

## ***CEC Initial Level Special Educator Preparation Standards<sup>1</sup>***

Among the sine qua non characteristics of mature professions are the identification of the specialized knowledge and skill and the assurance to the public that practicing professionals possess the specialized knowledge and skill to practice safely and effectively (Neville, Herman, & Cohen, 2005). Through credentialing of professionals and professional recognition of preparation programs, special educators assure the public that practicing professionals have mastered the specialized skills for safe and effective practice.

Reflective of the personalized needs of individuals with exceptionalities, agencies prepare and credential special educators in a variety of specialty areas. To address these important specialty preparation areas, CEC has developed the seven CEC Preparation Standards on a three-step foundation. CEC uses a rigorous consensual validation process to identify sets of knowledge and skills for entry-level and advanced special educators in the variety of specialty areas. These specialty sets capture the professional knowledge base, including empirical research, disciplined inquiry, informed theory, and the wisdom of practice for their area of expertise for each proposed knowledge and skill. As a part of the validation process, CEC uses a rigorous consensual validation process (CEC Validation Study Resource Manual, 2010).

CEC synthesizes the specialty sets into seven major preparation standards organized under four areas of focus: learners and learning environments, curricular knowledge, assessment, specialized pedagogical skills, and professional and collaborative skills. CEC has further analyzed the seven preparation standards into key elements with which preparation programs align program assessments of special education candidates for CEC Professional Program Recognition.

<b>Headings and Foci for the CEC Initial Preparation Standards</b>	
<b>Learner and Learning</b>	
1	Learner Development and Individual Learning Differences
2	Learning Environments
<b>Content Knowledge and Professional Foundations</b>	
3	Curricular Content Knowledge
<b>Instructional Pedagogy</b>	
4	Assessment
5	Instructional Planning and Strategies
<b>Professionalism and Collaboration</b>	
6	Professional Learning and Practice
7	Collaboration

While the CEC Preparation Standards cross special education specialty areas, CEC uses the specialty sets to inform and differentiate the content, contexts, and issues among and between the respective specialty areas (e.g., early childhood,

<sup>1</sup> NCATE approved November 2012.

mild/moderate, developmental disabilities, and learning disabilities). Preparation program faculties align their program assessments to the seven preparation standards with the key elements and program reviewers review for alignment between the program assessments and the seven preparation standards with the key elements.

**CEC Initial Preparation Standard 1:                      Learner Development and Individual Learning Differences**

<b>1.0    <i>Beginning special education professionals understand how exceptionalities may interact with development and learning and use this knowledge to provide meaningful and challenging learning experiences for individuals with exceptionalities.</i></b>	
<b>Key Elements</b>	
1.1	Beginning special education professionals understand how language, culture, and family background influence the learning of individuals with exceptionalities.
1.2	Beginning special education professionals use understanding of development and individual differences to respond to the needs of individuals with exceptionalities.

**Supporting Explanation**

From its roots, special educators have placed the learning needs of the individual at the center of special education instruction. Historically, pedagogy or teaching skill has been at the heart of special education. Whether helping individuals with exceptionalities master addition, cooking, independent living, or philosophy, special educators have altered instructional variables to optimize learning for individuals with exceptionalities. The *raison d'être* for special education lies in the specialized professional knowledge and skills to individualize<sup>2</sup> access to learning in both specialized and general curricula for individuals with exceptionalities. Development of expertise begins with a thorough understanding of and respect for similarities and differences in human growth and development. Like all educators, beginning special educators first respect individuals with exceptionalities within the context of human development and Individual learning differences.

Additionally, beginning special educators understand the characteristics between and among individuals with and without exceptionalities. They know exceptionalities can interact with multiple domains of human development to influence an individual's learning in school, community, and throughout life.

Moreover, beginning special educators understand that the beliefs, traditions, and values across and within cultures can influence relationships among and between students, their families, and the school community. Furthermore, the experiences of individuals with exceptionalities can influence families, as well as the individual's ability to learn, interact socially, and live as fulfilled contributing members of the community.

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<sup>2</sup> As used herein the term "individualize" is used as synonymous with terms such as "personalize", "customize", "adaptive", and "differentiated."

