THE EWING
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Mentoring Plan

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(Revised March 2019)

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Superintendent of Schools

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MENTORING VISION

All novice teachers, i.e., those holding a Certificate of Eligibility, Certificate of Eligibility with Advanced Standing, or a Standard Teacher of the Handicapped, will participate in a one year mentoring program consisting of 30 weeks for traditional route and 34 weeks for alternate route.

Through its mentoring program, the Ewing Township Public School District seeks to provide not only what a new teacher in the Ewing Township School District needs in order to be successful but what a mentor needs to know or to be able to do in order to support a new teacher for this or her success. The Ewing Township School recognizes success as the alignment and support of the New Jersey Professional Standards for Teachers, the ESSA Key Elements of High Quality Professional Development, and the common Core State Standards. We envision our mentoring program as one with encompasses total school (district) involvement; administrative endorsement and facilitation, mentor and novice teacher engagement, and faculty-at-large support. By this process, we feel that we can increase not only the quality and retention of our novice teachers but the academic achievement of our students.

MENTORING GOALS

Our goal for the Mentor Plan is to:

1. To enhance teacher knowledge of and strategies related to the Common Core State Standards in order to facilitate student achievement.
2. To identify exemplary teaching skills and education practices necessary to acquire and maintain excellence in teaching.
3. To assist novice teachers in the performance of their duties and adjustment to the challenges of teaching.
4. To assist novice and mentor teachers in developing reflective practice skills.
5. To increase our mentoring resources, including but not limited to, additions to our professional library, the provision of additional time during the course of the school day for mentors and novice teachers to meet, and the development of a cadre of in-house experts to work those involved in the mentoring program.

Mentoring Plan

Introduction

As a means of induction into the education profession and a member of the Ewing staff, a variety of mentoring structures are available to new staff. All new staff will participate in a four-day New Teacher Induction Program prior to the opening of school. The Induction Program is a comprehensive introduction including, but not limited to, district policies and procedures, teacher evaluation instrument, curriculum materials, and expectations effective teaching practices. The district offers a variety of ongoing learning opportunities for new staff including:

- Professional development sessions provided after school at the building and district level. Go to My Learning Plan to review workshop offerings.
- Literacy and Math Coaches at the elementary and middle school level
- On-going meetings/interaction with the Mentors, Principal, Assistant Principal, Content Supervisors, Literacy and Math Coach and Assistant Superintendent
- Classroom visitation. The mentor and mentee will work with the building principal to schedule the visitation.

Mentoring Logs must be submitted the 30th of each month for monitoring and review. A Mentoring Log will be posted in Google Docs and forward to the Curriculum and Instruction Office.

The district has adopted the Danielson Framework for Teaching as its Teacher Evaluation model. The district's mentoring program is anchored in this framework. The Danielson Domain includes:

- **Danielson Domain 1 - Planning and Preparation**
- **Danielson Domain 2 - Classroom Environment**
- **Danielson Domain 3 - Instruction**
- **Danielson Domain 4 - Professional Responsibilities**

Each monthly mentoring topic is linked to the Danielson Framework with a broad range of interactions in which the mentor and mentee will participate as it relates to their work.

Per the revised Mentoring Regulation, mentees will interact with the mentor as follows:

Expectations

- Minimum 1 meeting per week for 4 weeks (CEAS) with meeting (posted on the Mentoring log)
  - 30 weeks of 1:1 mentoring
- Minimum 1 meeting per week for 8 weeks (CE) with meeting (posted on the Mentoring log)
  - 34 weeks of 1:1 mentoring

Mentoring Program

Mentors

The district encourages and appreciates staff who give back to the profession by being a mentor to a new staff member. All mentors have demonstrated success in the classroom and meet the requirements per the May 5, 2014 revised Mentoring Regulations:

- Minimum of three years' experience with at least two years completed within the previous five year period
- Participated in training:
    - Teacher Evaluation Rubric/Practice Instrument (Danielson)
    - New Jersey Professional Standards for Teachers
    - New Jersey Core Content Standards
    - Classroom observation skills
    - Reflective conversation about practice
- Beginning in 2014-15
    - Earned a teacher practice rating of Effective or Highly Effective
    - Earned a summative practice rating of Effective or Highly Effective
- Maintain a log of their contact with their mentee which will be submitted to the Curriculum and Instruction Office on the 30th of each month

Payment Procedures

The district's Payroll Department will deduct 20 equal payments from the mentee for the mentoring program. The mentor will received payment for their mentoring service in the last June pay.

PRE-MENTORING SURVEY FOR NOVICE TEACHERS

This survey lets you, as a novice teacher, self-evaluate your strengths and weaknesses, as well as supply background and experience. You may wish to share some of this information with your mentor.

1. List your previous teaching experience, including student teaching.

2. List your three strongest assets as a teacher

3. List three areas of concern as a novice teacher in the Ewing Township School District.

4. How often would you like to meet with your mentor?

5. In what ways do you think a mentor would be helpful to you?

6. In what activities do you expect your mentor to engage you?

How would you rate your skills in the following areas?

