Teaching Students With Learning Differences: Results of a National Survey
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Executive Summary

When teachers use research-based practices and strategies to serve students with learning differences, they promote equity in education and help to develop the nation’s future workforce. A clearer understanding of the degree to which teachers implement such practices can inform efforts to improve teacher preparation and training.

In 2021, the EdWeek Research Center fielded a survey to learn more about teachers’ perspectives regarding instructional practices that can help students with learning differences to succeed. In the survey, researchers defined this population to include students with specific learning disabilities (such as dyslexia) and students with other processing challenges that can impact learning (such as attention deficits). The study’s definition of this group included students who had been formally identified for special education services and those who had not been identified for such services but experienced learning challenges.

Effective approaches for teaching these students have taken on even more critical importance due to the coronavirus pandemic. When schools were forced to abruptly switch to remote learning in early 2020 to curtail the spread of virus, students of all backgrounds experienced unprecedented disruptions to their learning and their daily lives. There is widespread concern that those changes have caused many students to miss out on key academic content and to face mental health difficulties. Students with disabilities and learning differences, in particular, lost existing services and supports. The pandemic also made it more difficult for educators to identify students in need of special education services. Implementation of instructional best practices will be vital in helping them recover lost ground.

The survey examined teachers’ perspectives on effective practices, their implementation of those instructional strategies, and the broader beliefs that impact their approaches to teaching.

Key survey findings include:

- Roughly three-quarters of teachers say that they personally have quite a lot or a great deal of knowledge about teaching students with learning differences. More than 9 in 10 teachers believe that special education teachers know quite a lot or a great deal about teaching such students. But just a slim majority (53%) think that general education teachers have that level of knowledge. Teachers less commonly perceive that paraprofessionals (31%), school principals (39%), or district administrators (28%) have quite a lot or a great deal of knowledge in this area.

- When asked to rate the training they received on teaching students with learning differences, just a slim majority (51%) of teachers reported that their training from a pre-service teacher preparation program was sufficient. Forty-two percent rated this training as insufficient and 7 percent indicated they have not received training.

- Teachers frequently implemented some best practices for teaching students with learning differences. For instance, more than 8 in 10 teachers reported that they provided students with more opportunities to practice/review content at least a few times weekly, including 46 percent doing so on a daily basis. By contrast, less than half of teachers said they used some other best practices—such as allowing students to choose assignments or topics to study (20%)—a few times a week or more.

- Some teachers frequently use approaches that are not consistent with best practice. Twenty-seven percent ask students to infer or figure out learning expectations and 15 percent introduce new content in large segments a few times or more weekly.
• General education teachers (16%) were two times more likely than their special education counterparts (7%) to introduce new content in large segments a few times a week or more. Just 41 percent of general education teachers said they never did so compared to 55 percent of special educators.

• The majority of respondents used practices that might not foster a growth mindset a few times a week or more: praising students for earning good scores or grades (67%), telling students that it’s alright to struggle because not everyone is good at a given subject (60%), and praising students for their intelligence (57%).

• Teachers were asked about the frequency with which they used several options for adapting curriculum materials for students with learning differences in the past year. Nearly two-thirds (64%) used graphic organizers—visual tools to help students identify relationships—a few times a week or more. The majority (59%) utilized guided notes—resources to help students with note-taking—that many times per week. Use of mnemonics—tools to help students remember/connect information—was slightly less common (49 percent used them at least a few times weekly). Nearly two-thirds (65%) of special educators used mnemonics a few times a week or more compared to just under half (49%) of general education teachers.

• The majority of teachers (54%) have never co-taught a class in which a general education teacher and a special education teacher served as co-teachers. But levels of experience with co-teaching differ by region. Just 36 percent of teachers in the Northeast have never co-taught compared to 50 percent in the Midwest, 53 percent in the South, and 74 percent in the West.

• Students who do not have disabilities have better educational outcomes, on average, than students who have disabilities. For instance, average reading scale scores for fourth-grade students without disabilities were 42 points higher than they were for fourth-graders with disabilities on the 2019 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). When asked about the extent to which particular factors explain such achievement disparities, teachers were more likely to say that home environments (72%), parenting (68%), and student motivation (67%) had a substantial impact than to point to the role of school quality (50%).

Introduction

When the coronavirus pandemic began, students and their teachers transitioned from traditional in-person instruction to remote learning almost overnight. Students with disabilities and learning differences—who may have been receiving specialized services—faced disruptions in their everyday experiences and routines. As schools returned to in-person classes, teachers have been called on to help their students recover ground they may have lost in their academic and social-emotional development.

Even before the pandemic, there was reason for concern that students with learning differences might struggle in classrooms where instructors were not trained to provide adequate supports tailored to their needs or where school policies did not foster implementation of effective teaching strategies. Given the tumultuous times since the onset of the pandemic, implementation of effective instructional practices for serving students with learning differences will play an even more vital role in learning recovery.

Research has identified instructional practices that promote success for students with learning differences and help them to thrive. To learn more regarding how teachers think about best practices and put them into effect, the EdWeek Research Center, with support from the Oak Foundation, launched a survey of 1,063 K-12 teachers in 2021.
The survey included questions about best practices that were culled from recommendations produced by the National Reading Panel, the National Mathematics Advisory Panel, the National Center for Learning Disabilities, the Council for Exceptional Children, and a range of other sources. It examined reading and math instruction, efforts to ensure students are prepared for postsecondary education, co-teaching roles for general and special education teachers, perspectives on teacher training, and other areas.

Key questions guiding the survey research included:

- How do general and special education teachers think about best practices for serving students with learning differences?
- Are there common misperceptions about those practices?
- To what degree are teachers implementing those instructional strategies?
- Do general and special education teachers differ in their views and practices?
- Are there differences based on the socioeconomic characteristics or locations of the school districts where teachers work?
- What are the broader philosophies or beliefs that inform teachers’ perspectives?

This report outlines survey findings. The goal of the research is to provide resources that help to guide teacher training and to boost teachers’ use of effective strategies.

**Methodology**

To learn more about educators’ experiences and views regarding students who have learning differences, the EdWeek Research Center conducted a nationwide survey of K-12 teachers. This report features results from the survey, which was developed to collect data on teachers’ practices and to learn about their perspectives. The survey was fielded in June 2021 with support from the Oak Foundation, which underwrites coverage of students with learning differences in Education Week.

Overall, 1,063 teachers responded to the survey. A total of 478 taught in elementary school with 185 in middle school, 387 in high school, and 13 teaching other grade levels. A total of 101 respondents were special education teachers.

Teachers responding to the survey hailed from every state with the exception of Delaware and served in a diverse variety of locations (urban, suburban, and rural). The economic and racial/ethnic composition of their districts also varied. Most survey respondents were veteran teachers with many years of experience in the classroom. Future research might seek to gather more information about the perspectives of newer or younger teachers.

Throughout this report, survey results are presented in whole percentage-point values and, therefore, may not sum to 100 percent.

In the survey, respondents were given a definition (shown on page 6) to use in thinking about students with learning differences.
SURVEY DETAILS

Surveys Administered: June 22, 2021 through January 3, 2022

Sample: Nationwide

Method: Online [e-mail invitations sent for an online survey]

Respondents: K-12 educators

Researchers provided respondents with the following definition in the survey.

Definition of students with learning differences:

Throughout the survey, when you think about the term “students with learning differences,” please include students with specific learning disabilities (such as dyslexia) and students with other processing challenges that can impact learning (such as attention deficits). Please think about both students who have been formally identified for special education services and students not identified for such services but experiencing learning challenges.

Perspectives on Effective Instructional Practices

The survey examined teachers’ views about instructional practices in several key areas including reading and math instruction, use of grouping strategies, adaptation of curriculum, and co-teaching in which general and special educators have roles in the classroom. There was a general consensus on the effectiveness of key practices but differences emerged by role (general education or special education teacher) and district characteristics, such as region, locale, or poverty level.

Reading Instruction

The National Reading Panel used a meta-analysis to evaluate the effectiveness of phonics instruction to teach students to read. The meta-analysis found that systematic phonics is effective for teaching K-6 grade students, as well as for students struggling to learn how to read. It also found that systematic synthetic phonics instruction, which it defines as “teaching students explicitly to convert letters into sounds (phonemes) and then blend the sounds to form recognizable words,” is helpful for students with learning disabilities and for students without disabilities who had lower performance.1 The panel concluded that students need phonics skills to learn to read and that “a variety of systematic phonics programs have proven effective with children of different ages, abilities, and socioeconomic backgrounds.”

2

The importance of phonics is the type of fundamental concept that prospective teachers might expect to see on the Praxis exam assessing the knowledge and skills necessary for entrance into the teaching profession for candidates in teacher preparation programs or looking to be certified. In fact, the answer key for an online Praxis test-prep sample question indicates that most students with learning disabilities need direct instruction in phonics and word recognition.3

Seventy percent of reading teachers reported that they place a lot of emphasis on phonics but 3 in 10 placed only some, a little, or no emphasis on it.
When you’re teaching students with learning differences to read, how much emphasis do you place on phonics?

Although phonics is essential, the National Reading Panel emphasized that teachers should also understand the importance of instruction on phonemic awareness, fluency, and comprehension. It noted that while fluency—reading quickly and accurately—is vital in comprehension, this aspect of the equation has historically been overlooked. The panel evaluated the impact of guided repeated oral reading in which students read text and receive guidance from teachers, peers, or parents. This approach was found to be effective in improving comprehension, fluency, and word recognition according to studies assessing its impact in both general and special education and with both skilled and struggling readers. The panel underscored that “teachers need to know that word recognition accuracy is not the end point of reading instruction” and that “fluency depends upon well developed word recognition skills, but such skills do not inevitably lead to fluency.”

