



American Academy of Special Education Professionals

AASEP

STAFF DEVELOPMENT in SPECIAL EDUCATION

Roles and Responsibilities of the Special Education Teacher

As a special educator you will come in contact with and be responsible for the educational needs of children with a wide range of disabilities. These children will also require a variety of different services, modifications and accommodations in their educational experiences. Knowledge of each type of disability and the specific needs of the children with that disability are crucial if you plan to be or are already involved in the field of special education. The various categories of disabilities are clearly defined in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004. These include:

- autism,
- deaf-blindness,
- emotional disturbance,
- hearing impairment (including deafness),
- mental retardation,
- multiple disabilities,
- orthopedic impairment,
- other health impairment,
- specific learning disability,
- speech or language impairment,
- traumatic brain injury, or
- visual impairment (including blindness).

The special education teacher in today's schools plays a very critical role in the proper education of exceptional students. The teacher is unique in that he/she can fit many different roles in the educational environment. However, each of these distinct roles involves a variety of responsibilities and functions. Understanding these responsibilities can only help the special educator become more familiar with the role and increase the chances for success. For instance, the special education teacher can be assigned to a variety of different educational situations. The varying educational roles of a special education teacher are described in this course.

1- A teacher in a self contained special education classroom in a general education school: This role would involve working with a certain number of disabled students in a special education setting. This type of setting allows for the use of mainstreaming, the involvement of a disabled child in a general education classroom for a part of the regular school day, as an educational tool when a student is ready for this type of transitional technique. The teacher in a self-contained classroom is usually assisted by a teaching assistant.

In this type of setting the special educator may be faced with a variety of responsibilities including but not limited to the following:

- Curriculum development
- Parent conferences
- Pre-and post testing using group standardized tests
- Involvement at the annual review-an annual meeting held by the IEP

Committee to discuss the progress of each child with a disability and to plan the next year's Individual Education Plan

- Involvement in the triennial evaluation process-an evaluation that takes place every three years to determine if the conditions for the original classification are still present or need to be modified. The requirement here would be limited to progress reports and recommendations for the following year.

- Monitoring the IEP, modifications and accommodations

2- The resource teacher in a categorical or non categorical resource room: A resource room in a special school which deals with only one type of exceptionality is called a categorical resource room. A non categorical resource room is a resource room usually found in the regular mainstream school where children with varied exceptionalities are educated at one time. This type of role necessitates close involvement with each child's homeroom teacher and the transfer of practical techniques and suggestions to facilitate the child's success while in the general education setting.

In this type of setting the special educator may be faced with a variety of responsibilities including but not limited to the following:

- Curriculum modification: here the resource teacher assists the classroom teacher in modifying the curriculum to meet the learning style and needs of the child with a disability
- Parent conferences
- Educational evaluator: in many cases the resource room teacher is asked to do the educational evaluations for initial evaluations, screening and triennial evaluations.
- Pre-and post testing using group standardized tests
- Involvement at the annual review-an annual meeting held by the IEP Committee to discuss the progress of each child with a disability and to plan the next year's Individual Education Plan
- Involvement in the triennial evaluation process-an evaluation that takes place every three years to determine if the conditions for the original classification are still present or need to be modified. The requirement here would be limited to either discussion of test results or to update the progress of the student and recommendations for the following year.
- Monitoring the IEP, modifications and accommodations

3- An educational evaluator on the Child Study Team (CST): The CST is a school based support team that discusses and makes recommendation on high-risk students. The role of an educational evaluator on this team requires a complete and professional understanding of testing and evaluation procedures, and diagnosis and interpretation of test results.

In this type of setting the special educator may be faced with a variety of responsibilities including but not limited to the following:

- Educational evaluator for initial evaluations (evaluations performed on students being classified for the first time).
- Involvement in the triennial evaluation process-an evaluation that takes place every three years to determine if the conditions for the original classification are still present or need to be modified.
- Interpreting diagnostic results from outside evaluations

4-A member of the IEP Committee (depending on the state may also be referred to as the Committee on Special Education or IEP Committee): The IEP Committee is a district based committee mandated by Federal law whose responsibilities include the classification, placement and evaluation of all disabled children within the district. This role involves interpreting educational test results, making recommendations, and diagnosing strengths and weaknesses for the Individual Educational Plan, a list of goals, needs and objectives required for every disabled student.

In this type of setting the special educator may be faced with a variety of responsibilities including but not limited to the following:

- interpreting educational test results,
- making recommendations for the IEP Committee, the IEP, classification or placement
- diagnosing strengths and weaknesses for the Individual Educational Plan (a list of goals , needs and objectives required for every disabled student)

5-A member of a multidisciplinary teaching team educating secondary students in a departmentalized program: This type of program is fairly new to secondary schools where the students with a disability follow a departmentalized program like other students but all their classes are taught by special education teachers.

In this type of setting the special educator may be faced with a variety of responsibilities including but not limited to the following:

- Curriculum development
- Parent conferences
- Involvement at the annual review-an annual meeting held by the IEP Committee to discuss the progress of each child with a disability and to plan the next year's Individual Education Plan
- Involvement in the triennial evaluation process-an evaluation that takes place every three years to determine if the conditions for the original classification are still present or need to be modified. The requirement here would be limited to progress reports and recommendations for the following year.
- Monitoring the IEP, modifications and accommodations

6-A consultant teacher: This is a special education teacher assigned to work with a child with a disability right in the mainstreamed class. There are times when the IEP Committee may decide that it would be in the best interests of the child to receive services within his/her own classroom rather than leave to go to a pull-out program like a resource room. This may occur when a child has problems with fragmentation, a situation where the schedule may cause him/her to leave the class to go to the resource room in the middle of one lesson and returns in the middle of another. This fragmentation can create severe confusion for some children.

