Aligning Inclusive Leadership Practices
with the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders

Developed by the Connecticut State Department of Education with support from the Council of Chief State School Officers and the members of the CT Advancing Inclusive Principal Leadership Team

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Introduction

The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) was selected by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) to participate in its Advancing Inclusive Principal Leadership initiative, a project designed to promote inclusive school practices for learners who receive specialized services. Over a two year period, a team composed of representatives across various organizations met to create and implement a state plan, recognizing the current context of Connecticut's schools and the work to include children with disabilities that was already in place. The team expanded the focus on inclusive practices to also include students who are multilingual learners. Team members identified Connecticut's strengths as well as opportunities for school principals and district leaders to increase equitable access, opportunity, and outcomes for each and every child who lives in their community.

As the team worked together, the importance of building a sense of belonging for *all* adults and children became apparent. Not only is this backed by research that tells us children have more academic and social gains with a sense of belonging, but the team recognized the many ways that the language we use to label children, school spaces, and educators, as well as our education traditions, serve to separate people and may limit opportunities for learning and success after school. In working to define "inclusive" school leadership practices, the team looked to the *Professional Standards for Educational Leaders* (PSEL) developed by the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA, 2015) and the document, *PSEL 2015 and Promoting Principal Leadership for the Success of Learners with Disabilities*, that was later developed by the CCSSO with the CEEDAR Center and key stakeholders in 2017.

To align with Public Act 23-159, which modified C.G.S. 10-151b, to reflect the current context of education, and to support CT's leaders and educators so they can support CT students, the Connecticut State Board of Education adopted both the CT Guidelines for Educator and Leader Evaluation and Support 2023 (CT Guidelines 2023), and the ccc, as recommended by the Educator Evaluation and Support (EES) Council, codified in C.G.S. 10-151d as the Performance Evaluation Advisory Council (PEAC), to be implemented in local education agencies beginning July 1, 2024.

Major shifts described in the CT Guidelines 2023 as reflected in the CT Leader and Educator Evaluation and Support Plans 2024 include:

- **Agency and Ownership:** From individual compliance to collaboration, trust, and commitment.

- **Continuous Learning:** From a single score to high-quality feedback, support, growth, and continuous learning.

- **High Expectations for All:** From achievement only goals to whole-child goals aligned to standards and Vision/Portrait of the Graduate.

- **Innovation:** From incremental improvement to transformational improvement.

These shifts provide school leaders with meaningful opportunities to transform their practice to lead inclusive schools.

> This document is aligned with the Connecticut State Board of Education's Every Student Prepared for Learning, Life, and Work Beyond School: The Comprehensive Plan for Education 2023-2028 (ct.gov), and is specific to the strategic priority:
>
> *All learners are supported, including those with high needs, and have equitable access to education regardless of background or advantage, as well as access to great teachers and leaders, and a diverse educational workforce.*

Definitions to Guide Inclusive Leadership Practices

- **Equality** means each individual or group of people has the same rights, resources, and opportunities.

- **Equity** refers to fairness and justice in the way people are treated, and especially freedom from bias and favoritism. An equity lens recognizes that each person has different circumstances and allocates resources and opportunities to reach an equal outcome. An equity approach requires us to identify and overcome intentional and unintentional barriers arising from bias or systemic structures that impact access, participation, and outcomes.

- **Transformational leadership** implies that a significant and profound change is influenced through establishing a relationship with stakeholders and developing a shared vision, resulting in a deep shift in stakeholder perspective and the culture of the organization. Transformational change is organization-wide and enacted over time. Transformational leaders inspire and motivate change.

- **Transformative leadership** implies causation, having the power to transform. It grounds practice in questions of justice and democracy, viewing education as having both individual and societal impact. It implies that a person, process, or event has the power to alter the current state or condition and change it into something else. In the context of inclusive practices, school leaders address inequitable practices and address deficit mindsets that act as barriers to the advancement of learners who have been traditionally underserved by the educational system. It acknowledges and is responsive to the unique cultural and practical needs of the students and families they serve. (Shields, 2018).

[Equality vs. Equity: What Is the Difference? | Merriam-Webster](#)

① Inclusive Leadership Practices
Standard 1: Mission, Vision, and Core Values

Standard 1 of PSEL 2015 calls on educational leaders to collaboratively develop and commit to a mission, vision, and set of core values that lead to the academic success and personal well-being of each student. It also calls on educational leaders to develop a shared understanding of and commitment to this vision and set of core values throughout the school community.

An inclusive leader will help the school staff and community at large develop a shared understanding of the term "inclusion" and its application to the school setting.

