

Students with Disabilities Certification Exam (060)

STUDY GUIDE

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Competencies 0001 – 0006 · Foundations through Functional Living Skills

How to Use This Guide

This master study guide covers the six content competencies tested on the New York State Students with Disabilities certification exam (Field 060). Each competency follows the same structure, so once you learn the rhythm, every section will feel familiar.

The four-part indicator structure

Inside each competency, every performance indicator is broken into four parts:

- **What this indicator means.** A plain-language description of the skill the state expects.
- **What you need to know.** The laws, ideas, vocabulary, and strategies behind the indicator, presented as bulleted content for easy review.
- **Common misconceptions and test traps.** Frequent mistakes and the wrong answers exam writers use to pull you off track.
- **Self-check questions.** Three multiple-choice questions per indicator, with answer explanations, to help you decide whether you are ready to move on.

How to study with this guide

Read each indicator section once for understanding. Then come back and try to explain the main ideas out loud, in your own words, without looking at the page. If you cannot explain it, you do not yet know it. Spread your study across short sessions rather than one long one. Spaced practice is one of the most reliable findings in learning research.

Every acronym is defined the first time it appears, and a combined glossary follows this section. New York State terms that differ from federal language are flagged where they appear, since those differences come up on the exam.

About the SWD 060 Exam

The New York State Students with Disabilities exam (Field 060) is the certification exam for special education teachers serving students from kindergarten through grade twelve. Knowing how the test is built helps you study with the right priorities.

Test design

- **Total testing time.** 195 minutes. You set your own pace.
- **Selected-response items.** 90 multiple-choice questions covering Competencies 0001 through 0006. Worth 80 percent of the score. Recommended time: 135 minutes.
- **Constructed-response item.** One scenario-based extended response (Competency 0007). Worth 20 percent of the score. Recommended time: 60 minutes.

How the competencies are weighted

Item counts and score percentages by competency:

- **Competency 0001 · Foundations of Special Education.** 11 items, 10 percent.
- **Competency 0002 · Knowledge of Students with Disabilities.** 11 items, 10 percent.
- **Competency 0003 · Assessment and Individual Program Planning.** 23 items, 20 percent.
- **Competency 0004 · Learning Environment and Behavioral Interventions.** 11 items, 10 percent.
- **Competency 0005 · Instructional Planning and Delivery.** 23 items, 20 percent.
- **Competency 0006 · Communication, Social, and Functional Living Skills.** 11 items, 10 percent.
- **Competency 0007 · Analysis, Synthesis, and Application.** 1 constructed-response item, 20 percent.

Where to focus your time

Competencies 0003 and 0005 each carry twenty percent of the score. Together they account for forty percent of the multiple-choice section. Spend more study time there. Competencies 0001, 0002, 0004, and 0006 are smaller individually but together account for the other forty percent of the multiple-choice section, so do not skip them. Competency 0007 is the constructed response and is treated separately.

This master guide covers Competencies 0001 through 0006. A separate guide will address Competency 0007.

Combined Glossary of Acronyms

These acronyms appear throughout the guide and on the exam. Each is also defined the first time it appears in the body of a competency.

AAC	Augmentative and Alternative Communication. Tools and methods that supplement or replace speech, ranging from picture cards to speech-generating devices.
ABC	Antecedent-Behavior-Consequence. A framework for analyzing what triggers a behavior, the behavior itself, and what follows it.
ACCES	Adult Career and Continuing Education Services. New York's adult vocational rehabilitation program.
ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act. Federal civil rights law that bans disability discrimination in employment, public services, and public spaces.
ADHD	Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder. A neurodevelopmental condition involving inattention, hyperactivity, or impulsivity. Often served under Other Health Impairment.
ASD	Autism Spectrum Disorder. A developmental condition affecting communication, social interaction, and behavior.
AT	Assistive Technology. Devices and software that help a student access curriculum and demonstrate learning.
BIP	Behavior Intervention Plan. A written plan for a student whose behavior interferes with learning, based on a Functional Behavioral Assessment.
CBA	Curriculum-Based Assessment. An assessment based directly on what is being taught.
CBM	Curriculum-Based Measurement. A specific kind of CBA that uses brief, repeated measures to track progress over time.
CCSS	Common Core State Standards. The standards New York adopted and adapted as the NYS P-12 Learning Standards.

CPSE	Committee on Preschool Special Education. Team that evaluates and plans services for children ages three to five.
CSE	Committee on Special Education. Team responsible for evaluation, classification, placement, and the IEP for school-age students.
DRA	Developmental Reading Assessment. A common informal reading assessment.
DSM-5	Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition. The reference used for medical and psychiatric diagnoses.
ELL	English Language Learner. A student whose primary language is not English and who is developing English proficiency. NYSED now uses MLL.
FAPE	Free Appropriate Public Education. The right of every eligible student with a disability to a publicly funded education designed to meet their individual needs.
FBA	Functional Behavioral Assessment. A process for figuring out the purpose a behavior serves so the team can plan effective supports.
FERPA	Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act. Federal law that protects the privacy of student education records.
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Federal law that guarantees special education and related services to eligible children.
IEP	Individualized Education Program. The legal document that describes a student's special education program, goals, services, and supports.
IFSP	Individualized Family Service Plan. The plan used for infants and toddlers from birth to age three in early intervention.
LD	Learning Disability. New York's term for what federal law calls Specific Learning Disability.
LRE	Least Restrictive Environment. The principle that students with disabilities should be educated alongside students without disabilities to the greatest extent appropriate.

MLL	Multilingual Learner. NYSED's preferred current term for students learning English in addition to another language. Replaces ELL.
MTSS	Multi-Tiered System of Supports. A framework of increasing support before referral.
NYS P-12	New York State P-12 Learning Standards. The K-12 standards adopted by NYSED.
NYSED	New York State Education Department.
OHI	Other Health Impairment. A disability category for students whose health condition limits strength, vitality, or alertness, including ADHD.
OPWDD	New York State Office for People With Developmental Disabilities.
OSEP	Office of Special Education Programs. The federal office that runs IDEA.
PBIS	Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports. A framework for teaching, supporting, and reinforcing expected behaviors school-wide and in classrooms.
PECS	Picture Exchange Communication System. A structured AAC method using picture cards.
PLAAFP	Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance. The opening section of the IEP that describes where the student is right now.
RTI	Response to Intervention. A tiered approach to identifying and responding to learning difficulties before referral.
SDI	Specially Designed Instruction. Instruction adapted to address the unique needs of a student with a disability.
Section 504	Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Federal civil rights law that bans disability discrimination in any program that receives federal funding.
SLP	Speech-Language Pathologist.
TBI	Traumatic Brain Injury. A disability category covering acquired injury to the brain caused by external force.

UDL

Universal Design for Learning. A framework for designing instruction so it is accessible from the start to the widest range of learners.

COMPETENCY 0001**Foundations of Special Education***History, law, ethics, partnership, and the work of the special education teacher*

*9 indicators · 11 items · 10% of test score***About Competency 0001**

NYSED describes the New York educator of students with disabilities as someone who knows the history and theory of special education, keeps learning, knows the laws and ethics of the field, and works well with everyone involved in a student's education. The exam is not just checking whether you can recite a law. It is checking whether you understand the special education teacher as a professional who connects history, law, ethics, family partnership, teamwork, and ongoing growth into one practice.

Foundations is the first competency for a reason. Almost everything in the other six competencies sits on top of the foundation built here. Time spent on Competency 0001 pays off across the whole test.

Read each indicator section once for understanding. Then come back and try to explain the main ideas out loud, in your own words, without looking at the page. Spread study across short sessions rather than one long one.

INDICATOR A

Historical and Philosophical Foundations

Applies knowledge of the historical and philosophical foundations of the field of special education and of contemporary issues, trends, and research.

What this indicator means

Know how special education grew from a system of exclusion into one that guarantees every child the right to an education. Know the major turning points, the ideas behind current practice, and the issues being debated today. The exam asks why something matters, not when it happened.

What you need to know

Special education in the United States grew from a system of exclusion. Several court cases and laws built the system you work in today.

- For most of American history, children with disabilities had no guaranteed right to public school. Many were institutionalized, kept at home, or turned away.
- After World War II, parents organized and the civil rights movement framed exclusion from school as a denial of basic rights.

Three court cases laid the legal groundwork:

- *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). Established that separate education is not equal.
- *PARC v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (1972). Established a right to free public education for children with intellectual disabilities.
- *Mills v. Board of Education of the District of Columbia* (1972). Extended that right to children with all disabilities and held that lack of money was not a valid reason to exclude them.

The federal law evolved through several major moments:

- 1975. Education for All Handicapped Children Act (Public Law 94-142). First federal law guaranteeing a free appropriate public education, called FAPE, to children with disabilities.
- 1990. The law was renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, or IDEA.
- 2004. IDEA was reauthorized. Stronger focus on access to the general education curriculum, research-based instruction, and accountability for outcomes.

Several principles run through this history:

- Normalization. People with disabilities should live lives as close to ordinary as possible.

- Least Restrictive Environment, or LRE. Students with disabilities should learn alongside peers without disabilities to the greatest extent appropriate.
- Individualization. Education must be planned for each student.
- Parent participation. Families are full partners.
- High expectations. Students with disabilities can and should access the general curriculum and meet meaningful standards.

Current issues likely to appear on the exam:

- Disproportionality. Students of color, especially Black students, have long been overrepresented in some disability categories. NYSED tracks this, and districts must address it.
- Inclusion and the continuum of services. The field has moved toward general education settings while keeping a continuum of placements for students whose needs differ.
- Response to Intervention and Multi-Tiered Systems of Support. Frameworks for delivering increasing levels of support before referral.
- Universal Design for Learning. Designing instruction so it is accessible to the widest range of learners from the start.
- Evidence-based practice. Federal law and ethics expect teachers to use practices research has shown to work.
- Transition and post-school outcomes. Strong transition planning and real work experience improve adult outcomes.
- Equity for multilingual learners with disabilities. An active area of research and policy in New York City.

Common misconceptions and test traps

- Confusing IDEA with the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504. IDEA is an education law that provides services. Section 504 and the ADA are civil rights laws that ban discrimination. A student can be covered by Section 504 without qualifying for IDEA.
- Believing LRE always means general education. LRE means the least restrictive setting in which the student can receive an appropriate education. The exam will offer tempting answers that say the most inclusive placement is always best. Those are wrong.
- Treating special education as a place rather than as services. Special education is what is provided, not where it is provided.
- Using outdated terms. The field has moved away from terms like handicapped. Use the current terms found in IDEA and NYSED documents.

Self-check questions

1. Which of the following best describes what changed when Congress passed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act in 1975?

- A. Public schools were required for the first time to provide a free appropriate public education to children with disabilities.
- B. States were given the option to serve children with disabilities if they had the funds.
- C. Children with disabilities became guaranteed placement in general education classrooms.
- D. Special education was officially recognized as a separate school system from general education.

Answer: A. *Before 1975, public schools could legally turn children with disabilities away. The 1975 law guaranteed FAPE for the first time.*

2. A parent asks a teacher to explain the difference between IDEA and Section 504. Which response is most accurate?

- A. IDEA and Section 504 are the same law under different names.
- B. IDEA is an education law that provides services, while Section 504 is a civil rights law that bans disability discrimination.
- C. Section 504 only applies to students who do not qualify for an IEP.
- D. IDEA covers students from birth to age twenty-one, while Section 504 covers only adults.

Answer: B. *IDEA provides special education services through an IEP. Section 504 protects students from discrimination in any program receiving federal funding and may provide accommodations through a 504 plan.*

3. A team is deciding placement for a student whose IEP calls for intensive specialized instruction. One member argues the most inclusive setting is always best. Why is that argument incorrect?

- A. The most inclusive setting is best only when parents agree to it.
- B. LRE means the least restrictive setting in which the student can receive an appropriate education, which is not always general education.
- C. LRE is a federal recommendation, not a requirement, so districts can decide what they prefer.
- D. Students with intensive needs are required by law to be placed in self-contained classes.

Answer: B. *LRE is about the right balance between access to peers without disabilities and access to an appropriate education. The team must consider general education first but may move to a more restrictive setting when needs cannot be met there with supplementary aids and services.*

INDICATOR B

Laws, Regulations, and Ethical Guidelines

Applies knowledge of relevant laws, regulations, state policies, and ethical guidelines, including those related to referral, assessment, eligibility, placement, behavior management, mandated reporting, and confidentiality.

What this indicator means

This is the largest body of content in Competency 0001 and one of the most heavily tested areas on the exam. Know what the law requires at every step of the special education process and your ethical duties around mandated reporting and confidentiality.

What you need to know

The major federal laws:

- IDEA. The central federal special education law. Guarantees FAPE in the LRE to every eligible child between birth and age twenty-one. Requires an IEP for every eligible school-age student. Sets out procedural protections for families. Lists thirteen disability categories.
- Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Bans disability discrimination in any program receiving federal funding.
- Americans with Disabilities Act, or ADA. Extends similar protections more broadly.
- Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, or FERPA. Governs student records. Gives parents the right to inspect them, request changes, and consent to who sees them.

New York implements IDEA through Part 200 of the Regulations of the Commissioner of Education:

- Part 200 defines disability categories, sometimes using language different from federal terms.
- Committee on Special Education, or CSE. Responsible for evaluation, classification, placement, and IEP development for school-age students.
- Committee on Preschool Special Education, or CPSE. Serves children ages three to five.
- Infants and toddlers from birth to age three receive early intervention services through an Individualized Family Service Plan, or IFSP, rather than an IEP.

The special education process and timelines:

- Referral. Made in writing by a parent, teacher, or other professional.
- Consent. The district must obtain informed written parental consent before doing an initial evaluation.

- Evaluation timeline in New York. Must be completed within sixty calendar days of consent.
- Evaluation requirements. Must use multiple measures. Must be conducted in the language most likely to give accurate information. Must not rely on any single procedure. Must be free of racial or cultural bias.
- IEP development timeline in New York. Within thirty school days of eligibility. (Note: evaluation is calendar days; IEP is school days. The exam tests this difference.)

Eligibility requires two conditions:

- The student must have a disability that fits one of the categories in regulation.
- The disability must result in the student needing special education services.
- A medical diagnosis alone does not make a student eligible.

New York's thirteen disability categories: autism, deafness, deaf-blindness, emotional disability, hearing impairment, intellectual disability, learning disability, multiple disabilities, orthopedic impairment, other health impairment, speech or language impairment, traumatic brain injury, and visual impairment including blindness.

New York terminology that differs from federal:

- Emotional disability (NY) vs. emotional disturbance (federal).
- Learning disability (NY) vs. specific learning disability (federal).

Required IEP components:

- Present levels of academic and functional performance.
- Measurable annual goals.
- How progress will be measured and reported.
- Special education and related services.
- Supplementary aids and supports.
- Extent to which the student will not participate with peers without disabilities.
- Accommodations for state and district assessments.
- Transition planning. Begins by the year the student turns fifteen in New York. (Federal law sets the age at sixteen. New York's age is earlier.)

Continuum of placements in New York City (least to most restrictive):

- Consultant teacher services in general education.
- Related services only.

- Integrated co-teaching, or ICT.
- Special class in a community school (e.g., 12:1:1).
- Special class in a District 75 specialized school.
- Home and hospital instruction.
- Approved nonpublic day and residential placements.
- The team must consider the general education classroom first. A more restrictive setting is chosen only when the student's needs cannot be met there with supplementary aids and services.

Behavior rules:

- When behavior interferes with learning, the CSE must consider positive behavioral interventions and supports.
- If more is needed, a Functional Behavioral Assessment, or FBA, identifies the purpose the behavior serves.
- The team then develops a Behavior Intervention Plan, or BIP.
- Ten-day rule. A student with a disability may not be removed from school for more than ten cumulative days in a year without a manifestation determination.
- Manifestation determination. A meeting to decide whether the behavior was caused by or directly related to the disability or by the school's failure to implement the IEP. If yes, the team must address it through the IEP, not standard discipline.

Mandated reporting:

- All teachers in New York are mandated reporters of suspected child abuse and maltreatment.
- Reasonable suspicion is the standard. You do not need to be certain.
- Report to the New York Statewide Central Register by telephone.
- Follow up with a written report to local child protective services within forty-eight hours.
- You do not need permission from a supervisor. The duty rests on you.
- The law protects you from liability when you report in good faith.

Confidentiality:

- Student records and information are protected by FERPA and Part 200.
- Share information only with people who have a legitimate educational interest.
- Do not discuss a student's disability in public spaces.
- Do not post identifying information where others can see it.

- Do not send personally identifying information through unsecured channels.

Common misconceptions and test traps

- Believing a medical diagnosis automatically qualifies a student for an IEP. It does not. The student must also need special education services to make progress.
- Confusing the timelines. In New York, the evaluation must be completed within sixty calendar days of consent, and the IEP must be developed within thirty school days of eligibility. Mixing up calendar days and school days is a frequent test trap.
- Thinking you must confirm abuse before reporting. You do not. Reasonable suspicion is the standard.
- Assuming you can share information freely with anyone in the school. The standard is legitimate educational interest, not employment.

Self-check questions

1. A parent gives a teacher a letter from her child's pediatrician diagnosing the child with ADHD and asks the school to write an IEP based on the diagnosis. What should the teacher explain?

- A. The diagnosis automatically qualifies the child for an IEP.
- B. A medical diagnosis is one piece of information, but the CSE must also evaluate whether the child needs special education services in order to make progress.
- C. Only a school psychologist can request an IEP, so the parent should consult one privately first.
- D. ADHD is not covered under IDEA, so the child cannot have an IEP.

Answer: B. *Eligibility requires both a qualifying disability and a need for special education services. A diagnosis alone is not enough.*

2. Which of the following best describes the New York timeline for the special education process?

- A. The evaluation must be completed within thirty school days of consent, and the IEP within sixty calendar days.
- B. The evaluation must be completed within sixty calendar days of consent, and the IEP within thirty school days of eligibility.
- C. The evaluation and the IEP must both be completed within sixty calendar days of consent.
- D. There is no required timeline, as long as the work is done by the end of the school year.

Answer: B. *In New York, evaluations are measured in calendar days (sixty), and IEP development is measured in school days (thirty). Confusing the two units is a common exam trap.*

3. A teacher suspects a student is being abused at home but has no proof. What is the teacher required to do under New York law?

- A. Wait until she has clear proof before reporting, since reasonable suspicion is not enough.

- B.** Get permission from the principal before making any report.
- C.** Call the New York Statewide Central Register and follow up with a written report to child protective services within forty-eight hours.
- D.** Ask another teacher to make the report instead.

Answer: C. *All teachers in New York are mandated reporters. Reasonable suspicion, not certainty, is the legal standard. The duty rests on the individual with the suspicion, and the law protects good-faith reports.*

INDICATOR C

Rights and Responsibilities

Applies knowledge of the rights and responsibilities of students with disabilities, parents and guardians, teachers, other professionals, and schools.

What this indicator means

Special education is built on rights, and rights come with responsibilities. Know who has which rights, who has which duties, and what happens when there is a conflict.

What you need to know

Student rights:

- FAPE in the LRE, designed to meet the student's individual needs and reasonably calculated to enable progress.
- *Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District* (2017). Supreme Court ruling clarifying that the IEP must aim higher than minimal progress and be appropriately ambitious in light of the child's circumstances.
- Education by qualified personnel.
- Confidential records.
- Participation in extracurricular activities alongside peers.
- As they grow older, participation in their own IEP meetings and transition planning.

Parent procedural safeguards:

- Prior written notice before the school proposes or refuses to take an action.
- Right to give or withhold informed consent for evaluation and initial placement.
- Right to participate as equal members of the CSE.
- Right to an independent educational evaluation at public expense under certain conditions.
- Right to a written copy of the procedural safeguards notice at least once a year.
- Right to inspect and review their child's records.
- Right to interpretation services in their native language during meetings.
- Right to dispute resolution through mediation, a state complaint, or an impartial due process hearing.

Additional rights for NYC parents:

- Right to receive IEP documents translated into their preferred language.
- Right to meaningful participation. A translated document is not enough. Families must understand what is being decided and have a real chance to influence it.

Special education teacher responsibilities:

- Implement the IEP as written, including goals, services, and accommodations.
- Monitor student progress and report it to families.
- Work with general education teachers and related service providers.
- Take part in CSE meetings.
- Keep information confidential.
- Report suspected abuse.
- Use research-validated practices.
- Advocate for the student's interests.

District duties:

- Child find. Actively identify, locate, and evaluate all children with disabilities who may need special education, regardless of severity. Includes children who are homeless, in foster care, attending private school, or highly mobile.
- Provide FAPE to every eligible student.
- Follow procedural safeguards.
- Employ qualified personnel.
- Make available the full continuum of services.
- Address findings of disproportionality.

Dispute resolution options:

- Mediation. Voluntary and informal, led by a neutral third party.
- State complaint. A written complaint filed with NYSED alleging a violation of law.
- Impartial due process hearing. A formal legal proceeding.
- Civil rights complaint under Section 504. Filed with the Office for Civil Rights of the U.S. Department of Education.

Common misconceptions and test traps

- Believing a translated document equals meaningful access. It does not. Meaningful participation requires interpretation during meetings.

- Thinking the IEP only needs to provide some educational benefit. The Endrew F. decision raised the bar to appropriately ambitious progress.
- Assuming parents must agree to whatever the team proposes. They do not. Parents can refuse consent for an initial evaluation or initial placement and have multiple ways to dispute decisions.
- Forgetting that students themselves have rights and should take part in their own planning as they grow older.

Self-check questions

1. A CSE meeting is scheduled for a student whose family speaks only Haitian Creole. The school has translated the draft IEP but has not arranged for an interpreter at the meeting. What is the most appropriate next step?

- A. Proceed with the meeting since a translated document has been provided.
- B. Ask the family's school-age child to interpret to keep the meeting on schedule.
- C. Request that the meeting be rescheduled or paused so a qualified interpreter can be present.
- D. Send the translated document home and treat the family's later signature as their participation.

Answer: C. *Meaningful participation requires interpretation during the meeting itself, not just a translated document. Using a child as interpreter is not appropriate, especially for confidential matters.*

2. Which of the following best describes child find?

- A. A district duty to identify, locate, and evaluate all children with disabilities who may need special education, including students who are homeless, in foster care, or attending private school.
- B. A parent's right to request that the school find a private placement for a student.
- C. A federal program that funds special education services for children under age three.
- D. A New York City initiative to recruit students into District 75 programs.

Answer: A. *Child find is a district responsibility under IDEA. It applies to all children with disabilities regardless of severity or setting and includes hard-to-reach populations.*

3. What did the Supreme Court decision in Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District (2017) clarify about the standard for an IEP?