1 = developing   2 = confident   3 = accomplished

____ lesson planning
____ planning for a substitute teacher
____ large group instruction
____ small group instruction
____ one-to-one instruction
____ behavior management
____ developing and administering informal classroom assessments
____ planning instructional units
____ planning and producing instructional materials
____ planning for students with special needs, including those "at risk" and "gifted"
____ parent conferences and communications
____ dealing with crisis in the classroom
____ establishing rapport with faculty and staff
____ understanding teaching/learning styles
____ understanding cultural or ethnic differences
____ ability to set appropriate levels of expectations for student achievement

Please list any other areas of concern that were not addressed in this survey.

NOVICE TEACHER SELF-ASSESSMENT INVENTORY

In the areas below, please indicate the response for each item that best matches your concern/need level. Use this inventory with your mentor to determine some areas for support, identify resources, and set learning goals.

1. **I am really anxious about this.**
2. **I'm okay, but it would be good to talk about this.**
3. **I've got this under control, at least for now.**

Information about Policy and Procedures

___ The teacher-evaluation system
___ Paperwork and deadlines
___ Expectations of the principal
___ Expectations of my colleagues
___ Communicating with parents
___ Standardized tests

Access Resources

___ Organizing/setting up my classroom
___ Accessing instructional materials & resources
___ Ordering materials
___ Arranging field trips
___ Using the library & media resources
___ Working with special services

Working with Students

___ Establishing classroom routines
___ Motivating reluctant learners
___ Maintaining student discipline
___ Assessing student needs
___ Differentiating instruction for individual learners
___ Implementing the curriculum
___ Evaluating student progress

Managing Time

___ Organizing my day/week
___ Lesson planning
___ Following the daily/weekly schedule
___ Attending meetings
___ Supervising extracurricular activities

___ Opportunity for professional development
___ Maintaining personal/professional balance

Consideration for our mentor/novice teacher relationship:

Other areas I'd like to address:

Mentor's Checklist

Before school begins...

- [ ] Call to introduce yourself
- [ ] Ask the beginning teacher to assemble a list of questions
- [ ] Tour the building
- [ ] Make certain that supplies and Teacher's Instructional Materials are available
- [ ] Answer questions and supply additional related information

On the first day...

- [ ] Introduce the beginning teacher to other staff members, especially those they will be working with most closely
- [ ] Review daily routine
  - [ ] Homeroom period
  - [ ] Attendance
  - [ ] Changing classes
  - [ ] Special schedules
  - [ ] Duty assignments
- [ ] Review the paperwork to go home with students on their first day
- [ ] Explain textbook distribution
- [ ] Assist with substitute plans, lesson planning and website navigation

During the first week...

- [ ] Check DAILY to make sure the beginning teacher has settled into a smooth routine
- [ ] Assist with any needed changes to the schedule
- [ ] Be certain that first day paperwork has been returned and processed properly
- [ ] Help the beginning teacher set up a grade book and do the first full week's lesson plan
- [ ] Review posting grades in the Genesis program
- [ ] Set up a regular WEEKLY meeting time to check on progress and answer questions
- [ ] Offer to allow the beginning teacher to observe you as you teach

Before progress reports are due...

- ☐ Provide needed information and advice for "Back to School Night"
- ☐ Review grading formulas
- ☐ Assist with progress reports
- ☐ Assist with pre-observation forms and answer questions about observation by administrators

Before first report cards are due...

- ☐ Help the beginning teacher prepare for any parent conferences or phone calls
- ☐ Assist with the completion of report cards as needed

As the year proceeds...

- ☐ Continue to meet WEEKLY to answer questions and offer assistance
- ☐ Explain standardized testing procedures
- ☐ Guide the beginning teacher through:
  - ☐ Referral to IR&S
  - ☐ IEP Meetings
  - ☐ Child Study Team referral process

At year's end...

- ☐ Explain procedures for:
  - ☐ Final grades
  - ☐ Needs assessment form
  - ☐ Professional Improvement Plan
- ☐ Review end-of-year checklist

Ewing Public Schools
Monthly Mentoring Opportunities

Each month presents opportunities for a variety of mentor/mentee conversations. The Monthly Mentoring chart below provides suggested conversations which align with the Danielson Domains, as well as the professional activities occurring during that month. The list below serves as the minimum requirements with the mentor/mentee adding discussion topics relevant to the mentees needs.