It is not a term about physical place, but rather a term that refers to the actions that staff take to ensure a sense of belonging and meaningful engagement. It is also a term that implies collaboration to create the educational services that lead to achievement of grade-level educational standards.

- **Communicate a vision** that all learners are valued members of the school community who belong in all general education settings and activities; and all staff are responsible for supporting the performance and progress of each and every learner; articulate the expectation for collaboration, equity, and mutual respect among all staff members. Promote inclusive education as a schoolwide priority and not the responsibility of a single department.

- Create a culture of open communication, respect, and trust as the school and community develop **a sense of collective responsibility** for improving the learning of all students.

- Model and encourage **language** that does not label children and school spaces by ability or service; and the school does not segregate any member of the school community based on ability or specialized service, fostering a sense of belonging for all learners and all adults.

- Support the **community to understand what, why, and how** children and youth with additional service and support needs can and should be included.

- **Proactively educate families and community members** on research, rationale, evidence-based practices, legal requirements, and national best practices that inform school decisions.

- **Assess** the current condition of inclusive practices (placement, sense of belonging, instructional engagement, social participation, accessing grade-level instruction). Ensure that there is **shared accountability** for all learners.

2 Inclusive Leadership Practices
Standard 2: Ethics and Professional Norms

Standard 2 focuses on ethics and professional norms of educational leadership and calls on educational leaders to act with integrity, fairness, transparency, trust, collaboration, and perseverance, among other norms. Principals should model and promote ethical and professional behavior among faculty and staff.

As a leader, the school principal will use data to call out inequities for both staff and learners in the school community. Particular attention is given to the social and emotional well-being of the adults in the building as well as the children and youth served by the school.

- Ensure that there is **shared accountability** for all learners.
- Establish and reinforce a **shared understanding of expectations** concerning learner academic and social outcomes across all learner populations.
- Promote the expectation that **all learners are general education learners first,** including those who receive English language services or special education services.
- Expect and support educators and specialists to understand and **model the principles of accessible instruction and positive behavior supports.**
- Build a professional community that **shares responsibility for improving the learning and sense of belonging** of all children/youth.
- **Prioritize** social-emotional well-being for staff and students as described in the Connecticut State Board of Education's Five-year Comprehensive Plan for Education 2023-2028.
- Ensure that **teams** (grade-level, subject area, intervention, etc.) use effective collaborative planning and decision-making structures.
- **Instruct all learners,** including those who receive specialized services, **with their peers in the general education classroom.**

3 Inclusive Leadership Practices
Standard 3: Equity and Cultural Responsiveness*

Standard 3 stipulates that educational leaders must strive for equity and employ culturally responsive practices that promote the academic success and well-being of each student. Educational leaders should recognize each student's strengths, diversity, and culture, and ensure they have equitable access to effective teachers, learning opportunities, academic and social support, and other resources necessary for success.

Principal leaders use research-informed strategies to support all members of their school community, recognizing and respecting their diverse identities. By finding commonalities and leveraging differences to support decision making, principals take an asset-focused lens to build on the social capital of all members.

Principals, regardless of their own background, model and demonstrate cultural humility and are respectful and open to ongoing learning about those in their school community.

- **Ensure spaces are not stigmatizing learners** by their location, appearance, labels, or design.
- Design the overall school **environment to be psychologically and physically safe and validating** of all cultures, identities, and backgrounds.
- Demonstrate **respect for learners' identities and welcome a diverse community** to participate in schools.
- Provide **opportunities for learners to engage in activities** (e.g., clubs, leadership activities, service learning, and peer mentoring) that broaden learners' perspectives.
- Build **authentic relationships with families** through two-way, reciprocal conversations that acknowledge families' cultures and native language and engage families in co-creating a culturally responsive learning environment. Oral and written translation is provided in the native language.
- Increase **understanding of second language acquisition** in all educators and leaders and demonstrate the importance of biliteracy in learner achievement by **encouraging multilingualism** in staff and faculty.
- Ensure that all **professional development opportunities are culturally sensitive and inclusive.**
- **Examine disaggregated school data** to discover trends in attendance, discipline, academic performance, and family engagement across all learner populations to inform instruction and **identify gaps in educational access and outcomes.**

* Adapted from the Connecticut State Board of Education (2021)
Position Statement on a Culturally Responsive Approach to Education.

(4) Inclusive Leadership Practices
Standard 4: Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment, and Social Engagement

Standard 4 focuses on developing and supporting intellectually rigorous and coherent systems of curriculum, instruction, and assessment for the academic success and well-being of each student.

Principals ensure that instruction is intellectually challenging and authentic to student experiences and educational objectives, responsive to student strengths, evidence-based, and differentiated.