- A. An IEP must guarantee that the student will perform at grade level by the end of the year.
- B. An IEP must aim higher than minimal progress and be appropriately ambitious in light of the child's circumstances.
- C. An IEP must be identical for all students in the same disability category.
- D. An IEP is only enforceable if the parent agrees to every provision.

Answer: B. *Endrew F. raised the standard from "some educational benefit" to a more meaningful one: appropriately ambitious progress in light of the child's individual circumstances.*

INDICATOR D

Culturally Responsive Partnerships

Applies knowledge of culturally responsive strategies that promote effective communication and partnerships with students with disabilities and their parents and guardians to help students achieve desired learning outcomes.

What this indicator means

New York City classrooms serve students and families from every part of the world. Build genuine partnerships with families whose home language, culture, immigration history, or relationship with schools may differ from your own. Culturally responsive practice is a stance of curiosity, humility, and respect that shapes how you communicate and how you decide.

What you need to know

Culture shapes how families approach school. Common patterns to recognize:

- Silence in a meeting may reflect respect, not agreement or disengagement.
- Reluctance to accept a disability label may reflect concerns about stigma in the community, not denial.
- Not attending a daytime meeting may mean the family is working two jobs.
- Assume competence and good intent. Adjust your practice so partnership is real.

Effective strategies with families:

- Provide interpretation, not only translation. Spoken language at meetings matters as much as written documents.
- Use plain language and avoid jargon, even with families fluent in English. Special education vocabulary is unfamiliar to most people.
- Schedule meetings at times that work for the family, including evenings when needed and permitted.
- Open communication early in the year, before there is a problem. A first contact that is positive builds the trust you will need later.
- Ask families what they want for their child. Their goals are central and may differ from what you would have assumed.
- Honor different ways of being a partner. Some families want frequent contact and detailed information. Others prefer to be contacted only when necessary. Both are valid.
- Be aware of your own assumptions and where they come from.

Communication with students has a cultural dimension too:

- Eye contact, physical proximity, humor, willingness to challenge an adult, and the meaning of silence all vary across cultures.
- None of these are signs of a learning problem.
- Draw on students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds as resources: represent diverse perspectives in materials, value students' home languages, and connect learning to students' lives.

Common misconceptions and test traps

- Treating culturally responsive practice as a checklist of facts about specific cultures. It is a stance, not a script. Generalizations become stereotypes.
- Using a child as an interpreter for a parent. This is not appropriate, especially for confidential matters.
- Assuming a parent's quiet manner in a meeting means agreement.
- Confusing language learning with disability. A student who is learning English may be quiet, may struggle with academic language, and may produce work that looks different from peers. These are characteristics of language learning, not necessarily of disability.

Self-check questions

1. A new student in a fourth-grade class has been in the United States for six months and is still learning English. He is quiet, rarely makes eye contact with the teacher, and produces shorter written work than peers. What is the most appropriate first response?

- A.** Refer the student for a special education evaluation right away because of the language and behavior differences.
- B.** Gather more information about the student's language development, prior schooling, and cultural background, and provide language-rich instruction with appropriate supports.
- C.** Treat the lack of eye contact as a sign of a possible autism spectrum disorder.
- D.** Place the student in a self-contained class until English skills improve.

Answer: B. *Quietness, limited eye contact, and developing English are not by themselves signs of disability. Language learning and cultural norms must be considered before referral. Premature evaluation contributes to disproportionality.*

2. A school sends home a fully translated IEP draft and assumes the family will sign and return it. Why is this approach not enough to ensure meaningful participation?

- A.** Translated documents are not legally allowed in New York State.

- B.** Families need interpretation during the meeting and a real chance to ask questions and influence decisions, not just a written document.
- C.** Families must always come to the school in person to receive documents.
- D.** Schools must wait for the family's school-age child to translate the document before sending it home.

Answer: B. *Meaningful participation goes beyond translation. Families need spoken interpretation during meetings, plain language, and genuine opportunity to shape the IEP.*

3. Which of the following best describes culturally responsive practice in special education?

- A.** A list of facts about specific cultures that the teacher memorizes and applies.
- B.** A stance of curiosity, humility, and respect that shapes how the teacher communicates and makes decisions.
- C.** A separate curriculum used only for students from immigrant families.
- D.** An optional approach that teachers may choose to use depending on the student.

Answer: B. *Culturally responsive practice is a stance, not a script. Treating it as a checklist of cultural facts leads to stereotyping. It applies to all students and families.*

INDICATOR E

Communication and Collaboration with Colleagues

Applies knowledge of effective strategies for communicating and collaborating with general education teachers, school staff, paraprofessionals, related services providers, medical personnel, volunteers, and community agencies.

What this indicator means

Special education is a team enterprise. No teacher serves a student alone. Work effectively with the wide range of adults who touch a student's school day, from the general education teacher to the speech therapist to the bus paraprofessional to the family doctor.

What you need to know

The team around a student with disabilities can include many adults:

- General education teacher and special education teacher.
- Paraprofessionals.
- Speech and language therapist, occupational therapist, physical therapist.
- School psychologist, school counselor, social worker, school nurse.
- Assistant principal and parent coordinator.
- Outside medical providers and community-based organization staff.
- Family members.
- Collaboration is the skill of weaving these perspectives into one coherent plan.

Co-teaching, called integrated co-teaching in New York. A general education teacher and a special education teacher share responsibility for a class that includes both students with and without disabilities. Common arrangements:

- One teach, one observe. One teacher leads while the other gathers data.
- One teach, one assist. One teacher leads while the other supports individual students.
- Station teaching. Students rotate through stations led by different teachers.
- Parallel teaching. The class is split in half and each teacher teaches the same content to one half.
- Alternative teaching. One teacher works with a small group on different content while the other teaches the larger group.
- Team teaching. Both teachers share the lead.

Using the co-teaching models well:

- The strongest partnerships use a variety of models depending on the lesson.
- Avoid always defaulting to one teach, one assist. It underuses the special education teacher.
- Consultation is another model. A consultant teacher works with general education teachers, sometimes through direct instruction and sometimes through indirect support.

Working with paraprofessionals:

- As the certified teacher, you direct their work, give clear expectations, and provide feedback.
- Respect their experience, which is often considerable.
- Common errors to avoid: leaving the paraprofessional with no clear direction; treating them as a personal assistant; allowing them to be the only person who works with a particular student, which isolates that student from teacher and peers.

Working with related service providers:

- Related services include speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy, counseling, and other supports listed in the IEP.
- Coordinate with these providers so what they do connects to what happens in the classroom.
- Many students, especially in District 75, also have outside providers.
- With parental consent, you may communicate with outside providers. Never without consent.

Strategies that make collaboration work:

- Schedule regular meeting time, even if brief.
- Clarify roles.
- Communicate in writing as well as in person.
- Listen first.
- Address conflict directly and respectfully.
- Recognize the contribution of every team member.

Common misconceptions and test traps

- Believing integrated co-teaching means one teacher teaches and the other helps. That is one model and the weakest if used alone.
- Treating a paraprofessional as a substitute for the teacher rather than as an instructional team member working under your direction.

- Failing to coordinate with related service providers, leaving the student with fragmented support.
- Sharing information with outside agencies without parental consent.

Self-check questions

1. In an ICT class, the general education teacher leads almost every lesson while the special education teacher walks around helping individual students. Which co-teaching change would best address the imbalance?

- A. Switch to one teach, one observe for every lesson.
- B. Add station teaching, parallel teaching, or team teaching so that both teachers regularly lead instruction.
- C. Have the special education teacher work in a separate room with the students with disabilities.
- D. Keep the current arrangement, since the special education teacher is already supporting all students.

Answer: B. *The strongest co-teaching partnerships use a mix of models so both teachers regularly lead instruction. Defaulting to one teach, one assist underuses the special education teacher.*

2. Which of the following best describes the special education teacher's responsibility toward a paraprofessional in the classroom?

- A. Direct the paraprofessional's work, give clear expectations, provide feedback, and respect their experience.
- B. Treat the paraprofessional as a personal assistant for clerical tasks.
- C. Allow the paraprofessional to be the only person who works with a specific student so that the student has consistency.
- D. Avoid giving feedback because that is the principal's job.

Answer: A. *Paraprofessionals are part of the instructional team. The certified teacher is responsible for direction, expectations, and feedback. Letting one student be served only by the paraprofessional isolates that student from the teacher and peers.*

3. A teacher wants to coordinate with a student's outside therapist to support her IEP goals. What must the teacher do first?

- A. Contact the therapist directly to share information about the student.
- B. Obtain written parental consent before sharing or receiving any information about the student.
- C. Ask another teacher to make the contact instead.
- D. Send a copy of the IEP to the therapist's office without consent.

Answer: B. *Sharing student information with outside providers requires parental consent under FERPA and Part 200.*

INDICATOR F

Self-Reflection and Professional Development

Applies knowledge of strategies for engaging in self-reflection and ongoing professional development activities to enhance effectiveness as an educator of students with disabilities.

What this indicator means

Every special education teacher should be a learner throughout the career, not only during the master's program. Reflection and professional development are ongoing professional duties, not optional extras.

What you need to know

Reflective practice:

- The habit of looking carefully at your own teaching and asking what worked, what did not, and why.
- More than worry. It is structured.
- Reflective teachers gather evidence: student work, observation notes, video, feedback from colleagues and students.
- Use evidence to find patterns, make changes, and reflect again to see whether the changes helped.
- Donald Schön: reflection in action (during teaching) and reflection on action (afterward). Both matter.

Professional development:

- Any structured activity that builds your knowledge or skills as a teacher.
- Most effective when sustained over time, content focused, collaborative, and connected to your daily work.
- New York requires teachers to complete continuing teacher and leader education hours to keep certification. The spirit of the requirement is growth, not only logging hours.

Sources of professional growth:

- Mentoring and coaching.
- Peer observation.
- Professional learning communities.
- Graduate coursework.
- Professional organizations such as the Council for Exceptional Children.

- Journals and books.
- Conferences at the local, state, and national level.

Common misconceptions and test traps

- Thinking reflection means feeling bad about a hard day. Reflection is structured and evidence based.
- Believing professional development is only what happens in a formal workshop. Daily learning from colleagues and from your own practice counts too.
- Assuming experienced teachers no longer need to grow. The exam treats ongoing learning as a permanent professional duty.

Self-check questions

1. Which of the following best describes reflective practice?

- A. Worrying about a difficult day and trying to forget it.
- B. A structured habit of gathering evidence about your teaching, looking for patterns, making changes, and checking whether the changes helped.
- C. An end-of-year evaluation completed by the principal.
- D. An activity required only of new teachers.

Answer: B. *Reflective practice is structured and evidence based. It is part of the ongoing professional duty of every teacher.*

2. What is the difference between reflection in action and reflection on action?

- A. Reflection in action happens during teaching; reflection on action happens afterward.
- B. Reflection in action is for general education teachers; reflection on action is for special education teachers.
- C. Reflection in action is private; reflection on action is shared with colleagues.
- D. There is no real difference between the two.

Answer: A. *Schön described both kinds. Reflection in action means thinking and adjusting while teaching. Reflection on action means analyzing what happened after the lesson is over.*

3. Which of the following is the strongest example of effective professional development?

- A. A one-time, two-hour workshop unrelated to the teacher's daily work.
- B. A sustained, content-focused, collaborative learning experience connected to the teacher's classroom.
- C. A weekend conference attended for the certificate of attendance.
- D. An online course completed without discussion or follow-up.

Answer: B. *Effective professional development is sustained over time, content focused, collaborative, and connected to the teacher's actual work.*

INDICATOR G**Research-Validated Practice**

Demonstrates knowledge of strategies and information sources for remaining current regarding research-validated practice in the field of special education.

What this indicator means

Know how to find, evaluate, and use research about what works in special education, and which sources of information are trustworthy.

What you need to know

Research-validated practice (also called evidence-based practice):

- Instructional methods or interventions studied through rigorous research and shown to produce meaningful improvements in student outcomes.
- The standard is not that someone said it works or that it has been used for a long time.
- The standard is that systematic studies, reviewed by other experts, support its effectiveness.
- Federal law requires schools to use evidence-based practices to the extent practicable.

Trustworthy sources:

- What Works Clearinghouse, U.S. Department of Education. Reviews research on programs and rates the strength of evidence.
- IRIS Center at Vanderbilt University. Free research-based modules.
- Technical assistance centers funded by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP).
- Peer-reviewed journals such as *Exceptional Children*, the *Journal of Special Education*, and *Teaching Exceptional Children*.
- Council for Exceptional Children and its standards on evidence-based practice.
- NYSED guidance.

Questions to ask before adopting a new program or method:

- Who is making the claim and what do they stand to gain?
- Is the claim based on systematic research or on testimonials?
- Has the research been published in a peer-reviewed journal?
- Was it tested with students like the ones you teach?
- Are there independent replications?

- Healthy skepticism protects students from fads and from interventions that waste time and money.

Common misconceptions and test traps

- Treating any published study as proof that something works. The strength of the evidence matters.
- Accepting a program because it is popular or because the materials look appealing.
- Believing newer is always better. Some long-standing practices have strong research support, and some new programs have none.

Self-check questions

1. A vendor presents a new reading intervention with glowing testimonials and polished marketing materials. What is the best first step before recommending the program for purchase?

- A.** Recommend the program because the testimonials are positive.
- B.** Check the What Works Clearinghouse and peer-reviewed sources to see whether the program has been rigorously studied with students similar to those in the school.
- C.** Recommend the program because the materials look professional.
- D.** Decline to consider it without further explanation.

Answer: B. *Testimonials and polished materials are not evidence. The standard for research-validated practice is rigorous study, peer review, and replication.*

2. Which of the following is a trustworthy source for checking whether a teaching method is evidence based?

- A.** The What Works Clearinghouse from the U.S. Department of Education.
- B.** A vendor's marketing brochure.
- C.** Anecdotes shared by colleagues at lunch.
- D.** Social media posts from program users.

Answer: A. *The What Works Clearinghouse reviews research and rates the strength of evidence. Other reliable sources include the IRIS Center, peer-reviewed journals, and OSEP-funded technical assistance centers.*

3. Why is a colleague's positive experience with a program not enough on its own to call the program evidence based?

- A.** Colleagues should not share recommendations with one another.
- B.** One person's experience is not the same as systematic research with peer review and replication across many students.
- C.** Programs only work if they are brand new.

D. Federal law forbids teachers from talking about programs they use.

Answer: B. *A single positive experience is helpful information but is not the same as evidence.*

Evidence-based practice rests on rigorous, systematic studies that have been reviewed by experts and replicated.

INDICATOR H**Services, Resources, and Organizations**

Demonstrates knowledge of local, state, and national services, resources, and organizations serving students with disabilities and providing program support.

What this indicator means

Students with disabilities and their families benefit from a wide network of services and organizations beyond the school. Know what is out there and how to connect families with it.

What you need to know

Local resources in New York City:

- New York City Public Schools and its Division of Specialized Instruction and Student Support.
- District 75. The citywide district that serves students with the most significant disabilities through specialized schools and programs.
- Family support centers and parent coordinators in every school.
- Borough-based committees on special education and committees on preschool special education.
- Community-based organizations.
- INCLUDEnyc. Information and support to families of children with disabilities.
- Advocates for Children of New York. Legal advocacy for families.

State resources:

- NYSED, particularly its Office of Special Education.
- Special Education Parent Centers funded across the state.
- New York State Office for People With Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD). Provides services to eligible individuals across the lifespan.
- Adult Career and Continuing Education Services (ACCES). Supports transition-age youth and adults with disabilities.

National resources:

- Federal Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP).
- Council for Exceptional Children and its many divisions.
- Disability-specific organizations such as the Learning Disabilities Association of America and the National Down Syndrome Society.

- Parent training and information centers funded under IDEA in every state.

Connecting families to resources is part of your role:

- Knowing a resource exists is only the first step.
- Families struggling with procedural rights may benefit from Advocates for Children.
- Families of children aging out of school may need ACCES and OPWDD.

Common misconceptions and test traps

- Thinking that connecting families to outside resources is not your job. It is part of the role.
- Assuming families already know what is available. Most do not.
- Failing to coordinate with other staff who may already be working with the family, such as the social worker or parent coordinator.

Self-check questions

1. A student in a District 75 program will turn twenty-one and age out of school services in the spring. The family has not received any information about adult services. What is the most appropriate response?

- A.** Tell the family there is nothing more the school can do for them.
- B.** Share information about the New York State Office for People With Developmental Disabilities and ACCES, and help the family begin the contact process.
- C.** Wait until the student has already aged out before discussing adult services.
- D.** Refer the family back to the principal without offering any contacts.

Answer: B. *Connecting families to adult services is part of transition planning. Eligibility for adult systems takes time, so contact must begin well before the student ages out.*

2. Which of the following best describes District 75?

- A.** A New York City district that serves students with the most significant disabilities through specialized schools and programs across the boroughs.
- B.** A federal program that funds special education in the highest-need states.
- C.** An assessment used to qualify students for an IEP.
- D.** A private agency that provides services outside the public school system.

Answer: A. *District 75 is a citywide district within New York City Public Schools serving students with significant disabilities. It is part of the public school system.*

3. Which organization provides legal advocacy for families of students with disabilities in New York City?

- A.** The What Works Clearinghouse.

- B.** Advocates for Children of New York.
- C.** The Council for Exceptional Children.
- D.** The Office of Special Education Programs.

Answer: B. *Advocates for Children of New York provides legal advocacy and support for families. The other organizations serve important functions but are not primarily legal advocacy organizations for NYC families.*

INDICATOR I**Advocacy**

Applies knowledge of the teacher's responsibility to advocate for the interests of students with disabilities.

What this indicator means

Advocacy is a professional responsibility, not an optional add-on. Speak up for students whose interests might otherwise be overlooked.

What you need to know

Forms advocacy can take:

- Quiet and daily. Ensuring a student's accommodations are actually provided in every class.
- Formal. Raising a concern at a CSE meeting when the proposed program does not match the student's needs.
- Systemic. Serving on a school committee that examines disproportionality.
- Public. Speaking at a community board meeting about resources for students with disabilities.
- The thread: willingness to act for students who may not be able to act for themselves, with knowledge, evidence, and respect.

Ethical advocacy:

- Grounded in what is best for the student, not in personal preference.
- Uses available procedures: CSE meetings, supervisor conversations, procedural safeguards.
- Does not bypass families or pretend to speak for them.
- Supports families in their own advocacy.
- Recognizes that families often know how to advocate for their child if given accurate information and respect.
- The Council for Exceptional Children's code of ethics includes advocacy as a professional duty.

Sustaining advocacy over a long career:

- Advocacy can be hard. It sometimes means disagreeing with a colleague or supervisor.
- Build relationships with colleagues.
- Learn the rules thoroughly.
- Choose your moments.

- Support other advocates in your school.

Common misconceptions and test traps

- Thinking advocacy is only the job of parents or lawyers. The state and the field treat it as a teacher responsibility.
- Believing advocacy means being adversarial. The most effective advocates work within systems and build relationships.
- Assuming you should not raise concerns as a new teacher. You should, when you have evidence and the issue affects students. The way you raise it matters as much as raising it.

Self-check questions

1. A new Fellow notices that a student's IEP includes physical movement as a regulation strategy, but the student is regularly being kept inside during recess as a behavior consequence. What is the most appropriate first step?

- A.** Tell the student's family that the school is violating the IEP and recommend a complaint.
- B.** Confront the colleagues responsible in front of the class so the practice ends right away.
- C.** Raise the issue at the next team meeting, bring the relevant page of the IEP, and propose an alternative consistent with the plan.
- D.** Say nothing because she is a new teacher and does not want to cause problems.

Answer: C. *Effective advocacy is knowledgeable, evidence based, and respectful. Bringing the IEP language to a team meeting and proposing an alternative addresses the issue without bypassing colleagues or families.*

2. Which of the following best describes ethical advocacy?

- A.** Acting on personal preference whenever the teacher disagrees with a decision.
- B.** Acting in the best interest of the student, using available procedures, supporting families in their own advocacy, and not pretending to speak for them.
- C.** Avoiding all conflict to maintain good relationships.
- D.** Letting parents handle all advocacy on their own.

Answer: B. *Ethical advocacy is grounded in the student's best interest and uses legitimate procedures. It supports rather than replaces the family's voice.*

3. Why is advocacy considered part of a special education teacher's professional responsibility?

- A.** Because the union requires it.
- B.** Because students with disabilities may not be able to act for themselves, and the field's ethical standards treat advocacy as a teacher duty.
- C.** Because principals always reward teachers who advocate.

D. Because advocacy is only required during the first year of teaching.

Answer: B. *The Council for Exceptional Children's code of ethics, NYSED, and the broader field treat advocacy as a professional duty grounded in the needs of students who may not be able to advocate for themselves.*

Putting It All Together

The nine performance indicators in Competency 0001 are nine angles on one question: what does it mean to be a competent and ethical special education teacher in New York public schools? History tells you why your role exists. Law tells you what you must do. Rights and responsibilities tell you who is owed what. Communication with families and colleagues tells you how the work gets done. Reflection and research tell you how to keep getting better. Knowledge of resources connects students and families to support beyond the classroom. Advocacy makes the rest of it real.

When you read a scenario question, ask which of these foundations the question is testing. The best answer is usually the one that respects the law, treats families and students with dignity, draws on collaboration, and reflects research-informed practice.

The exam is not the goal. The goal is the work.

COMPETENCY 0002**Knowledge of Students with Disabilities***Development, disability characteristics, and contextual factors*

*6 indicators · 11 items · 10% of test score***About Competency 0002**

Competency 0002 asks you to know how children develop, what disability looks like across categories, and how factors outside the disability itself shape learning. The exam is checking whether you can think about a student as a whole person rather than as a label.

This competency lays the groundwork for assessment, planning, and instruction in the rest of the exam. If you understand how a learning disability is different from an intellectual disability, how trauma affects learning, and what role medications and medical conditions play, you will be ready for the harder questions in Competencies 0003 through 0006.

Read each indicator section once for understanding. Then come back and try to explain the main ideas out loud in your own words. Spread your study across short sessions rather than one long one.

INDICATOR A

Typical and Atypical Human Growth and Development

Demonstrates knowledge of typical and atypical human growth and development in various domains (e.g., cognitive, linguistic, social, emotional, physical, sensory).

What this indicator means

Know how children typically develop across several domains and recognize when development is delayed or different. Without that baseline, you cannot tell whether a behavior is age-appropriate or a sign of concern.

What you need to know

Development happens across several domains at the same time. Each follows broad patterns, but children move through them at different rates and are shaped by their environments.

Cognitive development. How thinking, reasoning, memory, and problem-solving grow.

