



Introducing



# High-Leverage Practices in Special Education

## A Professional Development Guide for School Leaders

What constitutes an effective special educator? What instructional practices are best for fostering student engagement and learning? Answers to these questions are central to the High-Leverage Practices in Special Education initiative, led by the Council for Exceptional Children and the CEEDAR Center.

High-leverage practices are frequently occurring, educational practices that all special educators should know how to do. These practices are evidence based, meaning that they reflect effective methods that when successfully implemented can improve results for struggling learners. The twenty-two high-leverage practices—covering the areas of collaboration, assessment, social/emotional/behavioral, and instruction—are designed to serve as a road map for guiding teacher preparation, professional development, and/or current self-assessment.

The high-leverage practices provide a clear vision of effective teaching to those who work in school districts in beginning teacher induction and residency programs,

or who provide professional development for teachers of students with disabilities. Administrators and principals who provide professional development for special education teachers—and, arguably, for *all* teachers who instruct students with disabilities—can use these high-leverage practices to improve student outcomes.

Interest in high-leverage practices is quickly gaining momentum across the United States as educators embrace them and work to ensure that all teachers who work with students with disabilities have learned and mastered the practices. The Council for Exceptional

*“High-leverage practices in special education reflect new research on the effective methods that help struggling learners succeed.”*



## High-Leverage Practices in Special Education

### Collaboration

1. Collaborate with professionals to increase student success.
2. Organize and facilitate effective meetings with professionals and families.
3. Collaborate with families to support student learning and secure needed services.

### Assessment

4. Use multiple sources of information to develop a comprehensive understanding of a student's strengths and needs.
5. Interpret and communicate assessment information with stakeholders to collaboratively design and implement educational programs.
6. Use student assessment data, analyze instructional practices, and make necessary adjustments that improve student outcomes.

### Social/Emotional/Behavioral

7. Establish a consistent, organized, and respectful learning environment.
8. Provide positive and constructive feedback to guide students' learning and behavior.
9. Teach social behaviors.
10. Conduct functional behavioral assessments to develop individual student behavior support plans.

### Instruction

11. Identify and prioritize long- and short-term learning goals.
12. Systematically design instruction toward specific learning goals.
13. Adapt curriculum tasks and materials for specific learning goals.
14. Teach cognitive and metacognitive strategies to support learning and independence.
15. Provide scaffolded supports.
16. Use explicit instruction.
17. Use flexible grouping.
18. Use strategies to promote active student engagement.
19. Use assistive and instructional technologies.
20. Provide intensive instruction.
21. Teach students to maintain and generalize new learning across time and settings.
22. Provide positive and constructive feedback to guide students' learning and behavior.

Children and the CEDAR Center developed this professional development guide to support school district leaders in introducing and sharing the high-leverage practices with their staff members.

Read on to learn about the organization of the online guide, suggestions for using the professional development tools and materials, and ways to consider enhancing professional development with additional tools from the Council for Exceptional Children.

## Organization of the Guide

The downloadable online guide provides school leaders, including mentors and coaches, with practical tools for engaging their staff members in learning about how high-leverage practices in special education can enhance student learning in the school and district. In addition to this overview, which describes how the guide is organized, the guide is divided into three sections:

- **Getting to Know High-Leverage Practices.** The purpose of this section is to provide introductory information about high-leverage practices that can be used to build your knowledge and the knowledge of others.
- **Sharing High-Leverage Practices.** The purpose of this section is to provide professional development tools that can be used in both large- and small-group settings, to introduce high-leverage practices in special education.
- **Reflecting on High-Leverage Practices.** The purpose of this section is to provide professional development tools that support reflection and conversation about possible next steps for high-leverage practices in your school or district setting.



The high-leverage practices are designed to serve as a road map for guiding teacher preparation, professional development, and self-assessment.





