

CEC's Position on Special Education Teacher Evaluation

A Toolkit for Special Educators



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CEC's Position on Special Education Teacher Evaluation

The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) recognizes the importance of special education teachers in the education of all children and youth. Special educators have always believed that children's individual learning needs should drive instruction; indeed, pedagogy is the heart of special education practice. One way to judge a special education teacher's knowledge and skill is through a thorough and valid teacher evaluation. High-quality evaluations that are rigorous, systematic, and developed collaboratively with special education teachers drive continuous improvement and excellence. The principles of good evaluation apply to all teachers. Thus, all teachers should be included in one evaluation system that is appropriately differentiated based on their professional role.

CEC believes that special education teacher evaluations are only effective if they are based on an accurate understanding of special education teachers' diverse roles, measure and support the effective use of evidence-based interventions and practices, include accurate and reliable indicators of special education teacher contributions to student growth, and promote teaching as a profession in order to address the persistent problem of special education teacher retention.

To provide the individualized, appropriate supports and services that children and youth with exceptionalities need, special education teachers deliver instruction in many different ways and through many approaches. In all cases, special education teachers work collaboratively with other professionals as well as families to ensure that children and youth receive the specialized instruction, supports, and accommodations outlined in their individual education plan. Due to the individualized nature of special education, the precise roles of special education teachers often vary depending on a student and school's needs. For example, a special education teacher may teach in a collaborative or co-teaching model where he or she shares responsibility with other teachers; may provide direct instruction for part or all of the day, one-on-one or in small groups; and/or may consult with other educators about the design of appropriate accommodations and modifications to curriculum and instruction. Moreover, some special education teachers provide essential services beyond instruction such as coaching, mentoring, and case management. One teacher may assume some or all of these roles depending on the needs of the children and youth they work with. Thus, to evaluate a special education teacher fairly and accurately, CEC believes an evaluation must clearly identify a special education teacher's role specific to individual students and set performance expectations based on the duties associated with those roles.

Special education teachers should be prepared for their roles in alignment with CEC's research-based standards outlined in *What Every Special Educator Must Know: Ethics, Standards and Guidelines*. These standards provide guidance to special education teachers in the use of evidence-based practices and interventions that inform instructional practice. Evaluations should measure and support the use of evidence-based interventions and practices and be consistent with CEC's professional standards.

CEC also believes evaluations should include evidence-based measures of a special education teacher's contribution to student learning. Student growth should be one of many indicators of special education teacher effectiveness within a comprehensive evaluation system. Evaluations based on student growth alone, however, cannot validly determine the effectiveness of a special education teacher. Furthermore, when measuring student growth, evaluations should not use a student's progress on their goals, objectives, or benchmarks on the individualized education program (IEP) as a measure of a special education teacher's contribution to student growth. Doing so may compromise the integrity of the IEP, shifting its focus from what is designed to be a child-centered document to the performance of the teacher. The development and implementation of an IEP, however, should be included in special education teachers' evaluations as this is a primary responsibility of their professional role.

In addition, teacher evaluation systems must be designed to support teachers and provide them with the tools they need to be successful throughout their career. The field of education faces ongoing challenges in the preparation, recruitment, and retention of special education teachers. Thus, teacher evaluation systems must be designed to align with professional development to enhance a teacher's knowledge and skills, support induction programs for early-career special education teachers, and identify strategies to support collaboration and improve working conditions.

While special education teachers are the focus of this Position, it is important to note that the evaluation of gifted education teachers must also adhere to these same tenets. Gifted education teachers provide individualized supports and services for children and youth who demonstrate high levels of aptitude or competence in one or more domains. As such, their professional role must be included in the creation of a teacher evaluation system in the same way, and using much of the same criteria, as special education teachers. In this Position, the term "special education teacher" is meant to include special and gifted education teachers.