Principals promote the effective use of technology for teaching and learning, implement valid student assessment systems, and use both formative and summative assessment data appropriately to monitor student progress and improve instruction.

Principals ensure that all learners have an effective means to communicate their personal needs as well as their content knowledge of the curriculum.

- Develop and support **intellectually rigorous and coherent systems** of curriculum, instruction, and assessment to promote each and every learner's academic success.
- Ensure the use of **universal design for learning (UDL), culturally responsive instruction, differentiation, and other evidence-based core** practices (see appendix A).
- Collaborate with the school community to **design and implement a schoolwide behavioral/social-emotional learning (SEL)/mental health (MH) support system** that results in a positive and supportive learning environment for all staff and students.
- **Support school staff as they collaborate to use data** to:
  - » implement and continuously improve educational practices;
  - » make individualized instructional decisions to promote growth for each and every learner; and
  - » share accountability for learner progress.
- Support the use of embedded **social-emotional learning** and relational practices by educators in the classroom and throughout their school community.
- Promote a **sense of belonging and positive academic identity** for all learners.
- Know and promote understanding and application of the Connecticut English Language Proficiency (CELP) standards and strategies for **English learners (ELs)/multilingual learners (MLs).**
- Ensure that all learners, including those who require specially designed instruction in core content areas, receive it from **qualified and experienced educators.**

Inclusive Leadership Practices

(5) Standard 5: Communities of Care/ Specialized Learner Supports

Standard 5 focuses on leadership to cultivate inclusive learning communities to support each student. It emphasizes leaders' responsibility to build and maintain a safe, caring, and healthy environment that meets the needs of each student and creates and sustains an environment in which each student is encouraged to be an active and responsible member of the school community.

Leaders develop coherent systems of academic and social supports, services, extracurricular activities, and accommodations to meet the needs of a diverse range of learners.

- Support individualized education program (IEP) teams to plan for participation **in the general education classroom** every year when instructional setting is discussed.
- Ensure that specialized educators have the **resources** they need (such as common planning time, ongoing professional learning, coaching) to collaborate to provide quality, effective services and supports.
- Ensure that **specialized educators are valued** contributors and members of grade-level/ departmental teams and participate equally in decisions.
- Ensure that **teachers use research-based co-teaching practices** through supervision, professional learning, coaching, and resources.
- Promote the use of **flexible collaborative instructional models** based on the needs of learners in a class.
- Support the delivery of **evidence-based related services** (OTs, PTs, speech/language, etc.) within the general education class, based on learner needs.
- Support teams use a **structured learner-centered planning process** to plan academic and social participation and learning for students with more complex and specialized support needs.
- Ensure that learners with specialized service needs and their **families are proactively engaged** in before-school, during-school, and after-school activities and decisions.
- Ensure **paraeducators are trained** to assume instructional support roles under certified educator supervision.
- Ensure opportunities for **learners who receive specialized services to serve in decision-making and leadership roles** in the school.
- Ensure the **effective integration of technology** into instruction, including assistive technology and specialized instructional materials.
- **Create the time and promote the process** for collaboration and provide the resources for learner-centered planning.

Inclusive Leadership Practices
6 Standard 6: Professional Capacity of School Personnel

Standard 6 focuses on educational leaders' work to recruit, hire, support, develop, and retain effective and caring teachers and staff. It also focuses on leaders' responsibility to plan for and manage staff turnover and provide opportunities for effective induction and mentoring of new personnel.

The CSDE Leveraging Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) to Enhance Educational Leadership provides guidance for the selection, integration, and implementation of the best evidence-based behavioral practices for improving outcomes for all students, particularly marginalized and vulnerable populations.

- Ensure that educators **collaborate to vertically align the curriculum with state standards** and make it **accessible** to all learners.
- Ensure general and special educators understand the **learning needs** of individual children with disabilities and how to contribute to developing **standards-based IEPs.**
- Utilize multi-tiered systems of support to achieve academic and social-emotional outcomes for all students.
- Supervise and evaluate educators' **skills** in universal design for learning, culturally competent instruction, differentiation, language acquisition for ELs/MLs and other evidence-based instructional practices.
- Ensure **internal accountability systems** for monitoring learner progress and data used to improve instruction for all learners.
  - » Analyze and use meaningful quantitative and qualitative disaggregated data for instructional decisions.
  - » Identify disproportionality across learner groups.
  - » Support educators to make data-informed decisions to plan instruction, intervention, and specialized services.
- Foster a culture of **continuous improvement** through action research and professional growth.
- Provide continuous improvement through **generative, supportive, and ongoing feedback** to educators and staff.
- Effectively **recruit, interview, and retain diverse educators** experienced and committed to include and advance learners who receive specialized services.
- Identify opportunities for **educators to observe, support, and coach** each other in the implementation of inclusive practice.