- Jean Piaget described four stages: sensorimotor (birth to two), preoperational (two to seven), concrete operational (seven to eleven), and formal operational (eleven and up).
- Lev Vygotsky emphasized that learning is social. The zone of proximal development is the gap between what a child can do alone and what the child can do with support.

Linguistic development. Receptive language (understanding) and expressive language (producing).

- By six months. Most children begin to babble.
- By twelve months. First words.
- By twenty-four months. Words combine.
- By age four. Complex sentences.
- Multilingual development looks different from monolingual development but is not delayed development.

Social and emotional development. Includes attachment, self-regulation, perspective-taking, friendship, and identity. Erik Erikson described stages from trust versus mistrust in infancy through identity versus role confusion in adolescence.

Physical and sensory development:

- Gross motor skills, like walking and running.
- Fine motor skills, like grasping a pencil.

- Sensory development covers vision, hearing, touch, smell, taste, proprioception (knowing where the body is), and the vestibular sense (balance).

Atypical development:

- Development that follows a different path or pace from what most children show.
- Atypical does not always mean disability. Some children catch up. Others have a difference that becomes a disability when it interferes with daily learning.
- Key principle: development is uneven across domains. A child can be advanced in one area and delayed in another.

Common misconceptions and test traps

- Believing all children develop at the same pace. Variation is typical.
- Treating a delay in one area as evidence of disability. A delay must be persistent, significant, and affect learning to suggest disability.
- Confusing language difference with language disorder. A multilingual child going through a quiet period is not delayed.
- Forgetting that environment shapes development. Trauma, poverty, and lack of access to early experiences affect the rate of growth.

Self-check questions

1. Which of the following best describes Vygotsky's zone of proximal development?

- A. The age range during which a particular skill must be learned.
- B. The gap between what a child can do alone and what the child can do with support from a more knowledgeable other.
- C. A specific stage of cognitive development between ages two and seven.
- D. The maximum level of difficulty a child can tolerate without frustration.

Answer: B. *The zone of proximal development is the space where learning happens with appropriate support. It is central to the idea of scaffolded instruction.*

2. A four-year-old is producing one- and two-word phrases instead of full sentences. The family recently moved to the United States and the child is being raised in two languages. What is the most appropriate first conclusion?

- A. The child has a language disorder and should be referred for evaluation.
- B. Multilingual development can look different from monolingual development, and more information is needed before drawing conclusions about disability.
- C. The family should stop speaking the home language so English develops faster.

D. The child is showing typical development for age four and no further observation is needed.

Answer: B. *Multilingual development follows a different pattern than monolingual development. Limited expressive language alone, in this context, is not enough to indicate a disorder. Premature referral contributes to disproportionality.*

3. Which of the following best describes the principle that development is uneven?

A. Children develop at exactly the same rate in all domains.

B. A child can be advanced in one domain and delayed in another at the same time.

C. Development happens only in stages defined by Piaget.

D. Once a child falls behind in one area, they will fall behind in all others.

Answer: B. *Development is multi-dimensional and uneven. A child may show strong cognitive skills while still developing fine motor skills, or strong language while still developing social skills.*

INDICATOR B

Characteristics, Identification, and Medical Aspects of Disabilities

Demonstrates knowledge of the characteristics, identification criteria, etiologies, and medical aspects of various types of disabilities (e.g., learning disability, intellectual disability, autism, multiple disabilities).

What this indicator means

Know what each disability category looks like, what causes it when known, and how it is identified. This is one of the most heavily tested areas in Competency 0002.

What you need to know

New York recognizes thirteen disability categories. Some terms differ from federal language, and those differences appear on the exam.

- **Learning Disability (LD).** New York uses learning disability where federal language uses specific learning disability. A persistent difficulty in one or more academic areas (reading, writing, math) that cannot be explained by intellectual ability, sensory impairment, lack of instruction, or environmental factors. Common subtypes include dyslexia (reading), dysgraphia (writing), and dyscalculia (math). Cause is often unknown but research points to differences in how the brain processes information.
- **Intellectual Disability.** Significantly below-average intellectual functioning combined with deficits in adaptive behavior (everyday life skills), with onset before age eighteen. Causes include genetic conditions like Down syndrome and Fragile X, prenatal exposure to alcohol or other substances, birth complications, and early childhood illness or injury.
- **Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).** A developmental condition with two core features: persistent challenges in social communication and interaction, and restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities. Sensory differences are common. Cause is not fully known but involves a strong genetic component.
- **Emotional Disability.** New York uses emotional disability where federal language uses emotional disturbance. A condition involving long-term inability to learn that cannot be explained by other factors, difficulty with relationships, inappropriate behavior or feelings, pervasive mood of unhappiness, or physical symptoms or fears. Causes include trauma, neurological factors, and family history of mental health conditions.
- **Speech or Language Impairment.** A communication disorder such as stuttering, articulation problems, or impaired language that affects educational performance.

- **Other Health Impairment (OHI).** Limited strength, vitality, or alertness due to chronic or acute health problems. ADHD is most commonly served under OHI in New York. Other conditions include asthma, epilepsy, leukemia, diabetes, and Tourette syndrome.
- **Hearing Impairment and Deafness.** Hearing impairment is impairment that affects educational performance but is not included in the definition of deafness. Deafness is a hearing impairment severe enough that the child cannot process speech with or without amplification.
- **Visual Impairment Including Blindness.** An impairment in vision that affects educational performance even with correction.
- **Deaf-Blindness.** Concurrent hearing and visual impairments, the combination of which causes severe communication and educational needs.
- **Orthopedic Impairment.** A severe physical impairment affecting educational performance. Includes cerebral palsy, amputations, and conditions like muscular dystrophy.
- **Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI).** An acquired injury to the brain caused by external physical force, resulting in functional disability or psychosocial impairment. Does not apply to brain injuries that are congenital or caused by birth trauma.
- **Multiple Disabilities.** Two or more disabilities occurring together, the combination of which causes such severe educational needs that they cannot be addressed in a program for one of the impairments alone. Does not include deaf-blindness.

Identification requirements:

- Combines multiple sources: parent and teacher observations, formal assessments, medical reports when relevant, and review of the student's response to instruction.
- No single test determines a category.
- The team must rule out the possibility that the academic difficulty is caused by lack of appropriate instruction, limited English proficiency, or other environmental factors.

Common misconceptions and test traps

- Confusing learning disability with intellectual disability. A learning disability is a specific processing difference, not a low intellectual ability.
- Forgetting that NYSED uses different terms from federal law. Use emotional disability and learning disability on the New York exam.
- Believing ADHD is its own category under IDEA. It usually qualifies under Other Health Impairment.
- Treating one symptom as a diagnosis. Categories require a pattern that affects educational performance.

Self-check questions

1. Which of the following best describes the difference between a learning disability and an intellectual disability?

- A. Both involve below-average intellectual ability.
- B. A learning disability is a specific processing difference that affects one or more academic areas, while an intellectual disability involves significantly below-average intellectual functioning along with deficits in adaptive behavior.
- C. A learning disability is permanent, while an intellectual disability can be cured.
- D. Only intellectual disability is recognized as a disability under IDEA.

Answer: B. *Learning disabilities involve specific processing differences in the presence of typical intellectual ability. Intellectual disability involves overall intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior.*

2. Under New York State regulations, what term is used for what federal law calls emotional disturbance?

- A. Emotional disability.
- B. Behavioral disorder.
- C. Emotional and behavioral impairment.
- D. Mental health condition.

Answer: A. *New York uses emotional disability. Federal language uses emotional disturbance. Recognizing this difference is a frequent exam item.*

3. A student has been diagnosed with ADHD by a pediatrician. Under which IDEA disability category is the student most commonly served?

- A. Learning Disability.
- B. Other Health Impairment.
- C. Emotional Disability.
- D. Intellectual Disability.

Answer: B. *ADHD is most commonly served under Other Health Impairment, which covers conditions limiting strength, vitality, or alertness. ADHD is not its own IDEA category.*

INDICATOR C

Similarities and Differences Among Students With and Without Disabilities

Demonstrates knowledge of similarities and differences among students with and without disabilities.

What this indicator means

Students with disabilities are first and foremost students. They share most characteristics with their peers and differ in specific ways related to the disability.

What you need to know

Similarities. Students with and without disabilities share more than they differ:

- All students need warm relationships with adults.
- All students need predictable routines.
- All students need instruction matched to their level.
- All students need opportunities for social life.
- All students need to be challenged and to succeed.
- They share the same range of interests, family circumstances, cultural backgrounds, and personalities. A student with autism might love basketball. A student with intellectual disability might be a strong artist. A student with a learning disability might be a class leader.

Differences. The disability shapes specific aspects of learning and life:

- A student with a learning disability may need explicit instruction in skills that peers acquire more easily.
- A student with autism may need direct teaching of social cues that others learn by watching.
- A student with a hearing impairment may need visual or signed access to spoken information.
- These differences are about access, not worth or potential.

Variation within a category is large:

- Two students with autism can be very different from each other.
- Two students with learning disabilities may need very different supports.
- Hold both ideas at once: the category gives you starting points, and the individual student is what you actually teach.

Intersectionality. A student is never only their disability:

- Students are also their race, language, family, gender, sexual orientation, immigration status, and economic circumstances.
- A culturally responsive teacher understands all of these together rather than focusing on disability alone.

Common misconceptions and test traps

- Believing students within a disability category are alike. They are not. Variation within a category is often greater than variation between categories.
- Defining a student by their disability. The disability is one part of who they are.
- Lowering expectations because of a disability label. Students with disabilities can and should access challenging content with appropriate supports.
- Ignoring intersectionality. A Black student with a disability has a different experience of school than a white student with the same disability.

Self-check questions

1. Which of the following best describes the relationship between students with and without disabilities?

- A. Students with disabilities are fundamentally different from peers and require entirely separate instruction.
- B. Students with disabilities share most characteristics with peers and differ in specific ways related to the disability.
- C. Students with disabilities should not be taught alongside peers without disabilities.
- D. Students with the same disability category have nearly identical learning needs.

Answer: B. *Students with disabilities are first and foremost students. The disability shapes specific aspects of learning, but the student shares most characteristics with peers.*

2. Why is it incorrect to assume that two students with the same disability category will have similar instructional needs?

- A. Because disability categories are not real.
- B. Because individual variation within any category is large, and instruction must be planned for the specific student rather than for the category.
- C. Because the IEP is the same for all students in a category.
- D. Because disability categories change every year.

Answer: B. *Variation within a disability category is often greater than variation between categories. Instruction must be individualized.*

3. Which of the following best describes intersectionality in the context of special education?

- A. A required strategy for teaching multilingual students.
- B. Recognition that a student's identity includes disability along with race, language, family, gender, and other factors that shape their experience of school.
- C. An assessment tool used to measure adaptive behavior.
- D. A New York City policy on placement decisions.

Answer: B. *Intersectionality recognizes that students are never only their disability. Race, language, family, immigration status, and other factors shape their experience and must inform teaching.*

INDICATOR D

How Disability Characteristics Influence Education and Life

Applies knowledge of how the characteristics of various disabilities can influence an individual's education and life.

What this indicator means

Think beyond the label. Understand how a specific disability shapes the way a student experiences school, family life, and the wider community.

What you need to know

Each disability shapes daily life in particular ways. Knowing these patterns helps you plan instruction, supports, and accommodations that match what the student actually needs.

Learning disability:

- Reading or writing may be exhausting, even when the student understands the content.
- The student may avoid academic tasks, not from lack of interest but from years of frustration.
- Self-esteem can suffer when peers move ahead in skills the student struggles with.
- Central response: strong instruction targeted to the specific weakness, paired with respect for the student's strengths.

Intellectual disability:

- Affects the pace and depth of learning across most academic and life skill areas.
- Students often benefit from explicit instruction, frequent practice, and direct teaching of life skills that peers may pick up on their own.
- Family involvement and long-term planning for adult life are central concerns.

Autism spectrum disorder:

- Affects social communication, flexibility, and sensory processing.
- A student may struggle with unwritten social rules, transitions between activities, and overwhelming sensory environments like a loud cafeteria.
- Predictable routines, clear visual supports, and direct teaching of social skills help students participate fully.

Emotional disability:

- Can affect a student's ability to attend, regulate behavior, build relationships, and persist through challenge.
- Trauma is often part of the picture.
- Trusting relationships, predictable expectations, and access to mental health support are essential.
- Behavior is communication. Figure out what the behavior is communicating and respond accordingly.

Sensory disabilities (hearing and visual impairments):

- Affect access to information that other students receive automatically.
- Accommodations like sign language interpretation, preferential seating, large print, or screen readers are not extras. They are how the student receives the lesson.

Physical disabilities:

- Can affect mobility, fatigue levels, communication, and access to materials.
- Universal Design for Learning, accessible classrooms, and assistive technology open the curriculum to students who would otherwise be locked out.

Disability affects life beyond school:

- Family caregiving, transportation, medical appointments, social participation, and post-school options are all shaped by disability.
- The teacher who understands this works with families, not around them.

Common misconceptions and test traps

- Treating accommodations as optional or as giving the student an unfair advantage. Accommodations provide access.
- Assuming that struggle in academic tasks indicates low effort or motivation. For a student with a disability, the same task may take far more effort than it does for peers.
- Forgetting that behavior is often communication. A student who melts down at transitions may be telling you something about how the disability shapes their day.
- Thinking only about the school day. Disability affects family life, sleep, friendships, and community participation.

Self-check questions

1. Which of the following best describes the role of accommodations for students with disabilities?

- A.** Accommodations give students with disabilities an advantage over peers.

- B.** Accommodations provide access to instruction that peers receive automatically and are essential, not optional.
- C.** Accommodations are only used during testing.
- D.** Accommodations should be reduced as soon as possible to encourage independence.

Answer: B. *Accommodations level the field by providing access. They are part of FAPE and listed in the IEP.*

2. A student with autism becomes very upset during transitions between classroom activities. Which response best reflects an understanding of how the disability shapes the student's experience?

- A.** Punish the behavior so it does not happen again.
- B.** Provide predictable routines, advance warning, and visual supports for transitions, recognizing that the difficulty is part of the disability.
- C.** Remove the student from the classroom whenever transitions occur.
- D.** Ignore the behavior to avoid reinforcing it.

Answer: B. *Transitions are often difficult for students with autism due to challenges with flexibility and sensory processing. Predictability and visual supports are evidence-based strategies.*

3. Why is it important for a teacher to understand the impact of disability beyond the school day?

- A.** Because the IEP must include details about home life.
- B.** Because disability shapes family caregiving, sleep, friendships, and community participation, and effective teaching requires understanding the whole context of the student's life.
- C.** Because teachers are required by law to visit each student's home.
- D.** Because home life has no bearing on instruction.

Answer: B. *Disability extends beyond school. Working with families and understanding the broader context helps the teacher plan supports that fit the student's whole life.*

INDICATOR E

Different Ways Students With Disabilities Learn

Applies knowledge of the different ways in which students with disabilities learn, including students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and developmentally and age-appropriate strategies for addressing those differences.

What this indicator means

Students with disabilities approach learning in different ways, and culture and language add another layer. Effective teaching responds to all of these differences.

What you need to know

Effective instruction for students with disabilities is:

- Explicit. The skill is named and modeled clearly rather than left for the student to discover.
- Systematic. Skills are taught in a logical sequence that builds.
- Active. The student is doing, not just watching.
- These principles apply across age levels and disability categories.

Universal Design for Learning, or UDL. Three principles offer different ways to access content, show what they know, and stay engaged:

- Multiple means of representation.
- Multiple means of expression.
- Multiple means of engagement.
- Examples: a student who struggles with reading may listen to a text. A student who struggles with writing may dictate or type. A student who struggles with attention may benefit from frequent breaks and choice.

Multilingual learners with disabilities. NYSED uses Multilingual Learner, or MLL, where federal language used English Language Learner, or ELL:

- MLL recognizes the asset of speaking another language rather than framing English as something the student lacks.
- Students who are MLLs and have disabilities need both language development support and special education services.
- Skipping either is a violation of FAPE.

Distinguishing language learning from disability:

- Quietness, slower production of academic English, work that looks different from peers, and unfamiliarity with school routines are characteristics of language acquisition, not of disability.
- Refer for evaluation only when concerns persist after appropriate instruction in the student's strongest language and with linguistically appropriate supports.

Age and developmental level affect what strategies work:

- Young children benefit from concrete materials, play-based learning, and short tasks.
- Adolescents need real-world relevance, choice, and respect for their growing autonomy.

Common misconceptions and test traps

- Treating MLLs and students with disabilities as the same group. They overlap but are not the same.
- Believing that learning style preferences (visual, auditory, kinesthetic) are the basis for instruction. The research on learning styles is weak. Multiple means of representation under UDL is a stronger approach.
- Confusing language difference with language disorder. A student going through a quiet period in second-language acquisition is not delayed.
- Using the same strategies regardless of age. A worksheet that works for an eight-year-old may not be appropriate for a sixteen-year-old.

Self-check questions

1. Which of the following best describes the term MLL as currently used by NYSED?

- A. A student who has been classified as having a disability.
- B. A multilingual learner, recognizing the asset of speaking another language while developing English.
- C. A student who has been retained in grade.
- D. A student receiving services in a District 75 program.

Answer: B. *NYSED has moved from English Language Learner (ELL) to Multilingual Learner (MLL) to recognize the asset of multilingualism rather than framing English as something the student lacks.*

2. What is the most important consideration before referring a multilingual learner for special education evaluation?

- A. Whether the student has lived in the United States for at least five years.
- B. Whether concerns persist after appropriate instruction in the student's strongest language and with linguistically appropriate supports.
- C. Whether the family has agreed to evaluation in writing.

D. Whether the student is in a general education classroom.

Answer: B. *Distinguishing language acquisition from disability requires appropriate instruction first. Premature referral contributes to disproportionality.*

3. Which of the following best describes the three principles of Universal Design for Learning?

A. Multiple means of assessment, multiple means of grouping, and multiple means of grading.

B. Multiple means of representation, multiple means of expression, and multiple means of engagement.

C. Visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning styles.

D. Whole group, small group, and individual instruction.

Answer: B. *The three UDL principles give students different ways to access content (representation), show what they know (expression), and stay engaged (engagement).*

INDICATOR F

Factors Affecting Development, Learning, and Daily Living

Demonstrates knowledge of factors that affect development, learning, and daily living in students with disabilities (e.g., roles of families and communities; effects of medications, sensory impairments, and medical conditions).

What this indicator means

Disability never operates in isolation. Family, community, medical conditions, medications, and environment all shape how a student learns and lives.

What you need to know

Families. The most important context in any student's life:

- Families know the child best, hold the child's history, and will be there long after the school year ends.
- Treat families as partners and decision-makers, not as people to inform after the fact.
- Cultural and linguistic differences shape how families approach school.
- Silence in a meeting may reflect respect rather than disengagement.
- Reluctance to use a disability label may reflect community concerns about stigma.
- A family who cannot attend a daytime meeting may be working two jobs.

Communities. Shape opportunity:

- A student near libraries, parks, and after-school programs has different daily experiences than a student in an under-resourced neighborhood.
- Poverty affects nutrition, sleep, housing stability, exposure to environmental toxins, and access to medical care.
- None of these things cause disability, but all of them affect how a student shows up at school.

Medications. Common effects on learning:

- Stimulants for ADHD may improve attention but can affect appetite and sleep.
- Antiepileptic medications can cause drowsiness or affect memory.
- Antipsychotic medications can cause weight gain or sedation.
- Teachers do not prescribe or manage medication.

- Know what the student is taking, watch for side effects, and communicate observations to families and school nurses with parental consent.

Medical conditions. Common interactions with learning:

- Asthma can mean missed school days.
- Seizures can interrupt instruction and require recovery time.
- Diabetes requires monitoring and may affect energy and concentration.
- Chronic pain can make sustained attention difficult.
- Coordination with medical providers, with parental consent, supports the student in school.

Sensory impairments. Need accommodations across settings, not only in the classroom:

- A student with a hearing impairment may need preferential seating in every class, captioning for video, and quiet for instruction.
- A student with a visual impairment may need large print, screen readers, or braille materials.
- These supports must be provided consistently across settings.

Trauma. A significant contextual factor:

- Students who have experienced abuse, neglect, family separation, immigration stress, community violence, or housing instability may struggle with attention, emotional regulation, sleep, and trust.
- Trauma-informed practice recognizes that behavior is communication.
- Predictability and warmth heal.
- Punishment without understanding rarely helps.

The student is more than the disability. The teacher who understands the whole context plans more effectively, communicates more respectfully with families, and is less likely to mistake a contextual factor for a disability characteristic.

Common misconceptions and test traps

- Treating the family as a problem rather than a partner.
- Confusing the effects of poverty, trauma, or housing instability with characteristics of a disability.
- Ignoring medication side effects that affect learning. Drowsiness, agitation, or appetite changes may be medication related.
- Forgetting that some accommodations are needed in every setting, not only during testing.

Self-check questions

1. A student taking a stimulant medication for ADHD is increasingly tired in the afternoon and not eating lunch. What is the most appropriate teacher response?

- A. Assume the changes are unrelated to the medication and continue teaching as usual.
- B. Document the observations and communicate with the family and the school nurse, with parental consent, so the medical provider can be informed.
- C. Recommend that the family stop the medication.
- D. Refer the student for a special education evaluation.

Answer: B. *Teachers do not prescribe or manage medication, but careful observation and communication with the family and school nurse help the medical team adjust treatment when needed.*

2. Which of the following best describes a trauma-informed approach in special education?

- A. Punishing problem behavior firmly and consistently.
- B. Recognizing that behavior is communication, providing predictable routines and warm relationships, and avoiding punishment without understanding.
- C. Avoiding all challenging content because students with trauma cannot handle stress.
- D. Referring every student with trauma exposure for special education evaluation.

Answer: B. *Trauma-informed practice rests on understanding behavior as communication, building safety through predictability and relationship, and responding without re-traumatizing.*

3. Why is it important for a teacher to consider contextual factors such as poverty, housing instability, and trauma when working with a student?

- A. Because these factors are themselves disabilities under IDEA.
- B. Because these factors can shape how the student shows up at school and may be confused with characteristics of a disability if they are not understood.
- C. Because the IEP must list every contextual factor.
- D. Because the teacher must report contextual factors to child protective services.

Answer: B. *Contextual factors are not disabilities but they shape learning and behavior. Understanding the whole context helps the teacher plan effectively and avoid mistaking contextual challenges for disability characteristics.*

Putting It All Together

The six performance indicators in Competency 0002 ask one question from six angles: who is the student in front of you? Typical and atypical development gives you a baseline for noticing concern. Knowledge of disability categories helps you recognize patterns. Awareness of similarities and differences keeps you from defining a student by a label. Understanding how disability shapes education and life lets you plan supports that fit. Knowing that students learn in different ways, including as multilingual learners, leads to instruction that reaches them. Attention to family, community, medication, medical conditions, and trauma keeps you from confusing context with disability.