The evidence points to the effectiveness of explicit instruction to boost fluency and provides support for the idea that teachers should evaluate their students’ ability to read quickly and accurately.
The National Reading Panel defines fluency as “the ability to read a text quickly, accurately, and with proper expression.” When students in your class struggle with reading fluency, which of the following is likely the best approach to take with those students?

- Using guided repeated oral reading practice in which students read text out loud multiple times while teachers, peers, or parents provide feedback\(^*\) 74%
- Since fluency is the result of word recognition, the students should review lists of words 12%
- If the students spend more time reading and read more material, it shouldn’t be necessary to use specific instructional methods to focus on fluency 9%
- Asking students to take turns reading a portion of a text out loud 3%
- Since fluency is not important to reading comprehension, there isn’t a need to focus on the students’ fluency 2%

*Responses marked with an asterisk are consistent with best practices or research evidence.

Results show responses from early reading teachers.

Nearly three-fourths of reading teachers indicated that the best approach for assisting students struggling with reading fluency is to use guided repeated oral reading practice in which students read text out loud multiple times while teachers, peers, or parents provide feedback. But nearly 1 in 10 said that if students spend more time reading and read more material it shouldn’t be necessary to use specific instructional methods to focus on fluency.

**Math Instruction**

Studies indicate basic math skills are key to learning subsequent math content. The research supports the effectiveness of direct instruction for learning basic skills.\(^6\)

The National Mathematics Advisory Panel indicated that, according to its review of relevant studies, explicit instruction—in which teachers might ask students to talk about their problem-solving process—bolsters student achievement with respect to math computation and word problems for students struggling with math, including those with learning disabilities. Such instruction might also call for teachers to offer a wide range of examples and substantial...
feedback, along with efforts to ensure students master foundational skills. This type of instruction makes learning expectations clear for students rather than leaving them to their own devices to infer what they are expected to learn.

One-quarter of math teachers said it is not the appropriate instructional practice to ask students with learning differences to infer or figure out the math skills they are expected to learn.

Which one of the following practices do you believe is NOT appropriate for helping students with learning differences learn math?

None of these practices are inappropriate for helping students with learning differences learn math: 46%

Asking students to infer or figure out the math skills they are expected to learn*: 25%

Asking students to practice skills primarily on their own or independently: 17%

Asking students to keep track of their own progress, thinking, or learning: 7%

Incorporating manipulatives into teaching: 3%

Reviewing concepts shortly after you first introduced them to students: 1%

*Responses marked with an asterisk are consistent with best practices or research evidence.

Research studies support the idea that instruction in foundational skills can be important even when grade-level standards focus on proficiency in other areas. Such skills can be seen as major building blocks that need to be prioritized so that students with disabilities or learning differences master the concepts that are vital for understanding a subject area.
There’s nearly universal agreement among teachers that foundational skills are important. More than 9 in 10 agreed that it’s important to teach foundational skills to students with learning differences who have not yet mastered these skills even when grade-level standards do not emphasize them.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? It’s important to teach foundational skills to students with learning differences who have not yet mastered these skills even when grade-level standards do not emphasize them.

*Responses marked with an asterisk are consistent with best practices or research evidence.

Results show responses from all teachers.

### Instructional Strategies

The Collaboration for Effective Educator Development, Accountability and Reform (CEEDAR) and the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) identified high-leverage practices in special education based on a research synthesis in order to assist prospective special educators in learning to implement best practices in their own instruction.⁹

The practices include:

- Teaching metacognitive strategies to help students with disabilities learn to keep track of their own thinking and to organize their own learning.
• Using explicit instruction in which teachers expressly spell out what students should be doing and thinking as they tackle new or challenging content. Research supports its effectiveness in teaching reading, writing, and math skills to special and general education students. This approach to making goals for learning clear can work better for struggling learners than asking them to infer these expectations.

• Adapting curriculum to help students with disabilities successfully access content. One type of modification that can be effective would rely on teachers to reduce the amount of content where necessary. Introducing new content in large amounts may not be effective for some students struggling to learn it. Modifications can also feature approaches that enhance content including graphic organizers that help students visualize relationships, guided notes that are intended to assist students in recording important information presented in class, and mnemonics designed to assist students in remembering content.

Explicit instruction calls for teachers to be clear and to use scaffolding techniques to the degree to which students are asked to use inference to determine the way that written language operates.10

Scaffolding allows teachers to support students through questions, hints, and reminders that can help them to focus on strategies for learning.11

Studies support making learning expectations overt for students with learning differences and 87 percent of teachers agreed. Research also supports allowing them to choose assignments or topics to study, asking them to keep track of their own thinking and learning, and providing them with more opportunities to practice/review content. The vast majority of teachers agreed.

In line with the research evidence on best instructional practices, a strong majority of teachers also said that it would be ineffective to ask students with learning differences to infer learning expectations or to introduce new content in large segments.

### How effective do you think the following strategies are for teaching students with learning differences?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Very ineffective</th>
<th>Somewhat ineffective</th>
<th>Somewhat effective</th>
<th>Very effective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Providing students with more opportunities to practice/review content*</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making learning expectations overt for students*</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asking students to keep track of their own thinking and learning*</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allowing students to choose assignments or topics to study*</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asking students to generalize from a specific case to a more abstract concept*</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asking students to infer or figure out learning expectations</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introducing new content in large segments</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Responses marked with an asterisk are consistent with best practices or research evidence.

Results show responses from all teachers.
Perspectives differ to some extent by location, region, and school district demographics.

Eighty-three percent of teachers in rural areas or towns said that it’s effective to make learning expectations overt for students with learning differences compared to 90 percent of teachers in the suburbs and 93 percent in urban communities.

Forty-six percent of teachers in the South reported that it’s effective to ask students to infer or figure out learning expectations compared to 35 percent in the Northeast, 36 percent in the Midwest, and 31 percent in the West.

### How effective do you think the following strategies are for teaching students with learning differences?
**Asking students to infer or figure out learning expectations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Northeast</th>
<th>Midwest</th>
<th>South</th>
<th>West</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ineffective*</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Responses marked with an asterisk are consistent with best practices or research evidence.*

Results show responses from all teachers.

Teachers in higher-poverty school districts (where 51 percent or more students qualify for free or reduced-price meals) were more likely to see this practice as effective. Forty-three percent in higher-poverty districts described it as effective while just 34 percent in more affluent districts saw it that way.

Teachers in districts where students of color make up the majority of the population were nearly two times more likely to say that it’s effective to introduce new content in large segments than teachers in majority-white districts. Twenty-eight percent in majority-minority districts and 15 percent in majority-white districts described this practice as effective.
How effective do you think the following strategies are for teaching students with learning differences?
Introducing new content in large segments

- Ineffective*: 85% (General education teachers) 72% (Special education teachers)
- Effective: 15% (General education teachers) 28% (Special education teachers)

Results show responses from all teachers.

One in five general education teachers saw this practice as effective. By contrast, just 8 percent of special education teachers would describe it that way.

*Responses marked with an asterisk are consistent with best practices or research evidence.
Instructing Students in Groups

In education and research circles, there has been longstanding and continuing debate about the most effective placement of students with disabilities. One school of thought is that students with disabilities will benefit more from inclusion in the general classroom with peers who do not have disabilities. But some fear that approach will leave students with disabilities without the specialized services that are available to them when they are placed in separate classrooms or that their academic progress and class participation will suffer in mainstream settings. Those debates will likely continue.

More broadly, students with learning differences may or may not have been identified for special education services. As a result, grouping strategies that do not rely on such identification might have the most widespread impact for students already in the general education classroom. Research studies offer some clues for the strategies that can be useful for teachers working with a wide range of students.

School districts also indicate that instructional practices used for inclusion help all students and are based on research supporting their use with students who do not have special needs. While many factors—such as support from school leaders, collaboration by adults in the school, effective assessment of student needs, and parental involvement—may contribute to successful inclusion of students with disabilities, support from peers through buddy systems or similar approaches can play an important role.12

When it comes to allowing students to work with peers in groups, some research suggests that teachers might find it challenging to change their traditional instructional methods if they tend to focus on the teacher’s control over learning. It might be difficult to move from traditional teaching to an approach using group work with greater emphasis on the student’s role.

Special education teachers who have focused on individualized instruction would have to be open to a range of grouping strategies, more noise in the classroom, and new roles for themselves that will give students more responsibility for their own learning. This approach can help students to more independently improve higher-order thinking skills necessary to understand and write text or to successfully manage their own learning.13

The National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD) recommends flexible grouping in which groups are often rearranged based on data as a way to maintain “high expectations for all while recognizing student needs vary by topic and skill” rather than groups that are focused on overall achievement and fail to adapt to changing skill levels in specific areas.14

Nine in 10 teachers found groups that are often rearranged based on data/student progress on a specific skill to be effective. A somewhat smaller share—but still a strong majority—said that groups based on students’ overall achievement levels (72%) are effective.

Nearly all teachers (92%) reported it’s effective to use heterogeneous groups (made up of students with and without learning differences) compared with just 59 percent rating homogeneous groups (all students in group have learning differences) as effective.

Teachers were much more likely to point to the effectiveness of groups students remain in for a small part of the school day (83%) than to groups students remain in for most of the school day (45%) or school year (35%).
How effective do you think the following strategies are for instructing students with learning differences in groups?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Very ineffective</th>
<th>Somewhat ineffective</th>
<th>Somewhat effective</th>
<th>Very effective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Groups that are often rearranged based on data/student progress on a specific skill*</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heterogeneous groups, made up of students with and without learning differences*</td>
<td></td>
<td>52%</td>
<td></td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Groups students remain in for a small part of the school day*</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Groups based on students' overall achievement levels</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homogeneous groups, all students in group have learning differences*</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Groups students remain in for most of the school day</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Groups students remain in for all or most of the school year</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Responses marked with an asterisk are consistent with best practices or research evidence.