7 Inclusive Leadership Practices
Standard 7: Professional Community for School Staff

Standard 7 focuses on the importance of fostering a professional community for teachers and staff to promote each student's academic success and well-being. Educational leaders should establish workplace conditions for teachers and professional staff conducive to effective professional development, practice, and support of student learning.

Key factors of success for this standard include establishing a sense of collective responsibility and mutual accountability for the success of each student, and for the school as a whole. To achieve this, principals should encourage teachers to set high expectations for self-assessment and reflective learning.

- Model and engage educators in **reflective practice** to improve the inclusion and success of all learners.
- **Acknowledge effective educators** who exemplify inclusive practice.
- Create an environment that is conducive to **collaboration** and prioritizes collaboration in the school schedule and professional development.
- **Advocate for staffing** that enables school staff to meet the learning and support needs of unique student populations.
- **Adjust, adapt, and identify school staffing needs** to provide instruction and services to a diverse population.

Inclusive Leadership Practices
Standard 8: Meaningful Family and Community Engagement

(8)

Standard 8 focuses on engaging families, caregivers, and communities to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

Effective principals maintain a positive presence in welcoming and engaging the community and engage regularly in two-way communications about the school and its students, which is particularly important for students with disabilities.

Full, Equal, and Equitable Partnerships with Families: Connecticut's Definition and Framework for Family Engagement.

Connecticut's Definition: Family engagement is a full, equal, and equitable partnership among families, educators, and community partners to promote children's learning and development from birth through college and career.

- Strategically **reach out** to all families/caregivers in the school community, finding ways to communicate with all families/caregivers.
- Support, implement, and **engage** families/caregivers as described in *Core Competencies for Family/Caregiver Engagement*.
- Provide **information** to *all* families/caregivers regarding inclusive practices and the positive impacts for *all* learners.
- Train all staff in **culturally responsive** practices for success in creating partnerships with families/caregivers.
- Encourage families/caregivers to participate in **leadership** through culturally and linguistically responsive opportunities for decision-making on current and potential initiatives.

9 Inclusive Leadership Practices
Standard 9: School Operations/ Organizational Structures

Standard 9 charges educational leaders with the effective and efficient management of school operations and resources to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

Educational leaders should seek, acquire, and manage fiscal, physical, human, and other resources to promote student success and be ethical and accountable stewards of these resources by employing responsible and effective budgeting and accounting practices.

- Create and maintain a **master schedule** that prioritizes belonging of *all* learners in general education settings.
- Create and maintain a master schedule that allows educators to **collaborate** on curriculum, instruction, assessment, and individualized supports and services.
- Develop a master **scheduling process** considering the needs of learners with disabilities, ELs/MLs, and others who need tiered interventions and/or specialized services or supports.
- Advocate for the human, fiscal, and operational resources (e.g., time, technology, specialists, space) to execute **universally designed lessons** that include diverse populations of learners.
- Advocate for human and fiscal resources to support **school staff** in meeting the learning and support needs of unique and diverse student populations.
- Reflect on the **professional learning needs** of staff to serve unique and diverse student populations and include systems to integrate feedback from staff to improve school operations.

10 Inclusive Leadership Practices
Standard 10: School Improvement

Standard 10 charges educational leaders to act as agents of continuous improvement to achieve the school's mission and promote each student's academic success and well-being.

Effective principals prepare the school and community for change, establish an imperative for improvement, develop mutual commitment and accountability, and help develop the knowledge, skills, and motivation for all to succeed.

Principals should emphasize the "why and how" of change so that all staff are motivated and empowered to own improvement initiatives and share responsibility and accountability for their success.

- Engage educators in a **cyclical process** of continuous improvement through analysis of data for evidence-based decision-making.

- Highlight and disseminate school **data** to demonstrate the benefits of inclusive practices and inform iterative change.

- Examine and monitor disaggregated data on referrals for specialized services for proportionality across race, language/culture, etc.

- **Distribute leadership roles** and responsibilities to support teacher leadership, continuous improvement in teaching and learning, and shared responsibility for *all* learners in the school.

- Plan for **periodic equity audits** to identify areas for improvement in educational access, opportunity, and outcomes.

- Develop school improvement plans that include **sustainable systems to measure the impact** of practices that are evidence-based and culturally relevant.

- Communicate and advocate for supports and **resources** needed to implement inclusive practices to the school community.