The exam will ask you to apply this knowledge to scenarios. The strongest answers reflect a teacher who sees the student as a whole person, communicates with families as partners, distinguishes language and culture from disability, and plans instruction that is explicit, systematic, and culturally responsive.

The exam is not the goal. The goal is the work.

COMPETENCY 0003**Assessment and Individual Program Planning***Assessment, eligibility, IEP development, and team roles*

*10 indicators · 23 items · 20% of test score***About Competency 0003**

Competency 0003 is the largest competency on the exam in selected-response weight. Twenty-three of the ninety selected-response items come from this competency, twenty percent of the total. The state is testing whether you understand assessment as the foundation of every decision you make about a student: eligibility, program, placement, instruction, and progress.

This competency covers the full assessment cycle. You need to know the vocabulary, the kinds of assessments and their uses, how to choose assessments that are fair and unbiased, how to interpret results, how to use data to make decisions, how to communicate results to families and team members, and how the IEP, transition plan, and Behavior Intervention Plan are developed and implemented. Read for understanding, then practice explaining the ideas in your own words.

INDICATOR A**Basic and Specialized Assessment Terminology**

Demonstrates knowledge of basic and specialized terminology used in the assessment of students with disabilities.

What this indicator means

Know the language of assessment. The exam uses these terms precisely, and the wrong answer often comes from a definition that is close but not correct.

What you need to know

Reliability and validity:

- Reliability is consistency. A reliable assessment yields similar results when given again under similar conditions.
- Validity is whether the assessment measures what it claims to measure.
- An assessment can be reliable without being valid.
- It cannot be valid without being reliable.

Norm-referenced assessments:

- Compare a student's performance to a representative sample of peers.
- Standardized scores, percentile ranks, and grade equivalents come from norm-referenced tests.
- A standard score of 100 is the mean.
- A percentile rank of 50 means the student scored higher than half the norm group.

Criterion-referenced assessments:

- Compare a student's performance to a fixed standard rather than to peers.
- Tell you what the student can do, not how the student compares.
- Example: a spelling inventory checking specific phonics patterns.

Purposes of assessment:

- Formative assessment. Happens during instruction; shapes what comes next.
- Summative assessment. Happens at the end of a unit or year; measures what was learned.
- Diagnostic assessment. Identifies specific strengths and weaknesses, often before instruction begins.

Curriculum-Based Assessment, or CBA, and Curriculum-Based Measurement, or CBM:

- CBA is built on what is actually being taught.
- CBM is a specific kind of CBA using brief, repeated probes to track progress over time.
- CBM is well-established for monitoring response to instruction in reading, writing, and math.

Other key terms:

- Present levels of academic achievement and functional performance, or PLAAFP.
- Baseline. The student's starting point.
- Progress monitoring. Regular checking of progress toward goals.
- Accommodations and modifications, defined under Indicator E.

Common misconceptions and test traps

- Confusing reliability and validity. Reliability is consistency. Validity is whether the test measures what it claims to.
- Treating norm-referenced scores as if they tell you what a student can do. They tell you how the student compares to peers.
- Mixing up formative and summative assessment. Formative shapes ongoing instruction; summative measures what was learned.
- Believing that standardized tests are the only legitimate assessment. Curriculum-based and informal measures often give more useful information for instruction.

Self-check questions

1. A test consistently yields similar results across multiple administrations but does not actually measure the skill it claims to measure. Which of the following best describes this test?

- A. It is reliable but not valid.
- B. It is valid but not reliable.
- C. It is both reliable and valid.
- D. It is neither reliable nor valid.

Answer: A. *Reliability is consistency. Validity is whether the test measures what it claims to measure. A test can be reliable without being valid.*

2. A teacher gives a student a brief reading probe each week to track progress over time. Which kind of assessment is this?

- A. Norm-referenced assessment.
- B. Curriculum-Based Measurement.
- C. Diagnostic assessment.

D. Summative assessment.

Answer: B. *Curriculum-Based Measurement uses brief, repeated probes to track progress over time. It is well-established for monitoring response to instruction.*

3. Which of the following best describes the purpose of formative assessment?

- A.** To measure what students have learned at the end of a unit.
- B.** To compare a student's performance to a national peer group.
- C.** To shape ongoing instruction by checking student understanding during teaching.
- D.** To determine whether a student qualifies for special education.

Answer: C. *Formative assessment is for teachers to adjust instruction in response to what students are doing now. It is not primarily for grading or for eligibility.*

INDICATOR B

Formal and Informal Assessments

Demonstrates knowledge of the characteristics, uses, and limitations of various types of formal and informal assessments.

What this indicator means

Know what each type of assessment is good for and where it falls short. Different decisions call for different assessments.

What you need to know

Formal assessments. Standardized: same content, procedures, and scoring across all administrations. Examples include norm-referenced achievement tests like the Woodcock-Johnson, intelligence tests like the Wechsler scales, adaptive behavior scales like the Vineland, and standardized state assessments.

- Strengths. Comparison to peers, technical reliability and validity.
- Limits. A single point in time, may not match what was taught, can be culturally or linguistically biased, expensive, time-consuming.

Informal assessments. Flexible and teacher-designed. Include observations, work samples, running records, anecdotal notes, checklists, rubrics, conferences, and curriculum-based measures.

- Strengths. Tied closely to instruction, repeatable often, rich information, low cost.
- Limits. Not standardized, harder to compare across students or settings, depend heavily on the skill of the observer.

Functional Behavioral Assessment, or FBA. A specialized informal assessment used to understand the function of a behavior. Typically includes interviews, direct observation, and analysis of antecedent-behavior-consequence patterns.

Adaptive behavior assessments:

- Measure how a student manages everyday demands: communication, daily living skills, social interaction.
- Required for identifying intellectual disability.
- Useful for transition planning.

No single assessment is enough:

- Federal law and Part 200 require multiple measures across multiple domains for every special education evaluation.

- Combining formal and informal sources gives a fuller picture and protects against bias in any single instrument.

Common misconceptions and test traps

- Treating formal assessments as more accurate than informal ones. Each has strengths; both are needed.
- Using a single assessment to make a major decision. The law requires multiple measures.
- Forgetting that adaptive behavior is part of identifying intellectual disability.
- Believing that a standardized test cannot be biased. It can be, especially across language and cultural groups.

Self-check questions

1. Which of the following best describes a strength of curriculum-based measures compared to standardized achievement tests?

- A. They yield norm-referenced scores that allow comparison to a national peer group.
- B. They are tied closely to what is being taught and can be repeated frequently to monitor progress.
- C. They are required by law for special education eligibility.
- D. They eliminate the need for any other form of assessment.

Answer: B. *Curriculum-based measures connect directly to instruction and support frequent progress monitoring. Standardized tests offer different information.*

2. Which type of assessment is required to identify intellectual disability?

- A. Reading fluency assessment only.
- B. Curriculum-based measurement only.
- C. Adaptive behavior assessment, in addition to a measure of intellectual functioning.
- D. Functional Behavioral Assessment only.

Answer: C. *Intellectual disability requires both significantly below-average intellectual functioning and deficits in adaptive behavior. Adaptive behavior is a required component.*

3. Why does federal law require multiple measures in a special education evaluation?

- A. Because parents request multiple tests.
- B. Because no single assessment is sufficient and combining sources protects against bias and gives a fuller picture.
- C. Because each test must be given by a different professional.
- D. Because the law requires the use of all available standardized tests.

Answer: B. *Multiple measures across multiple domains are required to ensure a fair, accurate evaluation. This is a core procedural protection.*

INDICATOR C

Selecting and Administering Nonbiased Assessments

Applies knowledge of strategies for selecting and administering nonbiased assessments for given students.

What this indicator means

Choose and administer assessments in a way that does not penalize a student for language, culture, or disability. This is required by law and central to fair evaluation.

What you need to know

Federal law on assessment language and form:

- Federal law and Part 200 require that assessments be selected and administered to be racially and culturally non-discriminatory.
- Assessments must be conducted in the language and form most likely to yield accurate information about what the student knows and can do.
- For multilingual learners, this often means assessment in the student's strongest language or in two languages, by a qualified bilingual assessor when possible.

Sources of bias in assessment:

- Test content. May reference experiences common to one cultural group and not another.
- Test format. May favor students familiar with timed, paper-and-pencil tasks.
- Translated tests. May not be valid in the new language.
- Assessor and environment. The assessor's expectations and the testing environment also affect performance.

Strategies for reducing bias:

- Use multiple assessors and multiple measures.
- Use assessments normed on populations that include students like the one being assessed.
- Assess in the student's strongest language.
- Use assessors who share the student's language and cultural background when possible.
- Supplement standardized assessments with informal measures.
- Consider the student's response to instruction over time as part of the picture.

Accommodations vs. modifications during assessment:

- Accommodations change how the student takes the test (extended time, large print, breaks) without changing what is being measured.
- Modifications change what is being measured.
- Documentation of accommodations and modifications must be in the IEP.

Common misconceptions and test traps

- Believing a translated test is automatically valid. Translation alone does not ensure validity.
- Confusing accommodations with modifications. Accommodations preserve what is measured; modifications change it.
- Assuming a student's quiet response or low score is due to ability when language or cultural factors may be at work.
- Forgetting that bias is multi-source: content, format, assessor, environment, and test design.

Self-check questions

1. Which of the following best describes the legal standard for assessment language under federal law?

- A. All assessments must be conducted in English.
- B. Assessments must be conducted in the language and form most likely to yield accurate information about what the student knows and can do.
- C. Translated assessments are sufficient for any multilingual learner.
- D. Parents may choose any language for assessment regardless of student fluency.

Answer: B. *Federal law and Part 200 require that the language and form of assessment be the one most likely to give accurate information.*

2. What is the difference between an accommodation and a modification on an assessment?

- A. An accommodation changes what is measured; a modification does not.
- B. An accommodation changes how the student takes the test without changing what is measured; a modification changes what is being measured.
- C. Accommodations are only used in classroom assessment; modifications are only used on standardized tests.
- D. There is no difference between the two terms.

Answer: B. *Accommodations preserve what is being measured by changing the conditions of testing. Modifications change the construct itself. Both must be documented in the IEP.*

3. Which of the following is a recommended strategy for reducing bias in the assessment of a multilingual learner?

- A. Translate a standardized test into the student's home language and treat the result as valid.
- B. Use multiple measures, assess in the student's strongest language when possible, and consider the student's response to instruction over time.
- C. Use only standardized norm-referenced tests in English.
- D. Have the student's parent administer the assessment.

Answer: B. *Multiple measures, language-appropriate assessment, and attention to response to instruction together reduce bias. Translation alone does not validate a test.*

INDICATOR D

Interpreting Information from Formal and Informal Assessments

Interprets information from formal and informal assessments.

What this indicator means

Read scores, observations, and work samples accurately. Translate raw data into useful information for instruction and decisions.

What you need to know

Standard scores:

- Cluster around a mean of 100 with a typical standard deviation of 15.
- 85 to 115 is the average range.
- 70 to 84 is the low average to below average range.
- Below 70 is the well below average range.
- Exact cut points depend on the test.

Percentile ranks:

- Tell you what percent of the norm group scored at or below a given level.
- A percentile of 50 is the middle.
- Percentiles are not equal-interval. The difference between the 50th and 60th percentile is much smaller than the difference between the 90th and 99th.

Grade equivalents. Easy to misread:

- A grade equivalent of 5.2 does not mean the student is doing fifth-grade work.
- It means the student got the same raw score as the average student in the second month of fifth grade.
- Useful only as rough indicators.

Confidence intervals:

- Every test has measurement error.
- A standard score reported as 95 might really fall anywhere in a band, often plus or minus 5 to 10 points depending on the test.
- Treat single scores as ranges, not points.

Interpreting informal data:

- A few observations or work samples are starting points.
- Patterns across multiple sources, settings, and time give a fuller picture.
- Triangulation. Match findings across formal scores, classroom work, and observations to strengthen any conclusion.

Common misconceptions and test traps

- Treating a grade equivalent as the level the student is performing at. It is not.
- Reading a single test score as exact. All scores have measurement error.
- Drawing conclusions from one assessment or one observation. Look for patterns.
- Confusing percentile rank with percent correct. They are different concepts.

Self-check questions

1. A third-grade student has a reading test grade equivalent of 5.2. Which of the following is the most accurate interpretation?

- A. The student is reading at fifth-grade level and should be moved up.
- B. The student got the same raw score as the average student in the second month of fifth grade, but this does not mean the student is doing fifth-grade work.
- C. The student has scored in the ninety-fifth percentile.
- D. The student is two grade levels behind.

Answer: B. *Grade equivalents indicate where a raw score falls in a norm sample, not the actual instructional level. They are easy to misread and are best used as rough indicators.*

2. Which of the following best describes a percentile rank of 75?

- A. The student answered seventy-five percent of items correctly.
- B. The student scored higher than approximately seventy-five percent of the norm group.
- C. The student is in the seventy-fifth grade level.
- D. The student needs intensive remediation.

Answer: B. *A percentile rank of 75 means the student scored at or above seventy-five percent of the norm group. It is not the same as percent correct.*

3. Why is it important to interpret a single test score as a range rather than a single point?

- A. Because the parent might disagree with the score.
- B. Because every test has measurement error, and the true score likely falls within a confidence band around the reported score.

- C. Because scores change every time a test is given.
- D. Because the student's performance varies from day to day.

Answer: B. *Measurement error is built into every test. A reported score is best understood as the center of a band, not as an exact value.*

INDICATOR E

Using Assessment Information for Decision-Making

Applies knowledge of how individual evaluation assessment and data and other assessment information is used to make eligibility, program, and placement decisions for students with disabilities; evaluate instruction; monitor progress of students with disabilities; and make responsive, research-based, and timely adjustments to instruction.

What this indicator means

Assessment data drives every major decision. Know how the data is used at each step: deciding eligibility, designing the program, choosing placement, monitoring progress, and adjusting instruction.

What you need to know

Eligibility decisions:

- Require evidence the student meets a disability category.
- Require evidence the disability adversely affects educational performance such that the student needs special education services.
- The CSE reviews the full evaluation report, considers parent and teacher input, and votes.
- A medical diagnosis is one piece of information; the team makes the educational determination.

Program decisions:

- Translate eligibility into the specific services, goals, and supports the student needs.
- The IEP must be based on the present levels of academic achievement and functional performance, or PLAAFP, drawn from assessment data.
- Goals must be measurable, with baseline data, and connected to specific assessment evidence.

Placement decisions:

- Made after the program is designed, not before.
- The team considers the LRE in which the program can be delivered.
- Placement is reviewed at least annually and changes as the student's needs change.

Progress monitoring:

- Uses repeated, brief assessments to check whether the student is making expected progress toward IEP goals.

- If the student is not making progress, the team must adjust instruction.
- CBM, work samples, and other classroom data are commonly used.

Day-to-day instructional decisions:

- Made every day.
- Formative assessment, exit tickets, observation, and student questions all feed into adjustments.
- Effective teachers use data continuously, not only at the end of a unit.

Reevaluation:

- Required at least every three years.
- Determines whether the student continues to be eligible and whether the IEP still meets needs.
- The team can decide a full reevaluation is not necessary based on existing data, with parental consent.

Common misconceptions and test traps

- Skipping from eligibility straight to placement without designing the program first. Placement follows program.
- Believing that a medical diagnosis decides eligibility. The CSE makes the educational determination.
- Treating progress monitoring as optional. It is required by law and by good practice.
- Confusing reevaluation with annual review. Annual review of the IEP is yearly; full reevaluation is at least every three years.

Self-check questions

1. Which of the following best describes the correct sequence in the IEP team's decision-making?

- A. Choose placement, then write goals.
- B. Determine eligibility, design the program based on present levels and needs, and then decide on placement in the LRE.
- C. Determine placement first to know what services can be offered.
- D. Skip the present levels section and start with goals.

Answer: B. *Eligibility comes first. The program is built on the PLAAFP. Placement is the last step and is based on where the program can be delivered in the LRE.*

2. What does federal law require regarding reevaluation?

- A. A full reevaluation every year.

- B.** A full reevaluation at least every three years to determine continued eligibility and need, although the team may decide a full reevaluation is not necessary based on existing data with parental consent.
- C.** A reevaluation only when the parent requests one.
- D.** No reevaluation is required after initial eligibility.

Answer: B. *Reevaluation is required at least every three years. The team may use existing data if parents agree.*

3. A teacher is using brief weekly probes to track progress toward an IEP reading goal. The student has shown no progress for six weeks. What is the most appropriate next step?

- A.** Wait until the annual review to discuss the lack of progress.
- B.** Adjust instruction now, document the change, and continue progress monitoring to see whether the new approach is effective.
- C.** Conclude that the student cannot make progress.
- D.** Refer the student for reevaluation immediately without changing instruction.

Answer: B. *Progress monitoring exists to drive timely adjustments. Sustained lack of progress requires changing instruction now, not waiting for the annual review.*

INDICATOR F

Communicating Assessment Results and Maintaining Records

Demonstrates knowledge of effective strategies for communicating assessment results to all stakeholders and strategies and procedures for creating and maintaining records.

What this indicator means

Share assessment information clearly and respectfully with families and team members, and keep records that meet legal and professional standards.

What you need to know

Communicating assessment results to families:

- Use plain language. Avoid jargon. Define terms when they cannot be avoided.
- A parent who hears that a child's standard score is 78 may not know what that means. The same information is more useful as: "On this test, your child scored in a range that suggests reading is significantly more difficult than for most peers her age."
- Frame results in terms of what the student can do as well as where the student is struggling.

Cultural and linguistic considerations:

- Use a qualified interpreter for families who speak languages other than English.
- Schedule meetings at times that work for families.
- Recognize that some families may need extra time to absorb difficult information.

Records:

- Must be accurate, complete, and confidential.
- Maintain assessment records in secure locations.
- Share information only with people who have a legitimate educational interest.
- Documentation must support every decision in the IEP. If something is not in the record, it is hard to defend later.

Parent rights to records under FERPA:

- Right to inspect and review their child's records.
- Schools must respond within reasonable time, typically forty-five days under federal law and sooner under New York policy.

- Parents may request amendments to records they believe are inaccurate or misleading.

Common misconceptions and test traps

- Using jargon with families and assuming they understand. They may not, and they may be embarrassed to ask.
- Sharing student information with anyone who works in the school. The standard is legitimate educational interest, not employment.
- Treating documentation as optional. Records support every decision; decisions without records are hard to defend.
- Forgetting that parents have the right to inspect, review, and request amendments to records.

Self-check questions

1. Which of the following best describes effective communication of assessment results to families?

- A. Reading test scores aloud and assuming the family will follow up if they have questions.
- B. Using plain language, defining unavoidable terms, framing results in terms of what the student can do as well as where the student is struggling, and providing interpretation when needed.
- C. Sharing only positive information to avoid upsetting the family.
- D. Sending a copy of the assessment report home without a meeting.

Answer: B. *Effective communication is plain, complete, and respectful. It treats families as partners who deserve real information.*

2. Under FERPA, what right do parents have regarding their child's records?

- A. Parents may not see their child's records under any circumstances.
- B. Parents have the right to inspect and review their child's records and to request amendments to records they believe are inaccurate or misleading.
- C. Only parents who have an attorney may request records.
- D. Parents must wait until the child is eighteen to access records.

Answer: B. *FERPA gives parents the right to inspect, review, and request amendments. These rights transfer to the student at age eighteen.*

3. Why is thorough documentation of assessment decisions important?

- A. Because parents are required to sign every document.
- B. Because decisions without records are difficult to defend, and accurate records support every decision in the IEP and are required for compliance.
- C. Because documentation is optional but considered good practice.
- D. Because schools may charge parents for copies of records.

Answer: B. *Records support eligibility, program, and placement decisions and are required for legal compliance and continuity of services.*

INDICATOR G

Screening, Prereferral, Referral, and Classification

Applies knowledge of screening, prereferral (e.g., Response to Intervention), referral, and classification procedures.

What this indicator means

Know the steps from initial concern through classification. Know what each step requires and how a student moves from general support to special education.

What you need to know

Screening:

- Brief assessment given to all students or a defined group to identify those who may need closer attention.
- Universal screeners in reading and math are common in MTSS frameworks.

Prereferral interventions through Response to Intervention (RTI) or Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS):

- Tier 1. High-quality core instruction for all students.
- Tier 2. Targeted small-group support for students who need more.
- Tier 3. Intensive intervention for students with significant needs.
- Documentation of student response to instruction at each tier is essential.

Referral for special education evaluation:

- Can be made by parents, teachers, or other professionals.
- The school must obtain informed written parental consent before evaluation.
- Parents may also refer their child directly to the CSE chairperson at any time, regardless of where the student is in the prereferral process.
- RTI is not a barrier to referral.

Evaluation timeline:

- Must be completed within sixty calendar days of consent in New York.
- The evaluation team uses multiple measures across multiple domains.
- The CSE then meets to determine eligibility based on all available information.

Classification:

- The formal determination of a disability category.
- The student must meet a disability definition and need special education services.
- Reviewed annually and at reevaluation.
- Not a permanent label. It can change as the student changes.

Common misconceptions and test traps

- Believing RTI must be completed before a parent can refer for evaluation. It does not. Parents can refer at any time.
- Treating screening as a diagnosis. Screening identifies students who need a closer look, not students who have disabilities.
- Confusing eligibility with classification. Eligibility is the threshold; classification is the specific category.
- Forgetting that RTI documentation supports specific learning disability identification and is part of the evaluation in many cases.

Self-check questions

1. A parent wants to refer her child for special education evaluation. The school's RTI team has not yet completed Tier 3 intervention. What does the law allow?

- A. The parent must wait until the school completes RTI before referring.
- B. The parent may refer the child to the CSE at any time, regardless of where the student is in the prereferral process.
- C. Only school staff can make referrals.
- D. The parent must provide a private evaluation before the school will accept the referral.

Answer: B. Parents may refer at any time. RTI is not a barrier to referral, although RTI documentation may inform the evaluation.

2. Which of the following best describes the role of universal screening in an MTSS framework?

- A. It serves as a special education evaluation.
- B. It is a brief assessment given to all students or a defined group to identify those who may need closer attention.
- C. It is the same as a Functional Behavioral Assessment.
- D. It replaces the need for an IEP.

Answer: B. Screening identifies students for further assessment or support. It is not diagnostic and is not a substitute for evaluation.

3. Which of the following best describes Tier 2 intervention in an MTSS framework?

- A. High-quality core instruction for all students.
- B. Targeted small-group support for students who need more than core instruction.
- C. Intensive individual intervention for students with severe needs.
- D. A required step before any student can be referred for special education.