September:

Activity/Mentoring Conversation	Danielson Domain
Teacher Obligations: • Lesson plan review/feedback • How to take attendance in Genesis • How to set up Genesis Gradebook • Teacher Evaluation – SGO/SGP	Domains 1 and 4
Classroom Procedures: • Establishing fair and consistent classroom routines, discipline and rules	Domain 2
Instruction: • First two weeks of instructional planning	Domain 3
Professional Responsibilities: • Completing the PIP • Back To School Night • Teacher Pages • Parent /Teacher Interaction • Emergency Procedures • Request Professional Development workshop	Domain 4

October:

Activity	Danielson Domain
Teacher Observations: • Self-evaluation	Domains 1, 2, 3 and 4
Classroom Procedures: • Establishing fair and consistent classroom routines, discipline and rules	Domain 2
Instruction: • Using data to inform instructional decisions	Domain 3
Professional Responsibilities: • Parent/Teacher Communication	Domain 4

November:

Activity	Danielson Domain
Teacher Observations: • Parent/Teacher Conferences • Report Card preparation • Lesson plan review/feedback • PARCC preparation	Domains 1 and 4
Classroom Procedures: • Establishing fair and consistent classroom routines, discipline and rules	Domain 2
Professional Responsibilities: • Parent/Teacher Communication	Domain 4

December:

Activity	Danielson Domain
Classroom Procedures: • Establishing fair and consistent classroom routines, discipline and rules	Domain 2
Professional Responsibilities: • Parent communication	Domain 4

January:

Activity	Danielson Domain
Classroom Procedures: • Establishing fair and consistent classroom routines, discipline and rules	Domain 2
Instruction: • Using data to inform instructional decisions	Domain 3
Teacher Obligation: • Mid-Year SGO review • PIP reflection • Teacher Evaluation Reflection	Domains 1 and 4

February:

Activity	Danielson Domain
Classroom Procedures: • Establishing fair and consistent classroom routines, discipline and rules	Domain 2
Instruction: • Using data to inform instructional decisions	Domain 3
Teacher Obligation: • Teacher Evaluation Reflection	Domains 1 and 4

March:

Activity	Danielson Domain
Classroom Procedures: • Establishing fair and consistent classroom routines, discipline and rules	Domain 2
Instruction: • Using data to inform instructional decisions	Domain 3
Teacher Obligations: • Process for Teacher Annual • PARCC preparation	Domains 1 and 4

April:

Activity	Danielson Domain
Classroom Procedures: • Establishing fair and consistent classroom routines, discipline and rules	Domain 2
Instruction: • Using data to inform instructional decisions	Domain 3
Teacher Obligation: • Process for Teacher Annual	Domains 1 and 4

May:

Activity	Danielson Domain
Instruction: • Using data to inform instructional decisions	Domain 3
Teacher Obligation: • End of the year procedures	Domains 1 and 4

June:

Activity	Danielson Domain
Teacher Obligations: • End of the year procedures • Reflection	Domains 1 and 4

MENTOR CLASSROOM VISITATIONS AND CONSULTATIONS

Classroom visitation and consultation is an integral part of the mentoring process. It gives participants the opportunity to view techniques and strategies that would enhance classroom practice. It allows for coaching and tutoring. It opens discussion and provides the avenue or problem solving and reflection. Veterans and novices alike find that learning from watching others, a demonstration of effective skills, is a two-way street. Classroom visitation and consultation offers the chance to visually experience a new technique or an introduction to new concepts. From the classroom visitation feedback and support is given that allows participants to gain a better understanding of the teaching practice. As one practitioner expressed, "it provides a mirror for me to view myself in actual practice."

Classroom visitation and consultation on the mentoring process is both non-evaluative and non-judgmental. Its purpose is to help the participants view and react to the learning and teaching that occurs within the instructional setting.

The following procedures have been designed to make the classroom visitation and consultation meaningful and relevant:

1. A request must be made to the administrator of your intent to participate in an observation when release time is needed. He/she will set up the classroom visitation and consultation schedule based on funding, substitute availability, and the specific needs of the participants.
2. Upon completion of the classroom visitation/consultation, the participants must conference. It is suggested that the novice teacher record the goals of the lesson, the learnings that resulted from the discussion, and the possible implementation plans.

WHO BENEFITS

THE NOVICE TEACHER:

- Gains knowledge about district policies, job responsibilities, and school culture
- Has emotional support that eases many concerns and anxieties
- Improves teaching performance and promotes student learning
- Engages in professional growth activities that enhance knowledge of effective strategies and techniques
- Systematically builds on successful classroom practice
- Chooses to remain in the teaching profession and regains initial enthusiasm

THE MENTOR TEACHER:

- Becomes a more reflective practitioner
- Is more open to the challenges of systemic change
- Is able to transfer the knowledge and skills in effective classroom practice
- Retains enthusiasm and motivation for teaching
- Functions as a teacher leader
- Is recognized for contributing to the professional growth of themselves and others

THE STUDENT:

- Benefits from the experience of the veteran teacher
- Experiences the enthusiasm and energy of the novice or first year teacher
- Receives instruction that is based on the most recent research and best practices
- Learns in an environment that models collaboration, collegiality and life-long learning

THE ADMINISTRATOR AND SUPERVISOR:

- Is supported in efforts to improve teacher quality and effectiveness
- Has developed a cadre of teacher leaders to support reform efforts
- Retains the "best and brightest" teachers for the school
- Builds a feeling of collaboration within the school that encourages collegial problem solving
- Identifies and resolves the problems faced by new teachers

THE SCHOOL DISTRICT:

- Retains quality teachers who understand the district and school culture
- Identifies and assists new teachers in resolving problems
- Creates cohesive schools that promote teacher professional training through learning communities
- Becomes known for their support of the professional staff and the achievement of their students

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

PRINCIPAL/ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL/DEPARTMENT SUPERVISOR:

- Selects a mentor from the applicants for each novice and first year teacher as soon as they begin their assignment
- Provides a list of all induction pairs to the office of the Assistant Superintendent.
- Observes and evaluates new teachers according to state and district requirements
- Participates in and supports mentor and novice or new teacher trainings
- Monitors on-going activities of the mentoring pair

MENTOR TEACHER:

- Serves a s professional role model in both professional and classroom practice
- Fosters a trusting, confidential relationship
- Meets with the novice teacher on a regular basis
- Provides appropriate feedback after a non-evaluative observation or visitation
- Models effective instructional techniques for the novice or first year teacher
- Orients the novice teacher to district and school policies
- Provides a verity of resources to help the novice or first year teacher begin to form a repertoire of effective strategies and techniques (including suggested books, online resources and thorough "walk through" of the curriculum resources site)
- Participates in training modules that will assist the mentoring process
- Encourages the novice or teacher to record needs, questions, and descriptions in a journal, using that journal for discussion purposes
- Helps the novice or first year teacher identify best practice material for a portfolio
- Participates in site-based mentoring meetings, as needed with the mentoring coordinator
- Maintains continued involvement in professional growth opportunities
- Maintains a log of interactions with novice/first year teacher

COMMON DEFINITIONS

- **Novice Teacher:** Any full or part-time teacher who has not completed one year of full time teaching under a state teaching certificate.
- **First Year Teacher:** Any teacher with prior experience in another district or who took an extended leave of absence from Ewing Public School District or who is entering the Ewing Public School District as a new teacher.
- **Mentor Teacher:** A tenured veteran teacher who willingly models and supports strategies and techniques that encourage new teachers to develop successful classroom practices and techniques that will enhance the learning of the students.

A Mentor Teacher will be:

- Rated Effective or Highly Effective in the previous year
- Has three years of teaching experience with at least 2 completed within previous 5 years
- Skilled in the delivery of instruction and knowledgeable about core curriculum content standards
- Enthusiastic about profession
- A confidant who listens and guides
- Willing to take risks and look for new approaches
- Sensitive to the needs of others
- A team player
- Available for help and support
- Patient
- A teacher leader

Provisional Teacher Holding a Certificate of Eligibility with Advanced Standing: A new teacher who has completed a state approved college teacher training program and has been hired to work within the classroom, including EdTPA.

Provisional Teacher Holding a Certificate of Eligibility (Alternate Route): A new teacher who has not completed a state approved college teacher training program and who must undergo formal instruction that consists of approximately 200 clock hours of study in essential areas of professional knowledge and skills at a district-operated or state-operated training center.

Professional Partners: A veteran teacher who is a teacher new to the district who has a standard certificate.

NOVICE AND FIRST YEAR TEACHER:

- Develop a professional learning plan within 30 days of being hired

- Develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for optimal student learning

- Accept and implement appropriate suggestions in a professional manner

- Ask questions

- Meeting with your mentor on a regular basis and document the meeting times

- Visit your mentor and other teachers in several teaching situations and discuss new learnings

- Allow your mentor to visit your classroom to provide feedback and support

- Consider with your mentor about keeping a journal of your experiences that will help your reflect and build on successful practices

- Consider using the journal as a communication tool with your mentor

- Consider developing a portfolio and/or video of best practices that you would share with other new teachers

- Demonstrate enthusiasm for and a commitment to the school and district and the profession of teaching

- At the end of the first year, design a professional learning plan

- Participate in new teacher orientation and novice teacher program through the school year

Optional Novice Provisional Teacher Mentoring Log Template

Effective May 5, 2014, the New Jersey regulations governing district mentoring program requirements have changed. Novice provisional teachers (those teachers serving under a Certificate of Eligibility or a Certificate of Eligibility with Advanced Standing) must still be assigned an individual mentor at the beginning of the contracted teaching assignment. However, two of the regulatory changes impact the way these individual mentors track their time and receive payment for their services.

First, as specified in *N.J.A.C.* 6A:9-8(d), individual mentor teachers assigned to work with novice provisional teachers are now required to log their mentoring contact time. The format of the log itself and the procedures for using it are to be developed as part of the district mentoring plan. The mentoring logs are to be sent to the district administrative office and retained there.

