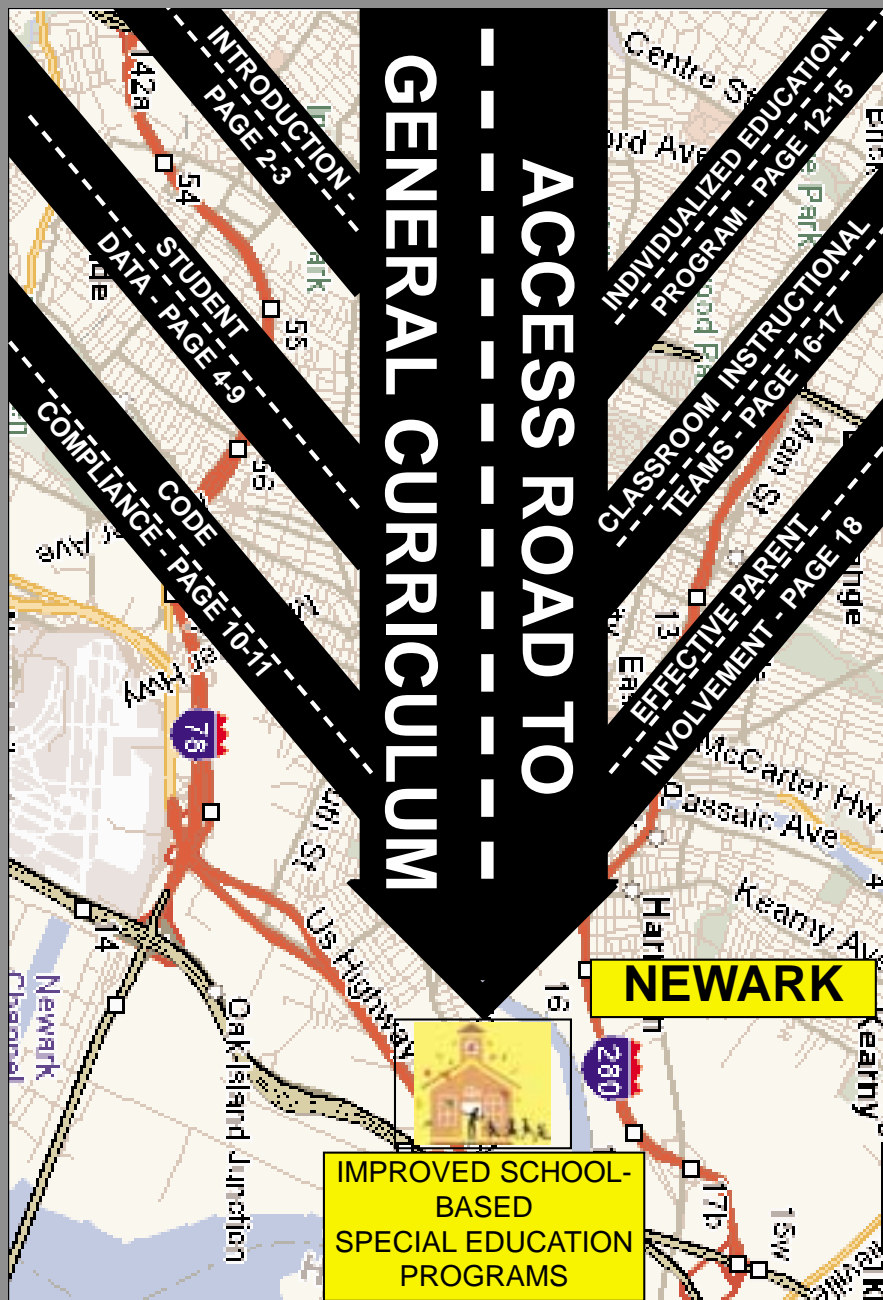


# BEST PRACTICES IN SPECIAL EDUCATION



## NEWARK'S ROADMAP TO IMPROVING SCHOOL-BASED SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS



# SCHOOL-BASED SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS MUST CHANGE TO IMPROVE THE PERFORMANCE OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

