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## SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVISORY

To: The Parents of Students with Disabilities

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SUBJECT: Curriculum Instruction toward the Common Core Learning Standards

Many parents have asked questions about how New York State's adoption of the Common Core Learning Standards will affect their children who have disabilities. Some of these questions arise from a lack of understanding of what the standards are; others from concern about how their own children are struggling with these new standards; others from concerns about how schools are providing needed supports for their children.

First and foremost, it is essential that we have high expectations for what students with disabilities can learn. With these high expectations for students, we must also have high expectations for teaching with appropriate opportunities, supports, services and instruction provided to students with disabilities. Regardless of the setting where your child receives instruction (for example, regular public school classroom, special class, approved private school, Board of Cooperative Educational Services), your child must be receiving instruction in the general education curriculum toward the State's learning standards. General education curriculum means the same curriculum that is taught to all students.

It is a fundamental right of students with disabilities to not only be taught the same content (the general education curriculum) as other students, but also to be provided appropriate supports and services based on their individual needs so that they can gain knowledge and skills in what is being taught and demonstrate what they have learned. Federal law requires that each child with a disability have an individualized education program (IEP) that identifies annual goals (including academic and functional goals), designed to meet the child's needs that result from the child's disability to enable the child to be involved in and make progress in the general education curriculum.

There is new rigor in the learning standards for New York State's students. This means that, for all students, teachers are expected to teach and students are expected to learn higher level critical thinking. In order for students with disabilities to meet these high academic standards and demonstrate their knowledge and skills, their instruction must incorporate the appropriate supports and accommodations. The Committee on Special

Education (CSE), school administrators and your child's teachers each have important roles to help your child reach these standards and are expected to:

1. develop and implement an IEP which includes annual goals based on information about your child's strengths and needs and present levels of performance and aligned with and chosen to facilitate your child's attainment of grade-level academic standards;
2. provide supports and related services within the least restrictive environment to meet your child's needs and to assist your child to be successful in the general education curriculum to meet grade level standards; and
3. ensure that your child's teachers, including special education teachers and support personnel are knowledgeable about the curriculum the school is using to implement the new standards and are prepared and qualified to deliver high-quality, evidence-based, individualized instruction and support services.

Working with the State's Commissioner's Advisory Panel for Special Education Services (of which the majority are parents of or individuals with disabilities) as well as with the State's Special Education Parent Centers, we have developed resources that were designed to assist you and other parents of children with disabilities to have a better understanding of the Common Core Learning Standards and how the IEP should include recommendations to support your child to progress towards those standards. Additionally, these resources were designed to encourage high expectations for how teachers provide instruction to your child and how your child's progress toward those standards is being monitored. These include:

- Resources that may help you to understand the Common Core Learning Standards (Attachment 1);
- Definitions of terms that may be new to you (Attachment 2);
- Questions to bring to meetings of the CSE to facilitate consideration of goals and supports for your child that are directly related to meeting these standards (Attachment 3); and
- Questions you may wish to ask your child's teachers (Attachment 4).

We hope that these resources are helpful and informative for you and we will work to continue to expand on these resources and provide regional information for you. Please contact the Special Education Parent Center near you (see <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/specialed/techassist/parentcenters.htm>) for additional information. If our office can assist you in this process, please feel free to contact us at (518) 473-2878 or by calling the Special Education Quality Assurance Office closest to you (see <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/specialed/quality/regassoc.htm>).

Attachments

## WHAT ARE THE COMMON CORE LEARNING STANDARDS?

The Common Core Learning Standards are the standards all students will be expected to reach. Compared to New York State's previous learning standards, they are more rigorous in academic content, fewer in number but deeper in understanding. They are designed to:

- help students gain the knowledge and skills that they need to think and work at a deeper level;
- create opportunities for all students to excel at reading, writing, speaking, listening, language and math;
- support students to think critically about what they read and the math that they do;
- allow teachers and students to focus more deeply on fewer critical concepts in mathematics;
- build students' abilities to apply what they have learned to the real world; and
- ensure that all students can communicate strong ideas and arguments in writing and react powerfully to what they read

New York State has established Common Core Learning Standards in three areas:

1. Prekindergarten Foundation for the Common Core
2. English language arts(ELA)/Literacy
3. Mathematics

## WHERE CAN I FIND MORE INFORMATION?

There are many resources available for parents on the <http://www.EngageNY.org> website. For those of you who have access to the internet, we encourage you to view the website, and particularly the pages created for parents. Below are a few that you may wish to access.

