

# HANDBOOK 12: Meeting Special Needs

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This handbook is one of a series published for the project Collaboration for Excellence: The North Dakota Curriculum Project.

The publication is free to public school educators in North Dakota, who may make copies without permission.

These handbooks represent a team product. A major contributor was Ann Clapper, who was previously Director of the Office of Curriculum Leadership and Improvement. Numerous educators in North Dakota reviewed all these materials and made valuable suggestions. Especially helpful were the following North Dakota educators: Janet Edlund, Dakota Prairie High School; Cheryl Kuhas, North Dakota Department of Public Instruction; Karen Nelson, Hettinger; Sandra Willprecht, Forman. Allan A. Glatthorn, Distinguished Research Professor at East Carolina University, served as consultant to the project.

It should be emphasized that the processes suggested here should be seen only as recommendations, not mandates. The authors value the ability of North Dakota educators to develop their own processes that reflect the needs and resources of their schools.

## 1. UNDERSTANDING THE NEED FOR A SPECIAL CURRICULUM

There is much talk these days in North Dakota about a standards-based curriculum. **Curriculum standards** are statements of the content that students are to learn in one subject for all grades or levels. Special educators and school administrators are currently debating the issue of whether a single standards-based curriculum should be provided for all students or whether special learners need a curriculum designed for them alone. Those arguing for a single curriculum believe that an inclusive curriculum that uses the same standards for all students is the best way to operationalize the core concepts of inclusion. Those arguing for special standards for special students believe that the uniqueness of special learners warrants the development of a special education curriculum based upon special standards.

The position taken here is that special learners deserve a differentiated standards-based curriculum, one that builds upon the common curriculum but adapts and supplements it in special ways. As explained further below, such a curriculum is like a pie that has one part regular, one part special, and one part individual.

This handbook will provide you with the knowledge and skills you need to develop a standards-based curriculum for special learners. While the authors of this handbook believe that the policy of **inclusion** is effective for most special learners and their classmates, there is no intent here to mandate inclusion for all students. Those decisions are best made at the local level on the basis of the individual needs of special learners. Administrators and teachers should find that the processes suggested here are useful for the special learners who attend public schools, regardless of their placement.

There are several reasons why special learners need their own curriculum:

- ! Rather than experiencing a patchwork curriculum as each teacher makes curriculum decisions, like all the rest of the students, special learners learn best from a well-coordinated curriculum based on their developmental needs.
- ! While they have individual needs, most have common strengths and weaknesses to which a well-designed curriculum can respond.
- ! A well-structured curriculum can simplify the development of IEPs.

## 2. UNDERSTANDING THE BASIC CONCEPTS

In order to be able to develop a standards-based curriculum for special learners, you need to know about three types of foundation knowledge—the types of curriculum, standards, and performance tasks and assessments.

### Types of Curriculum

Several types of curricula need the attention of the principal and the teachers.

! **Recommended**

" The curriculum that is recommended by scholars, professional organizations, and state departments of education. Their recommendations are usually promulgated through the various professional organizations to which they belong, such as the National Council for the Social Studies and the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics. The best compilation of recommended standards is Kendall and Marzano (1997).

! **Written**

" The curriculum that appears in locally produced documents: district scope and sequence charts; district curriculum guides; teachers' planning documents; curriculum units. A district curriculum guide is the most commonly used example of the written curriculum.

! **Taught**

" The curriculum that teachers actually deliver day by day. In deciding what to teach, most teachers give careful consideration to their students' needs, their knowledge of what has worked before, the tests that will be given, and the materials they have available. They tend to see the district curriculum guide only as a reminder of what they should emphasize.

! **Supported**

" The curriculum that includes the resources that support the curriculum—textbooks, software, and other media. Since elementary teachers in self-contained classroom usually have to teach all four academic subjects, they tend to rely on the text, especially in areas where they are not strong in content knowledge.

! **Assessed**

" The curriculum that appears in tests and performance measures: state tests, standardized tests, district tests, and teacher-made tests. Teachers are especially concerned about preparing their students for "high stakes" tests given by the state, since such tests are often used to evaluate school and the individual teacher effectiveness.