Results show responses from all teachers.

There were some differences in perceptions by grade level. Homogeneous groups (all students in group have learning differences) were seen as more successful by elementary school teachers (63%) and middle school teachers (61%) than by high school teachers (51%).

High school teachers (78%) were also less likely to view groups students remain in for a small part of the school day in a positive light compared to their peers teaching at the elementary (87%) or middle school (81%) levels.

By contrast, high school instructors (40%) were more likely to support groups students remain in for all or most of the school year than elementary (29%) or middle school (36%) teachers.

Groups students remain in for all or most of the school year more commonly got an effective rating among general education (36%) than special education (21%) instructors.
The views of teachers working in public schools also differed from those teaching in private schools with respect to certain practices that make using of student grouping.

While 6 in 10 teachers from public schools believed that instructing students in homogeneous groups (all students in group have learning differences) is effective, just 4 in 10 working in private schools agreed. Similarly, 73 percent of public school teachers agreed that groups based on students’ overall achievement levels are effective compared with only 58 percent of private school teachers.

Teaching ‘Twice Exceptional’ Students

Some students might be considered to be gifted or talented in at least one area but also struggle in other areas due to a disability. These ‘twice-exceptional’ students can benefit from individualized instruction that addresses both their strengths and their challenges. In order to limit frustration and build a positive perspective for students, it’s important to emphasize their strengths and their interests without focusing on or ignoring their weaknesses. Some evidence suggests that grouping students based on their strengths and interests can have benefits.

Collaboration in heterogeneous groups mixing students with stronger and weaker skills can also potentially have benefits if students are given adequate support to help them engage in group work.

If these students are simply seen as being above grade-level in some areas and below grade-level in others, their disabilities might be missed and would not be adequately addressed. Students need to receive a comprehensive evaluation to identify disabilities. Students’ strengths might disguise their disabilities or vice versa. And some students can inaccurately be described as lazy or as students who aren’t giving full effort when learning differences are affecting their school performance (NAGC, Understood). Focusing on student effort or motivation can cause students to feel labeled as underachievers.

Best practices for teaching twice-exceptional students can include efforts to provide students with options for working independently on projects of their choice and on group work.

Most teachers (77%) said that it’s effective to ask twice-exceptional students to work on independent projects of their own choice. Teachers working in private schools and smaller districts were more likely to find this practice effective than their peers in public schools and larger school systems. Eighty-six percent of teachers in private schools described this practice as effective compared to 76 percent in public schools. Eighty-two percent of teachers employed in districts with less than 2,500 students saw this strategy as successful but that number declines to 75 percent in districts with 2,500 to 9,999 students and to 71 percent in districts serving 10,000 students or more.

Nearly 9 in 10 rated group work with heterogeneous groups (mixing students with stronger and weaker skills) as an effective instructional practice.

Most (74%) also said it’s not effective to wait to see whether students are just good at some things and not good at others but more than one-quarter reported that’s an effective approach.

Teachers were split on the efficacy of asking students to focus on subject areas they are strong in rather than areas where they struggle. Forty-six percent cited this approach as effective and 54 percent described it as ineffective.
How effective do you believe the following practices are for teaching students who both have learning differences and are also advanced/gifted in one or more areas?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practice</th>
<th>Very ineffective</th>
<th>Somewhat ineffective</th>
<th>Somewhat effective</th>
<th>Very effective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focusing on student effort/motivation</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basing instructional strategies on whether students are performing on/above grade level or below grade level</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group work with heterogeneous groups, mixing students with stronger and weaker skills*</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asking students to work on independent projects of their own choice*</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group work with homogeneous groups, all students have the same skill levels*</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asking students to focus on subject areas they are strong in rather than areas where they struggle*</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waiting to see whether students are just good at some things and not good at others</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Responses marked with an asterisk are consistent with best practices or research evidence.

Results show responses from all teachers.

How effective do you believe the following practices are for teaching students who both have learning differences and are also advanced/gifted in one or more areas?

**Asking students to work on independent projects of their own choice**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District enrolls less than 2,500 students</th>
<th>District enrolls 2,500 to 9,999 students</th>
<th>District enrolls 10,000 students or more</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ineffective</td>
<td>Effective*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19%</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Responses marked with an asterisk are consistent with best practices or research evidence.

Results show responses from all teachers.
Teaching ELL Students With Learning Differences

Teachers may serve students who have disabilities and are also learning English as a second language. Group work and peer tutoring can help such students to participate in the general classroom. Instruction in classroom interaction skills and social norms can be helpful to English-language learners with disabilities when they aren’t familiar with school expectations. Teachers responding to the survey almost universally see these practices as effective.

When asked about the efficacy of strategies for teaching English-language learners who also have learning differences, at least 9 in 10 teachers said it’s effective to teach language skills across the curriculum or in all courses, to incorporate students’ cultural, family, or community practices into instruction, to provide remediation in academic subject areas where students are below grade level, and to teach higher-order skills such as critical thinking. There can be a tension between providing remediation and teaching higher-order skills which can lead to concerns that remediation is crowding out higher-level content.

A smaller share of teachers but still a strong majority (74%) said that focusing on basic skills in English rather than the student’s native language is effective. Research indicates that focusing on basic skills in English rather than the student’s native language might not be the best way to boost proficiency. Research has found that teaching students to read in their native language can be effective in elevating their performance in reading English. For instance, a study from the Rand Corporation, the American Councils for International Education, and the Portland school district found that students whose first language wasn’t English were more likely to reach proficiency when they were enrolled in a dual-language program.

Other researchers suggest that helping students to use their native language can provide useful information in identifying disabilities and determining whether students struggle in both English and the native language.

How effective do you believe the following strategies are for teaching English-language learners who also have learning differences?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Very ineffective</th>
<th>Somewhat ineffective</th>
<th>Somewhat effective</th>
<th>Very effective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teaching language skills across the curriculum or in all courses*</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td></td>
<td>67%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incorporating students’ cultural, family, or community practices into instruction*</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td></td>
<td>64%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching classroom interaction skills/social norms*</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td></td>
<td>59%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching higher-order skills such as critical thinking*</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remediation in academic subject areas where students are below grade level</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td></td>
<td>52%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group work with temporary groups based on learning a specific skill*</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td></td>
<td>52%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focusing on basic skills in English rather than the student’s native language</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Responses marked with an asterisk are consistent with best practices or research evidence.

Results show responses from all teachers.
Reducing Content

Studies indicate that tailoring content to the student is important with effective learning occurring when students find work somewhat challenging but not overwhelming. Reducing the amount of content doesn’t necessarily mean that teachers would focus on content or assignments that aren’t rigorous but instead would allow the curriculum to be adapted to individualize instruction.

Eight in 10 teachers agreed that reducing the amount of content can be an appropriate way to adapt the curriculum in order to individualize instruction for students with learning differences. Teachers working in the Northeast (82%) and the Midwest (87%) were more likely to agree than teachers in the South (76%) and West (76%).

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Reducing the amount of content can be an appropriate way to adapt the curriculum in order to individualize instruction for students with learning differences.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Somewhat agree*
- Strongly agree*

*Responses marked with an asterisk are consistent with best practices or research evidence.

Results show responses from all teachers.
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Reducing the amount of content can be an appropriate way to adapt the curriculum in order to individualize instruction for students with learning differences.

*Responses marked with an asterisk are consistent with best practices or research evidence.

Results show responses from all teachers.

### Student Behavior

Studies have indicated that students with learning disabilities may be more likely to be suspended from school. Those students can struggle with frustration in challenging situations and with addressing social cues. Some discipline policies might also categorize, stigmatize, or label students when they have behavioral difficulties.²⁸

A 2018 U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) report provides data regarding discipline practices for students with disabilities and suggests that a lack of behavioral supports can lead to restrictive placements of students that are not appropriate. Properly implementing supports that are based on evidence can boost participation in instruction while reducing the degree to which students are unnecessarily removed from instruction for disciplinary reasons. The report also suggests that schools should pay attention to research indicating that removals, such as school suspensions, that “significantly impede the implementation of the individualized education program (IEP), generally do not help to reduce or eliminate the reoccurrence of the misbehavior.”²⁹

There are strategies that center the reduction of improper student behavior on instructional practices. For instance, teachers can provide direct instruction to students with disabilities so that they learn how to appropriately respond in
classroom settings or interactions. Other potential strategies for addressing behavior problems include boosting student engagement by providing rigorous assignments and establishing individual discipline plans for students with specific challenges that are not adequately addressed by broader approaches.  

Roughly 9 in 10 teachers indicated that positive behavioral interventions and supports, direct instruction in appropriate behaviors, and individualized behavioral intervention plans are effective in reducing or eliminating the reoccurrence of inappropriate behavior in students with learning differences.

Most teachers think that out-of-school suspensions (75%) and expulsion from school (81%) are ineffective. But they are divided about the impact of in-school suspensions and more restrictive placements outside the general education classroom. Forty-nine percent found in-school suspensions effective while 51 percent described them as ineffective. Six in 10 saw restrictive placements as useful and 4 in 10 disagreed with that assessment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How effective do you believe the following approaches are in reducing or eliminating the reoccurrence of inappropriate behavior in students with learning differences?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Positive behavioral interventions and supports</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| ![Chart showing the percentage of teachers' responses to the effectiveness of various approaches.](chart)

*Responses marked with an asterisk are consistent with best practices or research evidence.

Results show responses from all teachers.

Perspectives varied by the characteristics of the districts where teachers worked. The majority of teachers in the South (56%) supported the effectiveness of in-school suspensions compared to 46 percent in the Northeast, 42 percent in the Midwest, and 45 percent in the West. Fifty-four percent of teachers in rural districts or towns saw this approach as useful compared to 44 percent in the suburbs and 45 percent in urban areas. The majority of teachers in higher-poverty
districts (55%) said that in-school suspensions are helpful compared with just 44 percent in more affluent school systems.

