Designing EPPs Aligned with CEC's 2020 Intial Practice-Based K-12 Standards

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ABSTRACT

CEC's 2020 Practice-Based Standards for Preparation of Special Educators (K-12) identify proficiencies considered essential for successful entry into the profession. To assist Educator Preparation Programs (EPPs) in the design and assessment of programs aligned with these new Standards, the authors introduce a six-step approach that is systematic, deliberative, and applicable in diverse contexts. The approach includes: (a) understanding the Standards and available resources, (b) aligning CEC Standards with CEC's High Leverage Practices (HLPs), InTASC and other applicable standards; (c) mapping the program to standards to identify gaps and redundancies; (d) developing course syllabi; (e) identifying key program assessments; and (f) implementing and monitoring the program. Each step of the process is described, and examples are provided.

KEYWORDS

CEC Standards, EPP program assessment, EPP program design, high leverage practices

The 2020 Practice-Based Standards for Initial Preparation of Special Educators (K-12) represent more than a periodic updating by the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC). Over a seven-year period, three different national workgroups formulated the 2020 Standards; two workgroups framed the overall approach and one, the Standards Development Workgroup, produced the final set of Standards (Berlinghoff & McLaughlin, 2022). Throughout the process, CEC provided multiple opportunities for input and feedback from the professional community. A primary intentional emphasis for 2020 was the focus on *practice* through incorporation of CEC's High Leverage Practices (HLPs). Additionally, the 2020 Standards fulfill guidelines of the Council for Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) and align with Standards of the Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC). Whether or not Educator Preparation Programs (EPPs) are pursuing CAEP Accreditation or CEC Program Recognition, they will want to align with the CEC 2020 Standards, since these reflect the current best thinking of the profession.

Faced with myriad challenges of recruitment, preparation, and support of special educators, EPPs need effective and efficient approaches for revising their existing programs and developing new ones. The purpose of this article is to introduce a six-step process that is applicable in diverse contexts for design and assessment of EPPs aligned with CEC Initial K-12 Standards. This approach to program design and assessment is systematic, deliberative, and best accomplished collaboratively by EPP faculty. It has evolved over decades of experience, as the authors have led program developments and reviews within their own institutions, served as reviewers and visiting team members for many other institutions, and consulted with other EPPs preparing for reviews. The process can be used for any program models (e.g., baccalaureate, masters, alternative, certificate) and enables EPPs to

innovate their offerings while ensuring their program completers are career ready. Although this article focuses specifically on implementation of the 2020 CEC Initial K-12 Standards, the overall process for program design and assessment could facilitate alignment with other professional preparation standards relevant to EPPs.

The steps described below should be helpful to EPPs as they create action plans to guide their program development work. Backwards mapping from the intended date for launching a new or revised program is a good way to begin. EPPs that are pursuing national accreditation or CEC Program Recognition will need several years of data on program completers, and this must be built into the process. When developing action plans and timelines, EPPs also must allow for whatever internal and external reviews and approvals are required prior to offering a new or significantly revised program. These reviews often take longer than anticipated and can require multiple submissions before approval is granted. Given the work involved in program design, the approvals needed in order to launch, and data on program completers that may be required for state approval or national accreditation, EPPs are advised to start early and plan for multi-year efforts.

STEP 1. BECOME FAMILIAR WITH PRACTICE-BASED STANDARDS AND RESOURCES AVAILABLE

The best resource for understanding and using the new standards for program development is the CEC publication, *Practice-Based Standards for the Preparation of Special Educators* (Berlinghoff & McLaughlin, 2022). Colloquially referred to as *The Purple Book*, it presents the Standards and Components, with their Supporting Explanations, and Knowledge Bases, along with potential performance indicators and potential sources of evidence for EPPs. Each Standard and its accompanying Components describe *what* candidates are expected to do; then the Supporting Explanations describe *how* we might see candidates performing; and the Knowledge Bases describe *why* each of the Standards and Components are important. The Standards can be used in a variety of program designs, because they do not dictate any specific program model. The seven Standards and 23 Components, along with a Field Experience and Clinical Practice Standard (Berlinghoff & McLaughlin, 2022), are presented in Figure 1.

> The most significant change in the 2020 Standards from earlier releases is that the current Standards are practice-based.

The most significant change in the 2020 Standards from earlier releases is that the current Standards are *practice-based*. The concept "practice-based" has a two-fold meaning: (a) a strong focus on application or performance of identified proficiencies, and (b) assurance of mastery through multiple opportunities for candidates to practice those proficiencies throughout their EPPs. From other professions (e.g., doctors, pilots, electricians), we know that practicing what has been learned in real world situations is crucial to mastery. For first year teachers, the link between coursework and practice is critical (Boyd et al., 2009). If teacher candidates are to apply what they have learned in their coursework to their classrooms, they need multiple opportunities, with feedback, to do so during their preparation programs (McLeskey et al., 2017).

