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# Preface

The intention of this publication is to offer a contemporary, practical, and ready-to-use handbook for professionals who provide support and mentorship to special education teachers. Today's classrooms are very diverse, and the role of special educators is shifting. For these reasons, our book provides a guide to mentoring that uniquely reflects the new landscape in the field of special education. In our preface, we provide a rationale for why this publication is timely and necessary for mentors of today's special educators. In addition, we provide an overview of the topics, activities, and tools in the book.

## Rationale

We believe there is a need to distinguish and address the distinctive needs of early-career special education teachers, as well as a need to focus on quality teaching and student achievement within special education for experienced teachers. This also includes general education teachers working in inclusive classrooms. The selected audience for this book includes school district personnel and professional developers for use with mentors who provide support and mentorship to beginning and experienced special educators in the field. The need for support of these special educators is critical. When addressing the current challenges in the field of special education, we must consider the national shortage of special education teachers. Approximately 50% of school districts across the nation have reported barriers in obtaining highly qualified special education teachers (U.S. Department of Education, 2009).

Beginning special education teachers report that they often feel they lack the prerequisite skills for working with their students,

particularly students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Experienced special education teachers often feel unsupported and overwhelmed by the continuous changes in districts related to No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Additionally, nationwide alternative programs are being developed as a means for special educators to clear their credentials outside of the university setting; therefore, there is an increased need for pertinent, relevant resources that professional developers and district support providers can refer to and depend on for resources. We believe that this book fills this need by providing up-to-date, research-based information for school districts and professional developers to use with mentors and special educators in a range of settings.

## **Organization of the Text**

**Chapter 1, Mentorship of Today's Special Educators, and Chapter 2, Mentor and Teacher Relationship,** focus on (a) developing relationships between mentors and mentees, (b) identifying expectations and roles on the part of participants, (c) discovering effective methods for mentors to address and support the needs of mentees, and (d) inspiring thoughtful teaching practice by developing a habit of mind for ongoing reflective practice. Included with the chapters are activities to be facilitated by mentors.

**Chapter 3, Beginning of School, Scheduling, and Planning Individualized Education Programs: Developing Systems,** addresses the fact that organization is a key component of many of the roles special educators perform and focuses on the critical function of mentors to support special educators in their early careers with the establishment of methods, strategies, and systems in order to maintain an upper hand on paperwork, communication, teaching, assessing, and so on. A strong understanding of legal requirements and tools of the trade is provided.

**Chapter 4, Supporting Student Learning,** concentrates on meaningful instruction and learning for all students. Culturally relevant teaching and differentiation of instruction are presented as avenues leading to student achievement. There is discussion regarding how essential it is for mentors to ask critical questions that move special educators forward in their style of teaching in order to address individual needs. A chart of the Universal Design for Learning is provided.

**Chapter 5, Response to Intervention and Positive Behavior Support**, is a resource for understanding Response to Intervention (RTI) and the role of special educators in both academic and behavior interventions. The chapter provides a variety of supporting documents for the implementation of RTI interventions and forms to enhance the process of Functional Behavior Assessment as a component of Positive Behavior Supports and academic progress monitoring.

**Chapter 6, Culturally Competent Assessment**, provides an overview of best practices related to culturally competent assessment, with an emphasis on the use of alternative assessments for culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students.

In addition, new regulations from the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act related to evaluation of students for special education services with specific information related to English Learners is presented. This information is intended for mentor use with special educators to clarify the inherent bias in standardized testing in the assessment of CLD students and to provide tangible options for student evaluation. A reproducible checklist developed by the Education Evaluation Center is a guide for mentor use with a beginning special education teacher.

**Chapter 7, Transition**, describes transitions that special educators facilitate in all areas of a student's life. Sensitivity to the families served is emphasized and a focus on effective communication with a family-centered approach to transition is presented. Instructional materials and tools for transition are provided to assist students in the development of skills that lead to successful transition experiences.

**Chapter 8, Collaboration With Paraprofessionals**, offers several activity ideas for the mentor and special educator to engage in to help develop important skills needed for collaboration with paraprofessionals, such as team building, communication, and planning. This chapter provides an overview of some of the issues, challenges, and solutions for meaningful communication and effective collaboration with classroom paraprofessionals.

**Chapter 9, Collaboration With Professionals**, highlights the essential components for providing the best possible special education plan for a student in the context of professional collaboration. A variety of activities for mentors and special education teachers are provided to guide the planning and implementation of strategies for collaboration with other educational professionals utilizing best practices.

**Chapter 10, Communication With Parents**, emphasizes the importance of building bridges between the school and home environment. The chapter provides an overview of challenges and solutions for mentors to consider in guiding special education teachers through the process of developing meaningful communication and collaboration with students, families, and the community.

**Resource A, Professional Development Case Studies for Mentors**, contains case study activities for use in professional development and training for mentors.

**Resource B, Teacher Retention and Peer Mentoring: A Model for Success**, highlights the features of a special education teacher preparation program that places an emphasis on mentoring in the context of peer-to-peer support.

**Resource C, Chapter Tool Kits**, accompanies the specific chapters in the book as resources for mentors in their work with teachers to help in explaining, demonstrating, collaborating, facilitating, and providing support with instruction, organization, and planning.

## Features of the Text

- *Advance organizers* at the beginning of each chapter to highlight the features of each chapter
- *Activities* in selected chapters to highlight topics and facilitate discussion between the mentor and mentee
- *Case studies* specifically designed for use in professional development and training
- *A model* featuring a special education teacher preparation program with an emphasis on peer mentoring
- *Tool kits* for mentor use with mentees. These tools include the following:

<i>Tools</i>	<i>Brief Description</i>
Tool 2.1. Teacher Information Form	This form is for mentors to record information for each teacher; it provides personal information that can be helpful for the mentor in developing relationships with individual teachers.
Tool 2.2. Meeting Notes Recording Form	This recording form helps to direct conversation during mentor/teacher meetings about what is working and why and what is not working and why, along with next steps and who will do what and when.
Tool 3.1. Caseload List	This is an organizer for mentors to help teachers systematize their caseloads in order to determine schedule of service.