! **Learned**

" The bottom-line curriculum—the curriculum that students actually learn. Even with effective teachers, there is often a gap between the taught and the learned curricula

since students are not always attentive and do not always understand what is being taught.

! **Hidden**

" Such a curriculum is hidden because most administrators and teachers are unaware of it. It is what students learn from the school's policies, procedures, values, and environment.

! **Excluded**

" The curriculum content that has been omitted from the curriculum.

*Consider these issues that are excluded from most U. S. history curricula: the interment of Japanese-Americans in World War 2; the importance of religion in American life; the impact of the labor movement. Many special learners have never experienced a Shakespeare play; it has been excluded from their curriculum because some teachers unwisely consider it "over their heads."*

Several implications emerge from the analysis of the curriculum of special learners:

- ! Focus on the learned curriculum; ensure that special students master an appropriate and a quality curriculum.
- ! Give special attention to the taught curriculum, since it is the major element influencing the learned. Use instructional methods that build on the special learners' strengths.
- ! Provide a multifaceted written curriculum to meet the needs of special learners.
- ! Structure the supported curriculum so that special learners use materials and resources that facilitate their learning.
- ! Ensure that the assessed curriculum for special learners measures only what they have had an opportunity to learn.
- ! Ensure that the hidden curriculum sends positive messages to special learners. Check especially on the terms that classroom teachers and regular students use to talk about special learners.
- ! Include in the special curriculum topics that have been unwisely excluded. Set high expectations for what special students can learn.

## Standards

Some dictionaries list as many as ten definitions of this complex term. This is the one used here: A statement of what is educationally desirable. Three types of standards are used in discussing educational matters.

### Curriculum Standards

These statements indicate what students are expected to learn. Sometimes they are called **content standards**. In current usage, most curriculum standards specify what students are to learn by the end of grade 12 in one subject, rather than what teachers are to teach. Here is an

example from science.

*Example: Knows the basic features of the earth.*

Curriculum standards are further analyzed into **benchmarks**. In discussing curriculum, a benchmark is one component of a curriculum standard, usually identified for a group of grade levels or a specific grade. Here is an example of a Grades 3-5 benchmark that results from analyzing the science standard about the earth.

*Example: Knows the major differences between fresh and ocean waters.*

### **Performance standard**

A performance standard is a statement of the level of student performance that will be considered acceptable. An example of a performance standard is the minimum score on the Graduate Record Examination that a university will accept for admission to graduate studies. Here is an example of a performance standard for a special learner studying ocean and fresh water.

*Example: Correctly specifies one difference between fresh and ocean waters.*

### **Opportunity Standard**

An opportunity standard is a statement of the supports required for the student to achieve the performance standard with respect to a given curriculum standard. Here is an example of an opportunity standard for special learners.

*Example: The special learners will experience a curriculum that has been adapted to respond to their special needs.*

The point is to ensure that the learners have the opportunity to achieve the performance standard.

## **Performance Tasks and Assessments**

Once the curriculum standards and their benchmarks have been identified, you then need to define the performance task and its performance assessment.

### **Performance Task**

A performance task is an open-ended problem that students solve, using the knowledge they have acquired.

*Examples of performance tasks that some special learners could accomplish:*

- \* *Draw a map showing how to get from your house to your school or your school bus stop.*
- \* *Suppose that your dog needs a fenced-in place. You decide to make the space 20 feet long and 10 feet wide. How much fencing would you need?*
- \* *Suppose that you were a Native American back in the time of Columbus. What do you*

*think you would have felt about the arrival of the white people? Make a recording of what your thoughts would have been.*

**Performance Assessment**

A performance assessment is an evaluation of how successfully the student has completed the performance task.

*Example of performance assessments of special learners:*

- \* *Interview the student.*
- \* *Have the student answer written questions.*
- \* *Evaluate a product the student has produced, such as a letter, or a model, or a speech.*
- \* *Observe the student as he or she demonstrates what has been learned.*

In assessing the performance you should develop and apply **rubrics**. A rubric is a scoring guide to help you and the student know what qualities will be assessed. Display 12-1 shows part of the rubrics for the task of making a map cited above.