Secondly, as specified in *N.J.A.C.* 6A:9-8(h), the administrative office of each school district will now be responsible for overseeing the payment of mentors. Payment may not be conferred directly from provisional novice teacher to mentor. The mentoring logs can be used to by the district to inform the payment process.

The optional mentor log template below is provided to assist districts in fulfilling these revised regulations. Please note that while the mentoring logs are required, the use of this particular template is not. Moreover, this template is based on a monthly log submission, but each district is free to determine the frequency with which they want to receive these mentoring logs.

Optional Novice Provisional Teacher Mentoring Log Template

Instructions: Please log each session with your mentee. Submit this log form to the district office on the last working day of each month for the duration of your mentorship. Please keep a record for yourself also.

Month: _____ Year: _____   School/District: _____

Mentor Name:_____   Mentor Signature:_____

Mentee Name:_____   Mentee Signature:_____

Total Number of Mentoring Hours This Month:_____

Date	Time From: To:	Description of Activities	Total Time

New Jersey Professional Learning Standards

Organization

The standards are now organized under four domains:

The Learner and Learning
- Standard 1: Learner Development
- Standard 2: Learning Differences
- Standard 3: Learning Environments

Content
- Standard 4: Content Knowledge
- Standard 5: Application of Content

Instructional Practice
- Standard 6: Assessment
- Standard 7: Planning for Instruction
- Standard 8: Instructional Strategies

Professional Responsibility
- Standard 9: Professional Learning
- Standard 10: Leadership and Collaboration
- Standard 11: Ethical Practice

Within each standard, the elements continue to be organized under the following criteria:
- Performances: the aspect that can be observed and assessed in teaching practice;
- Essential knowledge: the understandings that one needs to support effective practice; and
- Critical dispositions: the habits of professional practice that underlie the performances and knowledge and play a key role in how teachers practice.

Integrated Themes
New to these updated standards is the inclusion of key themes across multiple standards. In some cases, the theme is not explicitly stated but can be inferred from the description of the knowledge, disposition, or performance within the standard. The integrated themes are as follows:

- Collaboration
- Communication
- Creativity/innovation
- Critical thinking/problem solving
- Cultural competence
- English language learners
- Families and communities

- Individual differences
- Interdisciplinary/multiple perspectives
- Professional Learning
- Student-directed learning
- Teacher responsibility
- Technology
- Use of data to support learning

IT'S TIME TO BEGIN THE YEAR

1. Learn the layout of your school. Know how to get from your classroom to wherever you are going.

2. Get to know your principal, the vice principal, and your department supervisor. They will guide you through your first days in the school. Meet with your administrative supervisor to make sure the expectations of classroom practice are clearly defined.

3. Get to know the office staff and the facilities staff.

4. Familiarize yourself with the technology aspects of the job.

5. Make sure that you have the curricula/text books and teacher's manuals for all of the textbooks you will be using.

6. Thing about the instructional strategies you will be using at the beginning of the school year and establish the layout and a seating chart for your students.

7. Organize your classroom based on the needs of your grade level.

8. Check the paper supplies in the class and order what you will need for the first month of school.

9. Put up bulletin boards that are welcoming and that invite class participation.

10. Establish goals for the first couple of weeks of school.

11. Write lesson plans for the first week of school.

12. Establish routines for attendance, for class jobs, for homework, for class rules, etc.

13. Talk to other members of your grade level or department to get an understanding of the procedures for the first week of school.

14. Ask questions, ask questions, when you are unsure of what to do.

15. Take care of yourself. Stress levels can be minimized by making sure to schedule time for activities that relax and fulfill you, getting enough sleep and eating properly.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

You are about to begin the journey of your life. To help you get started, here are some tried and true tips that are guaranteed to bring success. Read on!

- Make a good impression your students and your colleagues. Be the kind of person that instills respect and trust. Be courteous, friendly, enthusiastic, and confident.

- Organize your classroom and your students. Organization is the key to moving through the transitions of the day.

- Move slowly through the first days of school. It is important to set the tone, your expectations, and the routine for the year with constant reinforcement. Being consistent in the early days will make your class run smoothly all year.

- Get to know your students as soon as possible. Highlight positive qualities and let them know you believe in them. Understand the unique needs of your students and look for resources that will promote curiosity and critical thinking. Expect success and you will get success!

- Establish rules that are firm, but fair. Have the students help in writing the rules in order to encourage them to establish fair parameters for the classroom.

- Develop support from the parents. Communicate, communicate, communicate! Let parents know your expectations and policies. Be prompt in returning calls for responding to notes. Maintain a positive and cheerful attitude. Listen carefully to concerns.

- Keep good records. Learn the policy of the district and the building.

- Build relationships with your colleagues. Get involved in school and professional activities. When you are involved in the system, you will have a better understanding of the system.