Answer: B. *Tier 1 is core instruction for all. Tier 2 is targeted small-group support. Tier 3 is intensive intervention. RTI documents response to instruction but is not a required gate to referral.*

INDICATOR H

Continuum of Services and Placements

Demonstrates knowledge of the continuum of services and placements available for students with disabilities.

What this indicator means

Districts must offer a full range of placement options, and the team must choose the LRE in which the student's needs can be met. Know the options and how they relate.

What you need to know

The continuum runs from least restrictive to most restrictive. In New York City, common options include:

- General education with consultant teacher services. The student is in a general education class; a special education teacher provides direct or indirect support.
- General education with related services only. The student receives services like speech or counseling but no special education instruction.
- Integrated co-teaching, or ICT. A general education teacher and a special education teacher share responsibility for the class.
- Special class in a community school. A self-contained class within a general education school. Common ratios include 12:1:1 (twelve students, one teacher, one paraprofessional), 8:1:1, and 6:1:1.
- Special class in a District 75 specialized school. For students with the most significant disabilities.
- Home and hospital instruction. For students who cannot attend school for medical or other reasons.
- Approved nonpublic day or residential placements. For students whose needs cannot be met in public school programs.

LRE principle in action:

- The team considers the general education classroom first.
- A more restrictive setting is chosen only when the student's needs cannot be met there with supplementary aids and services.
- Placement decisions are reviewed at least annually and changed as the student's needs change.
- Students should be educated as close to home as possible when their needs allow it.

Related services. Provided across all placements as needed, including speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy, counseling, and others listed in the IEP.

Common misconceptions and test traps

- Believing District 75 is a separate school district outside the NYC public schools. It is part of the NYC Public Schools.
- Treating placement as permanent. Placement is reviewed annually and changes as needs change.
- Confusing the LRE principle with a requirement that all students be in general education. LRE means the least restrictive setting where the student's needs can be met.
- Forgetting that related services are provided across placements, not only in restrictive ones.

Self-check questions

1. Which of the following best describes integrated co-teaching, or ICT?

- A. A self-contained special education class with a 12:1:1 ratio.
- B. A model in which a general education teacher and a special education teacher share responsibility for a class that includes both students with and without disabilities.
- C. A consultant teacher model with no shared responsibility for instruction.
- D. An approved nonpublic placement.

Answer: B. *ICT is a co-teaching model. Both teachers share responsibility for the class and for all students.*

2. What does a special class ratio of 12:1:1 indicate?

- A. Twelve teachers, one student, and one paraprofessional.
- B. Twelve students, one teacher, and one paraprofessional.
- C. Twelve hours of instruction with one teacher and one paraprofessional per week.
- D. Twelve grade levels combined into one classroom.

Answer: B. *The first number is students, the second is teachers, the third is paraprofessionals. So 12:1:1 means twelve students, one teacher, one paraprofessional.*

3. What does the LRE principle require of the placement decision?

- A. All students with disabilities must be placed in general education.
- B. The team must consider the general education classroom first and may move to a more restrictive setting only when the student's needs cannot be met there with supplementary aids and services.
- C. Placement is determined by the disability category alone.
- D. The most restrictive placement is chosen first to ensure the student's needs are met.

Answer: B. *LRE is about the right balance between access to peers without disabilities and access to the appropriate services. Start with general education and move only as needed.*

INDICATOR I

IEP Components and the Special Educator's Role

Demonstrates knowledge of the components of IEPs and the roles and responsibilities of special education teachers in developing, implementing, monitoring, and modifying IEPs, transition plans, and behavioral intervention plans.

What this indicator means

Know what is in an IEP and what the special education teacher does to develop, deliver, and adjust it. The IEP is a legal document; you are responsible for it.

What you need to know

Required IEP components:

- Present levels of academic achievement and functional performance (PLAAFP).
- Measurable annual goals, with short-term objectives or benchmarks for students who take alternate assessments.
- How progress will be measured and reported.
- Statement of special education and related services.
- Supplementary aids and services.
- Program modifications and supports for school personnel.
- The extent the student will not participate in general education.
- Accommodations for state and district assessments.
- Transition planning beginning by age fifteen in New York.
- Projected start date, frequency, location, and duration of services.

PLAAFP. The foundation of the IEP:

- Describes where the student is right now, both academically and functionally, drawing on assessment data.
- Goals must connect directly to needs identified in the PLAAFP.
- Without strong PLAAFP, goals are guesses.

Measurable goals:

- "Maria will improve her reading" is not measurable.

- "Maria will read aloud from grade-level text at sixty words per minute with three or fewer errors, measured by curriculum-based probes" is measurable.
- Use baseline data, criterion for success, and a method of measurement.

Transition planning in New York:

- Begins no later than the year the student turns fifteen, earlier than the federal age of sixteen.
- Must include measurable post-secondary goals based on age-appropriate transition assessment.
- Must include the transition services needed to reach those goals.

Behavior Intervention Plan, or BIP:

- Addresses behavior that interferes with learning.
- Based on a Functional Behavioral Assessment.
- Includes positive behavioral supports, replacement behaviors, and strategies for the team.

Special education teacher's role:

- Contribute to the PLAAFP.
- Draft goals based on assessment data.
- Implement the IEP as written.
- Monitor progress.
- Communicate progress to families.
- Participate in CSE meetings.
- Recommend modifications when needed.

Common misconceptions and test traps

- Writing goals that are not measurable. "Improve" or "better" without specifics fails the legal standard.
- Treating the PLAAFP as a formality. It is the foundation of the entire IEP.
- Forgetting that New York's transition age is fifteen, not sixteen.
- Implementing only parts of the IEP. As the special education teacher, you implement what is written, even if you would have written something different.

Self-check questions

1. Which of the following best describes a measurable annual goal?

- A. "The student will improve in reading."

- B.** "The student will read aloud from grade-level text at sixty words per minute with three or fewer errors, measured by curriculum-based probes administered weekly."
- C.** "The student will work harder in reading."
- D.** "The student will benefit from reading instruction."

Answer: B. *Measurable goals include baseline, criterion for success, and a method of measurement. Vague language fails the legal standard.*

2. By what age must transition planning be in place under New York State requirements?

- A.** Age fourteen.
- B.** Age fifteen, the year the student turns fifteen.
- C.** Age sixteen, matching the federal requirement.
- D.** Age eighteen.

Answer: B. *New York requires transition planning by the year the student turns fifteen. Federal law sets the age at sixteen. New York's age is earlier.*

3. What is the role of the PLAAFP in the IEP?

- A.** It is an optional section that some teams skip.
- B.** It is the foundation of the IEP, describing the student's current performance and providing the basis for measurable annual goals.
- C.** It is the same as the goals section.
- D.** It is only required for students taking alternate assessments.

Answer: B. *The PLAAFP is the foundation. Goals connect directly to needs identified there. Without a strong PLAAFP, the goals lack basis.*

INDICATOR J

Roles of Students, Families, and Team Members

Demonstrates knowledge of the roles of students with disabilities, parents/guardians, general education teachers, and related services providers in developing, implementing, monitoring, and modifying IEPs, transition plans, and behavioral intervention plans.

What this indicator means

Know who is on the team, what each member contributes, and how the work is shared. Effective IEPs are team products.

What you need to know

Required CSE members:

- The parent.
- The special education teacher.
- The general education teacher (if the student is or may be in general education).
- A district representative qualified to commit district resources.
- An individual who can interpret the instructional implications of evaluation results.
- The student, when appropriate (and required by age fourteen for transition planning in New York).
- Others at the discretion of the parent or district.

Parents:

- Equal members of the team.
- Their perspectives, concerns, and aspirations for their child must be considered.
- The team should ask families what they want for the child and what they see at home.
- Family knowledge of the child is unique and irreplaceable.

Students:

- Participate to the extent appropriate. Participation grows with age.
- By age fourteen in New York, students must be invited to the meeting whenever transition is discussed.
- Self-advocacy and self-determination develop with practice.
- Letting students lead parts of their meetings, when ready, builds skills for adult life.

General education teachers:

- Contribute knowledge of grade-level expectations, classroom routines, and how the student performs alongside peers.
- Essential to ensuring the IEP works in the general education setting.
- Essential to integrating supports with daily instruction.

Related service providers:

- Contribute discipline-specific assessment.
- Recommend services.
- Write goals in their domain.
- Report on progress.
- Coordination across providers is key; otherwise the student gets fragmented support.

Other team members may include the school psychologist, social worker, school nurse, parent coordinator, or outside specialists. Each brings a perspective the team needs.

Common misconceptions and test traps

- Treating parents as informed observers rather than equal team members.
- Excluding the student from their own meeting after age fourteen.
- Forgetting the general education teacher when the student has any participation in general education.
- Allowing related service providers to work in isolation. Coordination is essential.

Self-check questions

1. Which of the following best describes the parent's role on the CSE?

- A. The parent is invited but is not a voting member.
- B. The parent is an equal member of the team whose perspectives, concerns, and aspirations for the child must be considered.
- C. The parent's role is to listen and sign documents.
- D. The parent participates only when invited by the chairperson.

Answer: B. *Parents are equal members of the team under IDEA and Part 200. Their knowledge of the child is unique and required.*

2. Under New York State requirements, when must students with disabilities be invited to their own CSE meetings?

- A. Only at the parent's request.
- B. By age fourteen, whenever transition is discussed.
- C. Beginning at age sixteen.
- D. Only after the student turns eighteen.

Answer: B. *New York requires student participation by age fourteen when transition is discussed, earlier than the federal age. Self-advocacy develops with practice.*

3. Why is the general education teacher a required CSE member when the student is or may be in general education?

- A. Because state law requires every meeting to have at least five attendees.
- B. Because the general education teacher contributes knowledge of grade-level expectations, classroom routines, and how the student performs alongside peers, and is essential to ensuring the IEP works in the general education setting.
- C. Because only the general education teacher can request related services.
- D. Because the special education teacher is not allowed to attend.

Answer: B. *The general education teacher's contribution is required for any student in or potentially in general education. Their absence undermines IEP development for that student.*

Putting It All Together

The ten indicators in Competency 0003 cover assessment from start to finish: the vocabulary you need, the assessments themselves, how to use them fairly, how to read them accurately, how to use the data for major decisions, how to communicate findings and keep records, how the prereferral and referral process works, the continuum of placements, the IEP and its components, and the people who develop and carry it out.

Twenty-three of the ninety selected-response items come from this competency. Time spent here pays off. The strongest answers reflect a teacher who uses multiple measures, treats students and families as partners, distinguishes language and culture from disability, writes goals that are measurable, follows the IEP as written, monitors progress, and adjusts instruction in response to data.

The exam is not the goal. The goal is the work.

COMPETENCY 0004

Learning Environment and Behavioral Interventions

Routines, rapport, grouping, and positive behavior support

6 indicators · 11 items · 10% of test score

About Competency 0004

Competency 0004 covers two related areas: planning and managing a productive learning environment, and providing behavioral interventions. Eleven of the ninety selected-response items come from this competency, ten percent of the test.

This competency expects you to think about the classroom as a system. Routines, physical arrangement, communication, and rapport all shape what students can do. Behavior is shaped by the environment. The strongest answers reflect prevention, positive supports, individualization, and respect for the student.

INDICATOR A

Creating a Safe, Productive Learning Environment

Demonstrates knowledge of how to create and maintain a safe, productive learning environment for all students, including establishing routines and appropriate physical arrangements.

What this indicator means

A safe, productive classroom is built before the first lesson. Routines, expectations, and physical setup determine whether students can focus and learn.

What you need to know

Routines reduce uncertainty:

- Especially important for students with autism, attention difficulties, anxiety, or trauma, who often depend on predictability.
- Establish routines for entering the room, beginning class, transitioning between activities, asking for help, and ending class.
- Teach the routines explicitly, practice them, and post them visually.

Expectations:

- Few, positively stated, and taught directly.
- "Be respectful, be responsible, be ready" is more useful than a long list of rules.
- Define each expectation with concrete examples.
- Practice the behaviors. Acknowledge them when they happen.

Physical arrangement:

- Arrange seating so students can see the teacher, materials, and displays.
- Consider sight lines, sound, foot traffic, and accessibility.
- Reduce visual clutter where students need to focus.
- Make space for movement when movement is part of the plan.
- Some students need preferential seating, a designated quiet area, or a place to take a break.

Safety:

- Physical safety. Clear pathways, secure materials, emergency procedures.
- Emotional safety. An environment where students feel respected, mistakes are part of learning, adults are calm and consistent, and bullying is not tolerated.

Adaptations for significant medical or physical needs:

- Accessible furniture.
- A separate space for medication or feeding.
- Equipment for mobility or communication.
- Trained staff.
- The IEP and any health plan guide what is needed.

Common misconceptions and test traps

- Treating routines as something the teacher establishes and then forgets. Routines must be taught, practiced, and reinforced.
- Believing a long list of rules is better than a few well-taught expectations.
- Forgetting that emotional safety matters as much as physical safety.
- Treating physical arrangement as cosmetic. Arrangement shapes attention, behavior, and learning.

Self-check questions

1. Which of the following best describes effective classroom expectations?

- A. A long, detailed list of rules covering every possible behavior.
- B. Few, positively stated expectations that are taught directly with concrete examples and practiced over time.
- C. Rules announced on the first day and posted on the wall for the rest of the year without further attention.
- D. A list given to students to copy and memorize.

Answer: B. *Effective expectations are few, positive, taught, practiced, and reinforced. Quantity does not equal effectiveness.*

2. Why are predictable routines especially important for students with autism, attention difficulties, anxiety, or trauma?

- A. Because such students cannot learn without strict control.
- B. Because predictability reduces uncertainty and supports focus, regulation, and participation.
- C. Because routines replace the need for differentiated instruction.
- D. Because routines eliminate the need for accommodations.

Answer: B. *Predictability is a basic support for many students. Routines support emotional and cognitive availability for learning.*

3. Which of the following best describes emotional safety in the classroom?

- A. An environment where mistakes are punished to ensure high standards.
- B. An environment where students feel respected, where mistakes are part of learning, and where adults are calm and consistent.
- C. An environment that prioritizes academics over relationships.
- D. An environment that allows students to do whatever makes them comfortable.

Answer: B. *Emotional safety supports learning. It is built through respect, consistency, and recognizing mistakes as part of how students grow.*

INDICATOR B

Teacher Attitudes, Rapport, and Communication

Applies knowledge of ways in which teacher attitudes and behaviors affect all students, strategies for establishing and maintaining rapport with all students, and strategies for adjusting communication in response to student needs.

What this indicator means

How you carry yourself in the classroom shapes what students do. Your beliefs about students, your tone, and how you talk to them all matter.

What you need to know

Teacher expectations and outcomes:

- The Pygmalion effect, the influence of teacher beliefs on student achievement, is well-documented.
- When teachers expect more, students do more, especially when expectations are paired with strong instruction and support.
- Low expectations communicated in subtle ways, such as easier tasks, less feedback, or less wait time, depress student outcomes.

Building rapport:

- Consistent warm interactions.
- Know students as individuals.
- Find out what matters to them.
- Notice their efforts.
- Greet students by name.
- Ask about their lives outside school in ways that respect their privacy.
- Rapport is the foundation of behavior management. It is much easier to redirect a student you have a relationship with than one you do not.

Adjusting communication to student needs:

- Use concrete language with students who struggle with abstract language.
- Use visual supports for students who benefit from them.
- Slow your pace for students who need processing time.

- Allow alternative ways to respond, such as drawing, pointing, gesture, or assistive communication devices.

Body language and tone:

- A teacher who is calm, confident, and warm communicates very differently from one who is tense or sarcastic.
- For students with histories of trauma, a calm steady presence is itself an intervention.
- Sarcasm, even when meant as humor, often misfires. Many students with disabilities take it literally and feel attacked.

Cultural responsiveness:

- Different cultures have different norms around eye contact, physical proximity, directness, and the expression of disagreement.
- Awareness allows you to communicate respectfully across difference.

Common misconceptions and test traps

- Believing high expectations alone, without strong instruction and support, lead to high outcomes.
- Treating rapport as a personality trait rather than a learnable practice.
- Using sarcasm and assuming students understand it.
- Forgetting that body language and tone are part of communication.

Self-check questions

1. Which of the following best describes the relationship between teacher expectations and student outcomes?

- A. Teacher expectations have no measurable effect on student outcomes.
- B. Teacher expectations affect outcomes, especially when paired with strong instruction and support, and low expectations communicated in subtle ways depress outcomes.
- C. Teacher expectations matter only for students without disabilities.
- D. Teacher expectations matter only at the high school level.

Answer: B. *Teacher expectations are well-documented to affect student outcomes. Expectations alone are not enough; they must be paired with strong instruction.*

2. A teacher uses sarcasm in interactions with students, intending it as humor. Which of the following is the most likely effect for students with disabilities?

- A. Sarcasm reliably builds rapport with students.

- B.** Many students with disabilities take sarcasm literally and feel attacked, which damages rapport.
- C.** Sarcasm is a research-validated classroom management strategy.
- D.** Sarcasm is most effective with students who have language disabilities.

Answer: B. *Sarcasm often misfires. Students who interpret language literally, including many with autism or language disabilities, may feel attacked rather than amused.*

3. Which of the following best describes the role of rapport in behavior management?

- A.** Rapport is unrelated to behavior management.
- B.** Rapport is the foundation; it is easier to redirect or correct a student you have a relationship with.
- C.** Rapport replaces the need for explicit expectations.
- D.** Rapport is a personality trait some teachers have and others do not.

Answer: B. *Rapport supports every other strategy. Without it, redirection often fails. With it, even firm correction can preserve the relationship.*

INDICATOR C

Individual, Small-Group, and Large-Group Settings

Applies knowledge of methods for ensuring individual academic success in one-to-one, small-group, and large-group settings.

What this indicator means

Different group sizes serve different purposes. Use each one well. Vary groupings throughout a lesson and across the week.

What you need to know

One-to-one instruction:

- Allows the most intensive teaching: focused attention, immediate feedback, high engagement.
- Appropriate for introducing a new and difficult skill, assessing what a student can and cannot do, and the most intensive intervention.
- Risk of over-reliance: if one-to-one is the only setting, the student misses peer interaction and may become dependent on adult support.

Small-group instruction (typically three to six students):

- Targeted instruction for students with similar needs, plus peer modeling and discussion.
- Skilled small-group teachers keep all students engaged, use brisk pacing, give clear feedback, and check for understanding from each member.
- Group composition is flexible and changes as needs change.

Large-group instruction:

- Efficient for introducing concepts, demonstrating procedures, and building shared experiences.
- The challenge is keeping all students engaged.
- Strategies. Check for understanding throughout (cold calling, choral response, signal cards, brief writing). Maintain brisk pacing. Use clear visuals. Provide ways for students to participate non-verbally.

Using all three groupings strategically:

- Common pattern: brief whole-group introduction, then small-group differentiated instruction, then partner or independent practice with check-ins.

- Within an integrated co-teaching class, the two teachers together can support a wider range of group sizes than one teacher alone.

Independent work:

- Tasks must be at a level the student can complete with reasonable independence.
- Tasks too hard cause frustration and behavior problems.
- Tasks too easy waste time.
- Choice, novelty, and a clear endpoint help sustain engagement.

Common misconceptions and test traps

- Defaulting to one-to-one instruction whenever a student has a disability. One-to-one is one tool, not the goal.
- Treating small-group instruction as time when other students do quiet seatwork. Each group needs an effective task.
- Assuming whole-group instruction is passive. Effective whole-group teaching is highly active for all students.
- Giving independent work that is too hard or too easy. Match difficulty to the student.

Self-check questions

1. Which of the following is the strongest reason to vary groupings throughout a lesson and across the week?

- A. Variation keeps students confused so they remain alert.
- B. Different group sizes serve different purposes, and varying them keeps engagement high while meeting different instructional needs.
- C. Variation is required by federal law.
- D. Variation reduces the need to plan instruction.

Answer: B. *One-to-one, small-group, and whole-group settings each serve specific purposes. Skilled teachers use all of them strategically.*

2. What is a risk of relying on one-to-one instruction as the primary setting for a student with a disability?

- A. One-to-one instruction is illegal in New York.
- B. The student misses peer interaction and may become dependent on adult support.
- C. One-to-one instruction is less effective than whole-group.
- D. One-to-one instruction is too expensive for most schools.

Answer: B. *One-to-one is a useful tool for specific purposes. Over-reliance limits social participation and can foster dependence.*

3. Which of the following best describes effective independent work?

- A.** Tasks at a level so high that students must struggle to complete them.
- B.** Tasks at a level the student can complete with reasonable independence, with built-in choice or novelty when possible.
- C.** Tasks at a level so easy that students will not get frustrated.
- D.** Worksheets given without any expectation of completion.

Answer: B. *Effective independent work matches difficulty to the student and builds engagement through choice or novelty when possible.*

INDICATOR D

Accessibility, Acceptance, and Independence

Demonstrates knowledge of barriers to accessibility and acceptance of students with disabilities, adaptations that can be made to the learning environment to provide optimal learning opportunities for students with disabilities, and strategies for facilitating students' active participation and fostering their independence.

What this indicator means

Identify and remove barriers, both physical and social. Set up the environment so students can participate actively and grow into independence.

What you need to know

Three kinds of barriers to remove:

- Physical. Inaccessible furniture, unreachable materials, narrow pathways, equipment that is not adapted.
- Communication. Lack of access to assistive technology, materials only in print, instruction that does not adjust for language or sensory needs.
- Attitudinal. Low expectations, pity, exclusion from social interactions, assumptions about what a student cannot do.

Universal Design for Learning, or UDL. Three principles remove barriers by design:

- Multiple means of representation. Different ways to take in information.
- Multiple means of action and expression. Different ways to demonstrate learning.
- Multiple means of engagement. Different ways to stay invested.
- UDL benefits all students, not only those with IEPs.

Accommodations vs. modifications:

- Accommodations change how the student accesses or demonstrates learning without changing the standard (extended time, large print, oral response).
- Modifications change what is taught or measured (lower-level reading, fewer items required).
- Both must be in the IEP.

Active participation:

- Depends on access. A student cannot participate in a discussion they cannot hear, in an activity they cannot reach, or in instruction in a language they cannot understand.

- Setting up access is the precondition for participation.

Building independence:

- Built incrementally. The teacher's job is to fade support over time, not provide more support indefinitely.
- Tools that support independence: visual schedules, self-monitoring checklists, choice menus, and explicit teaching of self-advocacy.
- Asking a student "What do you need?" rather than assuming you know is often a more empowering response.

Peer relationships and acceptance:

- Students with disabilities benefit when classmates know them as people, not as students who get extra help.
- Structured peer interactions, cooperative learning, and inclusive social opportunities all build acceptance.
- Disability awareness done well is honest, age-appropriate, and avoids inspiration narratives.