**Display 12-1:  
Rubrics for Drawing a Map**

| Criteria                    | Performance Rating        | Indicators   |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|--|
| <b>1. Comprehensiveness</b> | Excellent: A              | Includes all 6 components: orientation; location of school or bus stop; location of home; route numbers; road names; distances |
|                             | Very good: B              | Includes 5 components  |
|                             | More than Satisfactory: C | Includes 4 components  |
|                             | Satisfactory: D           | Includes 3 components  |
|                             | Poor: F                   | Includes 1 or 2 components   |

### 3. UNDERSTANDING THE HALLMARKS OF A QUALITY SPECIAL EDUCATION CURRICULUM

A review of the literature and an analysis of our experience suggest that the following features would be found in a quality curriculum for special learners. (See, for example, Ford, Davern, & Scnorr, 1992; Mastropieri & Scroggs, 1992; and Schrag, 1993.)

- ! A significant part of the curriculum is based on the same standards used in developing the regular curriculum. These standards will be addressed by making such adaptations as using alternative instructional methods and providing additional time.
- ! A major part of the curriculum has been developed for special learners in general, to the extent that their needs can be predicted.
- ! The unique needs of individual students are addressed through an individual curriculum.
- ! The curriculum gives sufficient attention to the life skills that special learners need to function effectively in society.
- ! The curriculum gives special learners access to a meaningful present and a hopeful future. It is not a dead-end curriculum, but is instead one that opens doors.
- ! The curriculum is flexible and provides a sound basis for Individualized Educational Programs.
- ! The basic special education curriculum is coordinated from grade to grade, so that the curriculum for the present grade builds upon that for the previous grade and leads to the one for the next grade. Note that throughout this handbook the term **grade** is used to designate a level of curriculum, in order to achieve clarity. However, all placements for purposes of instruction should be individualized, without concern for the student's grade level. Also, the use of the term grade makes it easier to communicate with regular classroom teachers and should facilitate inclusion.
- ! The curriculum gives special learners structured experiences in solving problems that are real for them.
- ! The curriculum is structured so that special learners can achieve mastery and learn in relative depth, rather than leading to superficial coverage.

## 4. THE THREE PART CURRICULUM: THE REGULAR CURRICULUM

The quality indicators from the previous chapter can perhaps best be achieved through a curriculum supported by three parts:

- ! the regular curriculum,
- ! the special curriculum, and
- ! the individual curriculum. (See Display 12-2)

**Display 12-2:  
Summary of the Three Part Curriculum**

| Aspect                                    | Regular   | Special   | Individual                                 |
|---|---|---|--|
| <b>Source of Standards and Benchmarks</b> | Selected from the district curriculum                 | Added from the professional literature                | Added from the analysis of individual need |
| <b>Identified by</b>                      | Curriculum Task Force, with input from teaching teams | Curriculum Task Force, with input from teaching teams | IEP Committee                              |

As the name implies, the regular curriculum is the common curriculum provided to all students. (For a full explanation of how to develop a regular standards-based curriculum, see Glatthorn, 1999.) As an inclusive curriculum, it is built from selected standards and benchmarks offered to all students. However, its standards and benchmarks are offered to special learners by making certain non-curricular adaptations:

- ! Identifying a simpler performance task
- ! Lowering the performance standard
- ! Providing an alternative performance assessment
- ! Providing additional time for special learners
- ! Using alternative learning materials
- ! Changing the teaching/learning method
- ! Changing the instructor to a special educator or a peer, rather than the classroom teacher
- ! Using an alternative group structure (e.g., whole class for general students and small groups for special learners)

The types of adaptation you choose will, of course, depend on the needs and strengths of special learners and the nature of the skills and concepts to be learned. Display 12-3 summarizes the types of adaptations.

### Display 12-3: Adaptation Analysis of Regular Curriculum for Special Learners

**Subject:** Civics

**Grades:** 6-8

**Standard:** Understands the role of diversity in American life and the importance of shared values, political beliefs, and civic beliefs in an increasingly diverse American society.