Benedict et al. (2016) suggest that when EPPs are planning practice-based opportunities for teacher candidates, three guiding principles should be considered:

1. Focus: What do all candidates need to know and be able to do? How are candidates given opportunities to practice critical content and pedagogy?
2. Duration: What is the length of time given for candidates to practice and master content and pedagogy, so they are ready on their first day in the classroom?
3. Coherence: How are expectations made conspicuous across courses and fieldwork? What consideration has been given to course alignment, sequencing, and scaffolding?

Depending on the setting (e.g., urban vs rural) or program type (e.g., traditional vs accelerated), it might not be possible for all candidates to practice every targeted skill in a classroom setting; however, other options are available. These include, but are not limited to, microteaching, case studies or videos (e.g., CEEDAR Resource Library (n.d.); Kennedy HLP Video Showcase (n.d.), pre-student teaching fieldwork, mixed reality simulated classroom experiences, or student teaching/practicum (Benedict et al., 2016), Likewise, there are a variety of ways candidates can meet the Standards, as relevant to individual programs, and may include using I Do, We Do, You Do during instruction; modifying curricula for individual students and groups; developing and implementing behavior plans; or meeting with co-teachers, parents, or paraprofessionals. Products such as IEPs, lesson plans, assessment reports,

FIGURE 1: CEC 2020 Practice-Based Standards and Components (K-12)

STANDARDS	COMPONENTS
STANDARD 1: ENGAGING IN PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AND PRACTICE WITHIN ETHICAL GUIDELINES Candidates practice within ethical and legal guidelines; engage in ongoing self-reflection to design and implement professional learning activities; and advocate for improved outcomes for individuals with exceptionalities and their families while considering their social, cultural, and linguistic diversity.	**Component 1.1** Candidates practice within ethical guidelines and legal policies and procedures. **Component 1.2** Candidates advocate for improved outcomes for individuals with exceptionalities and their families while addressing the unique needs of those with diverse social, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds. **Component 1.3** Candidates design and implement professional learning activities based on ongoing analysis of student learning; self-reflection; professional standards, research, and contemporary practices.
STANDARD 2: UNDERSTANDING AND ADDRESSING EACH INDIVIDUAL'S DEVELOPMENTAL AND LEARNING NEEDS Candidates use their understanding of human growth and development; multiple influences on development; individual differences; diversity, including exceptionalities; and families and communities to plan and implement inclusive learning environments and experiences that provide individuals with exceptionalities high-quality learning experiences reflective of each individual's strengths and needs.	**Component 2.1** Candidates apply understanding of human growth and development to create developmentally appropriate and meaningful learning experiences that address individualized strengths and needs of students with exceptionalities. **Component 2.2** Candidates use their knowledge and understanding of diverse factors that influence development and learning including differences related to families, languages, cultures, and communities, and to individual differences, including exceptionalities, to plan and implement learning experiences and environments.
STANDARD 3: DEMONSTRATING SUBJECT MATTER CONTENT AND SPECIALIZED CURRICULAR KNOWLEDGE Candidates apply their understanding of the academic subject matter content of the general curriculum and specialized curricula to inform their programmatic and instructional decisions for learners with exceptionalities.	**Component 3.1** Candidates apply their understanding of academic subject matter content of the general curriculum to inform their programmatic and instructional decisions for individuals with exceptionalities. **Component 3.2** Candidates augment the general education curriculum to address skills and strategies that students with disabilities need to access the core curriculum and function successfully within a variety of contexts and the continuum of placement options to assure specially designed instruction is developed and implemented to achieve mastery of curricular standards and individualized goals and objectives.
STANDARD 4: USING ASSESSMENT TO UNDERSTAND THE LEARNER AND THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT FOR DATA-BASED DECISION MAKING Candidates assess students' learning, behavior, and the classroom environment in order to evaluate and support classroom and school-based problem-solving systems of intervention and instruction. Candidates evaluate students to determine their strengths and needs, contribute to students' eligibility determination, communicate students' progress, inform short and long-term instructional planning, and make ongoing adjustments to instruction using technology as appropriate.	**Component 4.1** Candidates collaboratively develop, select, administer, analyze, and interpret multiple measures of student learning, behavior, and the classroom environment to evaluate and support classroom and school-based systems of intervention for students with and without exceptionalities. C**omponent 4.2** Candidates develop, select, and administer multiple, formal and informal, culturally and linguistically appropriate measures and procedures that are valid and reliable, to contribute to eligibility determination for special education services. **Component 4.3** Candidates assess, collaboratively analyze, interpret, and communicate students' progress toward measurable outcomes using technology as appropriate, to inform both short- and long-term planning, and make ongoing adjustments to instruction.

