Students with Disabilities and the Common Core

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Students with Disabilities and the Common Core

Abstract
In lieu of an abstract, here are the article's first two paragraphs:

The adoption and implementation of the Common Core State Standards purports increased learning for all students. The Common Core, through the provision of rigorous standards, provides benchmarks for what students are expected to know or learn, to prepare them for college and the work force (http://www.corestandards.org).

Providing opportunities for students with disabilities to participate in the Common Core allows access to higher level curriculum. The Common Core standards provide a framework of what content should come before and after current standards, assert Saunders, Spooner, Browder, Wakeman and Lee (2013, p. 22,) and indicates what should be taught, not how to teach it (p. 32). This provides flexibility to teachers who possess in-depth knowledge of instructional strategies, how students' best learn, and how to differentiate, making learning and materials assessable to each student (Haager & Vaughn, 2013, p. 6). This is particularly pertinent for special education students in states where access to the general education curriculum has been limited. Access to general education curriculum is a plus for special educators as well, who in theory, should have increased opportunity for professional development in the content areas.

Disciplines
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Comments
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Mastering foundational skills are often paramount to understanding and developing higher level content, and students with disabilities often need additional time and practice to develop skills to proficiency. While Saunders, Bethune, Spooner and Browder (2013) assert “students with moderate and severe disabilities can learn content aligned with grade level standards” while continuing to work on basic skills, they also point out that many students with special needs lack a good grasp of the most basic foundational skills (p. 26). Wakeman, Karvonen and Ahumada (2013) suggest “embedding content yet to be learned within the context of grade-level content, whenever possible” (p. 10) to help develop conceptual knowledge. Haager and Vaughn (2013) assert such needed intensive interventions are likely to be ongoing and required over the length of the students’ educational careers (p. 10).

Conversely, Ayres, Lowrey, Douglas, and Sievers (2011) question the value of intensely focusing on curriculum linked to the standards, when “working toward fragmented watered down academic standards” are at the cost of “learning how to function independently in society” not only currently, but in the future (pp. 11-12).

Consequently, finding the balance between the developmental needs of students and grade level expectations creates a conundrum. Scruggs, Brigham, & Mastropieri (2013) assert educators need to find ways to provide student support beyond what we already have in place (p. 54). Simply pushing more content on students who are already struggling is not the answer as it can increase frustration and anxiety.

The essential question becomes, “How will students with disabilities fare being taught in a high stakes standardized environment?” Students with disabilities are a diverse group. It is important to remember that for many, small accomplishments can be tremendous gains not measured by benchmark standards. They have Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) because either they cannot work, or need additional supports to work at grade level. Yes, the Common Core has the potential to improve equity and access to academics through increasing rigor, encouraging critical thinking, and developing problem solving skills.
President’s Message

With the long winter behind us, hopefully we can now find energy and excitement in sunny, longer days ahead.

As we look forward, the discussions continue about the Common Core. I believe that the only way to move forward in a way that will benefit our students is to separate the Common Core from the testing. The intent of the Common Core was to enhance learning experiences for all students so that they have a shared solid foundation of knowledge and skills that would prepare them to function effectively in the 21st century. Currently, graduates are not all prepared to be successful in the workforce or higher education.

In order to support this change, leaders must work collaboratively. Leaders, both designated by title and those who rise to leadership positions, must lead the shift through a new set of skills. Leaders must have a vision and work purposefully and effectively toward that vision. Leaders must be willing to take risks and to learn from those experiences that don’t work out as expected. Leaders must be resilient and stand up for what they believe.

One way to develop as a leader is to participate in the Emerging Leader Program through ASCD. For information on the program and how to apply, check out the website at:


NYSASCD and ASCD have resources to support leaders and the development of skills and strategies that they needed to bring our daily focus to preparing all students to meet the challenges of higher education and work. Please contact us so we can assist you.

Students with Disabilities continued from page 1

if students are given the right supports. For some, the Common Core will help them reach the long-term goal for success in college or the workplace. For others, it has the potential to be a hindrance, unless we integrate the Common Core into IEPs and also focus on the student’s long-term needs, preparing individuals to be functioning members of society.

REFERENCES