However, beginning special educators' knowledge of human development goes beyond listing and ordering developmental milestones, and reciting legal definitions of exceptionalities. Beginning special educators understand how exceptionalities can interact with development and learning, and modify developmentally appropriate learning environments to provide relevant, meaningful, and challenging learning experiences for individuals with exceptionalities. Beginning special educators are active and resourceful in seeking to understand how primary language, culture, and family interact with the exceptionality to influence the individual's academic and social abilities, attitudes, values, interests, and career and post-secondary options.

These learning differences and their interactions provide the foundation upon which beginning special educators individualize instruction to provide developmentally meaningful and challenging learning for individuals with exceptionalities.

## **CEC Initial Preparation Standard 2                      Learning Environments**

<b>2.0    <i>Beginning special education professionals create safe, inclusive, culturally responsive learning environments so that individuals with exceptionalities become active and effective learners and develop emotional well-being, positive social interactions, and self-determination.</i></b>	
<b>Key Elements</b>	
2.1	Beginning special education professionals through collaboration with general educators and other colleagues create safe, inclusive, culturally responsive learning environments to engage individuals with exceptionalities in meaningful learning activities and social interactions.
2.2	Beginning special education professionals use motivational and instructional interventions to teach individuals with exceptionalities how to adapt to different environments.
2.3	Beginning special education professionals know how to intervene safely and appropriately with individuals with exceptionalities in crisis.

### **Supporting Explanation**

Like all educators, beginning special educators develop safe, inclusive, culturally responsive learning environments for all students. Beginning special educators also collaborate with education colleagues to include individuals with exceptionalities in general education environments and engage them in meaningful learning activities and social interactions.

Beginning special educators modify learning environments for individual needs. Knowledge regarding an individual's language, family, culture, and other significant contextual factors and how they interact with an individual's exceptionality, guides the special educator in modifying learning environments, and providing for the maintenance and generalization of acquired skills across environments and subjects.

Beginning special educators structure environments to encourage the independence, self-motivation, self-direction, personal empowerment, and self-advocacy of individuals

with exceptionalities, and directly teach them to adapt to the expectations and demands of differing environments.

Frequently, special educators safely intervene with individuals with exceptionalities in crisis. Special educators are also perceived as a resource in behavior management that include the skills and knowledge to intervene safely and effectively before or when individuals with exceptionalities experience crisis, i.e. lose rational control over their behavior.

**CEC Initial Preparation Standard 3                      Curricular Content Knowledge**

<b>3.0    <i>Beginning special education professionals use knowledge of general<sup>3</sup> and specialized curricula<sup>4</sup> to individualize learning for individuals with exceptionalities.</i></b>	
<b>Key Elements</b>	
3.1	Beginning special education professionals understand the central concepts, structures of the discipline, and tools of inquiry of the content areas they teach , and can organize this knowledge, integrate cross-disciplinary skills, and develop meaningful learning progressions for individuals with exceptionalities
3.2	Beginning special education professionals understand and use general and specialized content knowledge for teaching across curricular content areas to individualize learning for individuals with exceptionalities
3.3	Beginning special education professionals modify general and specialized curricula to make them accessible to individuals with exceptionalities.

**Supporting Explanation**

The professional knowledge base in general education has made clear that the educators’ understanding of the central concepts and structures of the discipline, and tools of inquiry related to the academic subject-matter content areas they teach makes a significant difference in student learning. There is good reason to generalize this conclusion to special educators.

Within the general curricula, beginning special educators demonstrate in their planning and teaching, a solid base of understanding of the central concepts, structures of the discipline, and tools of inquiry of the academic subject-matter content areas they teach so they are able to organize knowledge, integrate cross-disciplinary skills, develop meaningful learning progressions and collaborate with general educators in:

- Teaching<sup>5</sup> or co-teaching the content of the general curriculum to Individuals with exceptionalities across a wide range of performance levels.

<sup>3</sup> As used “general curricula,” means the academic content of the general curricula including math, reading, English/language arts, science, social studies, and the arts.

<sup>4</sup> As used, “specialized curricula” means the content of specialized interventions or sets of interventions including, but not limited to academic, strategic, communicative, social, emotional, and independence curricula.