**Video for Parents and Families about the Common Core Assessments** - This video is about the Common Core Learning Standards and the Grade 3-8 State assessments in ELA and math.

<http://www.engageny.org/resource/video-for-parents-and-families-about-the-common-core-assessments>

**Understanding the Grades 3-8 ELA and Mathematics Tests Parent Reports**

<http://www.engageny.org/resource/parent-resources-grades-3-8-ela-mathematics-tests>

**Informational brochures developed by the National Parent Teacher Association (PTA)**

[http://pta.org/files/Common%20Core%20State%20Standards%20Resources/2013%20Guide%20Bundle\\_082213.pdf](http://pta.org/files/Common%20Core%20State%20Standards%20Resources/2013%20Guide%20Bundle_082213.pdf)

## DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

*Working with the Special Education Parent Centers, we have identified important terms with which you should become familiar. These may be helpful to you as you dialogue with teachers and Committees on Special Education to ensure your child is being provided with the appropriate supports and services to help him/her reach the same learning standards as other children. While there are some differences, many of these terms have overlapping definitions (for example, scaffolds and differentiated instruction); for others, you should note how they are different (for example, accommodations and modifications).*

**Accommodations** mean changes in instruction and assessment that allow a student to gain access to content and/or complete assigned tasks. Accommodations allow students with disabilities to pursue the same course of study as other students. Examples of accommodations include, but are not limited to, teacher-provided notes/outlines, extra time to complete assignments, the use of a computer to complete assignments, a peer note-taker, the use of wider lined paper for written tasks, highlighted text, and the use of spell-checker. The terms 'accommodation' and 'modification' are very different (see definition of modification below). Accommodations determined necessary are based on an individual child's needs related to his/her disability and 'levels the playing field for students' (for example, give them an equal opportunity). Accommodations may change "how" a student learns, but do not reduce learning expectations nor change "what" the student will learn. In contrast, modifications change "what" is learned and the content of the grade-specific curriculum, thereby, reducing learning expectations.

**Curriculum modules** are the curriculum materials and lessons developed for each grade level. Curriculum modules include the year-long scope and sequence documents; information that frames or provides an overview of material to be taught, performance tasks (what students will be expected to do at the middle and at the end of each module); lesson plans and supporting materials (class work, homework, etc.). Information on curriculum modules developed by New York State for optional use by school districts can be found at <http://www.engageny.org/common-core-curriculum>.

**Differentiated instruction** means how teachers utilize various instructional strategies and structure the learning environment to address the variety of learning styles, interests, and abilities found among the students in the class.

**Explicit instruction** is a research-based specific way of teaching that has been shown to be highly effective for students with disabilities. In explicit instruction, the teacher sequences how he/she teaches by (1) setting the purpose for learning; (2) telling students what to do; (3) showing students how to do it; and (4) giving students opportunities to practice until they can be independent.

**Instructional shifts** means the significant changes in the Common Core Learning Standards regarding how and what students will be taught. For example, a 'shift' in English language arts is to provide students more opportunities to read nonfiction texts (for example, texts based on real-life events such as autobiographies). A 'shift' in mathematics is to teach students why the math works and ask students to talk about and prove their understanding.

A tool for parents to understand these 'shifts' can be found at [http://www.engageny.org/sites/default/files/resource/attachments/parent\\_workshop\\_backpack\\_guide.pdf](http://www.engageny.org/sites/default/files/resource/attachments/parent_workshop_backpack_guide.pdf).

**Least restrictive environment** means that placement of students with disabilities in special classes, separate schools or other removal from the general educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability is such that even with the use of supplementary aids and services, education cannot be satisfactorily achieved. The placement of an individual student with a disability in the least restrictive environment must (1) provide the special education needed by the student; (2) provide for education of the student to the maximum extent appropriate to the needs of the student with other students who do not have disabilities; and (3) be as close as possible to the student's home. A student with a disability must not be removed from education in age-appropriate regular classrooms solely because of needed modifications in the general education curriculum.

**Modification** means that there has been a change in the curriculum content or what is being tested. Modifications are made for students with disabilities who are unable to comprehend all of the content an instructor is teaching. Changing what is being taught (for example, using alternative curricula written at a lower level) could limit the student from meeting the State's learning standards, which in turn could impact whether he or she leaves school with a regular diploma. Providing students with modifications and/or accommodations to support learning is appropriate if it is what the individual student needs to progress in the curriculum.

