



An AFT-NYSUT-RIFTHP Educator Evaluation for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (E3TL) Consortium¹
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THE EVALUATION OF EDUCATORS IN EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS AND CLASSROOMS FOR ALL LEARNERS

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Educating *all students*, including students with disabilities and English language learners (ELLs), together in high-quality, age-appropriate general education classrooms—and providing them with the educational, linguistic, social and behavioral supports that address their strengths and challenges—is consistent with schooling in a democratic society, educational research, and federal laws eliminating segregation and supporting students’ civil rights (August & Shanahan, 2006; Freeman & Freeman, 2007; Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian, 2006; Salend, 2011; Sapon-Shevin, 2008).

Written specifically for school practitioners (teachers, administrators, and evaluators), but appropriate for all community members, this teacher evaluation issue brief outlines the conditions necessary for *all students* to be successful learners in general education classrooms.

Interrelated Principles of Effective Classrooms

Sound and successful education is based on four interrelated principles, which provide a framework for creating effective classrooms that comply with federal laws (e.g., Title III, IDEA and Section 504) and state policies which may extend beyond these federal requirements (Salend, 2011). These principles, which fully support and align with the teaching standards adopted by the Rhode Island Federation of Teachers & Health Professionals and the New York State United Teachers through their teacher evaluation models, are:

1. All Learners and Equal Access. Effective general education classrooms provide *all students* with equal access to a meaningful, challenging, engaging, appropriate and responsive general education curriculum, and the necessary services and supports that help students succeed in school and in society (Salend, 2011). Effective classroom instruction focuses on clear student expectations in the 21st-century skill areas of creativity and innovation, critical thinking and problem-solving, and communication and collaboration. In accordance with court decisions (e.g., 1981’s *Castañeda v. Pickard*) and federal statutes (e.g., Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act), the law ensures that ELLs and students with disabilities are educated in programs based on sound education theory; implemented effectively with resources for personnel, instructional materials and adequate space; and proven effective in overcoming language barriers. Effective educators offer a multilevel and multimodality curriculum as well as educational and social experiences that are both challenging and consistent with students’ cultural, experiential and linguistic backgrounds, and abilities (Salend, 2011; Sapon-Shevin, 2008).

2. Individual Strengths and Challenges and Supporting Diversity. Effective classrooms are designed to be sensitive to and promote acceptance of *all students’* individual strengths, challenges and backgrounds. In effective classrooms, educators treat *all students* as valued individuals capable of learning and contributing to society and teach *all students*

1. The E3TL Consortium, a collaborative initiative representing the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), the New York State United Teachers (NYSUT) and the Rhode Island Federation of Teachers and Health Professionals (RIFTHP), is in the midst of a five-year pilot project (funded by the U.S. Department of Education’s i3—Investing in Innovation—grants and the AFT Innovation Fund) that is focusing on implementation of state-of-the-art teacher development and evaluation systems across 10 districts in New York and Rhode Island using the Danielson teaching standards as the basis for each state’s rubric. The pilot includes the evaluation of teachers of special populations.

to appreciate diversity and to value and learn from one another. (Salend, 2011)

Effective teachers can help students with disabilities and ELLs achieve by holding these students to high standards and by providing them with the accommodations and supports they need to meet these standards. Effective teachers provide a positive learning environment that capitalizes on students' linguistic, social, cultural and intellectual diversity in all aspects of language and content acquisition (Sapon-Shevin, 2008).

3. Reflective, Responsive, Differentiated and Evidence-based Teaching Strategies. Effective classrooms are characterized by teaching that is guided by the use of the principles of universal design for learning (Rose & Meyer, 2002), and evidence-based practices with all students, including ELLs and students with disabilities. Effective educators are flexible and proactive; they accommodate students' strengths, challenges and diversities (Salend, 2011; Sapon-Shevin, 2008). Effective educators engage in ongoing reflection about their values and beliefs, and make evidence-based decisions to regularly examine their own practices for self-improvement and to ensure that *all students* are succeeding (Maheady & Salend, 2011). Educators are fair and individualize their expectations for all students by offering differentiated practices to accommodate students' diverse and unique strengths, challenges, backgrounds and experiences, as well as first- and second-language backgrounds and needs.

4. Culture, Community and Collaboration. Effective classrooms and schools recognize that student success is a group effort and establish a community that is based on collaboration among educators, students, caregivers, families, neighbors, and other relevant groups. In successful classrooms and schools, educators work cooperatively; communicate regularly; and share resources, responsibilities, skills, decisions and advocacy for the benefit of *all students* (Nevin, Cramer, Voigt, & Salazar, 2008; Salend, 2011; Swedeen, 2009). They initiate and ensure ongoing, culturally appropriate communication with all students' families in a language and form that is comprehensible.

Examining Commitments and Supports for Successful Professional Practice and Development

Research suggests that classrooms which positively acknowledge individual and cultural diversity can promote the learning and socialization of all students; however, the success of educators in creating effective inclusive classrooms is related to the commitments and the supports that educators receive from their school districts (Cushing et

al., 2009; Salend, 2011). Therefore, an evaluation of educators in effective settings should consider the extent to which district and school commitments and supports facilitate the implementation of effective classroom teaching practices. A working knowledge of the InTASC Standards (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2011) and the Common Core State Standards, as well as the New York State and Rhode Island Teaching Standards is crucial for all educators of students with disabilities and ELLs. The following questions (based on each of the four principles) administrators, teachers and staff can help facilitate implementation of effective practices in schools and classrooms in the service of all learners.