## INTRODUCTION

Not since the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act's (IDEA) initial authorization in 1975 have special education students, programs, and staff moved to the forefront of public education. Historically, special education students utilized an alternate curriculum and were frequently exempt from standardized tests. If they participated in the standardized tests, their respective schools and districts were not held accountable for the test results. Consequently, many special education teachers focused on the student's Individualized Education Program's (IEP) goals and objectives, to the exclusion of the general education curriculum. This continued to be a common practice even even after the 1997 IDEA reauthorization mandated the inclusion of special education students in each state's curriculum standards and assessments.

However, with the No Child Left Behind Act's (NCLB) mandate to include students with disabilities in each state's accountability system, public schools will now be partially

judged by how well special education students are learning these standards. Consequently, data-driven decisions must now be made on how to provide special education students meaningful access to the general education curriculum.

As the chart on the bottom of this page indicates, students with disabilities are experiencing significant difficulties learning these standards, as measured by their performance on the state's standards-based assessments. Similar problems are noted throughout the country. Unless significant effective efforts are expended in improving the performance of students with disabilities, more and more schools and districts will fail to achieve the NCLB's criteria for AYP and face progressive sanctions - and students with disabilities will continue to leave school without the knowledge and skills they need to succeed.

This document will utilize Newark's "Special Education Roadmap" to emphasize what school-based staff can do to improve the performance of students with disabilities. Our roadmap relies heavily on IDEA's

mandate to include students with disabilities in the general education curriculum and programs. To help keep us on track and overcome roadblocks, our roadmap utilizes data, IDEA-mandates, and research-based strategies.

## ACCESS TO THE GENERAL EDUCATION CURRICULUM IS ESSENTIAL TO LEARN THE GENERAL EDUCATION CURRICULUM

In order for students with disabilities to perform better on the state's standards-based assessments, teaching and learning must focus on the general education curriculum for each student's grade and corresponding subjects. Since teaching and learning of the general education curriculum takes place in the classroom, school-based and central office administrators must ensure that special education teachers have textbooks, teacher guides, staff development activities, and supplementary aids and materials for all grades/subjects of the students they teach. All new textbook series that the NPS orders will have supplemental materials that will facilitate access to the general education curriculum for students with a

### Number and Percentage of New Jersey's Schools Failing to Achieve Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) on the Spring 2003 Standards-Based Assessments Based on Total and Special Education Student Populations

Students	NJ-ASK		GEPA		HSPA	
	LAL	Math	LAL	Math	LAL	Math
All students	218	188	125	128	20	21
All Students	16%	14%	18%	18%	5%	6%
Only Special Education	73	60	248	266	85	92
Only Special Education	5%	4%	35%	38%	23%	25%

\*Note - The above data is based on NJDOE's report that there are 1,361 NJ-ASK schools of which 355 (26%) failed AYP goal; 704 GEPA schools of which 369 (52%) failed AYP goal; and 367 HSPA schools of which 265 (72%) failed AYP goal. NJDOE's data indicates that as students get progressively older, the numbers of schools that fail to ensure that 95% of all eligible special education take the assessment increases significantly and also results in AYP failures!

# SCHOOL-BASED SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS MUST CHANGE TO IMPROVE THE PERFORMANCE OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

wide range of needs, such as students with disabilities (e.g., books on tape, books that cover the same content at a lower reading level, etc.).

**ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY CAN PROVIDE ACCESS TO THE GENERAL EDUCATION CURRICULUM AND IS MANDATED IN IDEA, AS WELL AS NEW JERSEY'S ADMINISTRATIVE CODES FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION & ABBOTT SCHOOLS**

Newark's roadmap also led to a strong investment in assistive technology (AT) to provide special education students with access to the general education curriculum. We have an Assistive Technology Coordinator (Mike Scolamieri - (973) 350 - 5802) and Assistive Technology Evaluation teams who can be consulted and/or perform AT evaluations. We have also established a number of pilot schools and classes where comprehensive AT devices have facilitated teaching and learning and a lending library, where AT devices can be viewed and borrowed. Aside from the individual student determination of the need for AT devices and services, according to code, every Abbott school is supposed to ensure that school/class libraries have sufficient AT devices to meet the needs of its students. Newark's IEP Resource Guide also has an Appendix delineating how AT devices and services can be integrated throughout the IEP.