- Designing appropriate learning and performance accommodations and modifications for individuals with exceptionalities in academic subject matter content of the general curriculum.

Additionally, beginning special educators use a variety of specialized curricula, e.g. academic, strategic, social, emotional, and independence curricula, to individualize meaningful and challenging learning for individuals with exceptionalities.

**CEC Initial Preparation Standard 4                      Assessment**

<b>4.0    <i>Beginning special education professionals use multiple methods of assessment and data-sources in making educational decisions.</i></b>	
<b>Key Elements</b>	
4.1	Beginning special education professionals select and use technically sound formal and informal assessments that minimize bias.
4.2	Beginning special education professionals use knowledge of measurement principles and practices to interpret assessment results and guide educational decisions for individuals with exceptionalities.
4.3	Beginning special education professionals in collaboration with colleagues and families use multiple types of assessment information in making decisions about individuals with exceptionalities.
4.4	Beginning special education professionals engage individuals with exceptionalities to work toward quality learning and performance and provide feedback to guide them.

**Supporting Explanation**

Like all educators, beginning special educators understand measurement theory and practice for addressing issues of validity, reliability, norms, bias, and interpretation of assessment results. Like their general education colleagues, beginning special educators regularly monitor the learning progress of individuals with exceptionalities in both general and specialized content and make instructional adjustments based on these data.

Beginning special educators also use assessment information to support a wide variety of decisions within special education. Beginning special educators understand the legal policies and ethical principles of measurement and assessment related to special education referral, eligibility, program planning, individualized instruction, learning, and

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<sup>5</sup> Because of the significant role that content specific subject matter knowledge plays at the secondary school level, special education teachers routinely teach secondary level academic subject matter content classes in consultation or collaboration with one or more general education teachers appropriately licensed in the respective content area. However, whenever special education teachers assume sole responsibility for teaching a general curriculum academic subject matter course at the secondary level, the special educators possess a solid subject matter content knowledge base sufficient to assure the students can meet state curriculum standards.

placement for individuals with exceptionalities, including individuals from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Beginning special educators understand the appropriate use and limitations of various types of assessments, and collaborate with families and other colleagues to assure nonbiased, meaningful assessments and decision-making.

Beginning special educators conduct formal and informal assessments of behavior, learning, achievement, and environments to individualize the learning experiences that support the growth and development of individuals with exceptionalities.

Beginning special educators make multiple types of assessment decisions including strategic adaptations and modifications in response to an individuals' constellation of social, linguistic, and learning factors in ways to minimize bias.

Beginning special educators use assessment information to identify supports and adaptations required for individuals with exceptionalities to access the general curriculum and to participate in school, system, and statewide assessment programs.

Beginning special educators integrate the results of assessments to develop long-range individualized instructional plans anchored in both general and special education curricula, and translate these individualized plans into carefully selected shorter-range goals and objectives. They also have a central role integrating the results of assessments in developing a variety of individualized plans, including family service plans, transition plans, behavior change plans, etc.

Beginning special educators use available technologies routinely to support their assessments. With the rapid advance and use of technology, special educators use technologies to support and manage assessment of individuals with exceptionalities. The appropriate and efficient use of technology to support assessment tasks is rapidly becoming an essential tool for special education professionals.

**CEC Initial Preparation Standard 5**

**Instructional Planning and Strategies**

<b>5.0 <i>Beginning special education professionals select, adapt, and use a repertoire of evidence-based instructional strategies<sup>6</sup> to advance learning of individuals with exceptionalities.</i></b>	
<b>Key Elements</b>	
5.1	Beginning special education professionals consider an individual's abilities, interests, learning environments, and cultural and linguistic factors in the selection, development, and adaptation of learning experiences for individual with exceptionalities.
5.2	Beginning special education professionals use technologies to support instructional assessment, planning, and delivery for individuals with exceptionalities.
5.3	Beginning special education professionals are familiar with augmentative and alternative communication systems and a variety of assistive technologies to support

<sup>6</sup> Instructional strategies, as used throughout this document include intervention used in academic and specialized curricula.

	the communication and learning of individuals with exceptionalities.
5.4	Beginning special education professionals use strategies to enhance language development and communication skills of individuals with exceptionalities
5.5	Beginning special education professionals develop and implement a variety of education and transition plans for individuals with exceptionalities across a wide range of settings and different learning experiences in collaboration with individuals, families, and teams.
5.6	Beginning special education professionals teach to mastery and promote generalization of learning.
5.7	Beginning special education professionals teach cross-disciplinary knowledge and skills such as critical thinking and problem solving to individuals with exceptionalities.