STANDARD 5: USING EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTION TO SUPPORT LEARNING Candidates use knowledge of individuals' development, learning needs and assessment data to inform decisions about effective instruction. Candidates use explicit instructional strategies; employ strategies to promote active engagement and increased motivation to individualize instruction to support each individual. Candidates use whole group instruction, flexible grouping, small group instruction, and individual instruction. Candidates teach individuals to use meta-/cognitive strategies to support and self-regulate learning.	**Component 5.1** Candidates use findings from multiple assessments, including student self-assessment, that are responsive to cultural and linguistic diversity and specialized as needed, to identify what students know and are able to do. They then interpret the assessment data to appropriately plan and guide instruction to meet rigorous academic and non-academic content and goals for each individual. **Component 5.2** Candidates use effective strategies to promote active student engagement, increase student motivation, increase opportunities to respond, and enhance self- regulation of student learning. **Component 5.3** Candidates use explicit, systematic instruction to teach content, strategies, and skills to make clear what a learner needs to do or think about while learning. **Component 5.4** Candidates use flexible grouping to support the use of instruction that is adapted to meet the needs of each individual and group. **Component 5.5** Candidates organize and manage focused, intensive small group instruction to meet the learning needs of each individual. **Component 5.6** Candidates plan and deliver specialized, individualized instruction that is used to meet the learning needs of each individual.
STANDARD 6: SUPPORTING SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, AND BEHAVIORAL GROWTH Candidates create and contribute to safe, respectful, and productive learning environments for individuals with exceptionalities through the use of effective routines and procedures and use a range of preventive and responsive practices to support social, emotional and educational wellbeing. They follow ethical and legal guidelines and work collaboratively with families and other professionals to conduct behavioral assessments for intervention and program development.	**Component 6.1** Candidates use effective routines and procedures to create safe, caring, respectful, and productive learning environments for individuals with exceptionalities. **Component 6.2** Candidates use a range of preventive and responsive practices documented as effective to support individuals' social, emotional, and educational well-being. **Component 6.3** Candidates systematically use data from a variety of sources to identify the purpose or function served by problem behavior to plan, implement, and evaluate behavioral interventions and social skills programs, including generalization to other environments.

or behavior intervention plans might be the means by which candidates are given multiple opportunities to apply what they have learned and receive feedback.

STEP 2. COMPLETE CROSSWALKS TO ALIGN RELEVANT STANDARDS

The explicit alignment of the 2020 CEC Standards for Practice-Based Preparation of Special Educators K-12 with CEC's HLPs and InTASC Standards greatly facilitates program design and assessment efforts. Figure 2 details these alignments to provide a useful tool for program development.

In addition to benchmarking against InTASC Standards, HLPs, and CEC Standards, EPPs typically must meet standards, comply with regulations, and submit to program reviews at multiple levels. These may include, for example, requirements for programs within an academic department, college, and university. Beyond these internal expectations, EPPs must also comply with regulations from state governing boards, including those responsible for approval of teacher education programs and licensure of professional educators. National accreditation and recognition by national specialty associations (SPAs) are required in many states; in

FIGURE 1: CEC 2020 Practice-Based Standards and Components (K-12)

STANDARD 7: COLLABORATING WITH TEAM MEMBERS Candidates apply team processes and communication strategies to collaborate in a culturally responsive manner with families, paraprofessionals, and other professionals within the school, other educational settings, and the community to lead meetings, plan programs, and access services for individuals with exceptionalities and their families.	**Component 7.1** Candidates utilize communication, group facilitation, and problem-solving strategies in a culturally responsive manner to lead effective meetings and share expertise and knowledge to build team capacity and jointly address students' instructional and behavioral needs. **Component 7.2** Candidates communicate, coordinate, and collaborate with families and other professionals within the educational setting to assess, plan, and implement effective programs and services that promote progress toward measurable outcomes for individuals with and without exceptionalities and their families. **Component 7.3** Candidates communicate, coordinate, and collaborate with professionals and agencies within the community to identify and access services, resources, and supports to meet the identified needs of individuals with exceptionalities and their families. **Component 7.4** Candidates understand their role of working with paraprofessionals to implement efficiently and effectively necessary components of the IEP.
FIELD EXPERIENCE AND CLINICAL PRACTICE STANDARD FOR K-12 Special education candidates progress through a series of developmentally sequenced field and clinical experiences for the full range of ages, types, and levels of abilities, and collaborative opportunities that are appropriate to the license or roles for which they are preparing. These field and clinical experiences are supervised by qualified professionals.	

(Berlinghoff & McLaughlin, 2022, pp 7-9)

others it is optional. In some instances, the standards and program performance expectations of these various groups have been intentionally aligned, making it far easier for teacher educators to design and assess their EPPs in ways that position them for successful reviews. Unfortunately, this is not often the case. EPPs are then left on their own to analyze multiple sets of standards, whenever possible aligning them, in order to ensure that their program completers demonstrate mastery of all required competencies.

The matrix presented in Figure 3 serves as a tool to help EPPs visualize alignment of specific course objectives and assessments across multiple sets of standards. The first two columns of the matrix can be populated from Figure 2 above. Because the 2020 CEC Standards intentionally incorporated the CEC HLPs, it is not necessary for programs to show separate alignment with the HLPs. Appropriate state standards for program approval and/or teacher licensure should be added and, to the extent possible, aligned with the national standards. Additional columns may be added for any other standards that apply (e.g., college/school/ departmental performance expectations). In the next step, EPP faculty proceed to map their specific course objectives and assessments to the applicable standards.