**PARENT INVOLVEMENT IS CRITICAL**

Principals should ensure that parents are familiar with the general education curriculum and program to reinforce expectations at home. For example, schools should offer school-based parent workshops on curricu-

lum expectations, district-wide and State assessments, as well as the district's discipline policy, and what parents can do, using evidence-based strategies, to help their child succeed.

**NEWARK'S ROADMAP GUIDES SCHOOL-BASED STAFF ON THE ACCESS ROAD TO THE GENERAL EDUCATION CURRICULUM AND HOW TO TRAVERSE ROADBLOCKS ENCOUNTERED ON THIS JOURNEY**

The Roadmap identifies a number of roadblocks students with disabilities encounter on the "access road" to the general education curriculum, from special education referrals to IEP development and implementation. The Roadmap then provides directions for school-based staff to traverse these roadblocks, including ongoing monitoring of student progress. By improving school-based special education programs and services, the Roadmap should also substantially limit the need for costly



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and restrictive private school placements so prevalent in New Jersey, including Newark.

This document will not focus on all the needs of special education students nor NCLB's allowable statistical exceptions (e.g., safe harbor, statistically significant numbers) that schools, districts, and states are allowed to use under NCLB statute, regulations, or US Department of Education "guidance" to remove the test results of students with disabilities from NCLB's accountability sanctions.

## ROADBLOCKS FOR SCHOOL-BASED SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS



- 1. Insufficient and inadequate student data to make instructional and programmatic decisions.**
- 2. Failure to comply with special education mandates.**
- 3. IEPs are not always written to provide the resources needed to facilitate participation in the general curriculum and program.**
- 4. Instructional teams may not be working effectively and efficiently.**
- 5. Parents may not be integrally involved in their child's education in activities that research demonstrates improves student performance.**



**TOO MANY STUDENTS ARE REFERRED FOR COSTLY, TIME-CONSUMING, AND NEEDLESS SPECIAL EDUCATION EVALUATIONS!**



**STEERING COMMITTEE MET THROUGHOUT THE 2003 - 04 SCHOOL YEAR TO REVISE PRC/504 PROCEDURES**

New Jersey has one of the highest classification rates in the country. Based on the achievement results reported in the introduction, one can legitimately question the advantage of classifying so many of our students. In addition, to comply with the Abbott Regulations and the Intervention and Referral Services Code, and to get a jump-start on a significant component of IDEA's proposed reauthorization, the Newark Public Schools has revised its Pupil Resource Committee (PRC)/504 procedures. Every school in Newark, as well as all Abbott Districts, has a large array of school-based staff (e.g., guidance counselors, nurses, tutors, Whole School Reform (WSR) Social Workers, Parent Liaisons, etc.) and school-based intervention teams (PRC/504 Teams) to assist students experiencing academic, behavioral, and health

problems. NPS's new PRC/504 procedures and its companion resource guide of data-driven interventions can help staff identify problems in observable and measurable terms and then develop and implement research-based interventions to address identified problems. (For a copy of the research-based interventions that can be used to address academic and/or behavioral problems, contact your school-based PRC/504 Coordinator or your principal). By adhering to these new procedures, each school's instructional and administrative staff will better:

1. Monitor the effectiveness and efficiency of interventions while providing ongoing feedback for all stakeholders involved in the interventions.

2. Build the capacity of school-based staff, parents, and students to address academic and behavioral problems.

3. Ensure that students referred by school-based staff for a special education evaluation have problems clearly identified in observable and measurable terms.