Similar patterns emerge from the data on out-of-school suspensions. This practice is more commonly seen as effective among teachers in the South (33%) than among their peers located in the Northeast (17%), the Midwest (19%), and the West (25%). Thirty-two percent in higher-poverty districts viewed this form of discipline as effective compared to 22 percent in wealthier districts. Teachers working in school systems where students of color make up the majority of the enrollment were more likely to support the efficacy of out-of-school suspensions than their peers working in majority-white districts (34% and 22%, respectively). More than one-quarter of teachers (26%) serving students in public schools pointed to the successful impact of this approach while just 15 percent in private schools saw it that way.

Views on expulsion from school were also connected to where teachers work. It’s more commonly seen as successful in the South (27%) than in the Northeast (11%), Midwest (12%), and West (16%). There’s more support for it in larger districts enrolling 10,000 or more students (23%) or 2,500 to 9,999 students (20%) than in systems with less than 2,500 students (14%). Twenty-four percent of teachers in higher-poverty districts said this type of discipline is effective compared to 16 percent in lower-poverty systems. Similarly, 23 percent of teachers in districts where students of color make up most of the population believe expulsion is effective but just 16 percent of teachers in majority-white districts agreed. Teachers working in public schools (19%) were more than two times more likely to see expulsion as effective than their counterparts in private schools (8%).

How effective do you believe the following approaches are in reducing or eliminating the reoccurrence of inappropriate behavior in students with learning differences?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approach</th>
<th>Northeast</th>
<th>Midwest</th>
<th>South</th>
<th>West</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In-school suspensions</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out-of-school suspensions</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expulsion from school</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Responses marked with an asterisk are consistent with best practices or research evidence.

Results show responses from all teachers.
How effective do you believe the following approaches are in reducing or eliminating the reoccurrence of inappropriate behavior in students with learning differences? Expulsion from school is effective.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Private school/network</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public school/district</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District Enrollment</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 2,500</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2,500-9,999</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10,000 or more</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Racial Composition</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>49% or less white students</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50% or more white students</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District Poverty</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More than 50% low-income</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50% or less low-income</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results show responses from all teachers.

Sixty-eight percent of teachers in higher-poverty districts believe in the positive impact of more restrictive placements outside the general education classroom but that number falls to 52 percent among teachers serving in more affluent communities. This approach also received more favorable ratings from teachers working in districts located in rural areas or towns than from their peers in suburban or urban areas. Nearly two-thirds (65%) of teachers in rural areas or towns had a positive view of this method. Fifty-six percent of suburban and 52 percent of urban teachers saw it that way. Restrictive placements were also more commonly seen in a positive light in public schools—where 62 percent of teachers viewed this approach as effective—than in private schools where 36 percent had a positive impression.

**Co-Teaching**

Researchers have identified collaborative teaching as a priority area for the preparation and training of prospective special educators. In many cases, special education teachers have skills and knowledge beyond just the strategies they use to address particular disabilities and can bring these assets to a co-teaching assignment. They often need to have
knowledge regarding the development of literacy skills for both students who have disabilities and their peers who do not. Effective special education teachers working in secondary schools should also have content knowledge in subject areas.  

Multiple approaches or models can be useful for co-teaching. Each of these options has strengths and weaknesses.

Some evidence suggests that inclusion of special education teachers in mainstream classrooms can be successful when special education staff members are fully integrated into the general education classroom and their assistance is available to all students (both those identified for special education and those in general education). When services and assistance from special educators are available to all students, pupils who face challenges due to learning differences can potentially benefit from extra help even when they have not been identified for special education.

There are potential drawbacks to an approach in which special education teachers are assigned officially or unofficially to the role of assistants to the general education teachers. Students and teachers might perceive that they are being relegated to a lesser function. When teachers alternate take the lead in the classroom, they are more likely to be seen as equals.

When asked which approach they think should be used to assign roles to the general education teacher and special education teacher when co-teaching a class, the majority of respondents (58%) indicated that the general education teacher and the special education teacher should both provide instruction/services that are available to all students — both students with and without learning differences. Nineteen percent said the general education teacher should provide instruction to all students and the special education teacher serves as a resource for students with disabilities and learning differences. Another 19 percent believed that the special education teacher should provide knowledge of IEPs and goals/objectives specific to learning differences and the general education teacher should provide content knowledge for instructing students on specific academic subjects. Just 3 percent said the special education teacher should serve as an assistant and provide support to the general education teacher.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>When co-teaching a class, which approach do you think <strong>SHOULD BE USED</strong> to assign roles to the general education teacher and special education teacher?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The general education teacher and the special education teacher should both provide instruction/services that are available to all students — both students with and without learning differences*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The special education teacher should provide knowledge of IEPs and goals/objectives specific to learning differences and the general education teacher should provide content knowledge for instructing students* on specific academic subjects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The general education teacher should provide instruction to all students and the special education teacher serves as a resource for students with disabilities and learning differences*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The special education teacher should serve as an assistant and provide support to the general education teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of these approaches should be used to assign roles when co-teaching</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Responses marked with an asterisk are consistent with best practices or research evidence.

Results show responses from all teachers.
The views of special education teachers differed to some degree from the perspectives of their peers in general
education. Three-quarters of special educators believed that the general education teacher and the special education
teacher should both provide instruction/services that are available to all students. By contrast, that percentage declined
to 56 percent among general education teachers.

General education teachers (20%) were two times more likely than special educators (10%) to report that the general
education teacher should provide instruction to all students and the special education teacher serves as a resource for
students with disabilities and learning differences.

General education teachers (20%) were also more likely than their peers working in special education (13%) to indicate
that the special education teacher should provide knowledge of IEPs and goals/objectives specific to learning
differences and the general education teacher should provide content knowledge for instructing students on specific
academic subjects.

When co-teaching a class, which approach do you think SHOULD BE USED to assign roles to the general education
teacher and special education teacher?

- The general education teacher and the special education teacher should both provide instruction/services that
  are available to all students* (56%)
- The general education teacher should provide instruction to all students and the special education teacher serves as a
  resource for students with disabilities and learning differences* (20%)
- The special education teacher should provide knowledge of IEPs/goals/objectives specific to learning differences and
  the general education teacher should provide content knowledge for instructing students on academic subjects*
  (13%)
- The special education teacher should serve as an assistant and provide support to the general education teacher*
  (3%)
- None of these approaches should be used to assign roles when co-teaching (1%

*Responses marked with an asterisk are consistent with best practices or research evidence.

Results show responses from all teachers.
Implementation of Instructional Practices

In addition to questions asking about perceptions regarding best practices, the survey included items designed to ascertain the degree to which teachers implement those strategies in the classroom. Views on best practices only have a strong impact when teachers put those practices into effect.

Most teachers implement best practices several times a week or more and infrequently use practices that are not aligned with evidence on effective strategies. Some differences emerged across grade levels. General education teachers were also more likely than special educators to commonly implement some approaches that are not in line with best practices.

Common Teaching Approaches

Teachers frequently implemented some best practices. More than three-quarters of teachers (76%) said that they made learning expectations overt for students at least a few times a week this past school year, including roughly half of teachers saying they do so every day. More than 8 in 10 teachers reported that they provided students with more opportunities to practice/review content at least a few times weekly, including 46 percent doing so on a daily basis.

By contrast, less than half of teachers said they used other best practices a few times a week or more. These practices include asking students to keep track of their own thinking and learning (49%), asking students to generalize from a specific case to a more abstract concept (47%), and allowing students to choose assignments or topics to study (20%). Some teachers frequently use approaches that are not consistent with best practice. Twenty-seven percent ask students to infer or figure out learning expectations and 15 percent introduce new content in large segments a few times or more weekly.

This past school year, how often did you use the following instructional practices to teach students with learning differences?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional Practice</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>A few times a year</th>
<th>A few times a month</th>
<th>A few times a week</th>
<th>Every day</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Making learning expectations overt for students*</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing students with more opportunities to practice/review content*</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asking students to keep track of their own thinking and learning*</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asking students to infer or figure out learning expectations</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asking students to generalize from a specific case to a more abstract concept*</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allowing students to choose assignments or topics to study*</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introducing new content in large segments</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Responses marked with an asterisk are consistent with best practices or research evidence.

Results show responses from all teachers.
Seventeen percent of teachers in higher-poverty districts said they never allow students to choose assignments or topics to study. That compares to 10 percent in more affluent school systems.

Elementary school teachers (90%) were more likely to provide students with more opportunities to practice/review content at least a few times a week than their peers at the middle school (81%), or high school (79%) levels.

General education teachers (16%) were two times more likely to introduce new content in large segments a few times a week or more than their special education counterparts (7%). Just 41 percent of general education teachers said they never did so compared to 55 percent of special educators.

This past school year, how often did you use the following instructional practices to teach students with learning differences? Providing students with more opportunities to practice/review content

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional Practice</th>
<th>Elementary school teacher</th>
<th>Middle school teacher</th>
<th>High school teacher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A few times a month or less</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A few times a week or more</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results show responses from all teachers who said they taught such students.
This past school year, how often did you use the following instructional practices to teach students with learning differences? Introducing new content in large segments

- **Never**: 41% (General education teachers) 55% (Special education teachers)
- **A few times a month or less**: 43% (General education teachers) 38% (Special education teachers)
- **A few times a week or more**: 16% (General education teachers) 7% (Special education teachers)

**Instruction for ELL Students With Learning Differences**

When asked how often they used particular strategies to teach English-language learners who also have learning differences this past school year, the vast majority (76%) said they taught higher-order skills such as critical thinking at least a few times a week. Only 50 percent incorporated students’ cultural, family, or community practices into instruction a few times a week or more making it the least commonly used practice.