STEP 3. MAP THE PROGRAM TO IDENTIFY GAPS AND REDUNDANCIES

The matrix introduced in Figure 3 is useful as a graphic organizer to help EPPs focus on the many relevant standards that must be addressed. Once these standards have been analyzed and aligned, EPPs must then ensure adequate coverage through coursework and clinical experiences and also identify specific ways that candidate performance is assessed.

This step often begins by having individuals or groups responsible for specific courses or clinical experiences contribute to relevant sections of a shared document. For existing

FIGURE 2: InTASC, HLP, CEC Standards Alignment

InTASC Model Core Teaching Standards	High Leverage Practices	Initial K-12 Special Education Preparation Standards (primary alignment)
THE LEARNER AND LEARNING **#1: Learner Development.** The teacher understands how learners grow and develop, recognizing that patterns of learning and development vary individually within and across the cognitive, linguistic, social, emotional, and physical areas, and designs and implements developmentally appropriate and challenging learning experiences. **#2: Learning Differences.** The teacher uses understanding of individual differences and diverse cultures and communities to ensure inclusive learning environments that enable each learner to meet high standards. **#3: Learning Environments.** The teacher works with others to create environments that support individual and collaborative learning, and that encourage positive social interaction, active engagement in learning, and self-motivation.	**SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL/BEHAVIORAL PRACTICES** Effective special education teachers establish a consistent, organized, and respectful learning environment to support student success. To do this, they employ several practices that are critical in promoting student social and emotional well-being. **HLP 7:** Establish a consistent, organized, and respectful learning environment. **HLP 8:** Provide positive and constructive feedback to guide students' learning and behavior. **HLP 9:** Teach social behaviors.	**STANDARD 2: UNDERSTANDING AND ADDRESSING EACH INDIVIDUAL'S DEVELOPMENTAL AND LEARNING NEEDS** Candidates use their understanding of human growth and development; multiple influences on development; individual differences; diversity, including exceptionalities; and families and communities to plan and implement inclusive learning environments and experiences that provide individuals with exceptionalities high-quality learning experiences reflective of each individual's strengths and needs. **STANDARD 6: SUPPORTING SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, AND BEHAVIORAL GROWTH** Candidates create and contribute to safe, respectful, and productive learning environments for individuals with exceptionalities through the use of effective routines and procedures and use a range of preventive and responsive practices to support social, emotional and educational wellbeing. They follow ethical and legal guidelines and work collaboratively with families and other professionals to conduct behavioral assessments for intervention and program development.
CONTENT **#4: Content Knowledge.** The teacher understands the central concepts, tools of inquiry, and structures of the discipline(s) he or she teaches and creates learning experiences that make the discipline accessible and meaningful for learners to assure mastery of the content. **#5: Application of Content.** The teacher understands how to connect concepts and use differing perspectives to engage learners in critical thinking, creativity, and collaborative problem solving related to authentic local and global issues.	**INSTRUCTION** Effective special education teachers are well versed in general education curricula and other contextually relevant curricula, and use appropriate standards, learning progressions, and evidence-based practices in conjunction with specific IEP goals and benchmarks to prioritize long- and short-term learning goals and to plan instruction. **HLP 11:** Identify and prioritize long- and short-term learning goals. **HLP 12:** Systematically design instruction toward a specific learning goal. **HLP 13:** Adapt curriculum tasks and materials for specific learning goals. **HLP 16:** Use explicit instruction.	**STANDARD 3: DEMONSTRATING SUBJECT MATTER CONTENT AND SPECIALIZED CURRICULAR KNOWLEDGE** Candidates apply their understanding of the academic subject matter content of the general curriculum and specialized curricula to inform their programmatic and instructional decisions for learners with exceptionalities.

FIGURE 2: InTASC, HLP, CEC Standards Alignment

INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICE

#6: Assessment. The teacher understands and uses multiple methods of assessment to engage learners in their own growth, to monitor learner progress, and to guide the teacher's and learner's decision making.

#7: Planning for Instruction. The teacher plans instruction that supports every student in meeting rigorous learning goals by drawing upon knowledge of content areas, curriculum, cross-disciplinary skills, and pedagogy, as well as knowledge of learners and the community context.

#8: Instructional Strategies. The teacher understands and uses a variety of instructional strategies to encourage learners to develop deep understanding of content areas and their connections, and to build skills to apply knowledge in meaningful ways.

ASSESSMENT

Assessment plays a foundational role in special education. Students with disabilities are complex learners who have unique needs that exist alongside their strengths. Effective special education teachers have to fully understand those strengths and needs. Thus, these teachers are knowledgeable regarding assessment and are skilled in using and interpreting data.

HLP 4: Use multiple sources of information to develop a comprehensive understanding of a student's strengths and needs.

HLP 5: Interpret and communicate assessment information with stakeholders to collaboratively design and implement educational programs.

