

Connecticut State Board of Education
Hartford

**Position Statement on
the Education of Students with Exceptionalities**

February 10, 2012

The Connecticut State Board of Education believes that all students, including students with exceptionalities, are unique and influenced by cultural, linguistic, intellectual, psychological, health and economic factors. The Board also believes that throughout their education, all students may have exceptional challenges that impact their ability to learn. The Board recognizes, though, that the intensity of some of these challenges requires these students to receive special protections under state and federal law. Students with exceptionalities in Connecticut are defined by the Board as those students who have extraordinary learning abilities or outstanding talents in the creative arts, and those who meet the criteria for eligibility pursuant to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA). All students, including students with disabilities and those with outstanding talents in the creative arts or extraordinary learning abilities, should receive educational services that enable them to develop their full potential in light of these influencing factors. As such, the Board expects that teaching and learning provide a wide continuum of options and settings to foster high expectations, expertise, continuing improvement and curricula which are appropriately challenging for preparing all students, including those with exceptional learning abilities, for entry into higher education and/or the workplace.

The Board strongly encourages districts to recognize the value of and to increase support for services to students identified as talented and gifted to address their exceptionalities. Students identified as eligible under IDEA federal legislation must be provided with a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment. To address the uniqueness of each of these students, a varied educational environment and a unified and coordinated continuum of educational opportunities and supports are needed to provide and accommodate each student's strengths and challenges.

Educational models that promote multiple instructional strategies which encourage and accommodate students in the general education environment to the maximum extent appropriate are crucial. As such, the Board has embraced Connecticut's Framework for Response to Intervention (RTI), *Using Scientific Research-Based Interventions: Improving Education for All Students*. This model of strong core instruction and early intervention provides all students, including students with exceptionalities, the opportunity to receive the academic and behavioral supports needed to be successful.

All adults in the education community are responsible for assisting all students, including those with exceptionalities, in achieving academic and social goals. Educating students with these exceptional differences is improved through collaborative partnerships among families, school districts, educational organizations, state agencies, businesses and institutions of higher education. Each partnership strengthens the Board's vision of assuring that Connecticut's students, including those with exceptional challenges, are provided with a high-quality, comprehensive and equitable education.

References

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Policy Guidance for the Position Statement on the Education of Students with Exceptionalities February 10, 2012

The Connecticut State Board of Education, in its 2012 *Position Statement on the Education of Students with Exceptionalities*, identifies important considerations in educating students with exceptional learning differences. In order to create the opportunities necessary to meet the requirements for Connecticut's students with exceptionalities, the Board provides the following guidelines to increase the collaborative efforts of various stakeholders in building a coordinated system to meet the needs of these students.

Connecticut State Department of Education's Responsibilities

Provide leadership to help ensure that students with exceptionalities have equitable access to educational programs that lead to success after high school.

- Monitor school districts' implementation of state and federal laws regarding rights of students with exceptionalities.
- Provide leadership related to individualized instruction for students with exceptionalities.
- Provide information/guidance about students with exceptionalities to business and industry through collaboration with various workforce development groups.
- Ensure technical assistance to districts related to the identification procedures and educational programs for classroom teachers.

Foster the development of high-quality personnel to lead schools and serve students with exceptionalities.

- Disseminate information on best practices related to the identification of students with exceptionalities.
- Disseminate information on best practices related to the individualization of educational services for students with exceptionalities.
- Provide professional development opportunities for administrators in local education agencies (LEAs) to promote training for classroom teachers.
- Partner with higher education institutions to strengthen preservice and graduate education programs for all teachers related to the learning needs of the range of students with exceptionalities.

Assist families of students with exceptionalities to collaborate in their children's educational experience through understanding their legal rights and their children's uniqueness.

- Provide guidance and training to parents about their rights as parents of students who have exceptionalities and about partnering with the district in their children's education.
- Respond to questions from parents and school personnel on the educational rights and services for students with exceptionalities.

School Districts' Responsibilities

Provide leadership that promotes and assures student rights that respond to the individual student's needs.

- Recognize and communicate clearly to staff and community members that children with exceptionalities exist in every community—across ethnic, racial and socio-economic status and across all geographic locations.
- Promote the use of instructional materials that include strategies for addressing the learning needs of all students.
- Identify the supporting actions necessary to promote the appropriate and positive involvement of students with exceptionalities in the total school program, including extracurricular activities.
- Identify all students with exceptionalities in PK-12 each year as identified in legislation.

Recruit, hire and retain a high-quality workforce that appreciates and is skilled in educating students with exceptionalities.

- Hire highly qualified teachers with endorsements, coursework and/or continuing education units (CEUs) in special education and/or gifted education.
- Provide training to *all* educators who prepare to teach children with varying abilities, interests and learning styles. This will enable educators to, with the use of supplementary aids and services, modify curriculum, deliver individually designed instruction and implement effective instructional practices to students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment (LRE).
- Provide ongoing professional development related to differentiated instruction and other effective teaching strategies.
- Provide professional development opportunities for educators who work to assist learners to build skills necessary for successful transitions (e.g., decision making, problem solving, self-advocacy, independence, study skills, self-regulation, career exploration, etc.).