Elementary school teachers were more likely to put some recommended strategies into frequent practice than their peers teaching at the middle school or high school levels.

More than three-quarters of elementary teachers used group work with temporary groups based on learning a specific skill several times a week compared to just less than half of teachers in secondary schools.

Eighty-five percent of elementary level teachers taught language skills across the curriculum or in all courses a few times a week or more but just 6 in 10 teachers in middle and high schools did so.
This past school year, how often did you use the following strategies to teach English-language learners who also have learning differences?

- Teaching language skills across the curriculum or in all courses:
  - Never: 6%
  - A few times a year: 16%
  - A few times a month: 23%
  - A few times a week: 24%
  - Every day: 49%

- Focusing on basic skills in English rather than the student’s native language:
  - Never: 7%
  - A few times a year: 9%
  - A few times a month: 13%
  - A few times a week: 24%
  - Every day: 48%

- Teaching classroom interaction skills/social norms:
  - Never: 4%
  - A few times a year: 8%
  - A few times a month: 16%
  - A few times a week: 27%
  - Every day: 46%

- Teaching higher-order skills such as critical thinking:
  - Never: 5%
  - A few times a year: 18%
  - A few times a month: 39%
  - A few times a week: 37%
  - Every day: 39%

- Remediation in academic subject areas where students are below grade level:
  - Never: 6%
  - A few times a year: 7%
  - A few times a month: 19%
  - A few times a week: 33%
  - Every day: 34%

- Group work with temporary groups based on learning a specific skill:
  - Never: 6%
  - A few times a year: 8%
  - A few times a month: 24%
  - A few times a week: 23%
  - Every day: 38%

- Incorporating students’ cultural, family, or community practices into instruction:
  - Never: 6%
  - A few times a year: 18%
  - A few times a month: 26%
  - A few times a week: 30%
  - Every day: 20%

*Responses marked with an asterisk are consistent with best practices or research evidence.

Results show responses from all teachers who said they taught such students.

Similarly, more than 8 in 10 elementary school teachers taught classroom interaction skills/social norms at least a few times a week compared to 66 percent and 64 percent of middle and high school teachers, respectively.

Eighty-two percent of elementary teachers and roughly 7 in 10 secondary teachers said they were teaching higher-order skills such as critical thinking a few times a week or more.
The majority of elementary teachers (58%) incorporated students’ cultural, family, or community practices into instruction several times a week but less than half of middle school (43%) and high school teachers (44%) did so that often.

Elementary school teachers were also more likely to adopt two practices that don’t have consensus support among researchers. Eighty-four percent of elementary teachers, 58 percent of middle school teachers, and 63 percent of high school teachers said they focused on basic skills in English rather than the student’s native language a few times a week or more. Similarly, 8 in 10 elementary teachers spent time on remediation in academic subject areas where students are below grade level a few times a week or more compared to 58 percent of teachers at the middle school level and 52 percent of teachers in high schools.

This past school year, how often did you use the following strategies to teach English-language learners who also have learning differences?

For each strategy, the bars represent the percentage of teachers in each category who use the strategy:

- **Group work with temporary groups based on learning a specific skill**
  - Never: 6%
  - A few times a month or less: 16%
  - A few times a week or more: 43%

- **Teaching language skills across the curriculum or in all courses**
  - Never: 3%
  - A few times a month or less: 11%
  - A few times a week or more: 82%

- **Teaching higher order skills such as critical thinking**
  - Never: 1%
  - A few times a month or less: 16%
  - A few times a week or more: 71%
Teachers working in majority-minority districts more commonly taught classroom interaction skills/social norms than their peers teaching in majority-white districts (79% and 67%, respectively, taught them at least several times weekly). Eighty-six percent of special education teachers taught such skills at least a few times a week compared to 71 percent of general education teachers.

The majority of teachers in higher-poverty school systems (57%) frequently incorporated students’ cultural, family, or community practices into weekly instruction but less than half of teachers in lower-poverty districts (44%) did so. Teachers in districts where most of the enrollment was made up of students of color were also more likely to incorporate these cultural/community practices than those teaching where most students were white (59% and 45%, respectively, incorporated them at least several times a week). More than 7 in 10 special educators but slightly less than half of general education teachers did so. Sixty percent of urban teachers incorporated students’ family or cultural practices that often compared to 52 percent of suburban and 43 percent of rural/town teachers.

This past school year, how often did you use the following strategies to teach English-language learners who also have learning differences?

### Teaching classroom interaction skills/social norms

- **Never**:
  - General education teachers: 3%
  - Special education teachers: 7%
- **A few times a month or less**: 
  - General education teachers: 7%
  - Special education teachers: 26%
- **A few times a week or more**: 
  - General education teachers: 71%
  - Special education teachers: 86%

### Incorporating students’ cultural, family, or community practices into instruction

- **Never**: 
  - General education teachers: 6%
  - Special education teachers: 5%
- **A few times a month or less**: 
  - General education teachers: 24%
  - Special education teachers: 46%
- **A few times a week or more**: 
  - General education teachers: 48%
  - Special education teachers: 71%

Results show responses from all teachers who said they taught such students.
**Adaptations of Curriculum**

Teachers were asked about the frequency with which they used several options for adapting curriculum materials for students with learning differences in the past year. Nearly two-thirds (64%) used graphic organizers—visual tools to help students identify relationships—a few times a week or more. The majority (59%) utilized guided notes—resources to help students with note-taking—that many times per week. Use of mnemonics—tools to help students remember/connect information—was slightly less common (49 percent used them at least a few times weekly).

### This past school year, how often did you use the following strategies to adapt curriculum materials for students with learning differences?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Graphic organizers: visual tools to help students identify relationships</td>
<td>2% 10% 22% 26% 39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guided notes: resources to help students with note-taking</td>
<td>9% 12% 20% 24% 35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mnemonics: tools to help students remember/connect information</td>
<td>6% 18% 26% 34%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Responses marked with an asterisk are consistent with best practices or research evidence.*

Results show responses from all teachers who said they taught such students.

Elementary school teachers (75%) were more likely to use graphic organizers a few times a week or more than middle school teachers (65%), or high school teachers (55%). Eighty-two percent of special educators used this tool that often compared to 64 percent of general education teachers.

Seventy percent of middle school and 63 percent of high school teachers used guided notes at least a few times weekly but that number fell to 51 percent for teachers at the elementary school level.

Nearly two-thirds (65%) of special educators used mnemonics a few times a week or more compared to just under half (49%) of general education teachers.
This past school year, how often did you use the following strategies to adapt curriculum materials for students with learning differences?

**Assignment of Roles**

Fifty-eight percent of teachers believed that the general education teacher and the special education teacher should both provide instruction/services that are available to all students but just 46 percent of teachers who had participated in co-teaching said this approach was actually used to assign roles.

While just 3 percent of teachers thought that the special education teacher should serve as an assistant to the general education teacher, 11 percent said that this approach was used when they co-taught. Special education teachers were two times more likely than general education teachers to say this approach was used. Twenty-one percent of special education teachers said it was the model employed when they co-taught compared to just 9 percent of general education teachers.

Results show responses from all teachers who said they taught such students.
If you have co-taught a class in which a general education teacher and a special education teacher served as co-teachers, which of the following best describes the approach that was actually used to assign roles to the general education teacher and special education teacher?

- The general education teacher and special education teacher both provided instruction/services that were available to all students — both students with and without learning differences* 46%
- The general education teacher provided instruction to all students and the special education teacher served as a resource for students with disabilities and learning differences 28%
- The special education teacher provided knowledge of IEPs and goals/objectives specific to learning differences and the general education teacher provided content knowledge for instructing students on specific academic subjects 12%
- The special education teacher served as an assistant and provided support to the general education teacher 11%
- None of these approaches was used to assign roles when co-teaching 2%

*Responses marked with an asterisk are consistent with best practices or research evidence.

Results show responses from all teachers who said they have co-taught a class in which a general education teacher and a special education teacher served as co-teachers.

**Ways to Foster a Growth Mindset**

Studies have evaluated the effect that students’ beliefs about intelligence can have on their school success. Research indicates that students with a growth mindset—the belief that intelligence can be developed through effort—achieve at higher levels than their peers with a fixed mindset or the belief that academic talent is static rather than changeable.

Teachers can have an effect on their students’ learning mindsets through teaching practices. In the survey, teachers were asked how often they implement a range of classroom practices—some of which may be more likely to promote a growth mindset than others.

Teachers reported how often they used seven practices with students who have learning differences—on a scale ranging from “every day” to “never.” Three of the practices encourage a growth mindset, while the other four would not be expected to help students see intelligence as something that can change or grow.
Of the practices that boost growth mindset, respondents most commonly encouraged students to try new strategies when they are struggling to learn a concept. More than 8 in 10 respondents (87%) said they did so a few times a week or more.

They also commonly encouraged students who are already doing well to keep trying to improve. Eighty-six percent said they used this approach at least a few times weekly.

The majority of respondents used practices that might not foster a growth mindset a few times a week or more: praising students for earning good scores or grades (67%), telling students that it’s alright to struggle because not everyone is good at a given subject (60%), and praising students for their intelligence (57%).

This school year, how often have you engaged in the following practices with students who have learning differences in your typical classroom?

*Responses marked with an asterisk are consistent with best practices or research evidence.

Results show responses from all teachers who said they taught such students.
Elementary school teachers are more likely to encourage students to try new strategies a few times a week or more when they are struggling to learn a concept: elementary (92%), middle (84%), and high school (81%).

Ninety percent of teachers in higher-poverty districts said they were encouraging students who are already doing well to keep trying to improve at least a few times per week. Roughly 8 in 10 teachers in lower-poverty districts used that approach that often. That’s true of nearly 9 in 10 public school teachers and about three-quarters of private school teachers.