HLP 6: Use student assessment data, analyze instructional practices, and make necessary adjustments that improve student outcomes.

HLP 19: Use assistive and instructional technologies.

INSTRUCTION

Teaching students with disabilities is a strategic, flexible, and recursive process as effective special education teachers use content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge (including evidence-based practice), and data on student learning to design, deliver, and evaluate the effectiveness of instruction. This process begins with well-designed instruction

HLP 11: Identify and prioritize long- and short-term learning goals.

HLP 12: Systematically design instruction toward a specific learning goal.

HLP 13: Adapt curriculum tasks and materials for specific learning goals.

HLP 14: Teach cognitive and metacognitive strategies to support learning and independence.

HLP 15: Provide scaffolded supports.

HLP 16: Use explicit instruction.

STANDARD 4: USING ASSESSMENT TO UNDERSTAND THE LEARNER AND THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT FOR DATA-BASED DECISION MAKING

Candidates assess students' learning, behavior, and the classroom environment in order to evaluate and support classroom and school-based problem-solving systems of intervention and instruction. Candidates evaluate students to determine their strengths and needs, contribute to students' eligibility determination, communicate students' progress, inform short and long-term instructional planning, and make ongoing adjustments to instruction using technology as appropriate.

STANDARD 5: USING EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTION TO SUPPORT LEARNING

Candidates use knowledge of individuals' development, learning needs and assessment data to inform decisions about effective instruction. Candidates use explicit instructional strategies; employ strategies to promote active engagement and increased motivation to individualize instruction to support each individual. Candidates use whole group instruction, flexible grouping, small group instruction, and individual instruction. Candidates teach individuals to use meta-/cognitive strategies to support and self-regulate learning.

PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY	COLLABORATION	STANDARD 1: ENGAGING IN PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AND PRACTICE WITHIN ETHICAL GUIDELINES
#9: Professional Learning and Ethical Practice. The teacher engages in ongoing professional learning and uses evidence to continually evaluate his/her practice, particularly the effects of his/her choices and actions on others (learners, families, other professionals, and the community), and adapts practice to meet the needs of each learner. **#10: Leadership and Collaboration.** The teacher seeks appropriate leadership roles and opportunities to take responsibility for student learning, to collaborate with learners, families, colleagues, other school professionals, and community members to ensure learner growth, and to advance the profession.	Effective special education teachers collaborate with a wide range of professionals, families and caregivers to assure that educational programs and related services are effectively designed and implemented to meet the needs of each student with a disability. **HLP 1:** Collaborate with professionals to increase student success. **HLP 2:** Organize and facilitate effective meetings with professionals and families. **HLP 3:** Collaborate with families to support student learning and secure needed services. **HLP 4:** Use multiple sources of information to develop a comprehensive understanding of a student's strengths and needs.	Candidates practice within ethical and legal guidelines; advocate for improved outcomes for individuals with exceptionalities and their families while considering their social, cultural, and linguistic diversity; and engage in ongoing self-reflection to design and implement professional learning activities. Standard 7: Collaborating with Team Members Candidates apply team processes and communication strategies to collaborate in a culturally responsive manner with families, paraprofessionals, and other professionals within the school, other educational settings, and the community to lead meetings, plan programs, and access services for individuals with exceptionalities and their families.

programs, faculty should note what is currently being done and allow the process to inform program improvements. When faculty are designing brand new programs or intending *major* redesign of existing ones, they may start from scratch laying out where content should be covered and how student performance should be assessed. Documents can be created online using collaborative writing software, such as Google Docs, Drop Box, or Microsoft Teams. If faculty prefer to work face-to-face, it helps to have plenty of whiteboard space or large sticky notes.

Although collecting this initial input is essential, it is seldom sufficient. Meaningful program development requires a great deal of analysis, dialog, and collaborative decision making. Detailed mapping enables teacher educators to identify important gaps in the program, i.e., competencies that are not yet adequately addressed. It also is likely to reveal redundancies across courses and assessments. Some degree of redundancy may be intentional to build competencies sequentially. For example, the topic, IEP development, might be included in several different courses. An introductory course in special education may require knowledge of the IEP process and components; an assessment course may have candidates gather and synthesize data on present levels of performance; and methods courses may have them develop goals, objectives, and accommodations for the student's educational program. A course on collaboration may focus on interactions with the student, family, and other professionals before, during, and after the IEP meeting. Understanding how each course addresses a specific facet of a complex competency like IEP development enables faculty to build upon prior knowledge and skills in an efficient and effective manner. Given the number of competencies to be mastered, EPPs must be structured with great attention to detail to avoid unnecessary redundancy, such as repetition of course topics, assignments, or assessments at the same level of complexity.

Figure 4 provides an example of a completed map related to a single Component for Standard 7: Collaborating with Families, Paraprofessionals, and Other Professionals. In this case example, the EPP is William & Mary master's degree program for initial licensure in Special Education, K-12 General Curriculum, in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

With this amount of information, a portrait layout with vertical text is more practical than the horizontal matrix or landscape format introduced above.