Back-to-School Night

Back-to-School Night is the time to begin the communication process with your parents. It is a time to introduce yourself and talk about your philosophy. It is a time for you to explain your expectations for their children, walk them through the curriculum, tell them about the school routines, and let them see the creativity that will flow from your classroom activities. Back-to-School Night is not for individual parent conferences, which will come later as you become more familiar with the needs of your students.

Talking Points:

1. **Welcome**: Introduce yourself giving a short summary of your educational background and some of your personal history. Let the parents know what a privilege it is to be a part of their child's life and the importance of building a partnership to support the classroom learning. Discuss your goals for the year (i.e. organization of time and materials, responsibility, listening, respect, curricular goals).

2. **Academic Expectations**: Review the curriculum standards and concepts for each subject (or course) that will be the focus of classroom activities.

3. **Daily Work**: Discuss your procedures for daily work. What does a class period look like? What expectations do you have for class work? Go over the daily schedule.

4. **Assessment and Grading**: It is important to review the report card and your policies for grading. Go over how students will be assessed on tests and for their classroom performance.

5. **Special Services**: Review the Special Services that are available to all students.

6. **Conferences**: Let parents know how to contact you and that they can schedule an in-person conference through the school counseling office.

PARENTS AS PARTNERS

Parents care deeply about their children and want to be involved in the education of their children. You, as the teacher, want to give your students the best possible year. Together, as a team, YOU can! Most parents are reasonable, respectful, and cooperative when they deal with teachers. The following suggestions can help you build a successful connection between the home and the school:

1. Get to know your parents as soon as possible. In the first weeks of school, find time to call student's parent(s). Make this first call a positive one giving example of the success the child is experiencing.

2. Update your website with your expectations for the class, your routines, and the responsibilities of the child and the parent.

3. Before sending a response to a parent's written concern, have the supervisor, mentor or vice principal review what has been written.

4. Remember to say "thank you" to parents for their efforts.

5. Listen carefully and think before you speak

6. Always respond to a parent's concern. A problem should be addressed quickly to eliminate future concerns.

7. Be accessible to parents for conferences. Communicate to the parents the appropriate procedure to schedule a conference.

8. During conferences:
   - Allow enough time for the conference.
   - Greet the parents at the door.
   - Always open on a positive note.
   - Address specific concerns and give possible solutions.
   - Be organized and keep notes.
   - Encourage both parents to be involved in decisions.
   - Review what has been discussed before the parents leave.

Writing IEPs Aligned to Standards

Introduction

While some states are experiencing changes as they implement new standards, all school districts are tasked with writing IEPs aligned with state standards. Special educators working to develop IEPs will do well to keep their standards in mind as they prepare students for the challenges of post-secondary education and employment.

Some frequently asked questions include:

1. *Is there a legal requirement to write IEPs aligned to curricular standards?*
2. *How does this affect the way IEPs goals are written?*
3. *Should IEP goals be developed at the student's grade placement level?*

While public education is in flux, the core requirements for IEPs have remained largely constant since 1997. As educators increase their knowledge of the standards, it is a perfect time to clarify the unique relationship between standards and IEPs. Let's start with a quick refresher on key terminology:

- **Standards** define the academic outcomes students are expected to achieve upon completion of each grade.
- **Curriculum** articulates how a school district will provide instruction (sequence of units, methodology, materials and assessments) for all students that will result in achievement of those outcomes.

Is there a legal requirement to write IEPs aligned to standards?

Federal regulations require that IEPs address a student's "involvement and progress in the general curriculum." Providing further clarification, the U.S. Department of Education issued a guidance letter in 2015 stating that all IEPs must be tied to state academic standards.