Therefore, it is the position of CEC that a teacher evaluation system shall:

Include Fundamental Systemwide Components

- All educators must be included in one evaluation system that promotes an effective teaching and learning environment, encourages collaboration, and is appropriately differentiated to include and address each educator's individual role and performance standards.
 - Evaluation systems must be developed using research-based standards.
 - Evaluation systems must be implemented with fidelity and integrity.
 - Evaluation systems may include, but are not limited to, observations; evidence of a teacher's professional growth and contribution to the school and professional community; evidence of student work and learning; artifacts of practice; and surveys of a variety of individuals, including colleagues, parents, and students.
 - Evaluation systems must identify appropriate professional development opportunities for teachers based on the results of their evaluations.
 - Evaluation systems must support continuous improvement through the process of structured monitoring, intensive ongoing evaluation and coaching, and systemic professional development based on established research and best practice.
- Evaluation processes and all measures of teacher effectiveness must be open and transparent to the teacher being evaluated.
 - Evaluation systems must ensure the confidentiality of personally identifiable teacher evaluation results, including a process to support teacher due process rights and timely decision making in any due process action by an appropriate independent and objective authority.
 - Evaluation systems should be regularly examined in light of evolving research to ensure that they are based on current approaches and best practices.
 - Evaluation systems must be adequately funded.

Identify the Complex Role of the Special Education Teacher

- Evaluations must clearly identify and be based on a special education teacher's specific role and responsibilities during a given school year.
- Evaluations must articulate clear performance expectations based on professional standards that are mutually agreed upon by the special education teacher and evaluator.
- Evaluations must take into account the population of children and youth and their range of exceptionalities that special education teachers instruct and support during a given school year.

- Evaluations must be conducted by evaluators with expertise related to evidence-based service delivery models and individualized teaching practices and interventions in special education. To support useful and meaningful feedback in the evaluation, evaluators must understand how, when, and why these practices are implemented and the specific roles and responsibilities of special education teachers.
- Evaluators, including principals and other school leaders, must be trained in effective evaluation practices that accurately reflect the roles and responsibilities of special education teachers and the children and youth they serve.
- Evaluation systems should support state, provincial, and local education agency efforts to develop and implement teacher-student data links, including, but not limited to, accurately defining the teacher of record and ensuring that special education teachers are accurately represented when they are in collaborative or co-teaching situations.

Measure the Use of Evidence-Based Practices

- Evaluations must be based on multiple reliable measures and indicators that support valid measurement of special education teacher effectiveness.
- Multiple indicators of special education teacher effectiveness may include, but are not limited to: IEP development and implementation, development of lesson plans, skill in providing access to the general education curriculum, classroom environment and management, identification and implementation of appropriate instructional strategies, measures of student growth that are a fair and accurate representation of both student growth and the special education teacher's contribution to that growth, progress monitoring and assessment, collaboration with colleagues and families, contributions to the school community, and participating in ongoing professional development.
- Evaluations should never be based solely on student growth. Any evaluation that includes indicators of student growth should include multiple measures of that growth and provide an assessment that considers a teacher's contribution to growth in developmental,

academic, behavioral, and functional domains.

- High-stakes personnel decisions, such as promotion, tenure, and compensation, should never be based solely on student growth or any other single indicator.
- Evaluations should not use a student's progress on their goals, objectives, and benchmarks in the IEP as a measure of a special education teacher's contribution to student growth.
- Statistical models that estimate a teacher's contribution to student growth, such as value-added models, should not be applied to any teacher until there is a general consensus among researchers that the model provides a valid estimate of a teacher's contribution to student growth.

Recognize the Professionalism of Special Education Teachers

- Special education teachers must be involved in the development, implementation, and evaluation of the teacher evaluation process.
- Evaluations must respect special education teachers' professional practice and provide them with constructive and actionable feedback, resources, and opportunities to assist in addressing any areas for professional development and lead to well-grounded personnel decisions.
- Special education teachers must have reasonable case loads and paperwork responsibilities; competitive salaries; benefits; access to resources; and positive working conditions, including collegial and administrative supports.
- Evaluations must identify, based on data from multiple measures and indicators, when teacher dismissal is appropriate.