STEP 4. DEVELOP COURSE SYLLABI

Once EPP faculty have determined where essential topics will be addressed and how candidate proficiencies will be assessed, it is time to develop or update syllabi for all of the courses in the program. A course syllabus serves a number of purposes. The Center for Teaching Innovation at Cornell University (n.d.) explains four main functions of a good syllabus: (a) a communication tool to convey important information about the course to students; (b) a

FIGURE 3: Sample Matrix

INTASC STANDARDS	CEC STANDARDS	STATE S TANDARDS	SCHOOL/COLLEGE/ DEPARTMENTAL COMPETENCIES	PROGRAM COMPETENCIES	ADDITIONAL AS NEEDED

cognitive map placing the course in the broader academic context while specifying its intended learning outcomes; (c) a guide to expectations between the instructor and students with references to relevant policies; (d) a plan of action with a timeline for class sessions and assignments. Syllabi also have served as important documentation for accreditation and program approval reviews, since they provide the most detailed descriptions of the curriculum offered to candidates. Many states still require submission of course syllabi for program approval; however, the focus for national accreditation and program recognition has shifted in recent decades from reviewing inputs like syllabi to assessing candidate performance as an outcome. None-the-less, syllabi remain a critical component of program design, unpacking broad EPP goals into manageable units for instruction and assessment.

Initial development of course syllabi may be done by individual faculty or small teams of faculty responsible for design and delivery of specific courses. Whether updating existing syllabi or creating them for new courses, faculty must be mindful of the current emphasis on *practice-based* learning and assessment described above that may require reconceptualizing assignments, use of class time, and expectations for clinical experiences. In acknowledging both the challenges and opportunities involved, Benedict and her colleagues (2016) note the following lesson:

EPPs and their faculty work with local districts to fully incorporate effective, deliberate, practice-based opportunities within both campus-based coursework and field experiences that encompass the features of deliberate practice; practice that is sequenced, coherent, and scaffolded over time and coupled with feedback and reflection (p. 1).

Although syllabi cannot capture all the rich dimensions of practice-based preparation, the emphasis should be evident throughout the documents.

Institutions, departments, and programs often prescribe their own syllabi formats, but basic course information, such as instructors, course description, and pre/co-requisites, is typically included. Most syllabi list course objectives, major topics to be covered, required and supplemental resources, and major assignments/assessments. Some institutions also include relevant university-based or course-based policies, as well as available resources for support.

Two syllabi components—learning objectives and assessments—warrant particular attention when EPPs are purposefully aligning with CEC's 2020 Practice-Based Standards. As statements of intended learning outcomes (i.e., what candidates are expected to *do* upon completion of the course), the objectives should align very closely with the relevant CEC Standards and Components. It is often helpful to use actual language from the Standards and to identify the specific Standard or Component addressed by a course objective. Certainly, there may be additional objectives unique to the course, but the syllabus should explicitly designate objectives aligned with CEC Standards. Similarly, the focus on *practice-based standards* heightens the importance of assessments, particularly any candidate performance assessments that serve as key or program assessments. The syllabus itself may provide only a brief description of the assessments with more detailed specifications and rubrics provided with the actual assignment/assessment.

Prior to approval through appropriate institutional channels, the collective EPP faculty should review, discuss, and refine draft syllabi to create a deeper, shared understanding of the program curriculum and to ensure its alignment with appropriate standards. Although individual instructors have academic freedom to personalize their courses, they also have responsibility to both candidates and their EPPs to ensure that the designated proficiencies are developed and assessed as planned. Well-developed syllabi define essential elements of courses that should be consistently implemented. When multiple instructors, including part-time/adjunct faculty, are involved, syllabi are especially vital tools for ensuring program quality and coherence.

STEP 5. IDENTIFY A MANAGEABLE NUMBER OF KEY ASSESSMENTS FOR THE PROGRAM

During the curriculum mapping and syllabi development steps described above, EPP faculty have identified candidate assessments within courses and clinical experiences. Deciding which assessments will then be used as key or program assessments can sometimes

FIGURE 4: Sample Mapping for EPP Alignment with CEC Standards and State Competencies

CEC Standard Component 7.2: Candidates communicate, coordinate, and collaborate with families, paraprofessionals and other professionals within the educational setting to assess, plan, and implement effective programs and services that promote progress toward measurable outcomes for individuals with and without exceptionalities and their families.

VA State Competency 4.a. Collaboration: Skills in consultation, case management, and collaboration, including coordination of service delivery with related service providers, general educators, and other professions in collaborative work environments to include: (1) Understanding the Standards of Learning, the structure of the curriculum, and accountability systems across K-12; (2) Understanding and assessing the organization and environment of general education classrooms across the K-12 setting; (3) Implementation of collaborative models, including collaborative consultation, co-teaching with co-planning, and student intervention teams; (4) Procedures to collaboratively develop, provide, and evaluate instructional and behavioral plans consistent with students' individual needs.