Since eligibility for special education is based on the adverse effect a disability has on a student's involvement and progress in the general education curriculum, it is only logical that explicit connections to the curriculum (and associated standards) are addressed in each student's IEP.
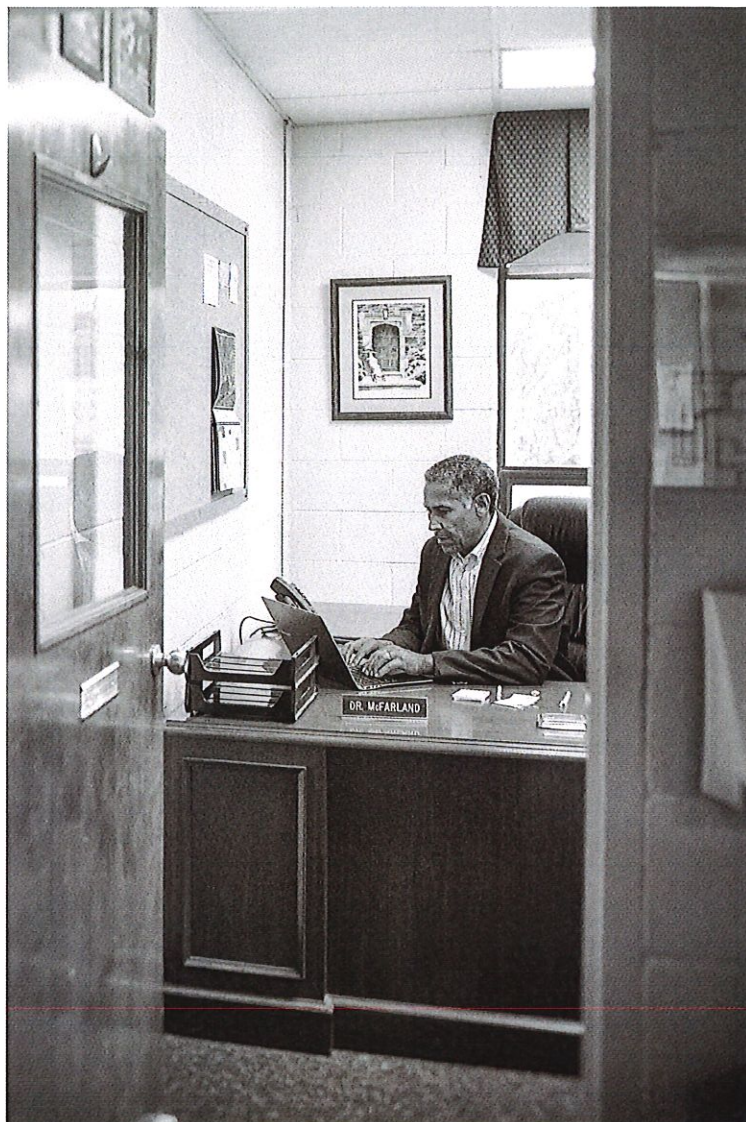
In simple terms, students develop skills and learn concepts they have been taught. All students need to learn to read, write, communicate, compute, solve problems, make connections, speak, listen, etc. Likewise, students may learn these skills in different ways, in different timeframes and to different degrees.

The essential question at the heart of this discussion is *not*, "Can the student meet this standard?" A more engaging question is, "What would it take for this student to have meaningful interaction with grade level content?" This keeps the focus on rigorous content while providing necessary adaptations to methodology, materials and/or performance criteria for some students.

How does this affect the way IEP goals are written?

The IEP goal writing process can be summed up simply.

Based on:
- Purpose of the standard
- Characteristics and needs of the learner

IEP Team will determine:
- Skills (what the student will demonstrate)
- Conditions (what must be present when the student demonstrates the skill)
- Criteria (how well the student must demonstrate the skill)

Utilizing a structured approach to decision-making (Gap Analysis) will ensure consideration of high curricular expectations without ignoring how their disabilities may affect the development of skills and acquisition of knowledge for some students.

GAP ANALYSIS

A gap analysis is used to systematically compare the student's actual performance levels to his or her grade placement expectations.

Step 1: Identify the targeted skill within the general education curriculum (refer to skills at student's *grade level placement*).

Step 2: Identify the unique characteristics of the student in relationship to the standard. Include a description of both strengths and the skills/behaviors the student presently demonstrates (refer to the grade level standards that reflect *actual performance*).

Step 3: Analyze the "gap" using the following guidelines:

1. Compare the student's present levels (actual) with the demands of the standard (expected).
2. Establish the size and nature of the gap and its relationship to the student's disability.
3. Decide how the student's strengths can be leveraged to increase access and engagement.
4. Determine the student's need(s) and prioritize skills to be addressed in the IEP goals.

Let's look at an example of how a team might use this process when writing an IEP goal for a 5th grade student using a standard that focuses on reading informational text.

Step 1 – Standards:

Considerations	Example: RI. 5.2. Determine two or more main ideas of a text and explain how they are supported by key details. Summarize the text.
Look at essence of the standard — what is the big idea?	Readers use details in a text to make meaning of the text.
Look at knowledge and skills — what does student need to know and be able to do?	Knowledge: main idea, detail, components of summary, etc. Skills: identifying main idea and supporting details and summarizing.
Look at vocabulary — what are the most important words?	Main idea, key details, summarize, determine and explain.
Look at cognitive demands — what does the student's brain need to do?	Decode text, use linguistic skills to comprehend grade level text and executive skills to keep track of details, prioritize key details, organize information to summarize and communicate summary with expressive language skills.

Step 2 – Student's Actual Performance:

John is a 5th grader with a reading disability that affects his decoding skills and an expressive language disability which affects both oral and written expression. John's strengths include strong receptive language, auditory comprehension skills, background knowledge and curiosity. His present levels show that he can independently read (decode) mid 3rd grade level text, but comprehends 5th grade level text when provided auditory supports. He can identify the main idea and details, but he has difficulty summarizing the text.

Step 3 – Analysis:

By analyzing the gap between the demands of RI. 5.2 and John's present levels, the team recognizes John can remain engaged in the same reading activities as his peers with the scaffold of auditory supports. The focus of his IEP goal will be on improving expressive language skills by summarizing the text. Because of deficits in decoding, John's team has determined he will have an additional goal aimed at improving his decoding skills. Because the purpose of a Reading Foundations standard and Reading Informational Text standard are different and will be addressed through different interventions, they will be written as two separate goals in the IEP.