Seventy-three percent of teachers in school systems where students of color make up a majority commonly suggested that students seek help from their classmates on schoolwork compared to 59 percent of teachers in majority-white systems. That’s a practice that can help students when they believe that requesting assistance is a sign of weakness.

However, teachers in majority-minority districts were also more likely to frequently encourage students by telling them a new topic will be easy to learn which is an approach that might not help students to develop the belief that learning can require persistence through difficulties.

### This school year, how often have you engaged in the following practices with students who have learning differences in your typical classroom?

#### Suggesting that students seek help from other students on schoolwork

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Northeast</th>
<th>Midwest</th>
<th>South</th>
<th>West</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A few times a month or less</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A few times a week or more</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Praising students for their intelligence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Northeast</th>
<th>Midwest</th>
<th>South</th>
<th>West</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A few times a month or less</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A few times a week or more</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results show responses from all teachers who said they taught such students.
Nearly 7 in 10 teachers in the South frequently suggested that students seek help from other students on schoolwork compared to 56 percent in the Northeast, 56 percent in the Midwest, and 71 percent in the West.

On the other hand, nearly two-thirds of teachers in the South praised students for their intelligence a few times per week or more, a practice that can reinforce the belief that intelligence is more important than learning strategies or persistence in trying to address challenges. That compares to 48 percent in the Northeast, 55 percent in the Midwest, and 50 percent in the West. Similarly, teachers in the South were more likely to often praise students for earning good scores or grades, which highlights the results but not the process: Northeast (54%), Midwest (66%), South (76%), and West (62%).

Teachers in higher-poverty districts more commonly tell students a few times weekly that it’s alright to struggle because not everyone is good at a given subject: lower-poverty districts (54%) and higher-poverty districts (64%). Public school teachers are also more likely to do so: public school/district (61%) and private school/network (41%).

**Postsecondary Support Services**

It’s important to teach high school students with disabilities to advocate for support services once they reach postsecondary schools because those institutions might not automatically provide the same services or as many supports as K-12 schools.  

Researchers with the U.S. Department of Education’s National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2) indicated that supports and accommodations in postsecondary education are connected to academic achievement for students with disabilities. But they noted that “when students leave secondary school and enter postsecondary institutions, the responsibility for arranging for accommodations and supports shifts from the school to the students. At the postsecondary level, students with disabilities are expected to advocate for themselves.”

Researchers suggest that it can be helpful for high schools to provide guest speakers or workshops that offer information about the services available to students with disabilities in postsecondary education. The transition to college and postsecondary life can be daunting for students of all backgrounds. Teachers and schools should try a variety of strategies to help students with disabilities prepare to take that leap and to find the assistance they need to address their specific challenges.

Students whose learning challenges did not result in their identification for special education in a K-12 setting may still need support to succeed in postsecondary courses so schools shouldn’t limit workshops and other college-prep assistance to students receiving special education services. Just as self-advocacy skills can be important in helping special education students learn to access services and accommodations, other students who have learning differences can benefit from developing the ability to request help—particularly given that their needs may not have been previously documented in their K-12 schools.

Most high school special education teachers (78%) said they put a lot of effort into teaching high school students with learning differences about the support services that might be available to them once they graduate and enroll in colleges/universities. But they vary in the extent to which they use specific approaches to help high school students with learning differences prepare for postsecondary.
How much effort do you put into teaching high school students with learning differences about the support services that might be available to them once they graduate and enroll in colleges/universities?

Results show responses from special education teachers in high schools.

Nearly two-thirds of high school special education teachers (65%) reported that at least a few times a week they teach students to advocate for/request support services. More than 4 in 10 indicated they teach these skills every day. The majority of special education teachers at the high school level said that they employ several approaches a few times a month or less: making students aware of websites/online resources about college preparation (85%), making students aware of workshops/events regarding college preparation (79%), and inviting representatives from colleges/universities to speak to their classes (53%). But 59 percent indicated that they never invite college students to speak to their classes and 44 percent reported that they never invite representatives from colleges/universities to speak to their classes.
How often, if at all, do you use the following approaches to help high school students with learning differences prepare to attend college/universities?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approach</th>
<th>Never (%)</th>
<th>A few times a month or less (%)</th>
<th>A few times a week or more (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teaching students to advocate for/request support services*</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making students aware of websites/online resources about college preparation*</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making students aware of workshops/events regarding college preparation*</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inviting college students to speak to your class*</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inviting representatives from colleges/universities to speak to your class*</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Responses marked with an asterisk are consistent with best practices or research evidence.

Results show responses from special education teachers in high schools.

Beliefs and Philosophy

Because the degree to which teachers implement particular classroom practices can be affected by their general attitudes and values, the survey also examined the broader philosophies or beliefs that inform teachers’ perspectives. Most teachers believed that they were knowledgeable about teaching students with learning differences but they were less confident that school principals and district administrators knew a lot about that topic.

Who has Knowledge About Teaching Students With Learning Differences?

Roughly three-quarters of teachers say that they have quite a lot or a great deal of knowledge about teaching students with learning differences. More than 9 in 10 teachers believe that special education teachers know quite a lot or a great deal about teaching such students. But just a slim majority (53%) think that general education teachers have that level of knowledge.
Teachers less commonly perceive that paraprofessionals (31%), school principals (39%), or district administrators (28%) have quite a lot or a great deal of knowledge in this area.

**How much would you say the following people know about instructional practices for teaching students with learning differences?**

- Special education teachers: 57% quite a lot or a great deal, 34% some, 8% very little, 0% none
- Me: 29% quite a lot or a great deal, 48% some, 22% very little, 0% none
- General education teachers: 43% quite a lot or a great deal, 42% some, 5% very little, 10% none
- School principals: 29% quite a lot or a great deal, 49% some, 11% very little, 10% none
- District administrators: 20% quite a lot or a great deal, 45% some, 23% very little, 7% none
- Paraprofessionals: 25% quite a lot or a great deal, 47% some, 19% very little, 6% none

Results show responses from all teachers.

High school teachers were somewhat less likely than their peers teaching at the elementary and middle school levels to believe that they have quite a lot or a great deal of knowledge. Seventy-three percent of high school teachers said they have that degree of knowledge compared to 79 percent of elementary school teachers and 81 percent of middle school teachers.

Nearly 8 in 10 public school teachers (79%) saw themselves as highly knowledgeable compared to 64 percent of private school teachers.

Almost all special education teachers (97%) saw themselves as very knowledgeable while three-quarters of general education teachers saw themselves that way.
How much would you say the following people know about instructional practices for teaching students with learning differences? Me (quite a lot or a great deal)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General education teacher</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special education teacher</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public school/district</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private school/network</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elementary school teacher</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle school teacher</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school teacher</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results show responses from all teachers.

The degree to which teachers viewed general education teachers as having quite a lot or a great deal of knowledge varied by region: Northeast (58%), Midwest (56%), South (52%), and West (45%). It also varied by the type of school: public school/district (55%) and private school/network (30%). The majority of general education teachers saw themselves as having quite a lot or a great deal of knowledge (75%) but just 35 percent of special education teachers believed general education teachers had that level of knowledge.

Thirty-nine percent of high school teachers viewed paraprofessionals as highly knowledgeable compared to 33 percent of middle school teachers. Just 23 percent of elementary school teachers saw paraprofessionals that way.

Teachers in the South were more likely to see school principals as highly knowledgeable about instructional practices for teaching students with learning differences. Forty-six percent of teachers in that region viewed principals as having quite a lot or a great deal of knowledge compared to 38 percent in the Northeast, 35 percent in the Midwest, and 33 percent in the West.

Views also differed to some extent by the size and type of school or district. Thirty-five percent of teachers working in districts with less than 2,500 students believed that principals are very knowledgeable compared to 40 percent of those teaching in districts enrolling 2,500 to 9,999 students and 44 percent in districts with enrollments of 10,000 or more. Just
over 4 in 10 teachers working in a public school/district thought that principals have this level of knowledge but only 27 percent of private school teachers agreed.

As with views regarding principals, teachers in the South were more likely to see district-level administrators as highly knowledgeable than their peers working in other regions: Northeast (28%), Midwest (22%), South (34%), and West (20%).

**Requirements for Successful Instruction**

Two-thirds of teachers believe that successful instruction for students with learning differences requires specialized skills that both general education teachers and special education teachers typically have. Sixteen percent believe that such instruction mostly requires the same skills that are needed to teach students who do not have learning differences. Another 16 percent think that it requires specialized skills that typically only special education teachers have.

Which of these statements is most aligned with your view?

- Successful instruction for students with learning differences requires specialized skills that both general education teachers and special education teachers typically have (67%)
- Successful instruction for students with learning differences mostly requires the same skills that are needed to teach students who do not have learning differences (16%)
- Successful instruction for students with learning differences requires specialized skills that typically only special education teachers have (16%)

Results show responses from all teachers.

High school teachers are nearly two times more likely than their peers teaching in elementary schools to say that successful instruction for students with learning differences mostly requires the same skills that are needed to teach students who do not have learning differences (21% and 11%, respectively). Sixty-three percent of teachers at the high school level indicated that successful instruction for students with learning differences requires specialized skills that
both general education teachers and special education teachers typically have. Seventy-one percent of elementary school and 69 percent of middle school teachers said the same.

Views differed by region. Teachers in the West were more likely to believe that good instruction mostly requires the same teaching skills for all students whether they have learning differences or not: Northeast (11%), Midwest (16%), South (14%), and West (26%). They were less likely to say that successful instruction for students who have learning differences entails specialized skills that both general education teachers and special education teachers often possess: Northeast (77%), Midwest (70%), South (68%), and West (57%).