Continually Incorporate Findings from Research

- Leaders of evaluation system reforms, including state education agencies, local education agencies, institutions of higher education, researchers, and policy makers, must collaborate to ensure that the development and implementation of evaluation systems are carried out in a

systematic, coordinated, and efficient manner.

- Research should identify reliable measures and indicators of student growth that can be validly used to evaluate special education teachers. Specifically, research must determine whether the measure/indicator supports valid assumptions about the growth of students with exceptionalities and whether that growth can be attributed to the special education teacher or is related to other outcome indicators.
- Policy makers and leaders should fund research that informs the use of statistical models that attribute student growth to educators who teach children and youth with exceptionalities and implement pilot programs that validate their use.
- Policy makers and leaders should consider the intended and unintended consequences of wide-scale implementation of teacher evaluation systems without more extensive research and development efforts that clearly link the evaluation system to improvements over time in the achievement of children and youth with exceptionalities.

Reference

Council for Exceptional Children 2012 Policy Manual; Section Four; Part 3; Page L-9.

Date Adopted

Approved by the Council for Exceptional Children Board of Directors 10/6/12

Everything You Need to Know!

Questions and Answers about CEC's Position on Special Education Teacher Evaluation

Question: *Why did CEC decide to develop a Position on Special Education Teacher Evaluation?*

Answer: In recent years, school reform efforts have focused increasingly on ways to evaluate and improve teacher performance. In part, this is because while several studies have demonstrated the importance of teachers on student performance, others looked at the systemic failure of many teacher evaluation systems to differentiate among teachers or provide them with any meaningful feedback. This research led policymakers at all levels to propose initiatives related to changing teacher evaluation systems, most notably, the Race to the Top Grant Competition and NCLB/ESEA Waivers. CEC wanted to bring attention to the unique needs of special education teachers in these discussions to ensure that any revised teacher evaluation systems meaningfully included special education teachers.

Question: *How does CEC's Position recommend evaluation systems incorporate special education teachers?*

Answer: CEC believes that all educators must be included in one evaluation system, but to be meaningful that system must address the complex role of special education teachers and the diversity of children and youth that they serve. Furthermore, for evaluations to be effective, evaluators must be trained about the ways special education teachers work – co-teaching, pull out, push in, consultation – and they must have expertise related to evidence-based service delivery models. This training is critical to ensure that a system can meaningfully evaluate special education teachers and provide them with actionable feedback.

Question: *Does CEC's Position address how to incorporate student achievement scores or student growth measures into teacher evaluations?*

Answer: CEC tackles this question head on. After extensive review of the research, and consulting with experts in the field, CEC recommends prohibiting the use of value-added measures and other similar statistical models in the evaluation of any teacher of students with disabilities until there is a general consensus among researchers that

Did CEC members contribute to the Position?

Of course! CEC involved members at every step of the process and took your concerns and comments seriously. Here is a chronology of our creation timeline that shows the many places you impacted the Position:

9/2011 Board of Directors
Approved Concept

1/2012 Small Expert Panel
Identified Issues/Challenges

3/2012 Representative Assembly
and CEC Members and
Convention Attendees
Commented on Critical Issues to
Address

6/2012 CAN Network
Commented; Over 600 CEC
Members Commented Online

8/2012 Close to 40 National
Experts Commented on Position

9/2012 Representative Assembly
Commented

10/2012 Board of Directors
Reviewed & Approved

such models are valid. CEC firmly believes that evaluations should include multiple measures of student achievement – one snapshot from one day is not enough to understand a student’s progress. Multiple measures provide a more reliable picture of how a child is achieving. Importantly, CEC calls for more research on these measures.