Appendix A:
Inclusive Instructional Focus for States, Districts, and Schools

District leaders and school principals promote effective instruction (standard 4) when they assess the capacity and delivery of evidence-based practices by their teachers and service staff, and when school principals put in place organizational practices that promote collaboration to use data to make instructional decisions as well as design the specialized services that promote learner success. Below are brief descriptions of evidence-based frameworks and evidence-based instructional practices that have been demonstrated to result in positive learner outcomes.

Instruction and Intervention Frameworks

Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

UDL is a scientifically valid framework for guiding educational practice that provides flexibility in the ways information is presented, how students engage in learning, and options for demonstrating knowledge and skills. A UDL approach intentionally identifies and reduces barriers in the curriculum content, learning activities, and environment to increase access for diverse learners. In the UDL classroom, the teacher arranges the physical environment and instructional methods with consideration to the variety of learners who may enter the classroom: those with disabilities, those who speak other languages and are learning English, those who have experienced trauma, etc. Lessons are intentionally designed to offer:

- Multiple methods to receive information (auditory, visual, experiential), using video, highlighted text, music, demonstrations, simulations, etc.
- Engage in learning activities in multiple ways such as visuals, drama, music, art, adapted materials, examples from life, fiction.
- Demonstrate learning in multiple ways, allowing extended time, pictorial representation, oral presentation, drama, written word, etc.

See www.cast.org for additional information.

Culturally Responsive Instruction (CRI)

CRI is "a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Prerequisites to culturally responsive teaching are strategies for teachers to critically examine the programs, their own teaching practices, and the research on effective methods leading to success with students who are racially, ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse. As teachers learn about their students' past and current life experiences, they can build relationships and use these experiences in the context of teaching and planning to remove barriers to learning. Steps that teachers can take to encourage all students, based on research of practices that support students of all cultures are (Krasnoff, 2016):

- Communicate high expectations.
    - » Welcome students by name as they enter the classroom.
    - » Use eye contact with all students, attending to the recognition of the contributions of students regardless of their performance level.
    - » Use proximity with all students, equitably.
    - » Use body language to convey acceptance and recognition of the student.
    - » Arrange the classroom to accommodate discussion.
    - » Ask advanced questions of all students, not only students performing at higher levels.

- Acknowledging the contributions of all students. Students of certain cultural backgrounds may be accustomed to having their questions or input dismissed. Each response is an opportunity for teachers to build deeper understanding.
  - » Avoid differential treatment by being aware of the extent that some students are called upon or used as models for other students.
  - » Seek multiple perspectives from students.
  - » Use multiple approaches to check for understanding and provide feedback.

- Connecting the classroom to the real world. Students are more likely to engage if they are interested in the material and can relate to it. Teachers can incorporate more familiar touchstones into lesson plans and ask students to reflect on the connections between their schoolwork and their everyday lives.
  - » Use visual aids with representation of the student's experiences and life in their neighborhoods.
  - » Create activities in which students can take risks and yet feel safe in personal expression.
  - » Identify student knowledge prior to instruction.
  - » Use students' real-life experiences to connect learning to students' lives.

- Using consistent body language with all students. Teachers unconsciously exhibit more favorable body language towards students that remind them of themselves. For students who have felt marginalized because of their cultural backgrounds, positive nonverbal communication can have an important effect on engagement.

- Having students work together in diverse groups. Collaborative activities can promote equality among peers, encourage students to participate, and open opportunities for learning.
  - » Structure diverse cooperative learning groups and support positive peer interaction and peer support in learning activities.

- Welcoming student feedback throughout the year. Although teachers try to be vigilant, it can be difficult to know if you are meeting each student's needs. Opening the lines of communication directly with students can provide vital information to better support them.

Differentiated Instruction (DI)

DI is a method to provide connections to the learners in a classroom by discovering their interests, learning strengths, talents, and abilities, and using this information to design lessons that offer a variety of ways to access curriculum content, engage in learning the content, and demonstrating what they have learned. While UDL aims to ensure that all learners have full access to the curriculum, regardless of their abilities or learning needs, differentiation is a response to address each individual learner's levels of readiness, interests, and abilities. The intent of differentiating instruction is to maximize each learner's growth and success by meeting them where they are in the learning process.

Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS)

MTSS is a schoolwide prevention and intervention framework, in which school teams use data to identify students who are at risk for not meeting grade-level performance expectations, and then select and design supports and interventions to promote proficiency in grade-level academic standards as well as social and behavioral competence. Decisions for students to receive or be exited from interventions are made by a collaborative team that monitors student progress and checks for fidelity of implementing those interventions. An MTSS framework may be designed for social and behavioral expectations, emotional health, and/or academic learning with multiple data points to identify both current performance and factors contributing to success and error patterns in academic and behavior performance. While most MTSS models use a three-tiered system as

described below, it is commonly understood that the team will use data to determine the need for more and less intensive support based on how the student responds to the interventions. All interventions are intended to be provided in addition to core instruction.