1. All Learners and Equal Access

- Does our school clearly articulate and communicate a vision for and commitment to educating *all students* in effective classrooms? If so, how? If not, what barriers to full inclusion and equal access for ELLs and students with disabilities exist and how can they be addressed?
- Do our school's classrooms have appropriate class sizes and composition? How can redesigning class size and composition ensure better proportionate representation? How does our school ensure that legal and educationally sound procedures are followed when identifying and placing ELLs and students with disabilities in appropriate educational placements?
- Does our school provide ample opportunities for ELLs to interact with fluent speakers of English in order to acquire academic and social language, and to support the acculturation of these students into the school and society while maintaining their first language and culture?
- Does our school provide all educators with access to students' individualized education program (IEPs) and Section 504 individualized accommodation plans? Does our school inform and support educators in understanding and implementing these individualized programs? How can we ensure that the best plans to meet *all students'* individual needs are implemented as intended?
- Does our school provide all educators with access to data (e.g., grades, observations, curriculum-based assessments, formative assessments, records and test scores) related to students' academic achievement and English language development? Does our school provide support to educators in interpreting these data to promote students' academic, social and behavioral success, and to ensure that ELLs learn language and content simultaneously?

- Do our school's policies and practices conform to state and federal laws for students with disabilities and ELLs? How can we enhance our school's policies and practices to make them more consistent with state and federal laws?
- Are *all* the teachers in the district, including special education teachers and teachers of English language learners, evaluated by a highly skilled and well-prepared evaluator? Are these evaluations based on the state's teaching standards using relevant performance indicators in a performance-based evaluation system that is inclusive of students with disabilities and ELLs?

2. Individual Strengths and Challenges and Supporting Diversity

- Does our school utilize strategies that help *all students* develop ongoing, natural friendships and supportive relationships with other students and teachers? How do the adults in our school model and support respectful friendships and relationships with all community members?
- Do *all students* in our schools have opportunities to engage in co-curricular and extracurricular programs? If not, how can we redesign our co-curricular and extracurricular offerings to ensure that every student has access to them?
- Does our school provide a variety of individualized, coordinated services designed to address the unique strengths and challenges of *all students*, such as pre-referral services, English as a Second Language (ESL) programs and services, response-to-intervention systems), first- and second-language support programs as appropriate, schoolwide positive behavioral supports and anti-bullying programs? How can we improve these systems of support for *all students*?
- Does our school help *all students* make successful transitions (e.g., between classes, from elementary to middle school, from school to work/postsecondary education) and develop self-determination? Does our district achieve and sustain a 100 percent graduation rate with *all students* advancing to fruitful and self-fulfilling postsecondary opportunities? If not, what steps can we take to help students make successful transitions and develop self-determination, and how can we reduce the rate at which students leave school before achieving a high school credential?
- Are our school's services, policies and practices diversified? Do they take into account the cultural, linguistic and experiential backgrounds of all students

and their families? Who is represented in our community, and how can we provide them a voice regarding our school's services, policies and practices?

3. Reflective, Responsive, Differentiated and Evidence-Based Practices

- Does our school provide *all students* with access to a challenging, high-quality and developmentally appropriate curriculum aligned to the state's standards within and across content areas? If so, how can we improve this access? If not, how can we improve the quality of the curriculum and redesign curriculum delivery to make sure it is fair and provides equal access for *all students* ?
- Does our school give *all students* access to effective and varied instructional practices, and an appropriate amount of instructional time? If so, how can we ensure continual improvement of these practices and instructional time allocations? If not, in what ways do we need to change our instructional practices and time allocations so that *all students'* strengths, challenges, diversities, backgrounds, language needs, styles, abilities and preferences are addressed?
- Does our school provide *all students and teachers* access to current and innovative instructional and assistive technologies? If not, how can we find and utilize our available resources so that all students and teachers have access to these technologies?
- Does our school support classroom instruction that is characterized by differentiation, flexible groupings, student- and group-directed learning, high-quality language development, cultural sensitivity and responsiveness, and authentic and relevant learning experiences? If so, how can we continually improve these practices? If not, in what ways can we provide the necessary professional development and support to change our classroom instruction to encourage and sustain these practices?
- Does our school utilize a variety of valid and reliable measures to assess student learning progress and inform instruction? Does our school offer students the appropriate assessment accommodations and alternatives they need to demonstrate their learning? What additional measures, assessment accommodations and alternatives can we use to evaluate student learning and inform instruction?
- Does our school implement a comprehensive and multifaceted evaluation of all aspects of its programs, and make improvements based on the

data collected? How do we use data to enhance our educational programs so they benefit *all students*? What additional data can we utilize?

- Does our school utilize a variety of strategies and supports to help *all students* develop academic, social and civic-engagement skills? How can we make sure that meaningful engagement is encouraged, modeled and celebrated at the school, in the classroom and with individual students?

4. Culture, Community and Collaboration

- Do our educators, students, families, caregivers and community members collaborate to communicate, share resources and expertise, make decisions, and solve problems? Does our school provide educators with adequate time to collaborate with each other and to communicate with families, caregivers and community members? What can we do to improve our system of collaboration and professional development to ensure better sharing of resources, decision-making and problem-solving?
- Does our school provide the resources, adult supports, time, scheduling arrangements and high-quality professional development to educate *all students* in inclusive classrooms? What can we do to encourage focused and fruitful collaboration and high-quality professional development?
- Does our school communicate a sense of community where individual differences are valued? How can we create an even stronger sense of community?

Conclusion

To ensure that teacher evaluation systems focus on enhancing instruction and advancing the learning of all students, it is important that evaluations assess:

- Teachers' knowledge, skills and dispositions related to helping all students achieve high standards;
- Teachers' willingness to engage in professional self-renewal and reflection related to helping all students achieve high standards, and to collaborate with special education and ESL/bilingual education teachers and other educators; and
- Teachers' ability to ensure that collaboration with colleagues, students, families, caregivers and community stakeholders has an impact on the learning of all students.

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