Common misconceptions and test traps

- Treating accommodations as advantages. They provide access, not advantage.
- Thinking UDL is only for students with disabilities. UDL benefits all learners.
- Increasing support indefinitely. Independence requires fading support over time.
- Assuming peer acceptance happens naturally. It is built through structured opportunities and adult modeling.

Self-check questions

1. Which of the following best describes Universal Design for Learning?

- A.** A set of accommodations used only for students with IEPs.
- B.** A framework for designing instruction with multiple means of representation, expression, and engagement, benefiting all learners.
- C.** A required state assessment.
- D.** A specific commercial curriculum used in District 75 schools.

Answer: B. *UDL is a design framework that benefits all learners. Its three principles reduce barriers from the start.*

2. Which of the following best describes the difference between an accommodation and a modification?

- A.** Accommodations are temporary; modifications are permanent.

- B.** Accommodations change how a student accesses or demonstrates learning without changing the standard, while modifications change what is taught or measured.
- C.** Accommodations are only used in testing; modifications are only used in instruction.
- D.** There is no difference between accommodations and modifications.

Answer: B. *Accommodations preserve the standard; modifications change it. Both must be documented in the IEP.*

3. What is the goal of fading adult support over time for a student with a disability?

- A.** To save staff time.
- B.** To build the student's independence by gradually transferring responsibility to the student as skills develop.
- C.** To meet a federal requirement that all support be removed by high school.
- D.** To prepare the student for a more restrictive placement.

Answer: B. *Independence is built by gradually transferring responsibility, with supports such as visual schedules, self-monitoring tools, and self-advocacy instruction.*

INDICATOR E

Behavioral Interventions and Positive Behavioral Supports

Applies knowledge of strategies for developing, implementing, monitoring, and modifying behavioral interventions for students with disabilities, including strategies for providing positive behavioral interventions and supports.

What this indicator means

Plan and implement behavior interventions based on understanding why a behavior is happening. Use positive supports first; punishment is rarely effective and often harmful.

What you need to know

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, or PBIS. A tiered framework:

- Tier 1. Establishes school-wide and classroom-wide expectations, teaches them, and reinforces them for all students.
- Tier 2. Provides additional support to small groups of students who need more (e.g., check-in/check-out, social skills groups).
- Tier 3. Intensive individualized support, often guided by an FBA and BIP.

Behavior is communication. The Antecedent-Behavior-Consequence framework, or ABC:

- Antecedent. What came before the behavior.
- Behavior. What was the behavior.
- Consequence. What came after.
- Patterns across many ABC observations point to the function the behavior serves.

Common functions of behavior:

- Gaining attention (peer or adult).
- Gaining access to a preferred item or activity.
- Escaping or avoiding a task or situation.
- Sensory regulation.
- Communication of an unmet need.
- Knowing the function tells you what to do. If a student is escaping a task that is too hard, increasing the task difficulty as a consequence will not help. If a student is seeking attention,

ignoring the behavior while teaching a more appropriate way to seek attention is more likely to succeed.

Functional Behavioral Assessment, or FBA, and Behavior Intervention Plan, or BIP:

- FBA gathers information through interviews, direct observation, and review of records to identify the function of a behavior.
- BIP is built on the FBA and includes preventive strategies (changing antecedents), teaching of replacement behaviors that serve the same function, reinforcement of positive behavior, and team responsibilities.

Reinforcement and punishment:

- Positive reinforcement adds something the student values.
- Negative reinforcement removes something the student wants to avoid.
- Both can strengthen behavior.
- Punishment is intended to weaken behavior but often produces side effects: avoidance, escalation, damaged relationships, and learning that the adult is the problem rather than the behavior.
- Use punishment rarely. Never as a primary strategy.

Effective reinforcement:

- Specific and timely.
- "Good job" is less effective than "You worked through that whole problem set without giving up; that is the kind of perseverance we have been practicing."
- Reinforcers must be valued by the student. What reinforces one student may not reinforce another.

IDEA discipline rules:

- A student with a disability may not be removed for more than ten cumulative days in a year without a manifestation determination.
- If the behavior was caused by or directly related to the disability, or by failure to implement the IEP, the team must address it through the IEP, not through standard discipline.

Common misconceptions and test traps

- Treating behavior as defiance without considering function. Behavior usually communicates something.
- Believing punishment is the strongest tool. It is often the weakest and has serious side effects.

- Forgetting the ten-day rule and the manifestation determination.
- Using vague reinforcement. Specific, timely feedback teaches; "good job" rarely does.

Self-check questions

1. What is the central premise of the Antecedent-Behavior-Consequence framework?

- A. Behavior is random and cannot be analyzed.
- B. Behavior occurs in context, and analyzing what comes before and after a behavior reveals patterns about its function.
- C. Behavior is always a sign of disability.
- D. Behavior is determined entirely by punishment.

Answer: B. *ABC analysis treats behavior as occurring in context. Identifying the function of behavior is essential to designing effective interventions.*

2. A student is repeatedly disruptive during a difficult math task. Observation suggests the student is trying to escape the task. Which of the following responses is most consistent with the function of the behavior?

- A. Increase the difficulty of the next math task as a consequence.
- B. Adjust task difficulty to a level the student can attempt with support, teach a replacement behavior such as asking for a break, and reinforce on-task behavior.
- C. Send the student out of the room each time disruption occurs.
- D. Ignore all task-related work for that student.

Answer: B. *When the function is escape, removing the student from the task reinforces the behavior. The intervention must change the antecedent and teach a replacement that serves the same function.*

3. Under IDEA, what must happen if a student with a disability is to be removed from school for more than ten cumulative days in a year?

- A. The principal makes the decision alone.
- B. The team must conduct a manifestation determination to decide whether the behavior was caused by or directly related to the disability or by the school's failure to implement the IEP.
- C. The student loses IEP services automatically.
- D. The parent must approve every removal in writing.

Answer: B. *The ten-day rule triggers a manifestation determination. If the behavior was a manifestation, the team must address it through the IEP rather than standard discipline.*

INDICATOR F

Crisis Prevention and Intervention

Applies knowledge of appropriate strategies for crisis prevention and intervention.

What this indicator means

Know how to prevent crisis when possible, recognize warning signs, respond safely when crisis occurs, and follow up afterward.

What you need to know

Prevention is the strongest crisis strategy. Most behavioral crises follow patterns that can be detected and interrupted. Early warning signs include:

- Voice gets louder.
- Pacing.
- Clenched fists.
- Withdrawal from interaction.
- Knowing each student's individual pattern allows you to intervene before crisis escalates.

The crisis cycle has several phases:

- Calm. Baseline.
- Triggers. Events that begin to raise stress.
- Agitation. Body language and tone change.
- Acceleration. Behavior becomes more intense and harder to interrupt.
- Peak. The crisis itself.
- De-escalation. Begins as intensity decreases.
- Recovery. Return to baseline.
- Different strategies fit different phases. What works during agitation will not work at peak.

De-escalation strategies:

- Keep your voice calm and quiet.
- Give the student space.
- Reduce verbal demands.
- Remove the audience when possible.

- Offer choices that include the option the student is moving toward.
- Use simple concrete language.
- Avoid argument, threats, and physical proximity that may feel intimidating.

Physical intervention:

- A last resort. Reserved for situations where the student or others are in immediate danger and no other strategy will keep people safe.
- Schools that use physical restraint require trained staff.
- New York and many districts limit when restraint can be used and require documentation, parental notification, and follow-up.
- Restraint is not discipline. It is emergency safety.

Follow-up after a crisis:

- Reconnect with the student once they are calm.
- Discuss what happened, what triggered it, and what to try next time.
- Document the incident.
- Communicate with the family.
- Update the BIP if patterns are emerging.
- Review with the team.

Self-care for the teacher matters. Crisis response is hard. Talk with colleagues. Use professional support when needed. Reflection on your own responses helps you do this work over a long career.

Common misconceptions and test traps

- Treating crisis response as a single skill. Different phases call for different strategies.
- Believing physical restraint is a regular tool. It is an emergency last resort, not a routine intervention.
- Skipping the follow-up. Reconnecting with the student and updating the plan are essential.
- Trying to use logical reasoning at peak. Reasoning fits calm, not crisis.

Self-check questions

1. Which of the following best describes the strongest approach to crisis behavior?

- A. Wait until the crisis happens and respond strongly.
- B. Recognize warning signs early and use prevention strategies before the crisis escalates.
- C. Use physical restraint as a regular intervention.

D. Ignore early signs to see whether they pass on their own.

Answer: B. *Prevention is the strongest crisis strategy. Knowing each student's pattern allows early, less restrictive intervention.*

2. Which of the following is most consistent with effective de-escalation during a student's agitation phase?

A. Use a loud firm voice and stand close to the student.

B. Keep your voice calm and quiet, give the student space, reduce verbal demands, and offer simple choices.

C. Argue logically with the student to point out the problem.

D. Threaten consequences if the behavior continues.

Answer: B. *De-escalation reduces stimulation and demands. Loud voices, close proximity, argument, and threats typically escalate further.*

3. After a behavioral crisis, what is the most appropriate follow-up?

A. Treat the incident as if it never happened to avoid embarrassing the student.

B. Reconnect with the student once calm, discuss what happened and what to try next time, document the incident, communicate with the family, and update the BIP if patterns emerge.

C. Suspend the student for a day to send a message.

D. Add the student to the principal's discipline list immediately.

Answer: B. *Follow-up restores the relationship, supports learning from the incident, and improves the plan. Avoiding the topic misses an essential teaching opportunity.*

Putting It All Together

The six indicators in Competency 0004 build a single picture of a classroom where students can learn. Routines and physical setup come first. Rapport and communication shape how teaching lands. Group sizes and accessibility shape who participates. Behavior interventions, grounded in function and built on prevention, support every student. Crisis response is the safety net for the rare moments when prevention fails.

Eleven of the ninety selected-response items come from this competency. The strongest answers reflect a teacher who prevents rather than reacts, who treats behavior as communication, who uses positive supports as a primary strategy, who builds independence rather than dependence, and who follows IDEA's discipline rules carefully.

The exam is not the goal. The goal is the work.

COMPETENCY 0005**Instructional Planning and Delivery***Standards, co-teaching, reading, writing, math, and instructional technology*

*10 indicators · 23 items · 20% of test score***About Competency 0005**

Competency 0005 is the second-largest competency on the exam by selected-response weight. Twenty-three of the ninety selected-response items come from this competency, twenty percent of the total. This competency expects you to deliver research-validated instruction in reading, writing, math, and content areas, while supporting students' access to the general curriculum.

The strongest answers on this competency reflect explicit, systematic instruction; specially designed instruction matched to identified needs; differentiation and scaffolding; co-planning and co-teaching with general educators; and the integration of assistive technology when it expands access. Read for understanding, then practice explaining each idea in your own words.

INDICATOR A

Curriculum Standards and Aligning Instruction

Demonstrates knowledge of applicable local, state, and national curriculum standards, including the NYS P-12 Learning Standards, and how to align instruction for students with disabilities to these standards.

What this indicator means

Know the standards your students are expected to meet, and design instruction so that students with disabilities have access to the same rigorous curriculum as their peers, with the supports needed to engage with it.

What you need to know

Standards in New York:

- New York implements the NYS P-12 Learning Standards in English language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, and other content areas.
- Standards set what students should know and be able to do at each grade level.
- National content standards from organizations like the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics also inform practice.

Access to the general curriculum:

- Students with disabilities are entitled to access the general curriculum based on grade-level standards.
- Accommodations, modifications, and specially designed instruction are provided as needed.
- The IEP must show how the student will participate in and progress in the general curriculum.

Aligning instruction to standards:

- Begin by knowing the standard.
- Identify what the student already knows and can do (PLAAFP).
- Determine the gap between the two.
- Specially designed instruction, or SDI, is content, methodology, or delivery of instruction adapted to address the unique needs of the student. SDI is what makes special education special.

State assessments:

- Most students with disabilities take the same state assessments as their peers, with accommodations as documented in the IEP.

- A small group of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities take the New York State Alternate Assessment, based on alternate achievement standards aligned to grade-level expectations.
- Eligibility for the alternate assessment is decided by the CSE.

Common misconceptions and test traps

- Believing students with disabilities should not be held to grade-level standards. Access to the general curriculum is a right under IDEA.
- Confusing accommodations with lowering standards. Accommodations preserve the standard.
- Treating SDI as the same as accommodations. SDI is the adaptation of content, methodology, or delivery itself.
- Forgetting that the alternate assessment is for a small group of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities, not for any student who struggles.

Self-check questions

1. Which of the following best describes the relationship between students with disabilities and grade-level standards?

- A. Students with disabilities cannot be expected to engage with grade-level standards.
- B. Students with disabilities are entitled to access the general curriculum based on grade-level standards, with accommodations, modifications, and specially designed instruction as needed.
- C. Students with disabilities follow a separate set of standards.
- D. Students with disabilities should focus on functional skills only.

Answer: B. Access to the general curriculum is a core right under IDEA. SDI, accommodations, and modifications support that access.

2. Which of the following best describes Specially Designed Instruction (SDI)?

- A. Any instruction provided in a self-contained classroom.
- B. The adaptation of content, methodology, or delivery of instruction to address the unique needs of a student with a disability.
- C. Use of accommodations during state testing.
- D. An IEP-based decision to lower the curriculum standards for a student.

Answer: B. SDI is what makes special education special. It is the adaptation of instruction itself, not the same as accommodations.

3. Which students take the New York State Alternate Assessment?

- A. All students with IEPs.

- B.** Students with the most significant cognitive disabilities, as determined by the CSE based on eligibility criteria.
- C.** Students whose parents request it for any reason.
- D.** Students whose grades are below average.

Answer: B. *The alternate assessment is for a small group of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. CSE determination is required.*

INDICATOR B

Co-Planning and Co-Teaching

Demonstrates knowledge of co-planning and co-teaching methods to strengthen content acquisition of students with disabilities.

What this indicator means

Effective co-teaching requires both partners to plan together, share responsibility for instruction, and use a variety of co-teaching models. The goal is content acquisition, not crowd control.

What you need to know

Integrated co-teaching:

- New York's term for co-teaching.
- A general education teacher and a special education teacher share responsibility for a class that includes both students with and without disabilities.

Common co-teaching models:

- One teach, one observe. One teacher leads while the other gathers data on student learning or behavior.
- One teach, one assist. One teacher leads while the other supports individual students. Useful but weakest if used exclusively.
- Station teaching. Students rotate through stations led by different teachers.
- Parallel teaching. The class is split in half; each teacher teaches the same content to one half.
- Alternative teaching. One teacher works with a small group on different content while the other teaches the larger group.
- Team teaching. Both teachers share the lead together.

Co-planning. The foundation:

- Without shared planning time, co-teaching becomes one teach, one assist by default.
- Includes deciding learning objectives, dividing instructional roles, identifying differentiation, planning assessment, and reviewing student data.
- Even brief regular planning is more useful than occasional long meetings.

Both teachers' expertise is needed:

- The special education teacher brings instructional adaptation, behavior support, and IEP implementation.

- The general education teacher brings content expertise and grade-level knowledge.

Successful partnerships also share:

- Responsibility for grading.
- Communication with families.
- Management of classroom routines.
- Students should see both adults as their teachers, not as a teacher and a helper.

Common misconceptions and test traps

- Believing one teach, one assist is the model. It is one model, the weakest if used exclusively.
- Treating co-teaching as something teachers do without shared planning time. Without planning, co-teaching collapses.
- Letting students see one teacher as the teacher and the other as the helper.
- Forgetting that co-teaching is for content acquisition. The point is student learning.

Self-check questions

1. Which of the following best describes effective co-planning?

- A. Each teacher plans independently and meets briefly to confirm logistics.
- B. Shared planning that includes objectives, instructional roles, differentiation, assessment, and student data review.
- C. Planning is unnecessary because the special education teacher will assist as needed.
- D. The general education teacher plans, and the special education teacher reviews afterward.

Answer: B. *Co-planning is the foundation of effective co-teaching. Without shared planning, co-teaching defaults to one teach, one assist.*

2. In a parallel teaching arrangement, what is happening?

- A. One teacher leads instruction while the other observes and gathers data.
- B. The class is split in half, and each teacher teaches the same content to one half.
- C. Students rotate through stations led by different teachers.
- D. Both teachers teach the whole group together at the same time.

Answer: B. *Parallel teaching splits the class so each teacher works with a smaller group on the same content. Station teaching uses rotation; team teaching has both teachers leading the whole group together.*

3. Why does always defaulting to one teach, one assist undermine co-teaching?

- A. It violates federal law.

- B.** It underuses the special education teacher's expertise, signals to students that one teacher is in charge and the other is helping, and limits the variety of instruction students receive.
- C.** It is the most demanding model on teacher planning time.
- D.** It cannot be used in NYC schools.

Answer: B. *Always defaulting to one teach, one assist underuses the special education teacher and shapes how students see authority. Effective co-teaching uses a variety of models.*

INDICATOR C

Research-Based Practices and Differentiation

Applies knowledge of research- or evidence-based practices that have been validated for learners with specific characteristics and for specific settings and knowledge of how to differentiate instruction by selecting, adapting, and using instructional strategies and materials according to the characteristics of a given student with disabilities.

What this indicator means

Choose strategies and materials that research has shown to work for students like the one in front of you, and adapt them to fit the individual student.

What you need to know

Differentiation:

- Adjusting content, process, product, or learning environment in response to student readiness, interest, or learning profile.
- Not the same as creating an entirely different curriculum for each student.
- It is the systematic adaptation of common instruction so that more students can succeed.

Effective practices for students with disabilities are typically:

- Explicit. The teacher names and models the skill.
- Systematic. Skills are taught in a logical sequence with cumulative review.
- Data-driven. The teacher checks for student learning frequently and adjusts instruction accordingly.

Scaffolding:

- Temporary support that allows the student to do something they could not do alone.
- Includes modeling, sentence starters, graphic organizers, partial completion, peer support, chunked tasks.
- Removed as the student gains independence.

Choice of strategy depends on the student:

- A student with a reading disability needs structured literacy approaches grounded in phonics.
- A student with autism may need visual supports and predictable routines.
- A student with ADHD may need movement breaks and frequent feedback.

- Knowing the research literature for each disability helps you choose.

Materials must fit the student:

- Reading level, format, language, and visual design all matter.
- Adapted texts, audio versions, simplified language, and high-interest material at lower reading levels can all support access.
- Avoid babyish materials for older students even when reading level is low. Respect the student's age.

Common misconceptions and test traps

- Treating differentiation as creating a separate lesson for every student. It is the systematic adaptation of common instruction.
- Believing that learning styles (visual, auditory, kinesthetic) are the basis for instruction. The research on learning styles is weak.
- Choosing strategies based on disability category alone, without considering the individual student's needs.
- Using babyish materials for older students with low reading levels.

Self-check questions

1. Which of the following best describes differentiation?

- A. Creating a separate curriculum for each student.
- B. Adjusting content, process, product, or learning environment in response to student readiness, interest, or learning profile.
- C. Removing all challenge from instruction for students with disabilities.
- D. Replacing core instruction with worksheets.

Answer: B. *Differentiation is the systematic adaptation of common instruction. It is not separate instruction for every student.*

2. Which of the following is the strongest description of effective scaffolding?

- A. Permanent supports that students should rely on indefinitely.
- B. Temporary support that allows the student to do something they could not do alone, gradually removed as the student gains independence.
- C. Lowering the academic standard for individual students.
- D. Replacing instruction with peer tutoring.

Answer: B. *Scaffolds are temporary. The goal is to fade them as students gain independence with the skill.*

3. Which of the following best describes the role of research in selecting instructional strategies?

- A. Choose strategies that have research support, validated with learners similar to the student in front of you, and adapt them to fit the individual.
- B. Choose strategies that look polished or are popular in marketing materials.
- C. Use a single approach for every student in a disability category.
- D. Avoid using research because every student is unique.

Answer: A. *Effective instruction draws on research validated with similar learners and adapts to the individual. Polished marketing is not evidence.*

INDICATOR D

Specialized Materials, Resources, and Assistive Technology

Demonstrates knowledge of sources of specialized materials, curricula, and resources for students with disabilities; strategies for incorporating and implementing instructional and assistive technology into the educational program; and strategies for evaluating, modifying, and adapting instructional resources and curriculum materials for individual learners.

What this indicator means

Know what specialized materials and technology exist, and how to use them to expand access for students with disabilities.

What you need to know

Specialized materials:

- Adapted texts.
- Large-print or braille materials.
- Audio books.
- Manipulatives.
- Curriculum materials designed for specific disability groups.
- Sources include Bookshare for accessible reading, Learning Ally for audio, the American Printing House for the Blind, and curriculum-specific publishers.

Assistive technology, or AT:

- Any device, software, or service that increases, maintains, or improves the functional capabilities of a student with a disability.
- Low-tech examples. Pencil grips, picture cards, raised-line paper.
- High-tech examples. Speech-to-text, screen readers, augmentative communication devices, eye-gaze systems.

AT and the IEP:

- Must be considered for every student with an IEP.
- The IEP team decides whether AT is needed and what specific technology will help.
- The school must provide and maintain AT listed in the IEP.
- AT must also be available at home if needed for FAPE.

Effective AT use:

- Requires more than putting a device in the student's hands.
- The student needs instruction in how to use it.
- The student needs opportunities to practice.
- The student needs support from staff who know how it works.
- AT that sits unused in a backpack does not increase access.

Adapting materials:

- Simplifying language.
- Adjusting reading level while keeping content rigorous.
- Adding visual supports.
- Breaking tasks into smaller steps.
- Providing graphic organizers.
- Converting print to accessible formats.
- UDL principles guide many of these decisions.

Common misconceptions and test traps

- Believing AT is only high-tech. Low-tech tools count and are often the best fit.
- Treating AT as optional. The IEP team must consider AT for every student.
- Providing a device without instruction in how to use it.
- Adapting materials by simplifying content rather than the demands. Keep the content rigorous.

Self-check questions

1. Which of the following best describes assistive technology (AT)?

- A. Only high-tech devices like tablets and software.
- B. Any device, software, or service that increases, maintains, or improves the functional capabilities of a student with a disability, ranging from low-tech to high-tech.
- C. Tools required only for students who cannot read.
- D. Equipment used only during state testing.

Answer: B. *AT covers a wide range from pencil grips to communication devices. Both low-tech and high-tech options can be appropriate.*

2. What does the IEP team's responsibility regarding AT include?

- A. Considering AT for every student with an IEP and providing what is documented in the IEP.

- B.** Considering AT only when the parent requests it.
- C.** Considering AT only for students with physical disabilities.
- D.** Considering AT only at the high school level.