Engage in partnerships to help assure the success of schools in meeting the needs of diverse learners.

- Collaborate with the parents of students with exceptionalities and other agency personnel who provide educational services to students with exceptionalities.
- Develop relationships with local business and industry that lead to improved opportunities for students with exceptionalities.

Provide the needed structures within schools to meet the individual needs of students.

- Develop and implement a systematic and coherent continuum of learning opportunities that address the needs of students with exceptionalities in PK-12 across the learning continuum.
- Deliver support services based on early identification of learning problems and early intervention strategies that accommodate different learning styles in the general education classroom.
- Ensure that teachers have time to administer classroom instructional assessments (e.g., diagnostic, formative, pre-assessments, etc.) to ensure that all students, including exceptional students, are working on appropriate learning activities every day and in every class.
- Provide the instructional materials, supplies, technology and equipment to support differentiated instruction for all learners.

- Provide time for teachers to develop rich and challenging educational opportunities for students with exceptionalities that focus on activities with clear educational benefit and result in improved student outcomes.

Teachers' Responsibilities

Assure students are afforded their educational rights.

- Comply with federal and state laws related to students with exceptionalities.
- Remain current in the knowledge and skills to meet the individual needs of students with exceptionalities.
- Stay current about the learning needs of students with exceptionalities, the instructional techniques related to differentiated instruction and assessment practices.
- Increase knowledge and skills for implementing evidenced-based and best practices to meet the diverse needs of all learners.
- Review state and national resources that highlight gifted education (e.g., Connecticut Association for the Gifted, National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented).
- Collaborate with colleagues and families for students to be successful.
- Collaborate with colleagues (e.g., grade level teams, co-teaching, consultation with paraprofessionals and integrated support specialists) to improve educational opportunities for students with exceptionalities.
- Engage in discussions with family and community members to enhance their ability in providing social and academic opportunities for students with exceptionalities.
- Use district and classroom assessment data to create learning objectives that are aligned with grade level expectations and meet the wide range of individual student needs.

Families' Responsibilities

Advocate for children's educational rights.

- Learn about the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) and state laws pertaining to children's education, using resources from the Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center (CPAC), the Connecticut State Department of Education and other organizations specific to students with exceptionalities.

Foster and promote in children a desire to learn and to understand their own uniqueness.

- Read about the academic, social and emotional issues surrounding the student with exceptionalities including the latest research, as well as evidenced-based and best practices.
- Understand the strengths and needs related to children's learning profile and style of learning and expression.
- Be informed of children's interests through family and community experiences.

Work collaboratively with teachers to support children's learning and progress.

- Support school programs through actions such as attending special school functions, chaperoning field trips or sharing expertise.
- Become familiar with the district's assessment practices and the meaning of different assessment scores.
- Be informed of children's interests through family and community experiences.

- Encourage students with exceptionalities to pursue courses, extra-curricular activities and opportunities in the workforce that appropriately challenge them.

Higher Education Institutions' Responsibilities

Provide educators with instructional training designed to ensure the success of students with exceptionalities.

- Provide pre-service coursework and practicum that explicitly address instructional practices which meet the needs of diverse learners (e.g., differentiation of instruction, assessment); curriculum standards and their development; and that target strategies for collaboration (e.g., co-teaching) and adult learning theory.
- Provide training to *all* educators that prepare them to teach children with varying abilities, interests and learning styles. This training will enable educators to, with the use of supplementary aids and services, modify curriculum, deliver individually designed instruction and implement effective instructional practices in the LRE.

Provide educators with knowledge and skills to implement federal and state educational requirements for students with exceptionalities.

- Provide pre-service coursework and practicum that address formal and informal assessments and the bias inherent in assessment; the key tenets of the IDEA; and strategies for working collaboratively with parents and families.

Community Leaders' Responsibilities

Assist in the successful transition of students with exceptionalities from school to work and independent living.

- Collaborate with schools to identify real world problems that can be adapted by teachers to make learning engaging and reflective of the real world.
- Provide enrichment experiences after school, on weekends, during school holidays and during the summer that expose students to explore new areas of interest, increase their skills and heighten their curiosity about the application of knowledge to real world problems and issues.
- Inform the Connecticut State Department of Education of workforce needs.
- Develop ongoing partnerships with schools to support and enhance the learning of students with exceptionalities in PK-12, including providing opportunities for internships and mentorships.

Understand the unique needs of students to recognize their contributions to society.

- Respect the diverse ways in which individuals learn and accomplish tasks.

Facilitate the provision of resources for schools to enable high-quality learning and outcomes of students with exceptionalities.

- Attend local and regional board of education meetings to advocate for adequate funding for education.
- Lobby state and federal legislators to support adequate funding for education of students with exceptionalities.