4. Ensure that interventions are more successful, while minimizing costly special education evaluations when they are not needed. As the following chart indicates, statewide and in Newark, less than 2/3 (two-thirds) of all students referred for time-consuming special education "identification meetings" and evaluations are classified! In Newark, the range of referral and classification rates between schools and SLTs is significant. NPS's central office administration will begin collecting significant school-based deviations from the district and state averages for initial referral rates and/or initial classification rates and flag them for further investigations and/or possible district intervention(s).

	Total Student Enrollment (excluding special ed.)	# Of Initial Referrals for Special Education Evaluations	Total Referral Rate	Total # of Students Initially Classified	% Of Initially Referred Students Classified	Initial Classification Rate
<b>Newark 2003-04</b>	<b>39,247</b>	<b>1,944</b>	$1,944/39,247 = 4.95\%$	<b>1,076</b>	$1,076/1,944 = 55.35\%$	$1,076/39,247 = 2.74\%$
<b>New Jersey 2002 - 03</b>	<b>1,146,523</b>	<b>40,436</b>	<b>3.53%</b>	<b>26,309</b>	<b>65.1%</b>	<b>2.29%</b>

**Caveats on the Above Table**

1. The enrollment figure reflects K - 12 public school students as on December 1;
2. The initial referral & classification numbers reflect data submitted in the End of the Year Reports; &
3. The # of initial classifications may be lowered because of the failure to complete the process partially due to a highly mobile student population in districts like Newark.



In addition to evaluating school-based interventions, Newark's Roadmap will improve the assessment, monitoring, and feedback of special education student performance, programs, and services. This section identifies the type of information required from special education referrals and evaluations, district-wide and state-wide assessments, as well as IDEA-mandates for monitoring and evaluating the performance of students with disabilities to make data-driven decisions. Since research demonstrates that ongoing monitoring and feedback improves implementation and subsequent student performance, these activities will establish the baseline data needed.

**Roadmap's Beginning & Ending Points**



In order to track the progress we are making on our Roadmap, we need to know the starting point. One starting point for a state, district, school, class, and student is the results of the state's standards-based assessments. However, this only represents one aspect of each student's PLEP that is documented on his/her IEP.

The beginning point for each special education student is noted in the PLEP section of his/her IEP. IDEA's expectation is that special education students will participate in the State's standards and the district's grade-level curriculum for all subjects and achieve IEP goals and objectives. That's one destination. However, NCLB has dramatically increased the distance we must travel for all special education students, since they are eventually expected to achieve proficiency on the State's standards-based assessments. Newark's roadmap shows what school-based special education programs must do to bridge the gap between the student's PLEP and IDEA/NCLB mandates.

**Special education referrals must document student information related to participation in the general education curriculum!**



The following mandated procedures for Newark's school-based staff better ensures the collection and utilization of data related to a student's participation in the general education curriculum and program, as well as the effectiveness and effi-

ciency of the special education referral process:

1. Student difficulties leading to a referral must be clearly delineated in observable and measurable terms with corresponding documentation and should include:
  - a. The results of district and statewide assessment, schoolwork, homework, and projects with the corresponding student's strengths and weaknesses. The referring staff member should specify how the identified weaknesses interfere with the student's participation and progress in the general education curriculum/program and the identified strengths facilitate participation in the general education curriculum and program.
  - b. Documented challenging behavior that interferes with the student's participation and progress in the general education curriculum and program must be identified in observable and measurable terms.
  - c. The results of interventions that have been attempted to address the identified problem(s), noting specific obstacles to success.

**STUDENT'S PLEP (PRESENT LEVELS OF EDUCATIONAL PERFORMANCE)**



**CORE CURRICULUM CONTENT STANDARDS (CCCS) AND DISTRICT'S GRADE-LEVEL EXPECTATIONS FOR EACH SUBJECT, AS WELL AS IEP GOALS & OBJECTIVES**

**SCHOOL-BASED SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS AND SERVICES**



2. Thoroughly filling out the Office of Special Education's (OSE) referral form and attaching the above delineated documentation will minimize the time of the code-mandated "Identification Meeting," and assist teacher(s), CSTs, other support staff, and parents in deciding:

- a. If the student is suspected of having a disability; and
- b. Which special education evaluations are needed.