- General Education instruction (Tier 1) consists of evidence-based practices and curricula that have been demonstrated to produce positive academic and behavior outcomes. It is universally designed and culturally responsive to meet the instructional needs of all learners, including those with unique learning profiles. Differentiation, re-teaching, pre-teaching, or scaffolding (sometimes referred to as Tier 1 intervention) may be designed based on interests, talents, and abilities as well as immediate instructional needs. Accessibility supports for English learners are also part of general education instruction.

- Supplemental instruction (sometimes referred to as Tier 2 or Tier 3 instruction)

- Targeted interventions (Tier 2) include evidence-based practices and programs demonstrated to improve academic and behavior performance for learners performing below grade level and who need additional skill-based instruction or who have demonstrated grade-level standards and qualify for gifted and talented service. They are provided in addition to core instruction. Interventions are selected or designed based on research related to the skill patterns (strengths and deficits) exhibited by the student(s). Interventions may be provided to individual students or small groups inside general education classes during independent or small group work, or during an intervention period outside of the general education class.

- Intensive Instruction (Tier 3) includes evidence-based practices demonstrated to accelerate academic and behavior performance in specific identified areas when targeted skill interventions are insufficient to achieve the desired grade-level performance. These are customized for individual learners and the strength or dose of intervention may increase or decrease over time.

Schools that have been working to build the capacity of teams to use data for instructional decision-making are finding that increasing and decreasing the intensity of intervention does not always fit easily into one tier or another. They are becoming more fluid in customizing the intensity of instruction to a child's learning needs and providing that individually or in small groups during flexible group time or during school-wide structured time or "what I need" (WIN) time in the master schedule.

Specially Designed Instruction

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) defines special education for children and youth with disabilities as specially designed instruction (SDI) to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability. Specially designed instruction is further defined as adapting the content, methodology, or delivery of instruction to:

- address the unique needs of the child that result from the child's disability; and

- ensure access of the child to the general curriculum, so that the child can meet the educational standards within the jurisdiction of the public agency that apply to all children.

Over 40 years of research clearly demonstrates the academic and social benefit of receiving specially designed instruction alongside nondisabled peers in general education classes as well as the benefits to learners without disabilities (e.g., Ties Center, 2018-2019; Oh-Young & Filler, 2015; Hehir, Grindal, Freeman, Lamoreau, Borquaye, & Burke, 2016; Kart & Kart, 2021). However, the placement of learners with disabilities varies greatly across the United States and is influenced more by zip code and demographic factors than the child's actual disability (Kurth, 2015; Kurth, Mastergeorge & Paschall, 2016). This calls for states and their local education agencies to build the capacity of educators to create the conditions in schools to successfully include **all** children with disabilities as a way to do business, greatly reducing the exclusion and segregation of learners with disabilities.

Key areas for educator development are co-planning strategies, time in the master schedule for collaboration, co-teaching in which two trained educators share instructional responsibilities, and adapting lessons for learners who have disabilities, rather than offering a parallel curriculum or focusing only on IEP goals. *Note: co-teaching structures may be also used to serve students without disabilities who receive other services such as language instruction education (ML/EL) program or speech/language services.*

Evidence-Based Instructional Practices

1. **Explicit instruction.** A systematic and direct method of teaching that emphasizes small steps, checking for understanding, and adjusting instruction for active student engagement and learning. Explicit instruction incorporates many of the elements described in research. Archer and Hughes (2011) clearly define 16 elements of explicit instruction.

2. **Explicit Goals.** By explicitly stating and posting clear **learning goals**, students will have a clear idea of what they will be learning and how they will know when they have achieved the instructional target(s).

3. **Descriptions and Models.** When teachers share learning strategies or model expected behavior, students are more likely to be able to demonstrate the skill and meet expectations. This may take the form of verbal models by thinking out loud as an example of how to process information, make decisions, or complete a task. It may involve providing a physical model of a product or definitions of steps to follow when engaged in learning.

4. **Frequent Feedback.** Feedback from a teacher is a straightforward way to reinforce the quality and accuracy of student work. Student performance can be further strengthened and improved when the teacher helps students to evaluate their own performance through assessment rubrics or other tools that define performance expectations. This feedback will be most effective when it is used as a regular part of the learning process and not only to evaluate or grade performance. Teachers may use rubrics, peer grading, checklists, or other tools to provide regular feedback.