*“High-leverage practices are essential to effective teaching and fundamental to supporting student learning.”*



Each section contains selected tools for conducting professional development. Professional development tools include:

- Information briefs and handouts that can be used to build your knowledge as well as be distributed to professional development participants.
- Links to videos that showcase concrete, accessible examples of high-leverage practices in action, in real classrooms, with real students.
- Sample agendas for conducting a one- or three-hour presentation.
- Slides and sample talking points for use during a presentation on high-leverage practices.
- Conversation starters and activities for engaging participants in learning and reflecting on next steps.

Some tools include enhanced activities and conversation starters that use publications and products available from the Council for Exceptional Children (see [www.highleveragepractices.org/resources/](http://www.highleveragepractices.org/resources/)). School leaders may want to consider using these to expand their own knowledge, as well as their colleagues' knowledge. Examples include:

- *High-Leverage Practices in Special Education* (2017). The book is a product of the High-Leverage Practices Writing Team, a collaborative effort between the Council for Exceptional Children and the CEEDAR Center. It describes the development process for identifying the practices and presents a definition and research synthesis for each of the twenty-two practices within each interrelated area of practice (collaboration, assessment, social/emotional/behavioral, and instruction) that teachers

should learn and master. A glossary of terms and a comprehensive reference list is included. School leaders will find this an excellent starting point when considering the efficacy of different practices for their programs.

- *High Leverage Practices for Inclusive Classrooms* (2019). The book focuses primarily on Tiers 1 and 2 in a multi-tiered prevention system, or work that mostly occurs with students with mild disabilities in general education classrooms. Practical information is presented on each of the twenty-two practices, such as a description of the practice, a case study to illustrate it, and a discussion of questions and issues that school-based teams should address when planning for implementation. School leaders will find this text invaluable when looking deeply at a high-leverage practice and providing teachers with practical descriptions of how the practice might look in educational settings.



The professional development guide includes practical tools that school leaders can use to share information about high-leverage practices and to support participants in reflecting on how the practices might be used.

- *TEACHING Exceptional Children* (March/April 2018). This special issue, “Putting High-Leverage Practices Into Practice,” presents nine previously published articles that reflect and embody specific high-leverage practices. The articles align with the four core areas (collaboration, assessment, social/emotional/behavioral, and instruction) and are intended to be a springboard for discussion and instruction related to “how-to” guidance. School leaders will find this an excellent resource for helping teachers “see themselves” using the approaches and understanding the positive results of using high-leverage practices.
- *High-Leverage Practices in Special Education: Reference Guides*. These laminated quick-reference guides from National Professional Resources fold out to present strategies, tips, and resources. The guides cover the areas of high-leverage practices—collaboration, assessment, social/emotional/behavioral, and instruction. School leaders will find these to be excellent tools for helping teachers generalize their understanding of high-leverage practices and for supporting them in implementing these practices with students.



School leaders can use the guide to introduce high-leverage practices and encourage conversation about their potential use.

- A team of teachers might review the materials together as part of their professional development plan.

In all cases, the tools in the guide have been designed to support professional development opportunities that introduce high-leverage practices; they are not designed to provide skill development in the practices or for planning school improvement initiatives. Further, there is no set way to use the materials; rather, school leaders are encouraged to use the materials as they see appropriate given the needs of their staff members.

## Using the Professional Development Guide

The professional development guide can be used by school leaders to introduce high-leverage practices in their schools and districts. Consider these examples:

- A central office administrator might share the information and encourage conversation about it at a planning meeting with other district leaders.
- A mentor teacher or coach might use the materials when providing technical assistance activities to the people they support.
- A school principal might incorporate the information into a staff meeting or series of meetings.
- A staff developer might conduct a workshop or workshop series with a school or group of teachers.

## In Summary

High-leverage practices have the potential to improve instruction that ultimately results in better outcomes for students with disabilities and others who struggle to succeed in school. Teachers who learn and master these practices are better prepared to engage in the types of complex instructional practice and professional collaborations that are required for effectively educating students with disabilities. This guide is intended to support you in designing professional development opportunities that introduce high-leverage practices in special education and encourage conversation about their potential use.



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