INCLUSIVE STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS BEHAVIORAL NEEDS FOR STUDENTS WITH IEPs

Instruction, Support, and Opportunities to Learn, Improve, and Generalize Skills

Before selecting interventions for an individual student, it is important to review and analyze existing data and develop a hypothesis about the root cause(s) or function(s) of why the student has difficulty accessing, engaging, or making progress in age- or grade-level curriculum, instruction, environments, or activities. Root cause analysis can provide a clear understanding of the conditions when a student is successful versus the conditions when a student is likely to demonstrate behaviors that interfere with their learning or the learning of others. Additional information on identifying disability-related needs through root cause analysis can be found in Step 2 of the [CCR IEP 5 Step Process](#).

Root cause analysis should also identify if the student requires:

- instruction, support, and opportunities to learn a "new skill,"

- instruction, support, and opportunities to improve proficiency in a "developing skill," or

- instruction, support, and opportunities to generalize the skill across all environments that the skill is relevant and beneficial for the student.

Root cause analysis not only helps identify the needs of students related to learning new skills, improving proficiency in skills, and generalizing skills across learning environments; but also helps adults with how to plan instruction and support, including how to best remove barriers to provide additional opportunities for student learning.

It is important to recognize that when a root cause analysis identifies the need to teach a new skill, it also requires adults to consider how they will continue to support the student's proficiency in developing the skill over time as well as generalizing the skill across all contexts in which the skill is beneficial to the student.

The distinctions between "learning a new skill," "improving proficiency," or "generalizing a skill across learning environments" are at times referenced as a "skill versus performance deficit" in traditional behavioral pedagogy. To better focus on an asset-based, trauma-sensitive, teacher- and environment-led behavior support framework, the work must center on the adult's role in teaching and learning. The focus is on how adults plan for instruction and support, to help a student "learn," "improve," and "generalize" skills to address unmet disability-related needs.

In the below descriptions and examples, the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) and CEEDAR Center [High Leverage Practices in Special Education](#) are used to assist in identifying instructional practices. All of the high leverage practices should be utilized throughout the learning continuum and are not hierarchical in how they should be used. However, some practices may be more effective or important to emphasize at various points in a student's learning. For students in early childhood programs, the CEC Division of Early Childhood (DEC) has published [Early Childhood Recommended Practices](#).

Learning a New Skill

A student needs instruction and support to learn a **"new skill"** when the root cause analysis indicates the student does not yet demonstrate an expected skill, social and emotional competency, or meet a behavioral expectation for students at the same age, grade, or family and cultural background.

Example: A student has demonstrated an interest in interacting with peers but has not demonstrated how to effectively initiate and sustain other students' attention. This may result in the student having only brief interactions with peers, not forming close friendships, demonstrating social interactions that interfere with the student's learning or the learning of others, or demonstrating patterns or conflicts with peers that lead to disciplinary removals or decreases in access or engagement in school instruction and activities.

Instructional practices should focus on explicit and intensive instruction to support student learning of "new skills." Modeling and structured practice, along with positive and constructive feedback, provided at high rates will help the student understand and know how and when to use the new skill. Assistive and instructional technologies may also assist in helping the student learn the skill and promote independence with using the skill across settings. Although it is always critical to provide strategies to promote active student engagement, it is especially important when the student is learning something new for the first time. Scaffolding the skill components along with authentic practice in context will help

the student experience success in using a skill for the first time. This scaffolding will quickly and intentionally increase understanding and proficiency of the skill as the skill develops over time.

Adults will have greater success in supporting students as they learn new skills when they focus instruction on positive strategies that teach and reinforce new skills to replace behaviors that may interfere with learning. Each student needs to understand clearly 'why' the skill is relevant and beneficial to the student, what the skill "looks" or "sounds" like (and what it doesn't), as well as the social and instructional contexts in which the skill is expected to occur.

Improving Proficiency in a Developing Skill

A student needs instruction and support to improve proficiency in a **"developing skill"** when the root cause analysis indicates the student has demonstrated some use of an expected skill, social and emotional competency, or behavioral expectation but has not met the expected proficiency in using the skill or competency for students at the same age, grade, or family and cultural background.

