

A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO SPECIAL EDUCATION

DAVID F. BATEMAN
& JENIFER L. CLINE



ASCD | Alexandria, VA USA

 **Council for
Exceptional
Children** | Arlington, VA USA
The national leader in special education

A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO SPECIAL EDUCATION

Introduction	1
1. Special Education and the Laws That Affect It	8
2. Educational Frameworks and the Pre-Referral Process	28
3. The Referral and Evaluation Process	44
4. General Education Teachers and IEPs	64
5. Other Students Who Require Accommodations	82
6. Transition	98
7. Classroom Management and Student Behavior	110
8. Service Delivery Options, Related Services, and Other Service Providers	126
9. Assessment, Grades, Graduation, and Diplomas	138
10. Putting It All Together	146
Appendix A: Special Education Terms and Acronyms	155
Appendix B: Definitions of Disabilities	163
Appendix C: People-First Language	166
Appendix D: Explanations and Examples of Accommodations, Modifications, and Interventions	168
Appendix E: Modifications by Type	170
Appendix F: Checklists for Multidisciplinary Team Meetings	174
References	177
Index	179
About the Authors	189

Introduction

With general education classroom teachers facing increased demands—from additional assessments to accountability to larger class sizes to working with students with disabilities—the profession of teaching is more complex and challenging than ever. We don't have all the answers for dealing with its every demand, but we do have concrete suggestions and descriptions of procedures and processes that can change the way teachers work with students with disabilities. Like other students, those with disabilities are expected to achieve in the general education classroom, and it is often the general education teacher who is responsible for that achievement.

This book is designed for you, the general education classroom teacher. Educating students with disabilities is most likely taking up more of your time each year. Parents and students look to you for information about learning strategies, standards, curriculum, accommodations, and modifications. There is a lot to know. Some of the issues related to students with disabilities are about paperwork and compliance, which may seem different from the content demands you face daily, but these elements are actually closely intertwined.

In this book, we address daily issues you are likely to encounter in working with students with disabilities, whether they have an individualized education program (IEP), have a 504 plan, or are not yet identified. We bring together information that will help you understand the process of how a student becomes eligible for special education services and your role in providing special education services and accommodations, and we present specific examples of what to do. We do not delve into the theory of the education of students with disabilities other than to confirm the belief in providing them with an education that improves their abilities and future possibilities. Federal law entitles them to such an education, and educational institutions are responsible for ensuring they receive it.

Our Purpose and What This Book Addresses

As a general classroom teacher, you will undoubtedly have students with disabilities in your classes. In fact, the majority of students diagnosed with disabilities spend most of their school time in the general education classroom (Friend & Bursuck, 2014). This was not always the case, and this shift has been happening continuously over the past 50 years. Furthermore, due to the provisions put in place to ensure equal opportunity for students with disabilities to access education and make progress in the curriculum, the situation is not going to change. Understanding the provisions and how to implement them is clearly important.

The realization that most students with disabilities spend the majority of their time in the general education setting steered the development of this book. Other factors guiding our efforts include the following:

- Students with disabilities are entitled to be included in general education classrooms to the maximum extent appropriate.
- The inclusion of students with disabilities is good for both students with and without disabilities.
- Parts (sometimes large parts) of a student's IEP are implemented in the general education setting.
- Students with disabilities have educational rights.
- Students with disabilities are children first and are not defined by their specific disability.

If you are like most general education teachers, it is likely you have received little if any training for working with students with disabilities. In this book we address this overarching problem by focusing on the following points: (1) your roles and responsibilities as the general education teacher, including working with other educators who are involved; (2) tools and information to assist with classroom instruction; (3) your relationship with parents of students with disabilities; (4) the range of students with disabilities, including those who do not receive any special education services; and (5) the importance of sound data management.

Roles and responsibilities

Like many general education teachers, although you probably received great training in how to teach content—reading, mathematics, science, social studies, essay writing, and so on—you need guidance on the roles

and responsibilities related to working with students with disabilities. You are looking for assistance understanding many factors, including your role in the special education process, your role in an IEP meeting, who the various people are who work with students with disabilities, where (and when) to seek help, needs related to students with 504 plans, what information you need to provide for evaluation reports, what to do for classroom management, and how to handle grading for students who may not be working on the same level as other students.

Classroom instruction

We realize that most general education teachers never set out to be special education teachers. However, we also know that although many teachers came to the profession wanting to teach content (e.g., mathematics, literature, science), the vast majority did so because they wanted to teach *students*. When the students in your classroom include students with disabilities—as is almost always the case—meeting this goal can be a challenge. We are here to help. Our goal is to help improve the lives of students with disabilities and to give you background knowledge and tools to assist you in doing this.

The parent-teacher relationship

Many parents know the names of only three adults in their child's school: the principal, the bus driver, and their child's teacher. Those whose children are eligible for special education services may also know the name of the special education teacher, but their primary contact will be you. You need to be ready to address their concerns, participate with them in meetings, and then be willing and able to provide an education that is appropriate for their child.

The range of disabilities

Serving students with disabilities is part of every general education teacher's career from start to finish; new teachers should expect to have students with disabilities during their entire teaching career. Those students come in all shapes and sizes and with various kinds of challenges, including learning, intellectual, social and emotional, or physical disabilities. In addition, an increasing number of students with disabilities have Section 504 plans (the topic of Chapter 5) and receive no additional assistance from special education staff; they are, therefore, the sole responsibility of the general education program.

