relevant and effective for all students.

Once mastered, educators can use these skills as a foundation for implementation of many other practices. HLPs 9 (Teach Social Behaviors), 14 (Teach Cognitive and Metacognitive Strategies), and 21 (Teach Students to Maintain and Generalize New Learning Across Time and Settings) are three such practices. The following section provides an introduction to each practice and how it relates to Pillar Practices, notes considerations for implementation with students with intersectional backgrounds, highlights examples of implementation for elementary and secondary levels, reviews key research, and highlights external resources. We also note how these embedded HLPs connect to the *Collaboration* and *Data-Driven*

Planning domain practices and set the stage for the HLPs within the *Intensify and Intervene* domain. All HLPs stand alone but are more effective when implemented in strategic combination.

What to Teach: Embedded HLPs
Pillar HLP 16: Use explicit instruction.
Pillar HLP 7: Establish a consistent, organized, and responsive learning environment.
Embedded HLP 9: Teach social behaviors.
Embedded HLP 14: Teach cognitive and metacognitive strategies to support learning and independence.
Embedded HLP 21: Teach students to maintain and generalize new learning across time and settings.

CHAPTER NINE

Embedded HLPs for Instruction in Behavior and Academics: How to Teach

At their inception, HLPs were intended to be foundational elements of an educator's repertoire (McLeskey et al., 2015). The embedded HLPs noted in this section fit this description perfectly. Educators who have mastered principles of explicit instruction and use them to create organized and effective learning environments for behavior and academics also need to consider unique adaptations students may need to succeed (HLP 13), introduce scaffolded supports to bridge current functioning level to expected performance (HLP 15), deliver instruction for academics or behavior skills in groupings of various sizes (HLP 17), keep students engaged enough so that learning is possible (HLP 18), use assistive or instructional technology (HLP 19), and deliver feedback to students that supports their growth in behavioral (HLP 8) and academic (HLP 22) domains. In sum, each of these practices interacts with or supports the implementation of explicit instruction and the creation and maintenance of an organized learning environment. Each practice also stands on its own and is foundational to numerous other practices and elements of educators' jobs.

How to Teach: Embedded HLPs
Pillar HLP 16: Use explicit instruction.
Pillar HLP 7: Establish a consistent, organized, and responsive learning environment.
Embedded HLPs 8 and 22: Provide positive and constructive feedback to guide students' learning (HLP 22) and behavior (HLP 8).
Embedded HLP 13: Adapt curriculum tasks and materials for specific learning goals.
Embedded HLP 15: Provide scaffolded supports.
Embedded HLP 17: Use flexible grouping.
Embedded HLP 18: Use strategies to promote active student engagement.
Embedded HLP 19: Use assistive and instructional technologies.

CHAPTER TEN

Pillar and Embedded Practices for Intensify and Intervene as Needed

Pillar HLP 20	Provide intensive instruction for academics and behavior.

Educators match the intensity of instruction to the student's learning and behavioral needs. Intensive instruction involves working with students with similar needs on a small number of high priority, clearly defined skills or concepts related to academics and/or behavior. Educators group students based on common needs; clearly define learning or behavioral goals; and use systematic, explicit, and well-paced instruction grounded in culturally inclusive pedagogies and practices (CIPP). They frequently monitor progress using validated measures to assess students' responsiveness and make adjustments as needed. Within intensive instruction, students have frequent and varied opportunities to respond and receive immediate, corrective feedback with educators and peers to practice what they are learning.

Brief Description

Intensive instruction refers to a set of research-based strategies and tools used to individualize supports for students with significant and persistent learning and/or behavioral needs when less intensive supports have not been effective. Intensive instruction is typically provided at Tier 3 within a schoolwide multi-tiered system of supports and is aimed at students for whom research-based Tier 1 and Tier 2 supports were insufficient to help them make adequate progress within the general education curriculum and/or their IEP goals.

Tier 3 intensive instruction is data-driven, highly focused, and culturally inclusive. Instruction typically targets the foundational academic skills or concepts that students need to access core curriculum (e.g., phonemic awareness, comprehension, math problem solving) or may focus on explicitly teaching students' social, emotional, and behavioral skills needed for success in school and the community. Instruction is delivered to small groups of students (typically no more than three, if feasible) with similar learning or behavioral needs.

Intensive instruction draws on HLPs from the domains of *Collaboration*, *Data-Driven Planning*, and *Instruction in Behavior and Academics* to create a comprehensive set of supports targeted to learners with the most intensive needs. To enact intensive instruction, educators combine and systematically intensify HLPs based on individual student's needs. Although highly individualized, effective intensive instruction has several essential components that