5. **Check for Understanding.** Asking students for their feedback can have more impact on learning than giving students feedback. This may involve asking students what they understand, how the course and lessons work for them, or what they need to acquire and apply the goals of the lessons. Asking students for their input allows the teacher to evaluate student learning, determine what misconceptions they might have, and modify instructional plans to meet student learning needs.

6. **Graphic models and visual representations.** Visual organizers, directions, and graphic imagery supplement instruction delivered orally through verbal descriptions or through reading print material. This additional sensory input can enable the learner to grasp connections in content and hierarchies of information. Examples are adding clear visuals to PowerPoint presentations, creating graphs or charts, or using diagrams. Graphic organizers such as concept maps, diagrams, charts, graphs, grids, and timelines, help students organize ideas, represent relationships, and retain information. They can be employed in the classroom as a learning activity, formative assessment, or a summative assessment.

7. **Practice.** Repeated practice, spaced throughout a lesson or unit of instruction provides opportunities for productive struggle, making corrections, and enduring understanding through repeated applications of the knowledge or skill. It provides opportunities for teacher feedback and problem solving by students. Guided practice with teacher feedback can bolster learner confidence in the learning process.

8. **Peer collaboration.** There are a variety of peer learning frameworks that have been researched and shown to be effective for promoting learning and motivation to persevere in the learning process. Some of these include:

    a. **General Peer-to-Peer Learning through partner and small group assignments.** Think-pair-share, partner reading, dyad or triad interviews, or group assignments are just some of the strategies that enable learning by supporting students to learn from each other and contribute to the learning of others. It is more motivating for children and youth and can be an effective learning method in large classes. Group work can draw on the unique strengths and perspectives of students to create a better learning experience or product than could be produced by an individual student.

    b. **Flexible Groups — Station teaching.** A method for offering multiple means for engaging in the learning process is to create varied opportunities for small groups to interact with the learning content. Viewing a video, solving a problem, guided instruction from a teacher, and developing a product can, for example, be designed to address differing student interests or skills and enable the teacher to provide direct instruction to one group or to monitor and provide input across groups. With **flexible grouping** of students (composition of groups varying based on interests, learning needs, or other characteristics), station assignments can be varied as a result of formative or summative assessment, and can provide opportunities for individual tutorials when needed.

    c. **Cooperative Learning.** Teaching students how to work on projects or learning activities in cooperative groups enables them to collaborate, support each other's learning, be accountable for the group's learning, and receive support from peers. A variety of cooperative group strategies (e.g., numbered heads together) and role-taking (e.g., materials manager, recorder) assist groups to efficiently engage in learning and be prepared to respond on behalf of the group.

    d. **Peer Assisted Learning Strategy (PALS).** PALS is a peer tutoring strategy in which every student in the class is paired, and each pair consists of one student who is academically stronger than the other. In 20- to 40-minute sessions conducted 2–4 times weekly, students take turns as tutor and tutee during activities to develop grade-level skills. This is considered an evidence-based practice by the What Works Clearinghouse.

9. **Learning strategy instruction.** Strategy instruction involves teaching methods to students that help them process and respond to an assignment or task. Increased independence results when students are provided structures (e.g., visual reminders, steps to success, modified notes forms, use of acronyms to enhance memory, sticky notes or colored cue cards, nonverbal prompts for routine transitions) to tackle tasks that need to be completed independently or as a part of whole-group activities. Self-regulated strategy development is an evidence-based framework for explicitly teaching academic (e.g., writing) as well as self-regulation strategies (e.g., self-monitoring, goal setting) to students.

10. **Nurture metacognition.** Metacognition refers to the processes related to planning, monitoring, and assessing personal understanding and performance. When students use metacognition (e.g., thinking about options, choices, and potential results of actions) they take more responsibility for their own learning. Teachers can help students to keep track of and chart their progress and monitor the extent to which they are meeting their own personal or academic goals.

As inclusive school leaders organize their educational system to enable inclusive practices, it will be critical that they:

- Promote a **system of data analysis and continuous improvement** that engages staff in practices that promote learning, growth, and achievement. Educators need to have **assessment literacy and data-informed instructional decisions** for differentiating and scaffolding instruction and determining the need for supplemental interventions.

- Provide a system for **coaching and feedback** for teachers who need support for implementing **academic** curricula, **social-emotional** learning (SEL) and **behavioral** support and interventions.

- Provide **safe opportunities for staff** to identify their strengths and skill/professional development needs to successfully include all children and youth in academic and social activities.

