

COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
March 24, 2011

SUBJECT: Commitment to Effective Instructional Practices and
Assessment for Students with Complex Support Needs

TO: School District Superintendents
School District Special Education Directors
Intermediate Unit Executive Directors
Intermediate Unit Special Education Directors
Charter School Chief Executive Officers
Charter School Special Education Directors
Approved Private School Administrators

FROM: John J. Tommasini
Director
Bureau of Special Education

The purpose of this Penn*Link is to affirm the commitment of the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE), Bureau of Special Education (BSE), to educating students with complex support needs. Our vision is that when students with disabilities are provided with appropriate instruction and supports, they can learn grade level academic knowledge and skills and communicate in ways that are commensurate with their same-age peers without disabilities and have the same learner outcomes as their non-disabled peers.

In support of this vision, our commitment includes ensuring access to the general education curriculum; standards aligned instruction focused on the big ideas, concepts and competencies for all students; fair assessments that align to and measure achievement to the common core standards; research that identifies meaningful growth measures; and access to technology for independent communication.

Research studies involving this group of students has been limited during the last two decades; however, there is an expanding research agenda in this area across the United States. Pennsylvania has been an integral partner in this research and will continue its role in research in order to further our vision and solidify our commitment to effective instructional practices and assessment for students with complex support needs. Additionally, future research will be expanding the possibility and the availability of growth measures and trend analysis of students who participate in the alternate assessment based on alternate achievement standards through a model similar to the Pennsylvania Value Added Assessment System.

The BSE is pleased to introduce a new section of its website that will provide research findings from past and current federally funded grants as well as resources to support teachers and administrators of students with complex support needs. The website may be accessed at http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/special_education/7465/student_swith_complex_support_needs/933312.

It will contain the following:

Partnership in the National Center State Collaborative (NCSC) Grant

The NCSC is a federally funded grant lead by the National Center on Educational Outcomes, the National Center on Improvement of Educational Assessment, and the National Alternate Assessment Center with staff from the University of Kentucky and University of North Carolina – Charlotte. Pennsylvania is one of 19 state partners working with the aforementioned entities to develop a comprehensive assessment system that will include curriculum and instruction modules focused on learning progressions, professional development modules, and interim and summative assessments that will allow for a measure of growth. Resources include:

- Abstract
- One Page Handout
- Presentation Kick-Off Meeting in Washington, D.C.
- PA Team

Standards Aligned System (SAS) Resources for Teachers of Students with Complex Support Needs

In June 2010, the BSE in coordination with the Bureau of Teaching and Learning, Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network (PaTTAN) and the University of Kentucky – National Alternate Assessment Center and Inclusive Large Scale Systems for Assessment group collaborated to modify lesson plans currently within the SAS. Lessons were designed with instructional modifications to allow students at the pre-symbolic, emerging symbolic and symbolic communication levels to participate and demonstrate their learning. Resources include:

- Presentation from the December SAS Institute – “Applying SAS to Students with Complex Support Needs”
- SAS Lesson Plans – seven grade level lesson plans incorporating pre-symbolic, emerging symbolic, and symbolic communication for students with complex support needs.

The Inclusive “Best Practices” Project

The Inclusive “Best Practices” Project is a collaborative effort among Seneca Highlands Intermediate Unit (IU) 9, Central IU 10, BLaST IU 17, the PaTTAN and the Lock Haven University Education Department. This project has developed a digital video case library, with accompanying professional development resources, that illustrates exemplary practices in inclusive instructional settings.

- Best Practices Project Overview

<http://www.iu17.org/39391088212940310/site.default.asp>

- Videos of students with complex support needs

<http://www.iu17.org/39391012910933373/blank/browse.asp?A=383&BMDRN=2000&BCOB=0&C=50599>

Membership, Participation and Learning: Inclusive Educational Practices for Students with Complex Support Needs

This training and technical assistance effort is designed to provide extensive training and on-going support over three years to identified schools resulting in effective implementation of inclusive educational practices for students with complex support needs.

- Membership, Participation and Learning Overview
- Membership, Participation and Learning Sites

University of Minnesota–North Central Regional Resource Center (NCRRC)

Funded by the federal government and lead by the NCRRC, the BSE partnered with Michigan and Wisconsin to explore the consequential validity of alternate assessment. Teachers and administrators of students with complex support needs provided valuable information through survey questions, phone interviews, and observations of students in the instructional setting with use of the National Alternate Assessment Center Observational (NAAC) Tool.

- Presentation – Office of Special Education Programs Project
- Director’s Meeting
- Report
- NAAC Tool

The BSE in partnership with PaTTAN system will continue to provide ongoing and sustained professional development to assist schools in providing effective instruction and supports to students with complex support needs. Access to High Expectations for Achievement: Pennsylvania Low Incidence Institute 2011 and other scheduled trainings may be accessed at www.pattan.net.

Questions regarding this Penn*Link or the information contained on the BSE website may be directed to Lynda A. Lupp, Special Education Adviser, at lylupp@state.pa.us.

Penn*Link