Example: A student has demonstrated some proficiency in understanding the perspective of other students, and the student can identify basic emotions for self and others (e.g., happy, sad, angry, excited). However, the student is not proficient in identifying more complex emotions compared to what is expected for the student's age, grade, or family and cultural background, and how those emotions might influence thoughts and behaviors. This may result in the student having difficulty knowing how to react in certain situations with peers or may result in the student having difficulty with academic skills such as reading and listening comprehension when asked to describe the author or character's point of view for texts at the student's grade level.

Instructional practices should still focus on explicit and intensive instruction to help improve proficiency in "developing skills" and should ensure prioritization of short- and long-term goals to systematically design instruction toward specific learning goals. Students benefit from flexible grouping so they are exposed to and can learn from other students using the same or similar skills at various levels of proficiency. Modeling, along with positive and constructive feedback, as well as assistive and instructional technologies, should continue.

Generalizing a Skill Across Learning Environments

A student needs instruction and support to **"generalize a skill"** across learning environments that are relevant and beneficial to the student when root cause analysis indicates the student has demonstrated proficiency in an expected skill, social and emotional competency, or behavioral expectation but does not demonstrate the skill consistently, when the skill is needed or beneficial to the student, or across people, places, activities, and other environmental variables.

For functional skills that impact behavioral expectations, it is not uncommon for adults to say, "but we know the student is able to (e.g., raise their hand, transition from class to class, self-regulate, solve conflicts with peers, etc.) so the student does not need additional instruction or support." Adults may also have the perspective that "the student was already taught to (e.g., demonstrate empathy, use a calming strategy, listen attentively, etc) so their behavior must be intentional." However, once adults understand how instruction and support is not only needed to learn new skills and increase proficiency in skills over time, but also needed to generalize a skill across learning environments, then adults can ensure that instruction and support is provided to address this unmet need.

When students can perform a skill proficiently across all settings and circumstances, this is generalization. One of the barriers to a student's independence is when a skill is taught and learned to proficiency in only one setting and in only one way. If generalization is not planned for when designing instruction, students may demonstrate a learned skill in only one way or in only one setting, modality, or circumstance. To ensure generalization, adults must intentionally design instruction when a skill is initially taught to ensure students develop multiple means of accessing, engaging, and representing the skill across school, home, and community environments. Collective responsibility is a critical aspect to designing this level of instruction and support, and a key to developing expert learners.

Example: For the previous two examples, a student may have demonstrated proficiency in both understanding the perspective of others and in initiating and maintaining relationships such that the student's social and emotional and behavioral skills are what is expected for the student's age, grade, or family and cultural background. However, the student may only be able to demonstrate initiating and maintaining relationships with one or two people, or only in certain activities, or may only be able to demonstrate understanding the perspective of others within a single medium (e.g., the student might identify the perspective of others when watching a cartoon but not in real-life situations with peers). Additional examples that identify a need to generalize a skill across environments are often seen in the area of regulation and self-monitoring. Students may be able

to demonstrate regulation and self-monitoring skills at a proficient level for one specific situation but do not always recognize different situational contexts for when those skills are needed and thus do not generalize those skills when they are relevant or beneficial to the student.

When a student does not demonstrate the use of a skill or support across environments, this may result in the student feeling frustrated knowing they have learned and understand a skill but are experiencing negative consequences for not accessing the skill or support across various contexts and settings. Even worse, if adults do not provide instruction or support to help a student generalize the use of a skill, this can affect the student's sense of belonging, self-concept, and motivation. Unlike most academic expectations, functional expectations (e.g., demonstrating expected social and emotional competencies) can vary widely across adults, settings, and contexts. This variation in adult expectations makes it very difficult for a student to become independent when not given opportunities, support, and practice in using a new skill or support across a variety of settings and in all ways it is expected. As stated earlier, it is critically important for adults to plan intentionally for generalization when designing instruction and engage as many adults as possible to support student learning.

The first CEC High Leverage Practice in Special Education is "Collaborate with Professionals to Increase Student Success." Generalizing the use of a skill across learning environments is not possible without collective responsibility for student learning and clear student academic and functional expectations across all adults in the school community. Another foundational High Leverage Practice is "Collaborate with Families to Support Student Learning and Secure Needed Services." In other words, engaging families in understanding and clarifying their functional expectations of the student and reinforcing the use of skills in the school, home, and community are critical components to generalizing skills across learning environments.