Question: *Does CEC recommend using student growth on IEP goals as a measure of student achievement in a special education teacher’s evaluation?*

Answer: No. CEC does not believe that teacher evaluations should use a student’s progress on their IEP goals, objectives or benchmarks as a measure of a special education teacher’s contribution to student growth. This is because IEP’s were designed to address individual, and thus, unique goals. CEC believes that the focus of the IEP must remain on the individual student.

Question: *Does CEC think there is any place for the IEP in the evaluation of a special education teacher?*

Answer: Yes! Special education teachers have great responsibility in the process of creating and implementing IEP’s and their substantial work in that area should be included in their evaluations.

Question: *Does the Position include any recommendations about how special education teacher evaluation can be linked to professional development systems?*

Answer: Yes. CEC firmly believes that professional development must provide teachers with information about their practice. Thus, evaluations must respect special education teachers’ professional practice and provide them with constructive and actionable feedback, resources, and opportunities to assist in addressing any areas for professional development and lead to well-grounded personnel decisions.

Question: *Where can I get more information about CEC’s Position on Special Education Teacher Evaluation?*

Answer: Head to CEC’s website!

- **Read** a background document and the full Position Statement here: <http://bit.ly/ThmJ9v>
- **Find** information about 10 ways to use the Position in your school, district or state here: <http://bit.ly/16vgIdI>
- **Join** our CEC Member Teacher Online Community discussion here: www.cec.sped.org/community/TeacherEval
- **Watch** a webinar about the Position here: <http://bit.ly/10vWJHG>
- **Watch** a panel discussion that CEC held in December of 2012 at its office with national policy stakeholders here: <http://bit.ly/Y9I1Hd>

“On any given day, or in any given week, I may work directly with families in the community, provide one-on-one instruction in a classroom, consult with other educators in my school about the best ways to accommodate children’s needs—all of these various activities are part of my role and you must understand all of them to fairly evaluate my work.”

**Hannah Ehrli, CEC 2012
Clarissa Hug Teacher of the
Year**



Teachers: It's CEC's Top Ten!

Innovative Ways to Use and Share CEC's Position on Special Education Teacher Evaluation

- 1) **Read, share, and discuss with colleagues.** Share CEC's Position with colleagues in your school, district and community. Use this [Position](#) to create an opportunity to educate your colleagues and community about (1) your important and complex role and (2) the diversity of the children and youth that you work with. In addition to the [background document](#) and [Position](#), use a CEC [power point](#) on this topic and share at a staff meeting.
- 2) **Volunteer to be a part of the process at the state or district level.** Teacher evaluation systems are being created and/or updated as you read this document! Your feedback is essential! Look for opportunities to serve on committees at your school, in your district, in your local professional community or at the state level. Be a part of the teacher evaluation system creation process and use CEC's [Position](#) to help ensure that the complex roles of special educators, and the unique needs of the students they serve, are at the table.
- 3) **Reach out to other like minded education groups and form a coalition to support effective special education teacher evaluation.** Everyone is impacted by new evaluation systems. Use this as an opportunity to speak to your general education colleagues and related service personnel about ways to work together. CEC has great resources including handouts and a [power point](#) on our website about how to form and work effectively in coalitions. Use these to broaden your reach. Work with your state CEC Unit Children and Youth Action Network Coordinator (CAN Coordinator). This representative will have even more information for you and can connect you to others in your state.
- 4) **Write an op-ed on special education teacher evaluation.** [Use CEC's Legislative Action Center](#) to contact the local media outlets in your area and highlight the important role special educators' play in our schools and identifies important ways they can be well served by teacher evaluation systems.
- 5) **Educate your state legislators and state department of education about special education teacher evaluation.** CEC's [Legislative Action Center](#) is a great resource that can connect you with your state and federal policymakers. Share CEC's [Position](#) and invite them to your school or district to see the great work you are doing every day, explain your complex role and the many diverse children you serve. If your state department of education is involved in creating models of evaluation systems or implementing evaluation systems statewide, share the [Position](#) with them also and ask how special education teachers can comment or be involved in the creation and implementation of new evaluation systems.
- 6) **Educate your own evaluator about your role before your evaluation.** One principle tenet of CEC's Position is that evaluators must understand and be trained about the unique role of the special educator and the diverse children and youth that you work with. You have a role in this also – spend some time in either a pre-observation conference or if your district doesn't hold a pre-evaluation meeting then schedule a time to

sit down with the person who will evaluate you and explain what you do and who you work with. Things you may want to focus on include:

- a. The IEP's of a few students you work with. Many evaluators may not understand how teachers use IEPs to guide their work with students. Spend a little time sharing your work with the evaluator.
 - b. Describe how you use interventions in the classroom with a student. Many things you do may appear invisible to an untrained eye.
 - c. Describe how you use data – both to monitor progress and to implement and adjust interventions.
 - d. Discuss the IEP process itself – explain your role in developing and implementing an IEP.
- 7) **Consider what would constitute evidence of student accomplishment for the children and youth you work with and share your ideas!** As CEC's Position highlights, to understand student growth, it is essential to consider many measures of student achievement. While more research needs to be done to identify multiple valid and reliable measures of student achievement, through your expertise you can share examples of how your students demonstrate growth. What are the best measures of their growth? Examples that come from the field and are rooted in best practice are important and need to be included. Share your ideas with colleagues in your area and nationally through CEC's Teacher Evaluation Online Community.
- 8) **Point out unintended consequences where they occur.** Teacher evaluation systems are large and touch many aspects of our schools. As such, there may be unintended consequences which occur only after a system is in place. Unfortunately, as we know from precedent, many large systems fail to adequately differentiate for special education. If you see unintended consequences for special educators that are troubling, talk with your colleagues, and bring them to the attention of those responsible. Advocate for change.
- 9) **Get involved in research!** Your contributions can be important to the field as a whole. Teacher evaluation systems are rolling out everywhere and many components are changing as they are implemented based on how they operate. Research on these systems and their components is critical. Find out if there are evaluations or studies of these systems happening in your area. Encourage your district to be involved!
- 10) **Join the national discussion by accessing CEC's resources.** Connect with others at the national level and use CEC resources to develop your discussions in your area! Join the national conversation by participating with other CEC members in CEC's Teacher Evaluation Community online. CEC's online teacher evaluation community is a real time ongoing discussion for CEC members only to talk to and learn from each other and share ideas. Interested in other CEC resources? Watch a [webinar](#) about the Position, watch a panel discussion that CEC held in December of 2012 at its office with national policy stakeholders and check out our [power points](#), and read [*Everything You Need to Know: Questions and Answers about CEC's Position on Special Education Teacher Evaluation.*](#)



Advocacy Toolkit:

Effectively Using CEC's Position on Special Education Teacher Evaluation in Your State

In recent years, school reform efforts have focused increasingly on ways to evaluate and improve teacher performance. This is in part because while several studies demonstrated the importance of teachers on student performance, others looked at the systemic failure of many teacher evaluation systems to differentiate among teachers or provide them with any meaningful feedback. This research led policymakers at all levels to propose many initiatives related to changing teacher evaluation systems, most notably, the Race to the Top Grant Competition and NCLB/ESEA Waivers. CEC wanted to bring attention to the unique needs of special education teachers in these discussions to ensure that any revised teacher evaluation systems meaningfully included special education teachers.

"It is not enough to be compassionate. You must act."

- Tenzin Gyatso

You may be asking yourself, how can I effectively use this Position to advocate for change in my state, with my network and with other like-minded groups and coalitions? Here are a few easy steps for you to follow to rev up the Advocacy in your State!