WHERE ADDRESSED IN THE EPP:

X87 – Collaboration for Teaching and Learning
X16 – Supervised Teaching in Special Education: Elementary
X17 – Supervised Teaching in Special Education: Secondary

HOW ASSESSED IN THE EPP:

X87 – Evaluations of candidates' co-planned and co-taught units including five lesson plans implemented in their field placement with one lesson observed by their university supervisor, and candidate reflection on the collaborative experience

X16 and X17 – Student teaching evaluations, including four items specifically on professional collaboration, completed by candidate, clinical faculty/cooperating teacher, and university supervisor

be difficult for EPPs to determine. The national accreditation process typically limits the number of program assessments to six to eight, as do many state departments of education. EPPs need sufficient amounts of appropriate data to inform program decision making, but not so much data that faculty cannot adequately analyze and reflect on what has been collected. EPPs should be mindful that a single key assessment might address multiple Standards and Components, so it is not necessary to have a separate assessment for each Standard or Component. For example, a student teaching/practicum/internship rubric evaluating instructional delivery could address CEC Standard 3, Standard 5, and Standard 6.

Noting the distinctions between key assessments and course assessments may simplify the process of choosing key assessments for a program. Some key assessments are course assessments, but not all course assessments are key assessments. For example, in a methods course, candidates might write three lesson plans during the semester. The first two submissions are written based on students in a case study, but the final lesson plan is for their assigned students in a field setting. All three lesson plans would be assessed and count toward the final course grade, but only the final lesson plan rubric score would be used as a key assessment for program data collection purposes. The focus of the first two lesson plans is on the product as the candidate develops the skill of writing lesson plans, whereas the final lesson plan includes the application or practice of instructional delivery. Similarly, an assignment based on an IRIS Module could serve as a course assessment factored into individual grades but not entered into the overall program evaluation.

When developing any assessment, EPPs are reminded that Standards and Components are *practice-based*, meaning assessments should be examining candidate performance, not simply a product. Thinking back to the earlier discussion of the principles of focus, duration, and coherence as they apply to practice-based development, EPPs need to ensure candidates will be given multiple and varied opportunities to apply what they have learned. No one expects concert pianists to become expert performers without extensive practice, so we should not expect candidates to be prepared for teaching without many opportunities to practice what they will be doing in classrooms. IEPs, classroom management plans, and lesson plans are acceptable key assessments, but *how* will candidates *use* them? Products might be necessary to document candidate skill progression but are not sufficient to show candidates can implement

FIGURE 5: Sample Rubric Element

Designs and manages a learning-focused classroom community and productive learning environment for students with disabilities.				
ALIGNMENT	**INEFFECTIVE (1)**	**LIMITED (2)**	**ADEQUATE (3)**	**EFFECTIVE (4)**
Standard 5 **Component 5.2** **Component 5.3** **Standard 6** **Component 6.1** **Component 6.2**	• Does not develop clear classroom routines and procedures; those that are used are not well-executed and do not appear to be developed based upon students' needs • Does not plan to prevent misbehavior through positive behavioral interventions and supports or punishes behavior. • Does not communicate intention and purpose for most rules, routines, and procedures. • Designs learning environments (e.g., physical, climate, time allowance) that result in few students' engagement • Rarely plans for and teaches social skills explicitly.	• Develops some classroom routines, but routine procedures are not well- executed and do not appear to be developed based upon students' needs • Inconsistently plans to prevent misbehavior through positive behavioral interventions and supports • Does not communicate intention and purpose for some rules, routines, or procedures • Designs learning environments (e.g., physical, climate, time allowance) that result in some students' engagement • Rarely plans for and teaches social skills explicitly but sometimes attempts to teach social skills relevant to a particular situation or "teachable moment".	• Develops routines for the classroom, individual, or support services with expectations and opportunities for students to practice. • Consistently plans to prevent misbehavior through positive behavioral interventions and supports • Defines methods for ensuring individual behavioral or academic success in one-to-one, small group, and large-group settings • Designs learning environments (e.g., physical, climate, time allowance) that result in most students' engagement in individual and group activities • Teaches social skills intentionally, including using explicit instruction strategies, to support student learning of skills required for students to work with others in the classroom while working toward student independence	• Develops effective routines specific to the nature of the classroom, individual need, and support services with specific expectations and opportunities for students to practice • Consistently and intentionally plans to prevent misbehavior through positive behavioral interventions and supports • Defines methods for ensuring individual behavioral and academic success in one-to-one, small group, and large-group settings • Designs learning environments (e.g., physical, climate, time allowance) that result in student ownership of individual and group activities • Teaches social skills intentionally, including using explicit instruction strategies and specific replacement behaviors, to support student learning of skills required for students to work with others in the classroom while working toward student independence.

Adapted from: Mississippi Department of Education. Retrieved :

https://www.mdek12.org/sites/default/files/Offices/MDE/OA/OTL/Teacher%20Center/special_education_growth_rubric_guidebook_2021_002.pdf

practices. As emphasized in the Field Experience and Clinical Practice Standard for K-12, candidate proficiency develops through multiple, scaffolded clinical experiences woven throughout the program with opportunities to apply what has been learned, receive feedback, and then try again.