### Supporting Explanation

Whether in individualizing access to general and specialized content, individualized decision-making and individualized instruction are at the center of special education practice. In the selection, development, and adaptation of learning experiences for individuals with exceptionalities, beginning special educators consider an individual's abilities, interests, learning environments, and cultural and linguistic factors. The interactions of these factors with the implications of an individual's exceptionality guides the special educator's selection, adaptation, and use of a repertoire of evidence-based instructional strategies in promoting positive learning results in general and special curricula and in modifying learning environments for individuals with exceptionalities appropriately.

Beginning special educators teach personalized literacy and numeracy to individuals with exceptionalities who are often non-responsive individuals in tiered intervention models. In their planning and teaching with these individuals, beginning special educators emphasize explicit instruction with modeling, and guided practice to assure acquisition and fluency, as well as, the development, maintenance, and generalization of knowledge and skills across environments, settings, and the life span through approaches such as cross curricular lesson planning. Moreover, they enhance 21<sup>st</sup> Century student outcomes such as critical thinking, creative problem solving, and collaboration skills for individuals with exceptionalities, and increase their self-awareness and reliance, self-management and control, and self-efficacy and advocacy.

Beginning special educators provide effective language models and use communication strategies and resources to facilitate understanding of subject matter for individuals with exceptionalities whose primary language is not English. Beginning special educators match their communication methods to an individual's language proficiency and cultural and linguistic differences. Beginning special educators are familiar with augmentative and alternative communication systems, and assistive technologies to support and enhance the language and communication of individuals with exceptionalities, and use individualized strategies to enhance their language development and teach communication skills to individuals with exceptionalities.

Beginning special educators implement a variety of individualized learning plans across a wide range of settings and a range of different learning experiences, including individualized family service plans, individualized transition plans, individualized behavior change plans.

Transitions are specific points of potential difficulty for individuals with exceptionalities. Beginning special educators develop a variety of individualized transition plans, such as transitions from preschool to elementary school and from secondary settings to a variety of postsecondary work and learning contexts.

For individuals with exceptionalities in early childhood, special educators focus the individualized instruction plan within the context of family services taking into account the needs, priorities, and concerns of families, as the primary providers of instruction.

Beginning special educators facilitate all personalized instructional planning within a collaborative context including the individuals with exceptionalities, families, professional colleagues, and personnel from other agencies as appropriate.

Beginning special educators use technologies routinely to support all phases of instruction planning. With the rapid advance and use of technology, special educators use technologies to support and manage all phases of planning, implementing, and evaluating instruction.

**CEC Initial Preparation Standard 6                      Professional Learning and Ethical Practice**

<b>6.0    <i>Beginning special education professionals use foundational knowledge of the field and their professional Ethical Principles and Practice Standards to inform special education practice, to engage in lifelong learning, and to advance the profession.</i></b>	
<b>Key Elements</b>	
6.1	Beginning special education professionals use professional Ethical Principles and Professional Practice Standards to guide their practice.
6.2	Beginning special education professionals understand how foundational knowledge and current issues influence professional practice.
6.3	Beginning special education professionals understand that diversity is a part of families, cultures, and schools, and that complex human issues can interact with the delivery of special education services.
6.4	Beginning special education professionals understand the significance of lifelong learning and participate in professional activities and learning communities.
6.5	Beginning special education professionals advance the profession by engaging in activities such as advocacy and mentoring
6.6	Beginning special education professionals provide guidance and direction to paraeducators, tutors, and volunteers.



## Supporting Explanation

Beginning special educators practice in multiple roles and complex situations across wide age and developmental ranges that requires ongoing attention to legal matters and serious consideration of serious professional and ethical issues. The Ethical Principles and Professional Practice Standards of the Council for Exceptional Children guide beginning special education professionals. These principles and standards provide benchmarks by which special educators practice and evaluate each other professionally.