<i>Tools</i>	<i>Brief Description</i>
Tool 3.2. Individualized Education Program Timeline Checklist	This is a graphic organizer that mentors can provide to help teachers keep track of tasks, forms, and important dates for planning Individualized Education Program meetings.
Tool 3.3. Progress Report	This is a resource mentors can provide teachers that solicits general education teachers' input in order to assist special education teachers in writing reports of present levels and progress reports.
Tool 3.4. School Year Individualized Education Program Schedule	Mentors can provide this form to teachers to assist in planning Individualized Education Program meetings for the whole year with school psychologists and other specialists as well as creating an "at-a glance" schedule distinguishing annuals and triennials.
Tool 3.5. Planning Calendar Example	This is an example for mentors to share with teachers to help in organizing all of the components of Individualized Education Program planning: permissions to send home, dates for sending notices of meetings, assessments to administer, and so on.
Tool 3.6. Individualized Education Program Meeting Agenda	This is an outline for mentors to provide to teachers for facilitation of Individualized Education Program meetings with succinct time frames.
Tool 3.7. Individualized Education Program Summary Example	This is a communication tool mentors can provide for teachers that addresses key descriptors of a student, including eligibility statement, strengths, challenges, accommodations, goals, and dates of Individualized Education Program meetings. The summary form is a snapshot that focuses on key elements of an Individualized Education Program for teachers, parents, and others working with the student in the current or next setting the student will transition to.
Tool 3.8. Student Profile	This is designed for mentors in helping teachers to organize information about students on their caseloads for student groupings and monitoring student progress toward goals.
Tool 4.1. Universal Design for Learning Guidelines	This tool is a checklist for mentors and teachers to use while collaborating on lesson design, after conferencing, and for teacher self-reflection to ensure that instruction includes multiple means or representation, action and expression, and engagement. In addition, for each listed item, the online version provides an instant link to the Universal Design for Learning website for additional resources.

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<i>Tools</i>	<i>Brief Description</i>
Tool 5.1. Response to Intervention Pyramid of Intervention	This graphic describes the tiers of intervention for a Response to Intervention model for the mentor to use in explaining and ensuring that teachers understand the process and their roles.
Tool 5.2. Twelve Steps for Interventions	This template can be used as the mentor collaborates with teachers and teachers collaborate with colleagues in planning the WHO, WHAT, HOW, and WHEN of interventions for students.
Tool 5.3. Student Success Team Referral	By sharing this form with special education teachers, mentors help them to become familiar with the information general educators supply when referring a student to the Student Success Team. Special education teachers can use this information to familiarize themselves with a student. Mentors and teachers can also use this information to discuss recommendations for the student.
Tool 5.4. Response to Intervention Flowchart	This flowchart clearly identifies the process of Response to Intervention and defines the roles of the team members. Mentors can share with teachers to explain the process and to assist in understanding and planning for next steps.
Tool 5.5. Response to Intervention: Intervention Examples	Mentors can provide these examples of interventions at each of the tier levels in the Response to Intervention model. Teachers can then offer these suggestions to team members and classroom teachers and make use of them personally in their intervention work with students.
Tool 5.6. Student Intervention Summary	This form can be used to summarize student interventions that mentors can share with teachers for data collection and record keeping.
Tool 5.7. Academic/ Behavior Pyramid	Mentors can provide this graphic in helping to explain how behavior interventions follow the same process in a Response to Intervention model.
Tool 5.8. Positive Behavior System Observation Form	Modeling the use of this form by the mentor will assist the special education teacher in observation and data collection for the purpose of behavior intervention. Data collected with this form include antecedent, latency, frequency, duration, intensity, and topography.
Tool 5.9. Student Observation of Behavior	This resource can be provided by mentors for teachers' use in assisting students to reflect on their behavior and helping students make progress toward use of replacement behaviors.

<i>Tools</i>	<i>Brief Description</i>
Tool 5.10. Behavior Progress Monitoring	This form can be used by adults in the student's environment to monitor targeted behavior. This helps with consistency and communication between school and home. Mentors can provide this resource for special education teachers' use.
Tool 7.1. Fifteen Skills for School and Work	This is a transition skill resource for mentors to share with teachers. This form allows students to compare and contrast the skills needed in the classroom with those needed in the workplace. This is a good activity to use when students ask questions such as, "Why do I have to do this math?"
Tool 7.2. Transition Checklist: Middle School to High School	This is a checklist of transition activities for mentors to assist the special education teacher when preparing plans for a student's transition from middle school to high school.
Tool 7.3. Transition Checklist: High School to Graduation	This is a checklist of transition activities for mentors to assist the special education teacher when preparing a student for transition from high school to graduation.
Tool 7.4. Transition Checklist: High School to Postsecondary	This is a checklist of transition activities for mentors to assist the special education teacher when preparing plans for a student's transition from high school to postsecondary life.
Tool 10.1. Teacher Reference Sheet of Family Background	Mentors can help teachers to gather information about the families of the students on their caseloads. This tool is extremely valuable in assisting teachers in communication with families and knowing the culture of their students.

## Reference

U.S. Department of Education. (2009). State and Local Implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act, Volume VIII-Teacher Quality Under NCLB: Final Report. Retrieved from [www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/opepd/ppss/reports.html](http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/opepd/ppss/reports.html)