**Benchmark:** Knows a variety of forms of diversity in American society.

(Standard and Benchmark taken from Kendall & Marzano, 1997)

| Type of Adaptation            | For Regular Learners                                      | For Special Learners  |
|-------------------------------|---|---|
| <b>Performance Task</b>       | Write essay explaining how you are the same but different | Discuss with other students how you are the same but different  |
| <b>Performance Standard</b>   | Identify 6 similarities and 6 differences                 | Identify 4 similarities and 4 differences                       |
| <b>Performance Assessment</b> | Develop, provide rubrics; grade essays accordingly        | Explain simplified rubrics; observe discussion                  |
| <b>Time For Learning</b>      | One instructional period                                  | Two instructional periods                                       |
| <b>Learning Materials</b>     | Social studies textbook                                   | Video cassette, "Same but different"                            |
| <b>Learning Method</b>        | Read text; write essay, "How I am the same but different" | View video cassette; discuss, "How I am the same but different" |
| <b>Instructor</b>             | Regular teacher   | Special educator  |
| <b>Group Structure</b>        | Whole class or small group                                | Cooperative groups or individualized learning                   |

The regular curriculum for special learners can be developed by a Special Education Curriculum Task Force. The task force should follow this process:

- (1) **Review** all the state and school district standards for all students.
- (2) **Select the regular standards** to be used for special learners by using these criteria:
  - ! Importance and usefulness for the special learners
  - ! Developmental appropriateness, within the developmental ability of special learners to achieve, given suitable adaptations
  - ! Importance to that subject
  - ! Likelihood of appearing on state tests

*Example: These are all the Life Science standards from the Kendall/Marzano compilation. The starred standards are those the task force identified as appropriate for special learners.*

1. *Knows about the diversity and unity that characterize life. \**
2. *Understands the genetic basis for the transfer of biological characteristics from one generation to the next.*
3. *Knows the general structure and functions of cells in organisms.*
4. *Understands how species depend on one another and the environment for survival. \**
5. *Understands the cycling of matter and flow of energy through the living environment. \**
6. *Understands the basic concepts of the evolution of species.*

- (3) **Select the benchmarks** to be mastered at each grade, using the same criteria.

*Example: The district science curriculum lists these four benchmarks for Standard #4, Grade 5. The starred benchmarks are those the task force identified as appropriate for special learners.*

- 4.1 *Knows that the behavior of individual organisms is influenced by internal and external cues and that humans and other organisms have senses to detect these cues.*
- 4.2. *Knows that an organism's behavior is related to the environment.*
- 4.3 *Knows that changes in the environment have different effects on different organisms.\**
- 4.4 *Knows that all organisms cause changes in the environment. \**

## 5. THE THREE PART CURRICULUM: THE SPECIAL CURRICULUM

The special curriculum should be seen as a quality program, specifically designed for special learners. The task force should employ the following process.

### (1) Identify Standards

- The standards identified for special learners would include modifications of the district standards and additional standards not included in the regular curriculum. The modifications would be made chiefly by simplifying the district standards. New standards would be identified by utilizing three different sources: the state standards for special education; the needs of special learners as identified by the task force, the IEP committee, and teaching teams; and the professional literature on special education. (The Loud & Brolin 1997 book is an excellent source for recommended adaptations.) Whereas the regular curriculum for special learners selects from the district standards, the special curriculum is developed by modifying or adding to the standards. See Display 12-4 for an example.

### (2) Identify Benchmarks

- The simplest way to identify benchmarks for each grade is for the task force to make the initial decisions by analyzing the standards and considering the developmental abilities of special learners. The task force would then ask all educators involved with special education to review their decisions. Interested parents should also be invited to review the tentative list of benchmarks. A form similar to the one shown in Display 12-5 can be used to survey educators and parents.

*Example of Standard and Benchmarks from special curriculum:*

*Standard: Understands family life now and in grandparents' era.*

*Proposed elementary benchmarks:*

*Grade 3: Understand how families work together now.*

*Understands how families worked together in grandparents' era.*

*Grade 4: Understands how families entertain themselves now.*

*Understands how families entertained themselves in grandparents' era.*

*Grade 5: Understands how families get information now.*

*Understands how families got information in grandparents' era.*

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## Display 12-4: Identifying Standards for the Special Curriculum

Listed are the K-4 U. S. History Standards, paraphrased from Kendall/Marzano (1997)  
The changes and additions made by the task force are noted.