Answer: A. *AT consideration is required for every student with an IEP. When AT is documented, the school must provide and maintain it.*

3. Which of the following best describes adapting materials for a student with a disability?

- A.** Replacing rigorous content with simpler content.
- B.** Simplifying language, adjusting reading level while keeping content rigorous, adding visual supports, and converting to accessible formats as needed.
- C.** Reducing the amount of work to almost nothing.
- D.** Using only worksheets at the student's grade level.

Answer: B. *Adaptation supports access without lowering the rigor of the content. The goal is engagement with grade-level ideas.*

INDICATOR E

Reading Instruction

Applies knowledge of research- or evidence-based explicit and systematic instruction and intervention in reading for students with disabilities, including reading in the content areas.

What this indicator means

Reading instruction for students with disabilities should be explicit, systematic, and grounded in the research on how children learn to read.

What you need to know

The Science of Reading. Five essential components of effective reading instruction:

- Phonemic awareness. Hearing and manipulating sounds in words.
- Phonics. The relationship between letters and sounds.
- Fluency. Reading with accuracy, speed, and expression.
- Vocabulary. Knowing word meanings.
- Comprehension. Understanding what is read.
- Strong instruction addresses all five.

Structured literacy:

- An approach grounded in reading research.
- Particularly effective for students with dyslexia and other reading disabilities.
- Includes explicit phonics instruction, systematic skill sequencing, cumulative review, and direct teaching of reading and spelling rules.
- The Orton-Gillingham approach and its descendants (Wilson, Lindamood-Bell, others) follow this model.

What does not work for students with reading disabilities:

- Whole-language and balanced-literacy approaches that rely on context, picture clues, and incidental learning.
- The exam treats explicit, systematic, structured instruction as the standard.

Reading in the content areas:

- Vocabulary support.
- Background knowledge.

- Text structure instruction.
- Explicit comprehension strategies.
- Strategies like previewing, summarizing, questioning, and graphic organizers help students access content texts.

Progress monitoring:

- Must happen frequently.
- Curriculum-Based Measurement, oral reading fluency probes, and other brief measures support timely instructional adjustments.

Common misconceptions and test traps

- Believing context and picture clues are effective strategies for students with reading disabilities. The research does not support this.
- Skipping phonics for students who are already past the early grades. Phonics instruction is appropriate at any age when needed.
- Treating fluency as just speed. Fluency is accuracy, speed, and expression.
- Forgetting that comprehension strategies must be taught explicitly, not assumed.

Self-check questions

1. Which of the following lists the five components of effective reading instruction supported by research?

- A. Listening, speaking, reading, writing, and grammar.
- B. Phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.
- C. Decoding, spelling, handwriting, listening, and writing.
- D. Reading, writing, math, science, and social studies.

Answer: B. *These five components, sometimes called the Big Five, come from converging research on how children learn to read.*

2. Which approach to reading instruction is most consistent with research on students with dyslexia and other reading disabilities?

- A. Whole-language reading with emphasis on context and picture clues.
- B. Structured literacy with explicit phonics, systematic sequencing, and cumulative review.
- C. Independent silent reading as the primary approach.
- D. Reading aloud only, without any formal instruction.

Answer: B. *Structured literacy is grounded in the research base for reading disabilities. Whole-language approaches that rely on context are not effective for these students.*

3. What does fluency mean in reading instruction?

- A. How quickly the student reads, regardless of accuracy.
- B. Accuracy, speed, and expression, all together.
- C. How well the student remembers what was read.
- D. How loudly the student reads aloud.

Answer: B. *Fluency is accuracy, speed, and expression. Speed alone is not fluency.*

INDICATOR F

Writing Instruction

Applies knowledge of research- or evidence-based explicit and systematic instruction and intervention in writing for students with disabilities.

What this indicator means

Writing instruction for students with disabilities should be explicit, systematic, and address each component of writing: handwriting, spelling, sentence construction, paragraph organization, and composition.

What you need to know

Writing is complex. Two main components:

- Transcription. Handwriting and spelling.
- Composition. Generating ideas, organizing them, and putting them into language.
- Students with disabilities may struggle with one or both. Instruction must address the specific needs of the student.

Self-Regulated Strategy Development, or SRSD:

- A research-validated approach.
- Teaches students explicit strategies for planning, drafting, revising, and editing.
- Pairs strategy with self-regulation: goal setting, self-monitoring, self-reinforcement.
- Effective across grade levels and disability categories.

Sentence-level instruction:

- Explicit instruction in sentence construction supports students who write in fragments or run-ons.
- Sentence combining, sentence expansion, and direct teaching of clauses and conjunctions all build sentence skill.

Spelling instruction:

- Should be systematic and connected to phonics for students with reading disabilities.
- Memorizing word lists alone is not effective.
- Patterns, rules, and morphology (prefixes, suffixes, roots) build durable knowledge.

Assistive technology for writing:

- Word prediction, speech-to-text, and graphic organizers reduce barriers and let students focus on ideas.
- AT does not replace instruction in writing skills. It supports access while skills develop.

Effective feedback:

- Targeted to specific aspects of the writing rather than evaluating the whole piece at once.
- "Your topic sentence states the main idea clearly. Now let's work on adding two examples." supports growth more than holistic comments.

Common misconceptions and test traps

- Treating writing as a single skill. It includes transcription and composition, each with subcomponents.
- Believing students will pick up writing skills through reading alone.
- Using only generic feedback ("good job", "needs work").
- Treating AT as a replacement for instruction in writing skills.

Self-check questions

1. Which of the following best describes Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD)?

- A. A whole-language writing approach.
- B. A research-validated approach that teaches explicit writing strategies paired with self-regulation skills like goal setting and self-monitoring.
- C. A method that avoids direct instruction in favor of free writing.
- D. A spelling program for elementary students.

Answer: B. *SRSD pairs explicit strategy instruction with self-regulation. It is well-supported by research across grade levels and disability categories.*

2. Why is generic feedback such as "good job" or "needs work" not effective for student writers with disabilities?

- A. Generic feedback is required by federal law to be replaced.
- B. Targeted, specific feedback on particular aspects of writing supports growth more than holistic comments.
- C. Students with disabilities cannot understand generic feedback.
- D. Generic feedback is too time-consuming for teachers to give.

Answer: B. *Specific feedback teaches. Generic feedback may feel kind but does not help students improve.*

3. What is the role of assistive technology in writing instruction for students with disabilities?

- A. AT replaces the need for any direct writing instruction.
- B. AT reduces barriers and supports access while skills develop, but it does not replace instruction in writing skills.
- C. AT is reserved for students who cannot use a pencil at all.
- D. AT should not be introduced until high school.

Answer: B. *AT and instruction work together. Tools like word prediction or speech-to-text support access while the student continues to build writing skills.*

INDICATOR G

Mathematics Instruction

Applies knowledge of research- or evidence-based explicit and systematic instruction in mathematics for students with disabilities.

What this indicator means

Math instruction for students with disabilities should be explicit, systematic, and connected to research on how students develop mathematical understanding.

What you need to know

Effective math instruction includes both:

- Conceptual understanding. The why.
- Procedural fluency. The how.
- Students with disabilities often need explicit instruction in both.
- Skipping conceptual understanding produces students who can compute but cannot apply math.
- Skipping procedural fluency produces students who understand ideas but cannot solve problems efficiently.

Concrete-Representational-Abstract sequence, or CRA:

- Begin with concrete manipulatives (counters, blocks).
- Move to representations (drawings, diagrams).
- Then move to abstract symbols (numerals, equations).
- Well-supported across topics and grade levels.

Word problems:

- An area where many students with disabilities struggle.
- Explicit instruction in problem types, schema-based instruction, and graphic organizers help students recognize structure and plan a solution.
- Reading and language demands of word problems must be addressed. A student who cannot read the problem cannot solve it.

Math facts:

- Automaticity with basic facts frees working memory for higher-level problem solving.
- Targeted, brief, frequent practice is more effective than long worksheets.

Errors are diagnostic:

- A student who consistently makes the same kind of mistake (subtracting the smaller digit from the larger regardless of position, for example) is showing a misconception.
- Explicit instruction can address the misconception.

Common misconceptions and test traps

- Treating math as either conceptual or procedural. Both are needed.
- Skipping concrete and representational steps and moving directly to abstract symbols.
- Treating word problems as primarily reading problems without teaching mathematical structure.
- Treating errors as carelessness rather than as diagnostic information.

Self-check questions

1. Which of the following best describes the concrete-representational-abstract (CRA) sequence?

- A. Begin with abstract symbols, then add representations and concrete manipulatives if needed.
- B. Begin with concrete manipulatives, move to representations such as drawings, then move to abstract symbols.
- C. Use only concrete manipulatives at all grade levels.
- D. Avoid manipulatives because they distract students.

Answer: B. *CRA moves from concrete to representational to abstract. The sequence supports conceptual understanding before symbolic work.*

2. Why are math facts and automaticity important for students with disabilities?

- A. Memorizing facts is the only legitimate goal of math instruction.
- B. Automaticity with basic facts frees working memory for higher-level problem solving.
- C. Math facts replace the need for conceptual understanding.
- D. Math facts are tested only at the elementary level.

Answer: B. *Automaticity matters because limited working memory cannot handle both fact retrieval and problem solving at once. Brief, frequent, targeted practice builds automaticity.*

3. What does it mean to treat student errors as diagnostic?

- A. Errors should be punished to discourage carelessness.
- B. Errors reveal misconceptions that explicit instruction can address.
- C. Errors are unimportant and should be ignored.
- D. Errors should always be corrected silently to avoid embarrassment.

Answer: B. *Errors point to misconceptions. Identifying the pattern of error allows targeted instruction that addresses the underlying misunderstanding.*

INDICATOR H

Essential Concepts, Vocabulary, and Content

Applies knowledge of research- or evidence-based strategies for identifying and teaching essential concepts, vocabulary, and content across the general curriculum.

What this indicator means

Identify the most important content for students to learn, and teach it explicitly using research-validated strategies.

What you need to know

Identify essential concepts:

- Not all content is equally important.
- Identify the big ideas that organize a unit and connect to future learning.
- Teach those explicitly.
- Use less time on details and more on the concepts students will return to again and again.

Vocabulary instruction:

- Select words carefully. Tier 2 words appear across content areas; Tier 3 words are content-specific.
- Define them clearly.
- Give multiple examples and non-examples.
- Provide opportunities for use over time.
- Teaching one word in passing is not enough.

Background knowledge:

- Comprehension depends on what the reader already knows.
- Build background through preteaching, video, real objects, and discussion.
- Many students with disabilities have gaps that come from limited exposure or missed instruction.
- Building background intentionally is part of the work.

Visual organization tools:

- Graphic organizers, semantic maps, and concept maps help students see relationships among ideas.

- They support comprehension during reading.
- They serve as tools for review and study.

Distributed practice:

- Repeated practice across days and weeks supports long-term retention.
- Teaching a concept once and moving on rarely produces lasting learning.
- Coming back to the concept in different contexts builds durable knowledge.

Common misconceptions and test traps

- Teaching everything in a unit at the same level of importance. Identify the essential concepts and prioritize them.
- Treating vocabulary as a list of definitions to memorize. Vocabulary requires examples, non-examples, and use over time.
- Assuming students have the background knowledge they need. Build it intentionally.
- Teaching a concept once and moving on. Distributed practice builds retention.

Self-check questions

1. Which of the following best describes effective vocabulary instruction?

- A. Have students copy definitions from a glossary and memorize them.
- B. Select words intentionally, define them clearly, give multiple examples and non-examples, and provide opportunities to use the words over time.
- C. Avoid teaching vocabulary because students learn it from reading.
- D. Teach every word in the chapter equally.

Answer: B. *Effective vocabulary instruction is intentional, includes examples and non-examples, and provides repeated use. Memorizing definitions alone produces shallow knowledge.*

2. Why is background knowledge important for comprehension?

- A. Background knowledge is unrelated to comprehension.
- B. Comprehension depends on what the reader already knows; building background makes new content accessible.
- C. Background knowledge replaces the need for explicit instruction.
- D. Background knowledge matters only for science topics.

Answer: B. *Comprehension and background knowledge are tightly linked. Many students with disabilities have gaps that the teacher must intentionally fill.*

3. What does distributed practice mean and why does it matter?

- A. Practicing a skill once and moving on, since further practice wastes time.
- B. Coming back to the skill across days and weeks in different contexts, supporting long-term retention.
- C. Having students practice independently with no feedback.
- D. Assigning long worksheets in a single session.

Answer: B. *Distributed practice builds durable knowledge. Returning to ideas across time and contexts produces stronger retention than massed practice.*

INDICATOR I

Learning Strategies and Cognitive Skills

Demonstrates knowledge of research- or evidence-based methods for explicitly teaching learning strategies, listening skills, study skills, and test-taking skills to help students with disabilities acquire academic content; strategies for explicitly teaching students to use self-assessment, problem-solving, and other cognitive strategies to meet their own needs; and explicit teaching methods to help students strengthen and compensate for deficits in perception, comprehension, memory, and retrieval.

What this indicator means

Teach students how to learn. Explicit instruction in strategies for taking notes, studying, taking tests, monitoring their own thinking, and compensating for cognitive challenges is part of special education.

What you need to know

Learning strategies:

- Deliberate procedures students use to plan, complete, and reflect on academic tasks.
- Examples. Note-taking strategies, test-taking strategies, mnemonics, self-questioning.
- Effective teaching follows a sequence: introduce, model, guide practice, monitor independent use, review.

Self-regulation (metacognition):

- Thinking about thinking.
- Self-regulated learners set goals, plan, monitor progress, evaluate work, and adjust.
- These skills can be taught explicitly.
- Strategies. "Stop and check," "think aloud," self-monitoring checklists.

Memory strategies:

- Mnemonics. Acronyms, keyword strategies, the loci method support recall.
- Spaced practice. Returning to material across time.
- Retrieval practice. Testing oneself rather than only rereading.
- Many students with disabilities benefit from explicit instruction in these strategies.

Compensation strategies:

- Help students work around persistent challenges.

- A student with weak reading may use audio.
- A student with weak handwriting may type.
- A student with weak working memory may use a checklist.
- Compensation is not giving up. It is finding the path that works.

Self-advocacy:

- A learnable skill.
- Students who can identify their own strengths and needs, ask for what they need, and negotiate accommodations have a powerful advantage in school and adult life.

Common misconceptions and test traps

- Assuming students will pick up learning strategies on their own. They often do not.
- Teaching strategies once without follow-up. Strategies require practice and review.
- Treating compensation as giving up. Compensation is a legitimate path.
- Forgetting self-advocacy. It is a skill, not a personality trait.

Self-check questions

1. Which of the following best describes effective teaching of learning strategies?

- A. Mention the strategy once and assume students will use it.
- B. Introduce, model, guide practice, monitor independent use, and review over time.
- C. Provide strategies only at the high school level.
- D. Avoid teaching strategies because students should figure out their own.

Answer: B. *Strategy instruction is most effective when taught explicitly with modeling, practice, and review. Mention alone produces little use.*

2. Which of the following is an example of metacognition?

- A. A student copies notes from the board without thinking about content.
- B. A student stops while reading to ask whether the passage makes sense and reread if needed.
- C. A student finishes a test as quickly as possible without reviewing.
- D. A student waits for the teacher to point out errors instead of self-checking.

Answer: B. *Metacognition is thinking about one's own thinking. Self-monitoring during reading is a metacognitive strategy that can be taught explicitly.*

3. Which of the following best describes the role of compensation strategies?

- A. Compensation is a temporary measure that should be removed quickly.

- B.** Compensation strategies help students work around persistent challenges and are a legitimate path to success.
- C.** Compensation is only for students who refuse to do the work.
- D.** Compensation strategies are illegal in standardized testing.

Answer: B. *Compensation supports access for students with persistent challenges. It is not giving up; it is finding what works.*

INDICATOR J

Technology to Promote Academic Success

Demonstrates knowledge of the use of technology for promoting academic success for students with disabilities.

What this indicator means

Use technology to expand what students can do, not as a substitute for instruction. Choose the right tool for the right student and the right task.

What you need to know

Technology supports learning in many ways:

- Text-to-speech reads aloud for students who struggle with decoding.
- Speech-to-text lets students who struggle with handwriting or spelling produce written work.
- Word prediction reduces typing demand.
- Screen readers and magnification support students with visual impairments.
- Captioning supports students with hearing impairments.
- Interactive software supports practice and individualized pacing.

Match technology to the individual:

- Two students with the same disability may benefit from very different tools.
- Trial and error, with student input, helps identify what works.

Integrate technology into instruction:

- Not added on top.
- A student who uses speech-to-text only for tests but writes by hand for class assignments is not getting full access.
- The tool should be part of how the student writes, not a special procedure.

Privacy and equity:

- Educational technology often collects data. Teachers should know what is collected and how it is used.
- Students without internet access at home need school-based options.
- Students whose families cannot afford devices need school-provided alternatives.
- Equity is part of effective technology use.

Technology supports collaboration:

- Shared documents.
- Communication platforms.
- Accessible video conferencing.
- These tools allow students with disabilities to participate in group work and remote learning.

Common misconceptions and test traps

- Believing technology replaces instruction. It supports access; it does not replace teaching.
- Choosing technology based on what is popular rather than what fits the student.
- Adding technology only for tests. Integrate it into daily instruction.
- Forgetting equity. Not every student has the same access at home.

Self-check questions

1. Which of the following best describes the role of technology in supporting students with disabilities?

- A. Technology replaces the need for explicit instruction.
- B. Technology expands what students can do and supports access; it does not replace teaching.
- C. Technology should be reserved for high school and beyond.
- D. Technology should be used only when no other option works.

Answer: B. *Technology and instruction work together. Tools support access while skills develop.*

2. A student uses speech-to-text successfully for tests but writes by hand for daily assignments. Why is this approach problematic?

- A. Speech-to-text is illegal for daily assignments.
- B. The student is not getting full access if the tool is reserved for tests; tools should be integrated into daily instruction.
- C. Speech-to-text only works during testing.
- D. Daily assignments should never include writing.

Answer: B. *Tools should be integrated into how the student does the work, not reserved for special situations. Daily integration supports both access and skill development.*

3. Why does equity matter in educational technology decisions?

- A. Equity is unrelated to technology.
- B. Students without home internet access or family resources for devices need school-based options to participate fully.
- C. Equity matters only in low-income schools.

D. Equity is the responsibility of district administrators only.

Answer: B. *Equity is part of effective technology use. Tools that work in school but not at home create new barriers; teachers should know what students have access to.*

Putting It All Together

The ten indicators in Competency 0005 cover the heart of teaching: standards, co-teaching, research-based practice, materials and technology, reading, writing, math, content learning, learning strategies, and educational technology. Twenty-three of the ninety selected-response items come from this competency.

The strongest answers reflect a teacher who plans from standards, uses explicit and systematic instruction, partners with general educators, draws on research, integrates technology meaningfully, and teaches students how to learn. Specially designed instruction, accommodations, and modifications work together to give students access to grade-level content.

The exam is not the goal. The goal is the work.

COMPETENCY 0006

Communication, Social, and Functional Living Skills

Communication, social skills, self-determination, and transition planning

8 indicators · 11 items · 10% of test score

About Competency 0006

Competency 0006 covers communication, social, and functional living skills, plus transition planning. Eleven of the ninety selected-response items come from this competency, ten percent of the test.

This competency expects you to teach skills students need for adult life, not only for academic content. Communication, social participation, self-advocacy, daily living, career skills, and successful transitions across settings are central. The strongest answers reflect explicit instruction, real-world practice, and respect for the student's voice and goals.

INDICATOR A**Communication Skills Instruction**

Demonstrates knowledge of instructional strategies for fostering communication skills of students with disabilities, including students from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

What this indicator means

Build communication skills through explicit instruction, frequent practice, and respect for the student's home language and culture.

What you need to know

Communication includes several areas. Students with disabilities may have needs in any of these:

- Receptive language. Understanding others.
- Expressive language. Producing language to others.
- Pragmatics. Social use of language.
- Articulation. Clear speech.
- Fluency. Smooth flow of speech.

Effective communication instruction:

- Embedded throughout the day, not limited to therapy sessions.
- Conversations during routines, structured discussions during lessons, and prompted exchanges during play all build communication.
- The Speech-Language Pathologist, or SLP, plans goals and provides direct service. Classroom teachers carry instruction across settings.

Multilingual learners:

- The home language is a resource, not a barrier.
- Skills built in one language transfer to another language.
- Encourage families to maintain the home language.
- The exam frames home language as an asset.

Augmentative and Alternative Communication, or AAC:

- Used by students with significant communication needs (described in detail in Indicator B).
- The teacher's role: ensure AAC is available, model its use, and provide communication partners who respond to AAC just as they would to speech.

Cultural responsiveness:

- Different cultures have different conversational norms: how directly to speak, how much eye contact to give, when to interrupt, how to address adults.
- None of these is a communication problem.
- Recognize cultural variation and avoid pathologizing it.

Common misconceptions and test traps

- Treating communication instruction as something only the SLP does. It happens across the day.
- Telling families to stop using the home language. The home language is a resource.
- Confusing cultural conversational norms with communication disorders.
- Forgetting that AAC needs partners who respond consistently.

Self-check questions

1. Which of the following best describes effective communication instruction for students with disabilities?

- A. Communication instruction is provided exclusively by the SLP during therapy sessions.
- B. Communication instruction is embedded throughout the day in routines, lessons, and interactions, and is supported by the SLP and classroom teachers together.
- C. Communication instruction should focus only on articulation.
- D. Communication instruction is unnecessary for students with intellectual disabilities.

Answer: B. *Communication develops across settings and times. The SLP plans and provides direct service, but practice and reinforcement happen across the day in classroom interactions.*

2. A multilingual family asks whether they should switch to English at home to help their child with a communication disability. What is the most appropriate response?

- A. The family should switch to English to support the child's English development.
- B. The home language is a resource. Skills built in the home language transfer to English. The family is encouraged to continue using the home language.
- C. The family should use only sign language at home.
- D. The school cannot offer guidance on home language use.

Answer: B. *Home language is an asset, not a barrier. Skills transfer across languages. Families should be encouraged to maintain the home language.*

3. A student from a culture in which limited eye contact with adults is a sign of respect avoids eye contact with the teacher. Which of the following best describes the teacher's most appropriate response?

- A. Refer the student for a communication evaluation.
- B. Recognize that limited eye contact in this context is cultural and is not a communication disorder; communicate with the family if the cultural norm is unclear.
- C. Insist that the student make eye contact with all adults at school.
- D. Treat the behavior as defiance.