Additional strategies from the CEC High Leverage Practices include adapting curriculum and materials to meet specific learning goals. For example, when social and emotional and behavioral learning is embedded in academic instruction, students are more likely to use these skills across learning environments. Teaching cognitive and metacognitive strategies to support learning and independence is another instructional practice to support active student engagement and can be used by the student in any setting or activity. Flexible grouping with peers, modeling along with positive and constructive feedback from a variety of adults, and the use of assistive and instructional technologies provides opportunities for students to practice skills across any environment where it is relevant and

beneficial. In addition, scaffolding instruction can assist the student to bridge the use of a skill in different ways or in different contexts and environments.

Instructional practices to generalize a skill across learning environments are also about teaching students to maintain and generalize new learning across time, adults, peers, activities, and settings. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) guidelines and principles can assist adults in identifying multiple means of supporting a student's engagement, representation, action, and expression when teaching new and developing skills, and generalizing the use of the skill across learning environments. For students to become expert learners, adults must provide multiple means and opportunities for students to understand, practice, and show competency of the social and emotional and behavioral skills they are expected to demonstrate.

Reflection and Application Activities

The following reflection and application activities were developed to build the knowledge, skills, and systems of adults so they can assist students with accessing, engaging, and making progress in age or grade level curriculum, instruction, environments, and activities.

1. Discuss with your team some of the root causes you feel are "why" students with significant behavioral needs have difficulty accessing, engaging, and making progress in general education instruction and environments. Make sure to identify a "skill" that if taught and supported will improve the student's access, engagement, and progress in their education.

   o For the skill(s) you identified, is your current focus on teaching, supporting, and providing opportunities for "learning a new skill," "increasing proficiency for a developing skill," or "generalizing the use of a skill across environments"?

   o For the skill(s) you identified, how can you intentionally plan and embed instruction and support to address all of the following: learning of a new skill, increasing proficiency as the skill develops, and generalizing the skill across learning environments?

   o How will you work with the student, family, and teacher to create short- and long-term learning goals for this skill?

   o Which of the High Leverage Practices in Special Education will you use to support teaching and learning of this skill?

- How can the Universal Design for Learning guidelines and principles assist in developing a learning environment and experiences that provide the students with multiple means for engagement, representation, action, and expression?

- How might flexible options to address learning variability in inclusive learning environments support the student's learning, proficiency, and generalizing the skill across environments?

2. How can adults (e.g., families, educators, administrators, staff, and others who provide support to the student) model and practice collective responsibility for student learning?

- How is the student engaged in helping to identify functional expectations and skill needs (e.g., social and emotional competencies or behaviors expected in various contexts), and how they would like to be supported in generalizing skills across environments?

- How are functional expectations discussed and communicated between adults? How are they discussed between adults and the student?

- How are adults collectively and individually supporting a student to generalize the use of new skills across environments?

3. How can the framework of designing instruction to address "learning a new skill," "increasing proficiency in a developing skill," and "generalizing the use of a skill across environments" be applied to students who are learning to use an accommodation, supplementary aid or service, or use of assistive technology?

- What opportunities do students have to access these types of supports across learning environments (e.g., classrooms, activities, home, and community)?

- How are students being taught to be independent in using these supports?

- How are students and families engaged in identifying which types of supports are most relevant and beneficial to the student as the student develops over time?

4. Using the [Inclusive Learning Communities (ILC) Practice Profile](#), from the Wisconsin DPI [RPIC Project](#), review the essential attributes of a learning environment that is inclusive of each and every learner. Consider the core competency area of Planning & Facilitation.

   o How are adults planning learning experiences for each and every learner, including students whose behavior interferes with their learning or the learning of others?

   o Reflect if the use in practice is Expected, Developmental, or Unacceptable.

   o What are the areas of strength and needs for adults in the building?

5. Using the Specially Designed Instruction guidance document (coming soon), review the table in Part 2 that compares Specially Designed Instruction to Supplementary Aids and Services. Consider the disability-related needs of a student whose behavior interferes with learning. Consider if the root cause identified the need for a "new skill," "developing skill," or "generalizing a skill."

   o How should those needs be met through Supplementary Aids and Services?

   o How should those needs be met through goal development and Specially Designed Instruction?

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