Assemble Your Information

First, get all the information you need about the Position:

- **Read** a background document and the full Position Statement here: <http://bit.ly/ThmJ9v>
- **Find** information about 10 ways to use the Position in your school, district or state here:
- **Join** our CEC Member Teacher Online Community discussion here: www.cec.sped.org/community/TeacherEval
- **Watch** a webinar about the Position here: <http://bit.ly/10vWJHG>
- **Watch** a panel discussion that CEC held in December of 2012 at its office with national policy stakeholders here: <http://bit.ly/Y9I1Hd>

"An enlightened citizen is an indispensable ingredient of the infrastructure of democracy."

- Barbara Jordan

Check out our [Q& A on the Position and our Teacher's It's CEC's Top Ten!](#)

Find Out What Is Happening In Your State

Check out these resources to determine what your state policy is and how it has changed:

- Look to your State Department of Education Website

- Check out [this state by state resource](#) provided by ASCD
- And [this map](#) showing all the changes made by states provided by the New America Foundation

Look For Opportunities to Work Together

Join together!

New teacher evaluation systems are impacting everyone. Probably one of the most effective things you can do is to reach out to your colleagues in other education and disability associations and form coalitions in your state to work together on the issues you care about. There is strength in numbers!

Here are a few tools you can use to do this:

- Read our [Power Point Presentation](#) on how to build effective coalitions.
- Check out the websites of local and state groups to see if they are working on these issues and whether they address special education.

“You must work, we all must work, to make the world worthy of its children.”

- Pablo Casals

Grassroots Power!

Here is a [quick guide](#) to a few things you can do to ensure you get your message across!

- Read [CEC's Grassroots Advocacy Toolkit](#) for ideas of how to work with others, write effective letters and speak out!
- Read this [great 1 pager](#) on how to call your State Legislator and share your concerns!
- Read this [great 1 pager](#) on how to schedule and conduct a visit with decision makers in your area.

Educate Others and Get People Talking!

Volunteer to be a part of the process at the state or district level

Teacher evaluation systems are being created and/or updated as you read this document! Your feedback is essential! Look for opportunities to serve on committees at your school, in your district, in your local professional community or at the state level. Be a part of the teacher evaluation system creation process and use CEC's [Position](#) to help ensure that the complex roles of special educators and the unique needs of the students they serve are at the table.

Write an Op-Ed!

Have you ever written an “Opinion Editorial” ? These are often called Op-Ed’s and can be an exceedingly effective way to state your opinion on a current issue of debate in your state and get noticed! So, if your state legislature is considering changes to the teacher evaluation law, is making updates or if there are proposals before them that address it in anyway – make your voice heard! And encourage others to do the same. Better yet, join with your state coalition partners and together submit a short 750 word statement identifying the issue and discussing your position. In the era of the internet, local newspapers, blogs and other media sources are always looking for great content. Try! Try! And Try again!

Educate your state legislators, state department of education and your local district!

Share CEC's [Position](#) with state legislators and key staff at your state department of education. Contact them and invite them to your school, district or classroom to see the great work you are doing every day and explain your complex role and the many diverse children you serve. If your state department of education is involved in creating models of evaluation systems or implementing evaluation systems statewide, share the [Position](#) with them also and ask how special education teachers can comment or be involved in the creation and ongoing implementation of new evaluation systems.

Present and Share Information!

Does your state have a CEC State Meeting or Conference? Offer to give a short presentation about CEC's Position. We have drafted it for you! [Check it out here](#). Want to see someone else give it to determine what things you might talk about? Watch our [video](#) of this presentation. Organize your own panel discussion of your coalition members and ask each to discuss their organization's position on this topic. Have a discussion and a Q&A with the audience and see where your ideas overlap. In so doing, you may educate a whole new group of people about the need to work together on this issue and ensure fair evaluations for all.

Work with Local and National Unions!

Reach out to your local union representatives to find ways you can partner. How are they working with special education teachers as a part of their involvement in negotiations and implementation of new teacher evaluation systems? Engaging these groups in discussions can ensure they remember the many types of positions held by educators in schools and ensure everyone is represented.

“Politics is too important to be left to politicians.”

- Charles DeGaulle