When a manageable number of assessments have been identified, rubric development begins. Some EPPs will consider revising and aligning existing rubrics, while others will start fresh. The fundamentals of rubric development must be considered with either approach. Bargainnier (2003) identified attributes of a quality rubric: (a) clear criteria; (b) rich, descriptive language; (c) focus on positive attainment; (d) differentiation of performance, product, and effort; and (e) universal validity and reliability. Considering more practical applications, Leise and El Sayed (2009) reminded faculty to consider ease of creation, ease of use, and program assessment value. Rubrics that are difficult to create and use or are of little value to the program are not worth the time and effort they take to develop.

For implementation of the 2020 CEC Initial Practice-Based Standards, EPPs should develop rubrics that evaluate what they want to *see* in action, not merely documents candidates have *produced*. Faculty have seen many times

the candidate who was able to produce a written lesson plan with excellent goals, objectives, I Do, We Do, etc., but not able to implement a lesson plan effectively with students. EPPs should develop rubrics that are written in language that is easy for candidates to understand and can be used across instructors. Each rubric element, aligned with Standards/Components, should represent a developmental sequence from level to level. Proficiency level descriptors should be defined in actionable, performance-based, or observable terms. Without meaningful descriptors, the simple use of rating scales (e.g., 1-4) for proficiency levels does not provide the basis for consistent evaluation across instructors, nor does it provide constructive feedback to candidates.

In several states, EPPs are required to use the edTPA or specific Teacher Work Samples (TWS). These assessments include their own rubrics, which may not be aligned with the 2020 CEC K-12 Initial Practice-Based Standards. If the EPP is applying for national accreditation, they might consider creating an additional rubric specifically aligned to the CEC Standards and Components to reflect the required practice-based approach. Figure 5 illustrates a rubric element focused on creating a safe and productive learning environment for students with disabilities. While the primary focus of this element is Standard 6, Components 6.1 and 6.2, requiring candidates to implement explicit instruction aligns with Standard 5, Components 5.2 and 5.3. As described in Step 5, it is possible for one assessment to measure multiple Standards and Components.

One concern with the implementation of key assessments is their consistent application across evaluators, particularly when non-program faculty are supervising candidates in their clinical placements. EPPs need to provide their adjunct and clinical faculty with specific training and mentoring in use of their required assessments. To monitor inter-rater reliability, EPPs may have faculty and/or experienced supervisors also score candidate performance in key areas.

STEP 6. IMPLEMENT AND MONITOR THE PROGRAM

The process of EPP design and assessment culminates with full implementation along with continuous monitoring of the carefully developed plans. Active participation of faculty throughout the process described above helps to ensure that the curriculum and assessments are implemented with fidelity. Achievement of intended program outcomes depends upon consistent and coherent execution.

Effective monitoring of both candidate and program performance requires EPP access to a high-quality data management system. The system should enable faculty, and typically candidates themselves, to enter, store, and retrieve necessary data. Desirable data systems also facilitate aggregation and disaggregation of data for analyses. Some EPPs use data systems that have been developed in-house for these purposes, but many choose one of the commercially available web-based assessment and eFolio systems, such as LiveText, Chalk & Wire, or Taskstream. Depending on the size and complexity of EPP offerings, designated Assessment Coordinators may be responsible for oversight of the system, training and support for users, and production of reports.

At regular intervals, EPP faculty should review the available data to monitor both candidate and program performance. Cumulative data on individual candidates allow faculty to see how they are progressing through their coursework and clinical experiences. By reviewing candidate performance each semester, faculty can intervene early to provide appropriate support to candidates who may be struggling.

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By reviewing data aggregated at the program level on at least an annual basis, faculty can discern patterns of EPP strengths, as well as areas of concern that may need to be addressed. When patterns of candidate performance on program assessments fall short of expectations, EPP faculty can recycle through relevant steps of the process to refine their curricular mapping, course syllabi, and assessments. Such continuous program improvement is the ultimate purpose of program evaluation. Additionally, systematic data collection, management, and analyses are essential for successful external program and accreditation reviews. Although specific requirements will vary, agencies expect EPPs to have rigorous assessment systems and to document use of data for student and program decision making.

CONCLUSION

The six-step process for program and assessment development presented above facilitates alignment of EPPs in special education with relevant standards, particularly CEC's 2020 Initial K-12 Standards. The approach includes: (a) understanding the Practice-Based Standards and available resources; (b) aligning CEC Standards with CEC's HLPs, InTASC and other applicable standards; (c) mapping the program to standards to identify gaps and redundancies; (d) developing course syllabi; (e) identifying key program assessments; and (f) implementing and monitoring the program. The approach is applicable for EPPs of any type and allows for innovation in program design while producing program completers who meet current expectations of the profession to be career-ready special educators. As other Standards such as the CEC Advanced Preparation Standards become available, this six-step approach might be applied across licensure areas.

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