Teachers employed in larger school districts were less likely than their peers in medium-sized or small districts to think that effective teaching for students with learning differences requires specialized skills that both general education teachers and special education teachers typically have: less than 2,500 students (70%), 2,500 to 9,999 students (72%), and 10,000 students or more (59%). They more commonly reported that effective teaching for students with learning differences requires specialized skills that only special education teachers generally have: less than 2,500 students (13%), 2,500 to 9,999 students (13%), and 10,000 students or more (24%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Which of these statements is most aligned with your view?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Successful instruction for students with learning differences mostly requires the same skills that are needed to teach students who do not have learning differences:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Successful instruction for students with learning differences requires specialized skills that both general education teachers and special education teachers typically have:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Successful instruction for students with learning differences requires specialized skills that typically only special education teachers have:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results show responses from all teachers.
**Experiences With Co-Teaching**

The majority of teachers (54%) have never co-taught a class in which a general education teacher and a special education teacher served as co-teachers. But levels of experience with co-teaching differ by region. Just 36 percent of teachers in the Northeast have never co-taught compared to 50 percent in the Midwest, 53 percent in the South, and 74 percent in the West.

Half of public school teachers didn’t have any co-teaching experience while 93 percent of private school teachers had not co-taught.

Most general education teachers (56%) had never co-taught with a special educator. By contrast, just 28 percent of special education teachers said they hadn’t participated in teaching a class with a general education counterpart.

**Have you ever co-taught a class in which a general education teacher and a special education teacher served as co-teachers?**

![Pie chart showing 54% yes and 46% no responses.](chart.png)
Have you ever co-taught a class in which a general education teacher and a special education teacher served as co-teachers?

Results show responses from all teachers.

**Interest in Co-Teaching**

Most teachers (80%) have either co-taught a class or are interested in doing so. They cited a variety of reasons for their interest. The majority said each teacher would have areas of knowledge to contribute and could help each other grow as teachers (54%), co-teaching would have a positive impact on their students’ overall achievement and progress (52%), and co-teaching would better serve students with learning differences in the class (51%).
This question asks about your interest in co-teaching a class. If you are a general education teacher, you would be co-teaching with a special education teacher. If you are a special education teacher, you would be co-teaching with a general education teacher. Which of the following have caused you to co-teach a class or make you interested in taking an opportunity to co-teach were it offered to you? Select all that apply.

Each teacher would have areas of knowledge to contribute and we could help each other grow as teachers 54%

Co-teaching would have a positive impact on my students’ overall achievement and progress 52%

Co-teaching would better serve students with learning differences in the class 51%

I think co-teaching would improve my instructional practices or strategies 40%

It would provide a resource or support system for me to share challenges and accomplishments with another teacher 39%

It would be an opportunity to use IEPs as a resource for collaboration to serve students with disabilities 30%

NA: I haven’t co-taught a class and am not interested in doing so 20%

Co-teaching would have a positive impact on my students’ standardized test scores 19%

It would allow both teachers to discuss federal and state special education laws/rules and we could collaborate on their implementation 18%

Other, please specify 6%

Results show responses from all teachers.

Teachers in the Northeast were more likely than their peers in other regions to say that a range of factors have caused them to co-teach a class or make them interested in taking an opportunity to co-teach were it offered to them. They more often thought co-teaching would improve their instructional practices or strategies: Northeast (54%), Midwest (39%), South (36%), and West (39%). Similarly, the percent of teachers from the Northeast citing the following reasons for co-teaching exceeded the share of teachers from other regions by at least 13 percentage-points.

• Co-teaching would have a positive impact on my students’ overall achievement and progress (Northeast, 64%)
Co-teaching would better serve students with learning differences in the class (Northeast, 67%)

It would provide a resource or support system for me to share challenges and accomplishments with another teacher (Northeast, 52%)

Teachers in the Northeast were also less likely to say that they haven’t co-taught a class and are not interested in doing so. Just 11% of Northeast teachers selected that survey response compared to 17% in the Midwest, 23% in the South, and 26% in the West.

Teachers in the South were than two times more likely than teachers in the Northeast to believe that co-teaching would have a positive impact on their students standardized test scores: Northeast (11%), Midwest (17%), South (24%), and West (15%). Teachers in higher-poverty districts more commonly agreed with that positive view of co-teaching’s impact on test scores than their peers in more affluent systems (23% and 14%, respectively).

This question asks about your interest in co-teaching a class. If you are a general education teacher, you would be co-teaching with a special education teacher. If you are a special education teacher, you would be co-teaching with a general education teacher. Which of the following have caused you to co-teach a class or make you interested in taking an opportunity to co-teach were it offered to you? Select all that apply.

- I think co-teaching would improve my instructional practices or strategies
- Co-teaching would have a positive impact on my students standardized test scores
- Co-teaching would have a positive impact on my students overall achievement and progress
- Co-teaching would better serve students with learning differences in the class
- It would provide a resource or support system for me to share challenges and accomplishments with another teacher
- NA: I haven’t co-taught a class and am not interested in doing so

Results show responses from all teachers.
Given the widespread interest in co-teaching, teacher preparation programs can look to prepare their students for such opportunities. In pre-service teacher preparation programs, a seminar or simulation established by faculty from both special education and general education backgrounds can provide one option for helping prospective teachers learn to collaborate in shared classrooms and to discuss federal or state special education laws.38

**Concerns About Co-Teaching**

When asked about factors that have reduced or eliminated their interest in co-teaching a class, teachers most commonly (31%) said that none of the factors examined on the survey had that effect. One-quarter indicated that they wouldn’t get enough time to plan and prepare—making it the most common concern reducing interest in such collaboration. Nearly one-quarter (24%) said administrators in their schools wouldn’t provide adequate support or structure needed for co-teaching to work well. That particular concern was more common among teachers in the Northeast (32%) than in the South (18%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concern</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None of these factors have reduced or eliminated my interest in co-teaching a class</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I wouldn’t get enough time to plan and prepare</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrators in my school wouldn’t provide adequate support or structure needed for it to work well</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The responsibilities of each teacher wouldn’t be clearly established or defined</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I wouldn’t receive adequate training on co-teaching</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adequate staff supports — such as paraprofessionals — won’t be provided</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One teacher would have control of the classroom and the other would have a lesser role</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I wouldn’t have a co-teacher with beliefs about instruction that are aligned with or similar to my own</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other, please specify</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I tried co-teaching previously and it didn’t work out well</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t think co-teaching would improve my instructional practices or strategies</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m not sure that general ed. teachers can adapt instruction in ways that special ed. teachers recommend</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-teaching would have a negative impact on my students’ overall achievement and progress</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-teaching would have a negative impact on my students’ standardized test scores</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results show responses from all teachers.
Concerns that one teacher would have control of the classroom and the other would have a lesser role also varied by school/district characteristics. Nearly one-quarter of teachers in districts with 10,000 students or more had that worry but just 13 percent in smaller districts (less than 2,500 students) agreed. Similarly, one-quarter of teachers in urban school systems cited worries about unequal partnerships compared to 13 percent teaching in rural areas or towns.

General education teachers are two times more likely than special educators to say they might be discouraged from co-teaching because they wouldn’t receive adequate training on co-teaching (special education teachers, 11% and general education teachers, 22%).

Special education teachers more often said other factors have reduced or eliminated their interest in co-teaching a class compared to their colleagues teaching in general education. They were more than two times more likely than general education teachers to be concerned that one teacher would have control of the classroom and the other would have a lesser role (special education teachers, 38% and general education teachers, 16%).

An even wider gap appears regarding adaptations to instruction. Special educators were five times more likely to say that they aren’t sure that general education teachers can adapt instruction in ways that special education teachers would recommend (special education teachers, 20% and general education teachers (4%).

A previous survey conducted by the Council for Exceptional Children found that although special education teachers saw the value of working together with their general education colleagues, they also worried about whether there would be adequate support systems in place to promote effective teamwork. Relatively low shares, for instance, saw district-level general education administrators, school principals, general education teachers, or paraprofessionals as well-prepared to provide support with instruction that assists students with disabilities in reaching IEP goals.39 Given these concerns, school districts seeking to implement co-teaching should work to ensure that supports and training are in place for both special and general education teachers, as well as for school and district administrators.

This question asks about your interest in co-teaching a class. If you are a general education teacher, you would be co-teaching with a special education teacher. If you are a special education teacher, you would be co-teaching with a general education teacher. Which of the following have reduced or eliminated your interest in co-teaching a class? Select all that apply.

- One teacher would have control of the classroom and the other would have a lesser role
- I am not sure that general education teachers can adapt instruction in ways that special education teachers would recommend
- I wouldn’t receive adequate training on co-teaching

Results show responses from all teachers.
The survey included an open-ended question asking teachers what they think general education teachers and special education teachers most need to know about each other’s jobs. Some pointed to difficulties or differences between these groups. For instance, a general education teacher noted that “at my school, there is a basic conflict between teachers, who are responsible for content learning for all students, and special education teachers who seem to feel responsible for certain students, but not for their learning of content.” A special educator said “general education teachers need to be more familiar with strategies to assist students with learning disabilities” and “also need to be willing to seek and accept assistance from the SPED teacher.” Another special education teacher commented that “general teachers need more knowledge on what goes in to planning, prepping, and writing IEPs, as well as all the legal requirements.”

But teachers also commonly cited opportunities for mutual understanding or collaboration between general and special education teachers. A general education teacher indicated that “they need to know everything about each other’s jobs and work together for the greatest benefits of children.” Another said “they need to know that both groups need each other” and “should work as a team and share the work.”

**Perspectives on Training**

Special educators and general education teachers in all subject areas will likely teach students with a variety of learning challenges and will need training on best practices for serving these students. A lack of high-quality training could leave teachers unprepared and trying to find strategies on the fly through trial and error. Previous research examining science instruction for students with disabilities found that for many science teachers “the first opportunity to think about or familiarize themselves with methods and materials specific to teaching students with disabilities was when confronted by such issues for the first time in their classrooms.”