**Special education evaluations and reports must focus on weaknesses that impede participation and progress in the general curriculum and strengths that facilitate this participation!**



Before a student is classified, a comprehensive special education evaluation is conducted, based on a suspected disability, and a subsequent report is generated. There are a number of code-mandated criteria that all special education evaluations and reports must address. Newark's Roadmap includes additional criteria including an emphasis on curriculum-based assessments, functional behavioral assessments, and a user-friendly summary that:

1. Is easily understood by staff and parents with baseline data and recommendations for



subsequent interventions at school, home, and/or the community.

2. Enables teams to make eligibility decisions for special education based on the 13 disabling conditions set forth in federal law and state code.

3. Identifies those weaknesses resulting from the suspected disabling condition and an explanation of how they interfere with participation in the general education curriculum and program. These weaknesses must be stated in observable and measurable terms, which can then be transposed into the PLEP section of the IEP, if the student is found "eligible for special education and related services." If the student is not classified, these weaknesses can be the focus of a Section 504 plan, Individual Health Plan, and/or general education interventions.



4. Identifies the student's strengths with an explanation of how the strengths facilitate the student's participation and progress in the general education curriculum and program. These strengths must be stated in observable and measurable terms and can then be transposed into the PLEP section of the IEP, if the student is found "eligible for special education and related services." If not, these strengths can be capitalized on in future general education interventions.

5. Determines whether the student's participation in the general education curriculum/program is limited due to academic and/or behavior performance and/or skills deficits, with recommendations to address these weaknesses.

Curriculum-based assessments should delineate the student's frustration, mastery, and instructional levels academically and how this knowledge can be utilized to improve teaching and learning. If a student's behavior impedes his/her learning in the general education curriculum/program, or that of his/her classmates, the evaluations should identify the causes for these behaviors and how they interfere with teaching and learning, using a functional behavioral assessment as appropriate. These findings should be noted in the PLEP section of the IEP and will have significant implications for instruction and programs.



**COLLABORATION BETWEEN CENTRAL OFFICE ADMINISTRATION, OSE'S PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT CENTER, AND NTU'S PRESIDENT DEL GROSSO ON PREPARING STAFF DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES TO UNDERSTAND & UTILIZE DISTRICT WIDE & STATEWIDE ASSESSMENTS**



**Student strengths and weaknesses on district-wide and state-wide assessments must be integrated into school-based teaching and learning activities!**



Because virtually all special education students are included in statewide and district-wide assessments, school-based staff must ensure that data from these assessments is utilized in:

1. Decisions on whether to accept/reject special education referrals, the types of required special education evaluations, and/or recommendations for interventions by school-based staff and/or parents;
2. Special education evaluations and subsequent analysis, reports, and recommendations; and
3. Programmatic and instructional decisions at the school level and in the classroom.

To meet these expectations, workshops are needed for IEP team members, including CSTs, special education teachers and providers, and parents of students with disabilities. The workshop participants should be provided with instruction and experiences, analyzing the format, content, and results of the State's and district's standards-based assessments to identify strengths and weaknesses related to the general education

curriculum. This could help in IEP decisions regarding PLEP statements, curriculum goals and objectives, supplementary aids and services, and test accommodations.

**Student progress in the general education curriculum and program must be monitored & integrated into school-based teaching and learning activities!**



Research demonstrates that continuous monitoring, evaluation, and feedback of student's progress has a positive impact on stakeholders involved in the interventions and on the student's performance. When properly implemented, the following procedure ensures this monitoring and feedback, while also introducing a needed degree of accountability:

**The monitoring & feedback on the progress of general education students should also be provided for special education students!**

Classwork, homework, projects, teacher-made tests, district-wide and state-wide assessments, quarterly report cards, and the district's discipline policy should be utilized for all special education students, unless exempt in his/her IEP, which is rare. The student, parent, and CST case-manager should be regularly informed of

the student's progress in the general education curriculum, program, and achieving IEP goals. These should be two-way communications that afford the stakeholder an opportunity to provide feedback and recommendations.

