








IRIS CENTER FOR TRAINING ENHANCEMENTS

K–12 General Educators for Inclusive Education: Roles, Responsibilities, and Competencies: Views from the Field


This summary of a much longer report condenses findings culled from structured telephone interviews with five preservice faculty members, two preservice trainees, five general education teachers (elementary, middle, alternative, and high school), six personnel from State Improvement Grants (SIGs) or related programs, and a face-to-face focus group of seven parent leaders (N=25). All told, these participants represented fifteen states and the District of Columbia.


Major Roles and Responsibilities of K-12 General Educators for Inclusive Education

NOTE: The roles and responsibilities of general educators much depend on the type of inclusive setting in which they work. In some of these, the general educator might be the only direct teacher. In other settings, the school might use a consultant model. In other cases, someone comes into and out of the classroom to assist students. Co-teaching is not always a possibility, nor are para-educators available in all instructional settings.

-  **Responsibility for all students:** Among the general educator's primary responsibilities is to create a productive learning environment for every student, to ensure that every student has an equal opportunity for teaching and learning, and to act as an advocate for all students. To accomplish this presupposes a belief that all students can learn, that general educators can set and maintain high expectations, and that they can come to an acceptance of variations in learning styles and modalities.
-  **Instruction:** General educators must be well-grounded in evidence-based methods for teaching in their assigned grade-level skill or content areas in the inclusive classroom. This entails curriculum sequencing and grouping and regrouping students for instruction.
-  **Collaboration:** The general educator participates fully in an integrated and comprehensive system of quality instruction for all students—not only in terms of content but, equally important, in the delivery of instruction. In many schools, this involves playing a meaningful role on the intervention team. Above all, it means collaborating with special educators and related service providers to support progress in the learning and behavior of students with disabilities in the inclusive classroom.
-  **Individualized education plan:** An important role of the general educator is to participate meaningfully in IEP meetings and IEP development, to carry out the IEP with fidelity, and to support students in participating in IEP development.
-  **Differentiation:** It is the general educator's responsibility to respond to students' learning styles; build upon their strengths and needs; set appropriate goals; use (or collaborate in using) accommodations, modifications, and evidence-based instructional strategies; incorporate technologies in instruction; and design academic and play activities at multiple levels.


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 **Classroom and behavior management:** The general educator is responsible for creating a classroom climate that is conducive for learning by all students. This often entails creating an inclusive environment for students with disabilities and ensuring that those students are included as peers with their fellow students. This responsibility includes effective classroom behavior management.


 **Working with families:** It is the general educator's responsibility to communicate and interact positively and productively with the families of all students in the classroom. Doing so involves working with the families of students with disabilities and the sensitivities that this entails.


Competencies:


Knowledge and Skills for Carrying Out the Roles and Responsibilities


 **Knowledge about disabilities:** The general educator must have a working knowledge of the disabilities present among students in the classroom, as well as what those disabilities imply for teaching and learning. Also necessary is a knowledge of the vocabulary of special education and the relevant provisions of IDEA.










 **Collaboration:** The general educator must cultivate an ability to work with those who play other roles in the school, as well as to understand how best to use the supports offered by related services and technology integration specialists. She must also work collaboratively and develop strong relationships with the special educator to work as a team and to learn from each other for the purposes of assessment, progress monitoring, and planning and delivering appropriate instruction. She must be able to supervise and work effectively with paraprofessionals.

 **Classroom organization and grouping:** The general educator should understand how to group and regroup students for the purpose of effective instruction. She must have or develop skills in classroom organization that will allow all students to fully take part in classroom activities.

 **Behavior, discipline:** Important also are skills in behavior management, functional behavioral assessment, and observation. The general education teacher must have a working knowledge of the various strategies for identifying the root causes of behavior, as well as the ability to use supports such as PBIS. She must know how to teach social skills and problem solving.

 **Differentiation:** The general education teacher must have the capacity to see the whole child—that is, the physical, cognitive, emotional, environmental, and cultural aspects of the child—and to capitalize on the strengths and talents of each student. She must be able to use and collaborate on the use of differentiated instructional strategies, modifications, and accommodations. The general educator needs skills related to curriculum adaptation for different learning styles and needs, as well as a knack for selecting and adapting materials. Important, too, is the ability to partition lesson plans to individualize, and to break learning tasks into smaller chunks. She must be able to design or adapt classroom tests for students with learning needs and should evince knowledge of evidence-based practices, such as Universal Design for Learning. The general educator should be able to identify sources of information on differentiations and adaptations.

 **Engaging/ involving students:** The general educator must be able to provide challenging and engaging work, not just worksheets and dittos. She must be skillful in devising learning activities that respond to the interests and context of students in the classroom. She must have knowledge of learning strategies and the ability to teach test-taking skills, as well as the ability to use project-based learning and community-based learning.

-  **Instructional/ assistive technologies:** Important is the general educator's capacity to help students use assistive technologies for learning. She must have a working knowledge of technology integration—using whiteboards, electronic equipment, and communication enhancements.
-  **Reading and literacy:** The general educator must be able to use (or collaborate to use) differentiated reading strategies, supports, and assessments (e.g., DIBELS). She must be skillful in devising alternative language arts tasks.
-  **Content instruction:** The general educator must have a developed understanding of the assigned subject/ skill areas and curriculum sequences, as well as an ability to deliver quality instruction for all students. She must have the skill to incorporate (or collaborate to incorporate) evidence-based practices in literacy and reading instruction in the content areas.
-  **Response to intervention:** The general educator requires skills in universal screening at Tier 1, as well as those related to formative assessment in depth and the connection between assessment to instruction. She must have a knowledge of effective tools available to assess what is being taught and have the ability to use those results to improve instruction. She must be ready to provide Tier 2 instruction (with support, if necessary).
-  **Transition to postsecondary:** The general educator needs to know how to provide and adapt instruction in twenty-first century learning skills. She must take part in the transition team and involve and assist students in self-determination and postsecondary planning.
-  **Diversity:** General educators must be able to distinguish a disability from issues tied to culture, socioeconomic level, or language. They must grasp the culture of the community in which students live and must comprehend how to incorporate this understanding into their instructional planning.
-  **Parent involvement:** The general educator should possess well-developed interpersonal skills in communicating sensitively with family members, as well as the ability to meaningfully involve them in their children's educations. She must have the ability to educate parents about the modifications and accommodations being used with their children. Important also is the capacity to show parents how to make use of certain classroom materials and interventions with their children at home.
-  **Time management:** General educators require skills in managing the demands related to (a) time spent on individualization; (b) time for collaborating with special educators and related services; (c) time for communicating with parents; and (d) time for the paperwork associated with students with disabilities.
-  **Standards:** All educators should be familiar with the Council for Exceptional Children's (CEC) standards and be able to apply them. They should also be cognizant of their state's curriculum standards and the requirements and accommodations provisions of their state and district assessments.