When asked to rate the training they received on teaching students with learning differences, just a slim majority (51%) of teachers reported that their training from a pre-service teacher preparation program was sufficient. Forty-two percent rated this training as insufficient and 7 percent indicated they have not received training.

**How would you rate the training you received on teaching students with learning differences?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Training Source</th>
<th>Completely insufficient</th>
<th>Mostly insufficient</th>
<th>Mostly sufficient</th>
<th>NA-Have not received training</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional development provided by my district or school</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training from pre-service teacher preparation program</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results show responses from all teachers.
The majority of public school teachers (53%) but just 35 percent of private school teachers said their pre-service training was sufficient. Thirteen percent of private school teachers said they had not received any pre-service training on this topic while 6 percent of public school teachers did not get such training.

Three-quarters (76%) of special education teachers rated their pre-service training as sufficient compared to less than half (49%) of general education teachers.

How would you rate the training you received on teaching students with learning differences?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>General education teachers</th>
<th>Special education teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Insufficient</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sufficient</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NA-Have not received training</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results show responses from all teachers.

A stronger majority of teachers (62%) believed that professional development provided by their districts or schools had been sufficient. Teachers in public schools (63%) were more likely to rate their professional development as sufficient than teachers in private schools (43%).

Student Placement

A narrow majority of teachers (53%) indicated that students with learning differences will typically be best served in the same classroom as students without learning differences but will need significant and specialized supports and services in order to be successful. Thirty-three percent said that such students will typically be best served in the same classroom as students without learning differences and can succeed with modest supports and services. Ten percent believed that students with learning differences will typically be best served in self-contained classrooms or separate
classrooms from students without learning differences where they can receive the specialized services and supports they need. Four percent indicated that students with learning differences will typically be best served in self-contained classrooms or separate classrooms from students without learning differences because they might not participate or feel comfortable in classes with students who don’t have learning differences.

Which of the following best describes your view regarding the placement of students with learning differences?

Results show responses from all teachers.

**Impact of RTI**

Response to Intervention (RTI) is a widely adopted approach that schools have used in efforts to identify and support students with learning challenges. Students having difficulties in the classroom are given services and supports based on being assigned to one of three tiers. A U.S. Department of Education evaluation of RTI found “that early-grade elementary students at the margin of being considered at risk by current screening measures failed to benefit from Tier 2 or Tier 3 intervention services provided to them.” It found that first-graders not only failed to benefit but lost ground compared to peers who received Tier I services only. Researchers responding to the study have suggested that these findings are more the result of educators’ implementation challenges than of RTI itself.

When asked how they think RTI generally impacts achievement for students with learning differences, the majority of teachers (58%) said they believed it will generally have positive effects. Nearly one-quarter (24%) reported that they aren’t familiar with RTI. Sixteen percent said that it won’t generally have any effects (positive or negative). Just 3 percent believed it will generally have negative effects.
How do you think Response to Intervention (RTI) generally impacts achievement for students with learning differences?

- It will generally have positive effects: 58%
- I’m not familiar with RTI: 24%
- It won’t generally have any effects (positive or negative): 16%
- It will generally have negative effects: 3%

Results show responses from all teachers.

Elementary school teachers (69%) were more likely to believe that it will generally have positive effects than middle (56%) or high school teachers (44%). Middle (24%) and high school teachers (38%) said that they aren’t familiar with RTI more commonly than their elementary school peers (12%).

Public school teachers (60%) were two times more likely than their private school counterparts (30%) to say that RTI will generally have positive effects and more than three times less likely to say they aren’t familiar with RTI (20% and 68%, respectively).

Views on Student Achievement

Students who do not have disabilities have better educational outcomes, on average, than students who have disabilities. For instance, average reading scale scores for fourth grade students without disabilities were 42 points higher than they were for fourth-graders with disabilities on the 2019 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). When asked about the extent to which particular factors explain such achievement disparities, teachers were more likely to say that home environments (72%), parenting (68%), and student motivation (67%) had a substantial impact than to point to the role of school quality (50%).
To what extent do you think each of these factors explains why students who do not have disabilities have better educational outcomes, on average, than students who have disabilities?

The majority of teachers working in suburban school districts (57%) said that school quality explains the disparities quite a lot or to an extreme degree compared to 49 percent of teachers in rural areas or towns and 38 percent of urban teachers. Teachers in private schools (68%) were more likely to agree with that view than public school teachers (49%).
To what extent do you think each of these factors explains why students who do not have disabilities have better educational outcomes, on average, than students who have disabilities? Student motivation (quite a lot/extremely)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District Poverty</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>50% or less low-income</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51% or more low-income</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District Locale</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural or town</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching Role</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General education teacher</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special education teacher</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results show responses from all teachers.

Views on the role of student motivation also varied by school/district characteristics. Teachers in higher-poverty districts (70%) were more likely to see it as having a major impact than teachers in wealthier districts (63%). A slight majority of urban teachers (52%) shared that perspective compared to 7 in 10 rural/town (70%) and suburban teachers (68%). General education teachers (68%) more commonly highlighted the influence of student motivation than special educators (55%).

Most teachers saw parenting as a key factor explaining disparities in educational outcomes but teachers in the South cited it more commonly than their peers in other parts of the nation. Nearly three-quarters of Southern teachers said it explained differences in achievement quite a lot or to an extreme degree. Closer to 6 in 10 teachers in other regions said so.

More than 7 in 10 teachers in higher-poverty districts agreed with that assessment of parenting’s role compared to about 6 in 10 working in more affluent school systems. Similarly, 76 percent of teachers in districts where most students are lower income believe home environments explain unequal educational outcomes. Sixty-six percent of teachers in wealthier districts shared that belief.

Most teachers think that genetics have a limited role in explaining differences between the educational outcomes of students who have disabilities and those who do not. Less than one-quarter (24%) of all teachers said that genetics
explain these differences quite a lot or to an extreme degree. Elementary school teachers (30%) were more likely to cite a major role for genetics than middle school (17%) or high school teachers (20%).

**Respondent Demographics**

A total of 1,063 teachers responded to the EdWeek Research Center’s survey examining teaching practices that serve students with learning differences. Respondents taught at varying grade levels and worked in districts that differed by locale, sector, size, and poverty level.

**Grade Levels**

Forty-five percent of teachers responding to the survey worked in elementary schools. Middle school and high school teachers made up 17 percent and 36 percent of respondents, respectively.

**Which title COMES CLOSEST to describing your job?**

- Elementary school teacher 45%
- Middle school teacher 17%
- High school teacher 36%
- Teacher-other grade levels 1%

Results show responses from all teachers.
Teaching Role

Survey respondents taught a range of academic subjects. The most common teaching assignment was elementary education (all subjects) at 28 percent. Special education teachers made up 10 percent of respondents.

Which of the following best describes the subject you teach this school year?

- Elementary education, all subjects: 28%
- English-language arts/literacy/reading in grades 3-12: 11%
- Social studies/humanities/civics/history: 10%
- Science: 10%
- Math: 7%
- Other, please specify: 7%
- Fine arts-related subjects [e.g., art, dance, music, theater]: 5%
- Special education in grades K-5: 5%
- Career-technical education: 4%
- Special education in grades 9-12: 4%
- World/foreign languages: 3%
- Special education in grades 6-8: 2%
- Physical education/health: 2%
- Bilingual education/English as a second language: 1%
- English-language arts/literacy/reading in grades K-2: 1%
- Computer science/data science: 1%

Results show responses from all teachers.

Experience

Nearly 90 percent of survey respondents had worked in K-12 education for more than 20 years.

How long have you worked in K-12 education?

- More than 20 years: 87%
- 11-20 years: 12%
- Less than 10 years: 1%

Results show responses from all teachers.
**Region**

Survey respondents hailed from every state with the exception of Delaware. Four in 10 respondents worked in the South.

**In which state is your district located?**

Results show responses from all teachers.

**Locale**

Most teachers responding to the survey worked in rural areas and towns (44%) or suburban districts (41%). Urban teachers made up the smallest share of respondents (15%).
Which of the following best describes your district’s location?

- Urban: 15%
- Suburban: 41%
- Rural or town: 44%

Results show responses from all teachers.

**Sector**

Most respondents (90%) worked in public schools/districts with the remaining respondents working in private schools/networks.

Which of the following best describes your employer?

- Public school/district: 90%
- Private school/network: 10%

Results show responses from all teachers.
**District Enrollment**

Roughly 4 in 10 respondents taught in districts with enrollments of less than 2,500 students. The remaining respondents were split between districts of 2,500 to 9,999 students and districts enrolling 10,000 students or more.

**Approximately how many students are enrolled in your school district?**

- **Less than 2,500**: 42%
- **2,500 to 9,999**: 31%
- **10,000 or more**: 28%

Results show responses from all teachers.

**District Poverty**

Respondents to the survey taught in both high-poverty and more affluent districts. Similar shares of respondents served in districts where the majority of students were low-income (53%) and where the majority were from families with higher incomes (47%). District poverty was measured by the percent of students eligible for free or reduced-price school meals.
Which of the following best describes your school district’s percentage of students who qualify for free or reduced-price meals?

![Pie chart showing percentages of students qualifying for free or reduced-price meals.]

- 25% or fewer low-income students
- 26-50% low-income students
- 51-75% low-income students
- More than 75% low-income students

Results show responses from all teachers.

**Race/Ethnicity of Student Population**

Most respondents worked in districts where white students made up the majority of the enrollment. Seven in 10 worked in majority-white districts.

Which of the following best describes the percentage of white students in your district?

![Pie chart showing percentages of white students in districts.]

- Less than 25 percent white students
- 25 to 49 percent white students
- 50 to 89 percent white students
- 90 percent white students or more

Results show responses from all teachers.
Notes


27. https://doi.org/10.3200/PSTL.53.3.197-208


30. https://doi.org/10.3200/PSTL.53.3.197-208