Data management

Good teaching is good teaching. However, using good practices for the data management that is required for students with disabilities can potentially enhance the educational experience for all students if you expand and use those practices for everyone. Good data management may also decrease the number of students being identified for services by better tracking of academic and behavior problems and the effectiveness of the interventions put in place to address these problems. At a minimum, the steps you take to document efforts to improve instruction for students with disabilities will likely improve the process and efforts directed toward all students.

Reasonable Expectations and Assumptions

Given all these factors, what can you, as a general education teacher, reasonably expect when working with students with disabilities? Here are some basic assumptions you should make:

You can expect to get assistance for a student who needs help. You are not in this alone. Others you can rely on to help provide support for students who are eligible for special education and related services include administrators, special education teachers, providers of related services, and outside agencies. Work with them, rely on them, and support one another. Remember you are an important player on the educational team of students with disabilities—particularly because you are most likely the first person who will detect a need for additional support for a student. If you do not make others aware of the need and work with them to provide the assistance required, the student may lose valuable educational opportunities. Such assistance may come in the form of an observation with recommendations, suggestions for classroom arrangement, suggestions for instruction, classroom support staff, or individualized instruction in an alternate setting. This support will not come unless you work with the administration and support staff to develop a program that is appropriate, based on the student's individual needs.

You can expect to be an active participant in a student's evaluation and plan development. You are the primary teacher of students, including those who are identified as eligible for special education and related services. Many of the other adults who will be part of the evaluation team will see the student only in isolated instances or for limited periods of time. After the evaluation is complete, the general education teacher is often the one who must continue to provide services (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2013).

Speak up. Make sure you are heard. You will most likely know more about this student's educational needs and classroom performance than anyone else on the initial evaluation team. Make sure you help students (eligible or not) to get assistance that will help them make progress.

You can expect to access school district resources. Districts offer a wide range of services for students with disabilities, some of which may include services provided by paraprofessionals; tutors; specialized service providers such as speech language pathologists, occupational therapists, and physical therapists; or programs designed to meet specific behavioral or vocational needs of students. In addition, reading specialists, school counselors, and special education teachers can help analyze content and

behavioral issues and develop adaptations to address them. It is important to be aware of the continuum of services your district provides so that you may advocate access for your students who require them.

You can expect to work with and get support from special education staff to understand what is important to know about a particular student with a disability and the effects of that disability on the child's education. As previously noted, most students with disabilities of various kinds—learning, intellectual, social and emotional, and physical—spend most of their school time in general education classrooms. As a general education classroom teacher, you recognize problems before anyone else and can provide important information about the student's performance compared to typically developing peers. It is important to be able to work with the special education staff to use this information to develop and implement appropriate services for students. This is also the case for students who are not eligible. Often, others can deliver individualized supports or additional information or strategies to supplement the general education program you provide to ensure that all students make progress.

What a General Education Teacher Can Expect When Working with Students with Disabilities

- To receive assistance for a student who needs help
- To actively participate in a student's evaluation for special education services and special education plan development
- To access school district resources
- To work with and get support from knowledgeable special education professionals
- To access a student's special education records and assessment information
- To be heard

You can expect to work with providers of related services. Students who are eligible for special education services may require additional assistance in the form of related services from other professionals in order to receive an appropriate education. The challenge is that many of these providers work with the student for only a limited amount of time each week. The rest of the time the student is in the general education classroom. It is important to understand the efforts and instruction being provided by the related service providers so you can reinforce skills while the student is in the classroom. Additionally, it is important to be able to report to the related service providers any updates and concerns about progress or lack of progress.

You can expect to have access to a child's special education records and assessment information. When a child becomes eligible for special education and related services, a fairly large report is developed, analyzing performance from a variety of perspectives. This is an important document for you as a general education teacher to be able to read and understand, so that you can be ready to implement its suggestions. Included in this paperwork will be the results of testing completed by either the district or independent evaluators, along with copies of the student's IEP (relevant parts should have already been provided to you). You will see a lot of important and private student information, and you will need to sign a sheet indicating that you accessed these records, which are kept locked up. Some of the information may be kept online and accessed with a password. It is imperative that you honor student and family confidentiality and talk only with the professionals who need to know information about this child in order to do their job.

You can expect to be heard! As you can see from this list of basic assumptions, the role and expectations of a general education teacher are to work with others in identifying problems, following up on concerns, actively participating in the development and implementation of a plan, and sometimes being the main point person representing the interests of students in your classes. To do all these things effectively, you need to be heard and respected as a viable team member providing services.



Working with students with disabilities in a general education classroom can be difficult. However, a lot of supports are available to ensure that these students receive an appropriate education.

In this book, we offer information to help you meet the needs of students with disabilities in your classroom. Use it to learn the steps to take, when to document, and when to seek assistance. The appendixes provide helpful resources, including a list of common special education terms and acronyms, definitions of disability categories, information on “people-first” language, information on accommodations, and checklists for effective multidisciplinary team meetings.

We are certain that no matter where you teach, you will have students with disabilities in your classes. Our job is to help you succeed as you work to ensure they receive the education to which they are entitled.