1. Understands family life now and in the past, and family life in various places years ago.  
**Special Curriculum:** Understands American family life now and in grandparents' era.
  2. Understands the history of the local community and how communities in North America varied long ago.  
**Special Curriculum:** Understands history of local community.
  3. Understands the people, events, problems, and ideas that were significant in creating the history of their state.  
**Special Curriculum:** Understands people and events that were significant in creating the history of their state.
  4. Understands how democratic values came to be, and how they have been exemplified by people, events, and symbols.  
**Special Curriculum:** Understands democratic values.
  5. Understands the causes and nature of movements of large groups of people into and within the United States, now and long ago.  
**Special Curriculum:** Understands why people come to live in the United States.
  6. Understands the folklore and other cultural contributions from various regions of the United States and how they helped form a national heritage.  
**Special Curriculum:** Understands the folklore of selected regions of the United States.
  7. Understands selected attributes and historical developments of societies in Africa, the Americas, Asia, and Europe.  
**Special Curriculum:** Understands present conditions in other regions of the world: one in Africa, one in the Americas, one in Asia, and one in Europe.
  8. Understands major discoveries in science and technology, some of their social and economic effects and the major scientists and inventors responsible for them.  
**Special Curriculum:** Understands major discoveries in science and technology and their impact on society.
  9. **Standard to Be Added:** Understands that many great people have had special limitations.
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## Display 12-5: Sample Survey Form: Teachers and Parents

As you may know, we are developing a new curriculum for our special students. We would like your input about what should be taught for each standard, each grade level. A standard is a statement that identifies the general knowledge and skills that students should know after several years of schooling. A benchmark is one of several specific learning outcomes that categorize a particular standard.

Please read each item (benchmark) carefully. Then tell us how important each benchmark is for our special learners at that grade level.

### Grade 4

**Standard:** Understands the history of our local community.

|  | Definitely<br>Not<br>Important | Probably<br>Not<br>Important | Important | Very<br>Important |
|--|--------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------|-------------------|
| 1. Understands changes in community life<br>over time..... | 1                              | 2                            | 3         | 4                 |

### (3) Add Life Skills

-- The term life skills is used here to mean the processes used in everyday life to solve problems, make decisions, and succeed as a family member, worker, and student. While Kendall and Marzano (1997) recognize the need for this component in the regular curriculum, it rarely appears in district curricula. And it seems especially useful for special learners. Therefore, the recommendation here is that the special curriculum should emphasize the life skills. To identify life skills, the following process may be used.

- 1) Review the literature on life skills, giving special attention to the recommendations of the state office.
- 2) Identify the Life Skills standards that you consider useful.
- 3) Identify the grade level benchmarks for each standard.

#### ***Example: Life Skill Standards***

*(This list has been paraphrased from Lloyd and Brolin, 1997.)*

- \* *Managing money*
- \* *Maintaining supportive living environments*
- \* *Maintaining personal health*
- \* *Developing appropriate personal relationships*
- \* *Using appropriate behavior while dining, at home and in the community*
- \* *Buying and maintaining clothing*
- \* *Participating in leisure activities*
- \* *Finding your way in the community*

#### ***Example: Life Skill Benchmarks***

- \* *Maintaining personal health*
  - Grade 6. Diet and nutrition*
  - Grade 7. Exercise*
  - Grade 8. Healthful environments*

## 6. THE THREE PART CURRICULUM: THE INDIVIDUAL CURRICULUM

The third leg is the individual curriculum. The regular curriculum is for all students and is adapted for special learners. The special curriculum is for all special learners who cannot handle the regular curriculum. The individual curriculum is designed for one student only with the intent to help them achieve a productive life.

The individual curriculum also addresses any special factors that need to be considered for each student. These special factors may include:

- ! Behavioral interventions
- ! Instruction in Braille
- ! Use of assistive technology
- ! Provision of special devices
- ! Accommodations for special deficits

*For example, a deaf student might work on this standard: Communicate effectively with American Sign Language.*

The individual curriculum is developed by analyzing the special needs of one student—needs not addressed by either the regular or special curriculum. The individual curriculum is determined by a systematic evaluation of the student's unique needs.