- Intentionally **eliminate structural barriers** to ensure all spaces are physically accessible, safe, and supportive for all.

Appendix B:
Resources Aligned to PSEL to Promote Inclusive Practices

Resources from CCSSO and CSDE

Council of Chief State School Officers. (ND). *Crosswalk of the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders to the Leadership Competencies for Learner-Centered, Personalized Education*. Washington, DC: Author.

Connecticut State Board of Education. (ND). *Every Student Prepared for Learning, Life, and Work Beyond School: The Comprehensive Plan for Education 2023–2028 (ct.gov)*. Hartford, CT: Author.

Connecticut State Department of Education. (ND). *Leveraging Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) to Enhance Educational Leadership*. Hartford, CT: Author.

Resources Related to Each PSEL Standard

PSEL Standards and Resources

1. **Mission, Vision, and Core Values**
   - CCSSO PSEL Leadership Competencies Crosswalk 2017
   - Developing a Shared Mission, Vision, and Goals
     » Overview of Practice
     » Levels of Practice and Guiding Questions

2. **Ethics and Professional Norms**
   - Connecticut Code of Professional Responsibility for School Administrators
   - Connecticut Code of Professional Responsibility for Teachers
   - CSDE Components of Social, Emotional, and Intellectual Habits: Kindergarten through Grade 12

3. **Equity and Cultural Responsiveness**
   - ESL Practices Quick Reference Guide: School Leadership
   - Tennessee Leadership for Equity Playbook, April 2018
   - Recognizing, respecting and employing each student's strengths, diversity, and culture as assets for teaching and learning (cultural responsiveness and attentiveness to equity)
     » Overview of Practice
     » Levels of Practice and Guiding Questions

4. **Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment, and Social Engagement**
   - Providing Meaningful and Effective Instructional Feedback to Teachers
     » Overview of Practice
     » Levels of Practice and Guiding Questions
   - Developing an Aligned System of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment
     » Overview of Practice
     » Levels of Practice and Guiding Questions

5. **Communities of Care/Specialized Learner Supports**
   - Connecticut IEP Manual, CSDE – July 1, 2022
   - ESL Practices Quick Reference Guide: School Leadership
   - Building a Trusting and Positive Culture
     - » Overview of Practice
     - » Levels of Practice and Guiding Questions

6. **Professional Capacity of School Personnel**
   - Educator Effectiveness Guidebook for Inclusive Practice
   - Inclusive Practice Tool: Massachusetts School-Leader Administrator Rubric Resource
   - Developing an Instructional Leadership Team and Fostering Teacher Leadership
     - » Overview of Practice
     - » Levels of Practice and Guiding Questions

7. **Professional Community for School Staff**
   - Minnesota Department of Education Principal Resources

8. **Meaningful Family and Community Engagement**

   Full, Equal, and Equitable Partnerships with Families: Connecticut's Definition and Framework for Family Engagement.

   Connecticut's Definition: Family engagement is a full, equal, and equitable partnership among families, educators, and community partners to promote children's learning and development from birth through college and career.
   - NAFSCE Family Engagement Core Competencies: A Body of Knowledge, Skills, and Dispositions for Family-Facing Professionals
   - Toolkit of Resources for Engaging Families and Communities as Partners in Education
     - » Building an understanding of family and community engagement
     - » Building a cultural bridge
     - » Building trusting relationships with families and communities through effective communication
     - » Engaging in all data conversations

9. **School Operations and Organizational Structures**
   - Strategies for Creating Inclusive Schools Considerations Packet

10. **School Improvement**
    - Creating an Inclusive School Environment: A Model for School Leaders
    - Leading Through Change for Continuous Improvement
      - » Overview of Practice
      - » Levels of Practice and Guiding Questions
    - Guiding Principles for Creating Safe, Inclusive, Supportive, and Fair School Climates, U.S. Department of Education

Quality Indicators of Inclusive Practices

Florida Inclusion Network (2023). *District Best Practices for Inclusive Education* (BPIE) *Assessment*. Tallahassee, FL: Author.

Florida Inclusion Network (2023). *School Best Practices for Inclusive Education* (BPIE) *Assessment*. Tallahassee, FL: Author.

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Maryland Coalition for Inclusive Education (2023). *Quality Indicators of Inclusive Schools*. Elkton, MD: Author.

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ND). *Inclusive Practice Tool: Massachusetts School-Level Administrator Rubric Resource*. Malden, MA: Author.

New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities and New Jersey Coalition for Inclusive Education (2009). *Quality Indicators for Effective Inclusive Education Guidebook*. East Brunswick, NJ: New Jersey Coalition for Inclusive Education.

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