Beginning special educators understand special education as an evolving and changing discipline based on philosophies, evidence-based principles and theories, policies, historical points of view that continue to influence the field of special education and the education of and services for individuals with exceptionalities and their families in both school and society. Beginning special educators understand how these factors influence professional practice, including assessment, instructional planning, implementation, and program evaluation.

Beginning special educators are sensitive to the aspects of diversity with individuals with exceptionalities and their families, how human diversity can influence families, cultures, and schools, and how these complex issues can each interact with the delivery of special education services. Of special significance is the growth in the number and prevalence of English Language Learners (ELL) and the provision of effective special education services for ELL with exceptionalities and their families.

Beginning special educators understand the relationships of the organization of special education services to the organization of schools, school systems, and education-related agencies within the country and cultures in which they practice. Beginning special educators are aware of how their own and others' attitudes, behaviors, and ways of communicating can influence their practice, and use this knowledge as a foundation to inform their own personal understandings and philosophies of special education.

Beginning special educators engage in professional activities and participate actively in professional learning communities that benefit individuals with exceptionalities, their families, colleagues, and their own professional growth. Beginning special educators view themselves as lifelong learners and regularly reflect on and adjust their practice, and develop and use personalized professional development plans. Beginning special educators plan and engage in activities that foster their professional growth and keep them current with evidence-based practices. Beginning special educators also know how to recognize their own skill limits and practice within them.

There has been substantial growth in the use of special education paraeducators over the past few years, and beginning special educators frequently provide guidance and direction to paraeducators and others, such as classroom volunteers and tutors.

### CEC Initial Preparation Standard 7

### Collaboration

<p><b>7.0</b> <i>Beginning special education professionals collaborate with families, other educators, related service providers, individuals with</i></p>
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***exceptionalities, and personnel from community agencies in culturally responsive ways to address the needs of individuals with exceptionalities across a range of learning experiences.***

**Key Elements**

7.1 Beginning special education professionals use the theory and elements of effective collaboration.

7.2 Beginning special education professionals serve as a collaborative resource to colleagues.

7.3 Beginning special education professionals use collaboration to promote the well-being of individuals with exceptionalities across a wide range of settings and collaborators.

**Supporting Explanation**

One of the significant changes in education over the past several decades is the rapid growth of collaborative educational teams to address the educational needs of students. The diversity of the students, complexity of curricular demands, growing influence of technology, and the rising targets for learner outcomes in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has created the demand for teams of educators collaborating together to ensure all students are effectively learning challenging curricula.

Special educators view general educators as possessing knowledge and expertise in curriculum, and general educators reciprocally view special educators as having knowledge and expertise in the education of individuals with exceptionalities. Beginning special educators embrace their role as a resource to colleagues and use the theory and elements of collaboration across a wide range of contexts and collaborators.

Beginning special educators collaborate with their general education colleagues to create learning environments that meaningfully include individuals with exceptionalities, and that foster cultural understanding, safety and emotional well-being, positive social interactions, and active engagement. Additionally, special educators use collaboration to facilitate personalized instruction planning and transitions of individuals with exceptionalities in promoting the learning and well-being of individuals with exceptionalities across a wide range of settings and different learning experiences.

Beginning special educators routinely collaborate with related-service providers, other educators including special education paraeducators, personnel from community agencies, and others to address the needs of individuals with exceptionalities.

Special educators have long recognized the positive significance of the active involvement of individuals with exceptionalities and their families in the education process, and special educators involve individuals with exceptionalities and their families collaboratively in all aspects of the education of individuals with exceptionalities.

## **Glossary**

**Individuals with Exceptionalities** Individuals with exceptionalities include individuals with sensory, physical, emotional, social, cognitive differences, developmentally delays, exceptional gifts and talents; and individuals who are or have been abused or neglected; whose needs differ so as to require personalized special education services in addition to or in tandem with educational services available through general education programs and other human service delivery systems.

**Special Education Services** Special education services are personalized, i.e. individualized, services that appropriately credentialed special educators provide directly or indirectly to individuals with exceptionalities.