**Annual Reviews**

At least annually, or sooner if conditions warrant it, an IEP must be developed and implemented. This provides stakeholder participants (e.g., teachers, parents, student if appropriate, related service providers, etc.) with information related to the student's progress in the general education curriculum, program, & IEP goals. It also provides a forum for these code-mandated participants to develop a new IEP to increase the student's participation in the general education curriculum and program, as well as achieve IEP goals.



**More than ever, special and general education teachers need to collaborate - pictured above are 13th Ave teachers Laurie Salfred-Ingham, Dianne Capers, and Frank Riccio**



### Reevaluations

At least every three years, or sooner if conditions warrant it, every student with a disability must be reevaluated to determine continuing eligibility and programmatic needs, which should also assess progress since the last evaluation, including the student's strengths and weaknesses related to the general education curriculum and program.

**The IEP and its various components provide a critical vehicle to monitor and provide feedback on a student's progress**

Each IEP, when developed and implemented correctly, will ensure ongoing monitoring and feedback for code-mandated participants.

### IEP PLANNER

Newark's Roadmap includes an IEP planner that the case manager provides to all the student's teachers, related service providers, and parents 15 days before the IEP meeting. The student's teachers and related service providers must fill out and return these IEP Planners one week after they receive it, identifying strengths and weaknesses related to participation and progress in the general education curriculum/program to ensure that his/her input and concerns are considered.

An IEP planner like the one developed by SPAN (Statewide Parent Advocacy Network) and accessible on SPAN's webpage can assist parents in preparing for the meeting. Parents can provide critical information regarding the strengths of their child and express their concerns for enhancing the education of their child. They can offer insights into how their child learns, what his/her interests are, whether the skills the child is learning in school are being used at home, and other aspects of their child. The CST should ensure that parent involvement and concerns are embedded in the IEP, as appropriate, for each student (e.g., PLEP, related services, Behavior Intervention Plan, reporting out progress in achieving IEP goals, etc.)

### PLEP Statements

The PLEP section of the IEP utilizes an array of information sources (e.g., class work, homework, projects, teacher-made tests, teacher reports, special education evaluations, parent input, district-wide assessments, and State's standards-based assessments) to identify the student's strengths, weaknesses, and needs related to the general education curriculum and programs.

The PLEP section of the IEP establishes the baseline data of where the student is functioning

when the IEP is developed, while the goals project where the student should be at the end of the IEP implementation. To accomplish this, teachers may utilize backward curriculum mapping, as well as prioritizing subjects, content, and skills to guide teaching and learning activities.

In addition, the previous year's PLEP statements, as well as goals and objectives, should be compared to the student's current performance to assess progress. This comparison should then be utilized to determine if the previous program met the student's needs and how the new IEP should be revised.



Clearly, to make these PLEP statements relevant for the standards-based assessments, they should delineate the student's strengths and/or weaknesses related to the:

1. Content that is based on the Core Curriculum Content Standards (CCCS) and Cumulative Progress Indicators (CPI); and
2. Format, including performance on multiple choice questions and open ended questions, including rubrics, speed, and length/duration of tasks.

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**Goals & Objectives**

An IEP's goals can be viewed as an end of the year test, which we are going to use to assess the success of the IEP program and services. In addition, the mandated short-term objectives and benchmarks enable a child's teacher(s), parents, and others involved in developing and implementing the child's IEP to gauge, at intermediate times during the year, how well the child is progressing toward achievement of the annual goal.



**CST AND TEACHER COLLABORATION IS CRITICAL IN DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING IEPs- PICTURED ABOVE ARE CHARLES MITCHELL, CAROLYN SMALLS, JOYCE BROWN, AND JIM BROWN OF WEST SIDE HIGH**

To facilitate this type of monitoring and feedback, the code requires that goals and objectives are written in observable and measurable format, whether we are dealing with academic skills, targeted behavioral problems, language/speech problems, etc.