In this type of setting the special educator may be faced with a variety of responsibilities including but not limited to the following:

- Curriculum modification: here the consultant teacher assists the classroom teacher in modifying the curriculum to meet the learning style and needs of the child with a disability

- Parent conferences

- Pre-and post testing using group standardized tests

- Involvement at the annual review-an annual meeting held by the IEP Committee to discuss the progress of each child with a disability and to plan the next year's Individual Education Plan

- Involvement in the triennial evaluation process-an evaluation that takes place every three years to determine if the conditions for the original classification are still present or need to be modified. The requirement here would be limited to either discussion of test results or to update the progress of the student and recommendations for the following year.

- Monitoring the IEP, modifications and accommodations

7- An itinerant teacher: This is a special education teacher employed by an agency hired to visit various schools in several districts and work with children with disabilities. This provides each child with the required auxiliary services and allows a district to meet requirements without having a program of their own.

In this type of setting the special educator may be faced with a variety of responsibilities including but not limited to the following:

- Curriculum modification: here the itinerant teacher assists the classroom teacher in modifying the curriculum to meet the learning style and needs of the child with a disability
- Parent conferences
- Educational evaluator: in some cases the itinerant room teacher is asked to do the educational evaluations. If this is the case the district will usually pay the agency a fee for this service.
- Pre-and post testing using group standardized tests
- Involvement at the annual review-an annual meeting held by the IEP Committee to discuss the progress of each child with a disability and to plan the next year's Individual Education Plan
- Involvement in the triennial evaluation process-an evaluation that takes place every three years to determine if the conditions for the original classification are still present or need to be modified. The requirement here would be limited to either discussion of test results or to update the progress of the student and recommendations for the following year.
- Monitoring the IEP, modifications and accommodations

8-An Inclusion Teacher in a partial inclusion program or full inclusion program (for an explanation of the different types of inclusion settings see _____): An inclusion class is a mainstream class with a population of children with and without disabilities. This classroom will consist of a general education teacher and a special education teacher working as a team.

In this type of setting the special educator may be faced with a variety of responsibilities including but not limited to the following:

- Curriculum development and modification: here the special education teacher assists the classroom teacher in developing and modifying the curriculum to meet the learning style and needs of the children with disabilities
- Student assistance: here the special education teacher may circulate among the children with disabilities during a lesson to ensure that they understand the concepts being taught, help with note taking skills, answer questions, and reinforce concepts.

- Parent conferences
- Pre-and post testing using group standardized tests
- Involvement at the annual review-an annual meeting held by the IEP

Committee to discuss the progress of each child with a disability and to plan the next year's Individual Education Plan

- Involvement in the triennial evaluation process-an evaluation that takes place every three years to determine if the conditions for the original classification are still present or need to be modified. The requirement here would be limited to either discussion of test results or to update the progress of the student and recommendations for the following year.

- Monitoring the IEP, modifications and accommodations

9-A teacher in a self contained special education classroom in a special school:

This role would involve working with a certain number of more seriously disabled students in a special education setting. The teacher in this setting is usually assisted by a teaching assistant as well as aides because of the seriousness of the disabilities exhibited by this population of students.

In this type of setting the special educator may be faced with a variety of responsibilities including but not limited to the following:

- Curriculum development
- Parent conferences
- Pre-and post testing using group standardized tests
- Involvement at the annual review-an annual meeting held by the IEP Committee

to discuss the progress of each child with a disability and to plan the next year's Individual Education Plan

- Involvement in the triennial evaluation process-an evaluation that takes place every three years to determine if the conditions for the original classification are still present or need to be modified. The requirement here would be limited to progress reports and recommendations for the following year.

- Monitoring the IEP, modifications and accommodations
- Working very closely with related service providers especially vocational and transition specialists if in the secondary level.

10- As a private practitioner: In this position you would be involved with the evaluation and remediation of children as an auxiliary service after school. In this capacity the special education teacher provides evaluation and remediation services for children with disabilities in addition to those provided by the district.

In this type of setting the special educator may be faced with a variety of responsibilities including but not limited to the following:

- Suggestions to the district on curriculum modification: here the private practitioner assists the classroom teacher in suggestions for modifying the curriculum to meet the learning style and needs of the child with a disability
- Initial evaluations requested by the parent
- Involvement at the annual review-an annual meeting held by the IEP Committee to discuss the progress of each child with a disability and to plan the next year's Individual Education Plan
- Involvement in the triennial evaluation process-an evaluation that takes place every three years to determine if the conditions for the original classification are still present or need to be modified. The requirement here would be limited to either discussion of test results or to update the progress of the student and recommendations for the following year.

Whatever the role, you will always encounter a variety of situations that require practical decisions and relevant suggestions. No matter what role you play in special education, there is always a need to be able to fully understand symptoms, causality, evaluation, diagnosis, prescription and remediation as well as communicating vital information to professionals, parents and students.

There is no doubt that you will need to learn a great deal, have a good base of knowledge in legal and educational areas and be ready for an exciting, rewarding, but demanding profession.

Adapted from the Special Educator's Survival Guide/Pierangelo/Jossey Bass Publishers/2005