Should IEP goals be developed at the student's grade placement level?

Whether a student's goal is set at their grade placement level will be determined by analyzing the student's present level and the relevant standard. IEP goals must be challenging, and they must be attainable. Once the Gap Analysis is completed, the Team can determine what supports are necessary to allow the student to have meaningful engagement with grade level content. In other words, how can the team make the least change to the *purpose of the standard* while ensuring the student has meaningful interaction with the content?

The basic elements of a goal provide the team several opportunities to *align* the goal to grade level content while individualizing it to address the student's unique disability-related needs. Goals must include the following:

- **Skills** — What skills (consistent with the grade level standard) will the student need to demonstrate?
- **Condition** — What level of support/scaffolding is needed for the student to demonstrate the skill?
- **Criteria** — What specific criteria will be used to determine if the student demonstrates the skill?

SKILLS

Select the appropriate skills to address in an IEP through the Gap Analysis. Because many basic skills are sequential, it is possible that a goal may be based on a skill that is aligned with a lower grade than the student's placement. For example, a 4th grade student with a significant reading disability may have a reading goal that targets decoding single syllable words, a skill typically learned in a lower grade. However, this same student may also need goals addressing higher level skills (determine main idea and details, multiply, convey ideas in written form, etc.). It is likely that some students will have more than one goal in areas such as reading and math.

CONDITION

Determine the condition under which the student must demonstrate the skill. The team can decide what is negotiable — in other words, what adaptations might be necessary for the student to have meaningful interaction with the content in order to learn/demonstrate the "skill."

For example, if the *skill* is to communicate information based on evidence and the student is unable to independently write a paragraph, the condition for the goal may be "given the use of a graphic organizer," "dictating," or "using visual representations." We can alter the *condition* to reflect the degree of scaffolding necessary for the student to engage in challenging content. Consider what can be modified while preserving the purpose of the standard.

- Level (e.g. given a passage at the student independent reading level)
- Supports (e.g. given a verbal prompt)
- Environment (e.g. in a familiar setting with known adult)

CRITERIA

Identify the performance criteria necessary for the student to attain the goal. Adapting criteria allows for full or partial participation in the grade level based on present levels of performance and what is attainable within one year.
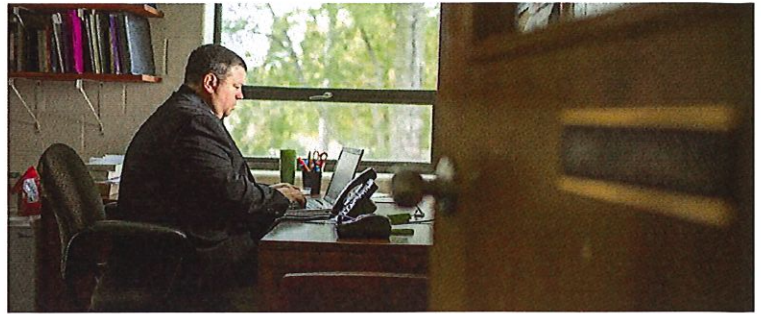
Here is John's IEP goal written to align with reading informational text: *RI. 5.2. Determine two or more main ideas of a text and explain how they are supported by key details. Summarize the text.*

> **When provided grade level digital text (with auditory supports), John will summarize the text by verbalizing or writing 3-5 sentences that include the main idea and at least 2 key details that support the main idea for 4 consecutive opportunities.**

Now let's look at Jennifer. Jennifer is also a 5th grader. She has an intellectual disability that impacts all aspects of her language and academic functioning. She loves participating in reading activities, her receptive language is a relative strength and she uses visual cues to help with comprehension. Jennifer can independently read 1st grade level text. Her language deficits make it very difficult for her to comprehend vocabulary and syntax above the 2nd-3rd grade level. She can answer who, what and where questions on 1st grade level text. She is unable to independently identify the main idea of a paragraph which is an essential pre-requisite skill for summarizing. Here is the goal Jennifer's team selected to align with RI.5.2.

> **After reading 1st grade level multi-paragraph informational text, Jennifer will identify the main idea of each paragraph by completing a fill in the blank graphic organizer with 90% accuracy for four consecutive opportunities.**

Both John and Jennifer have IEP goals that align with 5th grade expectations. Each of their goals establishes challenging, yet attainable expectations based on their unique needs.

Final Thoughts

Standards provide a framework for the skills students need for life beyond high school. Students will develop these skills in different ways and in different timeframes. When we ask the question, "What would it take for this student to have meaningful engagement with the curriculum?" the IEP team is empowered to not only address the student's unique needs, but also ensure the student has access to challenging and engaging curriculum. When we set high expectations and provide appropriate supports, students are likely to meet or exceed them.

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