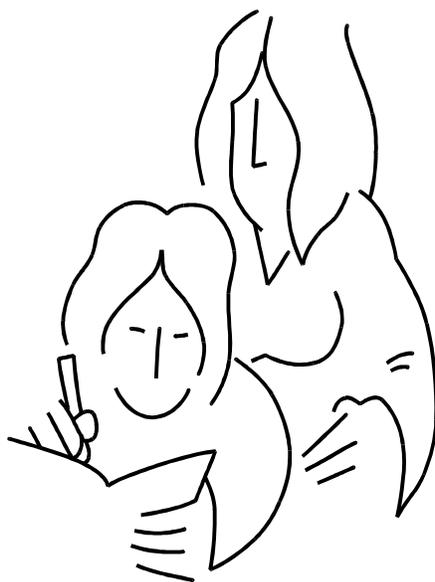


# Competencies for Educators Working With Children with Diverse Learning Needs

A report submitted by

*The Professional and Teacher Development  
Task Force*



# Introduction

As greater numbers of children with specialized learning needs are spending more time in general education classrooms, the quality of their instruction and the services necessary to meet their needs have become a more integrated feature of the learning environment. All teachers are expected to welcome children with diverse learning needs into their classrooms and provide them access to the general curriculum.

The question of whether teachers are well-equipped to tackle this challenge is a critical one. What additional skills do they need? What do they need to know? What sort of principles and values should they hold? Federal legislation (The No Child Left Behind Act) holds that every child in America's schools deserves a *highly qualified teacher*. But what does that really mean for children with special education needs?

*No Child Left Behind* defines a highly qualified teacher as someone with extensive knowledge in his/her discipline. He/she must be licensed by the state, hold a bachelor's degree, and demonstrate competence in his/her subject area. The law does not define the skills, competencies, and dispositions necessary to teach effectively. These qualities are critical to students with disabilities and others whose learning presents challenges.

The Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council has funded a project, *The Professional and Teacher Development Task Force*, whose charge is to develop strategies to ensure that "school professionals and teachers will be skilled and knowledgeable to meet the educational needs of all students in diverse classrooms."

This Task Force is comprised of public school educators, university faculty, educational consultants, family members, persons with disabilities, advocates, Council members, and Ohio Department of Education personnel. (The membership list is attached). During the course of 2004, the group developed a set of five competencies which it feels are necessary for the effective preparation of and training for school personnel in order to enable them to successfully meet the needs of every learner in the school community. These competencies should be viewed as *value added* to the knowledge, skills, and dispositions intrinsic in traditional teacher preparation programs.

This document is a result of the best thinking of the above mentioned group as well as that of more than two hundred classroom teachers whose input was sought through structured focus groups conducted across the state.

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# Competencies for Educators Working with Children with Diverse Learning Needs

## ➤ **Professional and Ethical Practice**

All educational environments must reflect sound professional and ethical practices.

Those who work with children with diverse educational needs must be especially mindful of issues of confidentiality: discussion of a student's needs, disability diagnosis, and/or family history must only be held in a context that supports the sharing of that knowledge. Education personnel should regularly reflect on their own feelings and biases concerning children and families from diverse backgrounds and/or with special education needs and work diligently to treat each child with fairness and equality while striving to meet his/her individual needs. Educators should engineer their environment to enable all students, including children and youth with disabilities, the opportunity to learn through various modalities, using a broad set of instructional strategies, and should consistently assess and measure the progress of each learner. Educators should appreciate the cultural norms of the school community and demonstrate respect for the children and their families in the manner in which they dress, communicate, and behave.

## ➤ **Collaboration Skills**

Educators must demonstrate the ability to work effectively on intervention/IEP teams.

The competence necessary for meaningful participation includes the ability and willingness to work in partnership to design and implement strategies for student success

while consistently using a problem-solving process. This means collaborating with fellow educators, community service providers, and families to support the learning of children and youth with disabilities. Educators need to go beyond pre-conceived roles and maintain openness to innovative thinking. They should have knowledge of available resources for their own support, as well as for learners and their families, within their building, the school district, and the community and demonstrate an eagerness to utilize them. They must welcome and encourage meaningful family participation in every aspect of educational planning for learners with special educational needs.

➤ **Capacity to Create a Positive, Safe, and Nurturing Learning Environment**

Children learn best when their primary needs for safety and security are met. Educators must ensure that the school community is an environment where *every* child is welcome valued, and challenged. Teachers should demonstrate that they appreciate the diversity of the learners in their classrooms, including ethnic, socioeconomic, racial, and learning differences, by showing respect for each child and his/her culture. Effective educators build on the strengths and abilities of their students and empower them to lead their own learning process. Educators must develop and implement varied classroom management structures, schedules, and strategies to cultivate an atmosphere of trust and honesty with their students. They should possess a sound working knowledge of positive behavior supports and utilize every opportunity to teach appropriate conduct to all learners who have not mastered those skills. The school community must be a place where all children feel comfortable asking for help and demonstrating their skills while being who they are.

### ➤ **Knowledge of 504, IDEA, and Ohio's Operating Standards**

The role of the general educator in the design and implementation of special education services is a critical one. All educators should possess a working knowledge of the tenets of 504 (*Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973*), IDEA 04 (*The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act*) and *Ohio's Operating Standards for Schools Serving Children with Disabilities 3-21 years of age*. They should understand and embrace their role in the MFE (multifactor evaluation) process and in the development and implementation of effective and meaningful IEPs (Individualized Education Program). Everyone in the school community must recognize that all children are general education students first and that special education is specialized *instruction* and an array of services rather than a place.

### ➤ **Skills Necessary to Assess and Meet the Needs of All Students**

All decisions about specialized instruction must be data-driven. Educators ought to demonstrate the competence to collect, analyze, and employ data to drive their support for and assessment of student learning. In order to support individual goals, extend various methodologies and support ongoing assessments for every learner, teachers must be competent in developing a universal design for learning. This will ensure that every student has access to and is able to make progress in the general curriculum. All educators must create a learning environment where every child can succeed in the area(s) of his/her gifts and strengths and increase capacity in areas of weakness.