**Progress monitoring** is the process to regularly assess a student's academic and behavioral performance in order to evaluate the effectiveness of instruction and supports. Progress monitoring can be implemented with individual students or an entire class.

**Specially designed instruction** means adapting, as appropriate to the needs of an eligible student with a disability, the content, methodology, or delivery of instruction to address the unique needs that result from the student's disability; and to ensure the student's access to the general curriculum, so that he or she can meet the educational standards that apply to all students.

**Scaffolding** means the supports that teachers build into their lesson planning and provide to students in the learning process (for example, modeling the correct answer, using pictures, helping students connect what they already know to the new information being taught).

**Universal Design for Learning (UDL)** means designing a lesson to give all individuals equal opportunities to learn. In UDL classrooms, for example, information and content is presented in different ways; students are allowed to express what they know in different ways; and students' interests and motivation to learn is stimulated in different ways. When instruction is 'universally designed', after-the-fact changes to curriculum and instruction to accommodate individual student needs are often unnecessary.

## QUESTIONS FOR COMMITTEE ON SPECIAL EDUCATION MEETINGS

1. What progress has my child made toward the standard?
2. What can my child currently do and what does he/she struggle with?
3. What gets in the way of my child learning/gaining the grade level knowledge/skills?
4. What is my child expected to know and be able to do to meet the next year's grade level standards?
5. What accommodations and/or modifications, will my child need, if any:
  - ✓ In what he/she is taught in subject areas (content)?
  - ✓ How he/she will be taught (instructional method)?
  - ✓ Instructional materials (such as text books)?
  - ✓ The physical environment in the classroom?
  - ✓ How his/her learning will be assessed (for example, testing accommodations)?
6. In light of the special education services my child will receive, who will be responsible for implementing each of the supports and accommodations? Which teachers (for example, resource room, consultant teacher, general education teacher) can I expect to be focusing on which goals?

### Tips and Expectations

- ✓ *While the individualized education program (IEP) must identify the specially designed instruction your child will receive, it must be developed in direct consideration of the grade level standards your child will need to meet in the coming year and must be delivered within the least restrictive environment.*
- ✓ *Expect the IEP to identify annual goals that are designed to meet your child's needs that result from your child's disability to enable your child to be involved in and make progress in the general education curriculum. Goals should not be a restatement of the general education curriculum.*
- ✓ *Become familiar with your child's IEP. You should have been provided a copy of the IEP. If you do not have a copy of the IEP or do not understand information written in the IEP, ask your child's teacher.*
- ✓ *Compare your child's progress report to the IEP goals. If your child is not making the progress expected, ask for a meeting with your child's teachers or the Committee on Special Education to review and, if appropriate, revise the IEP.*
- ✓ *If you do not understand the terms being used at the IEP meeting, ask for clarification.*
- ✓ *If you are the parent of a preschool child with a disability, ask how the special education services your child will receive will be aligned with the Prekindergarten for the Common Core Learning Standards.*

## TALKING WITH YOUR CHILD'S TEACHERS

1. How is my child doing in comparison to other students in the class with respect to reaching this year's grade level standards in English language arts and math?
2. How are you monitoring my child's progress toward meeting these grade level standards?
3. In what areas of learning is my child showing strengths?
4. If my child is not doing as well as expected, what are his/her challenges?
5. What additional supports, accommodations and/or instruction will or can my child get to help him/her in these areas?
6. What teaching and learning strategies are being used now in the classroom to help my child meet the grade level standards and what do they look like?
7. How often do you meet with my child's other teachers (such as speech and language, resource room, consultant teacher, etc.) to discuss my child's progress to meet the standards?
8. What can I do to support my child in learning English language arts and math at home?

### Tips and Expectations

- ✓ *Have regular communication with your child's teacher.*
- ✓ *When you meet with your child's teacher(s), bring the individualized education program (IEP) and use it as a guide for discussion on your child's progress toward the annual goals and meeting the grade level standards.*
- ✓ *Expect your child's special education teachers, related service providers and regular class teachers to know what supports your child needs and to be meeting and working together to implement your child's IEP.*
- ✓ *Expect your child's teachers to be able to explain the different teaching strategies, supports and accommodations or modifications your child receives in the classroom to learn the curriculum.*
- ✓ *Expect periodic reports for your child's progress toward the annual IEP goals that include information on how he/she is progressing in the general education curriculum (the same curriculum that is taught to all students).*