## 7. ASSEMBLING THE COMPONENTS OF THE WRITTEN CURRICULUM

At this point the task force should be able to develop the components of the written curriculum—the Scope and Sequence Chart and the Curriculum Guide.

### Developing the Scope and Sequence Chart

One Scope and Sequence Chart should be developed for the regular curriculum and one for the special curriculum. A Scope and Sequence Chart, as the term implies, is a large chart that shows the scope of the curriculum by listing the standards down the left side and the sequence (grades) across the top. The benchmarks are noted in each appropriate cell. (See Display 12-6).

While many school systems do not bother developing a Scope and Sequence Chart, it serves several purposes. The chart:

- ! Guides the development of the Curriculum Guide.
- ! Helps special educators and teaching teams see the progression of knowledge and skills across the levels of the curriculum.
- ! Provides a useful road map for parents.
- ! Enables all involved to see at a glance the skills and knowledge to be emphasized.

**Display 12-6:  
Scope and Sequence Chart for Special Curriculum**

Benchmarks are noted in the cells

| Standard          | Grade 1        | Grade 2                  | Grade 3                     | Grade 4                              |
|-------------------|----------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Family Life       | Our families   | Grandparent families     |                             | Families long ago                    |
| Local Community   | Where we live  | Where grandparents lived | Protectors in our community |                                      |
| Democratic Values | Honesty        | Respect                  | Freedom                     | Trust                                |
| Folklore          | Nursery rhymes | Folk tales               |                             | Myths                                |
| Discoveries       |                |                          |                             | Wheel<br>Fire control<br>Automobiles |

Throughout this process, the goal of the task force is to develop a Scope and Sequence Chart that is characterized by the following features.

- ! It specifies no more than ten standards for each subject, Grades K-12.
- ! For each standard, it specifies no more than four benchmarks for each grade, each standard.
- ! The placement of benchmarks reflects the developmental capabilities of special learners.
- ! The placement of benchmarks shows progression from level to level, without excessive repetition.

Note, however, that the grade level designations should be used very flexibly. The teaching team should place each student where he or she belongs developmentally, regardless of the grade.

### **Developing the Curriculum Guide**

The next step in the curriculum process is to use the Scope and Sequence Chart as a basis for developing a useful Curriculum Guide for each subject included in the curriculum. The goal is to produce a Curriculum Guide that is teacher friendly. A teacher friendly guide is one that is clear, easy to use, and sharply focused on the essentials. The recommendation here is that each guide should include these elements in the order listed.

- ! A statement about the importance of special education
- ! An explanation of the regular curriculum, organized by levels
- ! For each level, a statement of the standards and their benchmarks
- ! A similar explanation and description of the special curriculum
- ! Guidelines for writing IEPs based on the curriculum guide

Some districts also include the classroom learning objectives. These are the very specific outcomes for each benchmark. Here, for example, are the learning objectives for the Grade 3 benchmark for the “learning to learn” standard.

***Benchmark: Learning from the library***

- 1. Showing good behavior in the library*
- 2. Taking care of library books*
- 3. Using the computerized catalog*
- 4. Finding and using encyclopedias in the library*

The recommendation is that the objectives not be included in the Curriculum Guide. Instead they can be specified in the IEP, thus giving the teacher more flexibility.

Note also that the individual curriculum is not included in the guide, since it is completely individualized. Instead it becomes an important component of the IEP, as explained below.

### **Developing IEPs from the Three Parts**

It should now be a relatively simple matter to use the three parts of the curriculum to write an IEP for each student. The IEP committee should answer these questions in doing so.

- ! Which standards and benchmarks from the regular curriculum should be emphasized?
- ! How should the regular curriculum be adapted?
- ! Which standards and benchmarks from the special curriculum should be emphasized?
- ! How can the individual curriculum address special needs not met by the regular or special curriculum?
- ! What instructional strategies should be used for the regular, the special, and the individual curriculum?
- ! How will student learning be assessed, both formatively and summatively?

### **A Concluding Note**

Special students deserve the best. A quality curriculum is one major component of excellence in education for special learners.

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