Answer: B. *Cultural conversational norms are not communication disorders. Recognizing variation and communicating respectfully is the appropriate response.*

INDICATOR B

Augmentative and Alternative Communication

Demonstrates knowledge of communication and social interaction alternatives for students with disabilities, including strategies for planning and implementing instruction in the use of alternative and augmentative communication (AAC) systems.

What this indicator means

Know what AAC is, how to support students who use it, and how to plan instruction so that students can communicate effectively.

What you need to know

Augmentative and Alternative Communication, or AAC. Any method that supplements or replaces speech:

- Unaided systems. Gestures, sign language, facial expressions.
- Aided systems. Picture boards, communication books, speech-generating devices.
- AAC is for students whose speech is not sufficient to meet their communication needs.

AAC and speech development:

- AAC does not delay or replace speech development.
- Research shows AAC supports speech development in students who are able to develop speech.
- AAC provides essential communication for those who are not.
- The myth that AAC will keep a student from talking is widespread and wrong.

Common AAC methods:

- Picture Exchange Communication System, or PECS. A structured method that begins with single-picture exchange for a desired item and builds to sentence construction.
- Speech-generating devices. Range from simple recorded-message devices to dynamic touchscreen systems with thousands of vocabulary items.

Effective AAC instruction:

- Choose the system with the SLP and the team.
- Ensure the device is available across settings.
- Model its use, called aided language stimulation.
- Respond to all communication attempts.

- Provide reasons to communicate.
- Communication partners must be patient and willing.

Common AAC users:

- Students with autism, intellectual disability, cerebral palsy, apraxia of speech, and some other conditions.
- The decision to use AAC is based on the student's communication needs, not on the disability label.

Common misconceptions and test traps

- Believing AAC will prevent or delay speech. Research does not support this.
- Treating AAC as a last resort. AAC is appropriate when speech is not sufficient, regardless of how recent the determination.
- Failing to respond to AAC communication or treating it as less important than speech.
- Forgetting that AAC must be available across all settings, not only during therapy.

Self-check questions

1. Which of the following best describes the relationship between AAC and speech development?

- A. Using AAC delays or prevents speech.
- B. AAC supports speech development in students able to develop speech and provides essential communication for those who are not.
- C. AAC and speech are mutually exclusive; students must choose one.
- D. AAC replaces the need for any other communication instruction.

Answer: B. *Research consistently shows AAC supports speech rather than delaying it. The opposite belief is a widespread myth.*

2. Which of the following best describes the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS)?

- A. A speech therapy program for students with articulation difficulties.
- B. A structured AAC method that begins with single-picture exchange for desired items and builds toward sentence construction.
- C. A computer program for typing assignments.
- D. A reading instruction approach.

Answer: B. *PECS is a structured AAC method that builds from simple exchanges to more complex communication. It is well-supported for students with autism and other communication disabilities.*

3. What is aided language stimulation?

- A. Speaking loudly so the student can hear better.
- B. Modeling AAC use by pointing to symbols on the student's device while speaking, to teach how the system works.
- C. Using only spoken language with the student.
- D. Removing the AAC device during instruction so the student is forced to speak.

Answer: B. *Aided language stimulation models AAC use for the student. Communication partners point to symbols while speaking, helping the student learn the system in context.*

INDICATOR C

Integrating Affective, Social, Career, and Life Skills

Applies knowledge of strategies for integrating affective, social, career, and life skills with academic curricula.

What this indicator means

Skills that students need for life are not separate from academics. Integrate emotional, social, career, and life skills into ongoing instruction.

What you need to know

Affective skills:

- Include emotional regulation, self-awareness, motivation, and resilience.
- Can be taught through structured opportunities embedded in academics.
- Examples. A writing assignment about a goal the student is working toward; a math project tied to managing money; a science unit on stress and the body.

Social skills:

- Include cooperation, conflict resolution, perspective-taking, and friendship.
- Cooperative learning structures, partner work, and class discussions provide natural settings for practice.
- Should be explicitly taught for students who need it, then practiced in real situations.

Career skills:

- Include awareness of career options, work behaviors, basic vocational skills, and exploration of interests.
- Can be embedded in any grade level, not just high school.
- Discussing career connections during content lessons builds awareness over time.

Life skills:

- Include time management, organization, money management, food preparation, transportation, and health care.
- Some students need direct instruction in these.
- Others build them through opportunity and incidental learning.

- Both kinds of students benefit from intentional integration into academic content.

Integration is more effective than isolation:

- A student learning about budgeting in math class who also runs a small classroom store applies both math and life skills.
- A student writing a persuasive essay about a community issue practices writing while exploring civic participation.

Common misconceptions and test traps

- Treating life skills as separate from academics, taught only in self-contained classes.
- Believing career awareness should wait until high school.
- Assuming students will pick up social skills without explicit instruction.
- Treating affective skills as soft and unnecessary.

Self-check questions

1. Which of the following best describes effective integration of life skills with academic curriculum?

- A. Teach life skills only in a separate class with no connection to academic content.
- B. Embed life skills in academic activities, such as a math unit on budgeting connected to a classroom store.
- C. Teach life skills only through worksheets.
- D. Avoid teaching life skills to students who can keep up with academic content.

Answer: B. *Integration is more effective than isolation. Life skills connected to academic content reinforce both.*

2. When should career awareness instruction begin for students with disabilities?

- A. Only in high school.
- B. Career awareness can be embedded at any grade level, building over time through discussion of career connections in content lessons.
- C. Only after the student turns sixteen.
- D. Only for students in District 75 programs.

Answer: B. *Career awareness builds over years. Discussion of career connections in any grade contributes to long-term transition planning.*

3. Which of the following best describes the relationship between social skills and explicit instruction?

- A. Social skills are picked up automatically and do not require teaching.
- B. Social skills should be explicitly taught for students who need it, then practiced in real situations.

- C. Social skills can only be taught in therapy.
- D. Social skills should be taught only after academic skills are mastered.

Answer: B. *Social skills, like other skills, are learnable. Explicit instruction followed by real practice supports acquisition.*

INDICATOR D**Social Skills Instruction**

Demonstrates knowledge of social skills needed for educational and other environments and strategies for designing, implementing, and evaluating instructional programs that enhance the social participation of students with disabilities across environments.

What this indicator means

Plan and deliver social skills instruction that helps students participate successfully in school, with peers, and in the community.

What you need to know

Social skills include:

- Initiating interaction.
- Taking turns.
- Listening.
- Expressing needs.
- Asking for help.
- Recognizing emotions in others.
- Resolving conflict.
- Adjusting behavior to different settings.
- Students with autism, intellectual disability, emotional disability, ADHD, and other disabilities often need explicit instruction in some or all of these.

Effective social skills instruction follows a common pattern:

- Identify the specific skill the student needs.
- Define it concretely ("taking turns means waiting until the other person finishes speaking before saying my idea").
- Model it.
- Practice in structured settings (role-play, peer-mediated activities).
- Practice in real settings with feedback.
- Reinforce when used spontaneously.

Research-validated approaches:

- Social Stories. Describe a social situation in plain language to prepare a student for what to expect and what to do.
- Video modeling. Shows the skill in action.
- Peer-mediated approaches. Recruit classmates as instructional partners.

Generalization is the goal:

- A student who uses turn-taking in a structured group but not at recess has not generalized the skill.
- Plan for generalization by practicing the skill in multiple settings, with multiple people, and across days and weeks.

Social participation goes beyond skill instruction:

- Inclusive opportunities, structured group work, and adult facilitation all support meaningful participation.
- A student with strong social skills who has no opportunity to use them with peers is not participating socially.

Common misconceptions and test traps

- Defining a social skill vaguely. Concrete definitions are essential.
- Practicing only in structured settings without addressing generalization.
- Treating social skills instruction as punishment for inappropriate behavior.
- Forgetting that social participation requires opportunity, not only skill.

Self-check questions

1. A student successfully takes turns in a structured social skills group but does not take turns at recess.

What does this pattern most likely indicate?

- A.** The student has mastered the skill and instruction is complete.
- B.** The skill has not generalized across settings, and instruction needs to plan explicitly for generalization in multiple settings.
- C.** The student is being defiant at recess.
- D.** Social skills cannot be taught.

Answer: B. *Generalization is the goal of social skills instruction. Practicing only in structured settings often does not transfer.*

2. Which of the following best describes a Social Story?

- A.** A casual conversation between teacher and student.

- B.** A short, specific description of a social situation in plain language, used to prepare a student for what to expect and what to do.
- C.** A reading comprehension assessment.
- D.** A discipline procedure.

Answer: B. *Social Stories are research-supported tools that prepare students for social situations through clear description and concrete cues.*

3. What is the role of opportunity in social participation for students with disabilities?

- A.** Opportunity is irrelevant; only skill matters.
- B.** Social participation requires both skill and opportunity; structured peer interactions and inclusive settings provide the practice context for skills to be used.
- C.** Opportunity is the responsibility of parents only.
- D.** Social participation is automatic once skills are mastered.

Answer: B. *Skill without opportunity does not produce participation. Inclusion and structured peer interactions provide the context for using social skills meaningfully.*

INDICATOR E

Self-Advocacy and Self-Determination

Applies knowledge of strategies for teaching self-advocacy and self-determination skills and for encouraging increased independence.

What this indicator means

Teach students to understand themselves, set goals, make decisions, and speak up for what they need. These skills support school success and adult life.

What you need to know

Self-determination. The ability to act as the primary causal agent in one's own life. Includes:

- Self-awareness.
- Self-knowledge.
- Choice-making.
- Decision-making.
- Problem-solving.
- Goal setting and attainment.
- Self-regulation.
- Self-advocacy.
- Self-efficacy.
- These can be taught.

Self-advocacy. A specific skill within self-determination:

- Knowing your strengths, needs, and rights.
- Communicating them to others.
- Negotiating for what you need.
- Example. A student who can say "I learn best when I have a quiet space to work" is self-advocating.

Student involvement in IEP meetings:

- By age fourteen in New York, students must be invited to their own meetings whenever transition is discussed.

- Students can participate in many ways: attending, listening, contributing input, leading parts of the meeting, or leading the entire meeting.
- Skills build with practice.

Goal setting:

- Teachable. The teacher helps the student identify a goal, break it into steps, plan how to track progress, and reflect on success.
- Visual goal charts, contracts, and self-monitoring tools support the work.

Self-regulation:

- Managing attention, emotion, and effort.
- Strategies. Self-monitoring (checking one's own behavior), self-instruction (talking through a task), and self-reinforcement (rewarding oneself for progress).

Disability awareness:

- Part of self-determination.
- Students benefit from age-appropriate, honest information about their disability and how it affects them.
- Knowing the diagnosis is not enough. Understanding what it means in daily life is the goal.

Common misconceptions and test traps

- Treating self-determination as a personality trait rather than a teachable set of skills.
- Excluding students from their own IEP meetings to protect them.
- Withholding information about a student's disability from the student.
- Believing self-advocacy is only for older students.

Self-check questions

1. Which of the following best describes self-advocacy?

- A.** A personality trait that some students have and others do not.
- B.** Knowing your strengths, needs, and rights, communicating them to others, and negotiating for what you need.
- C.** Asking the parent to handle all communication with the school.
- D.** Following all teacher directions without question.

Answer: B. *Self-advocacy is a learnable set of skills that supports school success and adult life. It is not a personality trait.*

2. Under New York State requirements, when must students with disabilities be invited to their own CSE meetings?

- A. Only at age eighteen.
- B. By age fourteen, whenever transition is discussed.
- C. Never; the meeting is for adults.
- D. Only at the parent's request.

Answer: B. *New York requires student participation by age fourteen when transition is discussed, earlier than the federal age of sixteen. Self-advocacy develops with practice.*

3. What is the role of disability awareness for students with disabilities themselves?

- A. Students should not be told about their disability.
- B. Students benefit from age-appropriate, honest information about their disability and how it affects them, supporting self-determination.
- C. Disability awareness is only for the parents.
- D. Disability awareness is required only for high school students.

Answer: B. *Self-determination requires self-knowledge. Students who understand their disability can advocate effectively and make informed decisions.*

INDICATOR F

Personal Management, Career, and Independent Living Skills

Applies knowledge of how to plan and implement instruction in personal management skills, career development and occupational skills, and independent living skills, including instruction in community-based settings.

What this indicator means

Plan instruction in skills students need for adult life. Use real-world settings when possible.

What you need to know

Personal management:

- Hygiene, grooming, dressing, eating.
- Managing one's own schedule and belongings.
- Some students need explicit instruction. Others build skills through opportunity.
- Match instruction to the student's age, dignity, and current skill level.

Career development:

- Awareness of careers.
- Exploration of interests.
- Work-readiness behaviors (punctuality, following directions, working with others).
- Specific job skills.
- The IEP may include vocational goals beginning well before the student leaves school.

Independent living skills:

- Cooking, shopping, using transportation.
- Managing money, paying bills.
- Finding and keeping housing.
- Accessing community resources.
- Students with intellectual disabilities, autism, and other significant disabilities often need explicit instruction in these skills.

Community-based instruction:

- Takes learning outside the school.

- A student practicing money skills at a real store, ordering at a restaurant, or riding public transit applies skills in the setting where they will use them.
- Generalization is much stronger when instruction includes real settings.

Age-appropriateness:

- Functional skills should fit the student's age, not their developmental level.
- A sixteen-year-old should not practice skills with materials designed for younger children.
- Use age-appropriate materials and respect the student's dignity.

Family involvement:

- Essential in functional skill instruction.
- Families know what skills the student uses at home, what is needed for the household, and what the family wants for the student's future.
- Coordinate instruction with family priorities.

Common misconceptions and test traps

- Using materials designed for younger children with older students. Age-appropriate materials are essential.
- Treating functional skills as separate from academic content.
- Skipping community-based instruction. Real settings support generalization.
- Planning functional skills without family input.

Self-check questions

1. Why is community-based instruction important for functional skills?

- A. It is required by federal law for all students with disabilities.
- B. Real settings support generalization of skills to the contexts where they will be used.
- C. Community-based instruction is less expensive than classroom instruction.
- D. Community-based instruction replaces all classroom instruction.

Answer: B. *Generalization is much stronger when instruction includes the real settings where the skill will be used. Community-based instruction is a key tool.*

2. Which of the following best describes age-appropriate functional skill instruction for a sixteen-year-old?

- A. Practice with materials designed for elementary-age children.
- B. Practice with materials and tasks suited to a sixteen-year-old, respecting the student's age and dignity.

- C. Skip functional skills until adulthood.
- D. Use materials with cartoon characters to make tasks fun.

Answer: B. *Functional skills should be taught with age-appropriate materials. Younger materials are inappropriate even when reading or task levels are low.*

3. Why is family involvement essential in functional skills instruction?

- A. Families decide all curriculum content.
- B. Families know what skills the student uses at home, what the household needs, and what the family wants for the student's future, and coordination supports skill use across settings.
- C. Family involvement is required only for students under age ten.
- D. Family involvement is optional and rarely useful.

Answer: B. *Coordination with families ensures that instruction connects to home and community priorities and supports use of skills across settings.*

INDICATOR G

Transitions Between Environments During School Years

Applies knowledge of strategies for promoting successful transitions between various environments during the school years (e.g., home to school, classroom to classroom, school to school).

What this indicator means

Plan and support transitions between settings during the school years. These transitions are stress points that can be managed well or badly.

What you need to know

Transitions during the school years include:

- Early intervention to preschool.
- Preschool to kindergarten.
- Classroom to classroom within a day.
- Year to year.
- School to school (such as elementary to middle school).
- Any change of placement or program.
- Each is a moment when continuity of services and supports is at risk.

Effective transition planning starts early:

- The team meets, gathers and shares information.
- Plans the new setting's supports.
- Prepares the student.
- Prepares the receiving staff.
- The IEP must travel with the student. The receiving teachers must understand what works.

Daily transitions:

- Moving from one activity to the next, one classroom to the next, or school to home challenges students who depend on predictability.
- Visual schedules, transition warnings, and preview of the next setting all reduce stress.

Year-to-year transitions:

- Transfer records.
- Hold meetings between sending and receiving teams.
- Help the student and family meet new staff.
- Visits to the new setting before the change reduce uncertainty.

School-to-school transitions, such as elementary to middle school:

- Especially significant. The structure of the school day changes.
- The number of teachers grows.
- Independence demands rise.
- Transition planning addresses each of these areas.

Family and student involvement:

- Families experience these transitions too. They benefit from clear information, advance notice, and contact with the receiving team.
- The student's voice should be part of the planning whenever possible.

Common misconceptions and test traps

- Treating transition planning as something done only at age fifteen for post-secondary transition.
- Forgetting daily transitions. They are real and require planning.
- Skipping the transfer of information between sending and receiving teams.
- Excluding the student and family from transition planning.

Self-check questions

1. Which of the following are examples of transitions during the school years?

- A. Only the move from school to college or work after high school.
- B. Daily transitions between activities, classroom to classroom, year to year, and school to school transitions, all of which require planning for students with disabilities.
- C. Only the move from preschool to kindergarten.
- D. Only changes in special education placement.

Answer: B. *Transitions during the school years are many. Each is a moment requiring planning, including daily transitions for students who depend on predictability.*

2. What supports help students with disabilities navigate daily transitions between activities?

- A. Surprise transitions to build flexibility.
- B. Visual schedules, transition warnings, and preview of the next setting.

- C. Removing the student from the room when transitions are coming.
- D. Daily transitions do not need any specific support.

Answer: B. *Predictability supports daily transitions. Visual schedules and transition warnings reduce stress for students who benefit from structure.*

3. Why are school-to-school transitions, such as elementary to middle school, especially significant?

- A. They are usually optional and can be avoided.
- B. They involve major changes in school structure, number of teachers, and independence demands, all requiring planning.
- C. They affect only students without disabilities.
- D. They are simple changes that do not require attention.

Answer: B. *School-to-school transitions involve substantial change. Planning for structure, staffing, and independence supports a successful move.*

INDICATOR H

Post-Secondary Transitions

Applies knowledge of strategies for promoting successful post-secondary transitions.

What this indicator means

Plan transition from school to adult life. Post-secondary education, employment, and independent living are the targets.

What you need to know

Transition planning age in New York:

- Begins by the year the student turns fifteen.
- Earlier than the federal age of sixteen.
- Part of the IEP.
- Includes age-appropriate transition assessments, measurable post-secondary goals, and the transition services needed to reach those goals.

Three areas of post-secondary goals:

- Education and training.
- Employment.
- Independent living, when appropriate.
- Goals must be based on transition assessment, not on assumptions.

Transition assessments:

- Interest inventories.
- Skill inventories.
- Work samples.
- Structured interviews with the student and family.

Transition services include:

- Instruction.
- Related services.
- Community experiences.
- Employment and other post-school adult living goals.

- Daily living skills, when appropriate.
- Functional vocational evaluation, when appropriate.
- Services connect what the student does in school to what the student will do after school.

Adult service connections must begin during school. Eligibility takes time:

- New York State Office for People With Developmental Disabilities, or OPWDD. Provides services to eligible adults.
- Adult Career and Continuing Education Services, or ACCES. Supports vocational rehabilitation.
- Social Security Administration. Administers disability benefits.
- Each requires application and documentation that should begin well before the student exits school.

Self-determination in transition:

- Matters more than at any other time.
- The post-school plan is the student's life.
- The student must be at the center of the planning.
- The team supports and informs rather than deciding for the student.

New York exit credentials:

- Regents diploma.
- Local diploma (with safety net options for some students with disabilities).
- Skills and Achievement Commencement Credential. For students who took the alternate assessment.
- Career Development and Occupational Studies Commencement Credential.
- Each has different post-school implications. The team helps the student and family understand the options.

Common misconceptions and test traps

- Forgetting that New York's transition age is fifteen, not sixteen.
- Treating the post-school goals as the team's goals rather than the student's.
- Waiting until the last year to begin adult service connections.
- Confusing the various exit credentials and their post-school implications.

Self-check questions

1. By what age must transition planning be in place under New York State requirements?

- A. Age fourteen.
- B. Age fifteen, the year the student turns fifteen.
- C. Age sixteen, matching the federal requirement.
- D. Age eighteen.

Answer: B. *New York requires transition planning by the year the student turns fifteen. The federal age is sixteen.*

2. Why must adult service connections, such as OPWDD or ACCES, begin during the school years rather than at exit?

- A. Because schools are required to provide adult services.
- B. Because eligibility for adult services takes time, and applications and documentation must begin well before the student exits school.
- C. Because adult agencies require parental consent only after the student turns twenty-one.
- D. Because adult services are unrelated to the IEP.

Answer: B. *Adult eligibility processes are slow. Beginning during school ensures continuity of services into adult life.*

3. Which of the following best describes the role of the student in transition planning?

- A. The student observes while the team makes the plan.
- B. The student is at the center of planning, with the team supporting and informing rather than deciding for the student, because the post-school plan is the student's life.
- C. The student is invited only when the parent is unavailable.
- D. The student's input is required only after age twenty-one.

Answer: B. *Transition is the student's life after school. Self-determination is central, and the student should be at the center of planning.*

0007 Competency Constructed Response (Written Question)

Putting It All Together

The eight indicators in Competency 0006 cover the skills students need for life: communication in any form, social participation, integrated affective and life skills instruction, social skills, self-advocacy and self-determination, personal and career and independent living skills, transitions during the school years, and post-secondary transitions. Eleven of the ninety selected-response items come from this competency.

The strongest answers reflect a teacher who teaches skills explicitly, plans for generalization, respects students' voices and goals, includes families as partners, and connects school instruction to adult life. Transition is the long arc, beginning before age fifteen in New York and continuing through every transition the student faces.

The exam is not the goal. The goal is the work.

Final Notes for Test Day

You have studied six competencies, ninety-eight performance indicators, and the laws, strategies, and research that hold them together. As you walk into the testing center, a few reminders may help.

Read carefully

Most wrong answers on this exam look reasonable. The strongest answer is usually the one that respects the law, treats students and families with dignity, draws on collaboration, and reflects research-validated practice. When two options seem equally good, look for the one that fits more pieces of that picture.

Watch for terminology traps

New York uses some terms that differ from federal language: emotional disability rather than emotional disturbance; learning disability rather than specific learning disability; transition planning by age fifteen rather than sixteen; Multilingual Learner (MLL) rather than English Language Learner (ELL). The exam tests these distinctions.

Trust your preparation

If a question feels unfamiliar, slow down and break it into parts. Identify the indicator it is testing. Ask what a thoughtful, ethical, well-prepared special education teacher would do. The answer is almost always one of the options.

Pace yourself

Ninety multiple-choice items in 135 minutes leaves about 90 seconds per item. The constructed response gets 60 minutes of focused writing. If you get stuck, mark the item and move on. Come back at the end.

The exam is not the goal. The goal is the work that follows it. Every student in your future classroom will benefit from the time you spent mastering this material. Good luck.