Each goal and objective must also specify the evaluative methods and criteria that will be utilized to

monitor the student's progress. To better ensure a connection with the state's standards-based assessments, projects, assignments, homework, and teacher-made tests should use a similar content (e.g., CCCS and CPI), format, and evaluative method/criteria (e.g., multiple choice and open-ended questions that use scoring rubrics).

**Reporting Method**

The IEP must delineate the method and frequency that the parents will be informed of the student's progress towards achieving the goals and objectives.

Although Newark's special education students are provided with quarterly report cards, they are not always provided with quarterly reports on progress towards all IEP goals and objectives.

Consequently, Newark's Roadmap requires that its new electronic special education student information system has this capability.



If this monitored progress is not sufficient to enable the child to achieve the annual goals, then:

1. Instructional and/or related service strategies and priorities may have to be adjusted.
2. The IEP may have to be revised to reflect different identified needs under the PLEP section, and differ-

ent goals, strategies, resources, related services, etc. The parents or teachers can request that the IEP be revised, a new IEP developed, or a reevaluation to determine why the IEP-mandated program is not succeeding. It could be that the IEP did not meet the student's needs, the student's needs changed, or the IEP is not being implemented appropriately. These will all be assessed when the requested activities are considered and/or completed. To facilitate this process the Roadmap has introduced a process and form to revise an IEP.

**AS PART OF THE ROADMAP, THE NEWARK PUBLIC SCHOOLS DEVELOPED A STEP BY STEP GUIDE ON HOW TO DEVELOP A CODE-COMPLIANT IEP THAT UTILIZES THE SAME FORMAT AS THE STATE'S SAMPLE IEP.**

**WE ENCOURAGE STAKEHOLDERS TO ACCESS THIS DOCUMENT ON NPS'S WEBPAGE.**

**ANY QUESTIONS REGARDING THIS DOCUMENT CAN BE MADE TO NEWARK'S PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT CENTER - (973) 350 - 5811 OR E-MAIL [MGerry@nps.k12.nj.us](mailto:MGerry@nps.k12.nj.us)**



Newark's Roadmap emphasizes compliance with code-mandates, utilizing data collection, reporting, and monitoring emphasized in the previous section.

**The best IEP is worthless if it's not being implemented!**

Therefore, to improve school-based special education programs, implementation needs to be better monitored. The case-manager is responsible for monitoring IEP implementation and code-compliance.

On the other hand, as the educational leader in every school, the principal must ensure that legal mandates are followed and special education programs utilize research-based strategies to provide effective teaching and learning of district curriculum and State standards. Therefore, the Special Education Roadmap established and utilizes the following protocol to monitor, evaluate, and provide feedback on school-based compliance.

**In the NPS, the biweekly principal and CST meeting and corresponding form provide a critical feedback-loop to identify and attempt to address school-based special education compliance problems. It provides:**

1. An accurate and up-to-date status, including written documenta-

tion of compliance concerns (e.g., initial evaluations, annual reviews, reevaluations, placements, related services, etc.).

2. The principal and the case manager with:

a. A regularly scheduled opportunity to collaborate on solving school-based special education problems that arise, with documentation of how the identified problems were resolved. For example, many school-based compliance problems (e.g., initial evaluations, IEPs, eligibility meetings, and related services) can now be addressed after school with the NPS/NTU memorandum of agreement.

b. A venue to identify special education problems that require central office intervention.

3. Principals and central office administration, including NPS's "Special Education Oversight Committee," with data on possible systemic problems that require systemic intervention(s).



**NPS'S SPECIAL EDUCATION OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE MEETINGS, WHICH ARE ATTENDED BY SENIOR NPS ADMINISTRATION, NTU, SPAN, AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS**

**Compliance with special education mandates frequently improves special education programs by ensuring that:**

1. General and special education teachers attend IDEA-mandated meetings so that their respective concerns will be identified and addressed programmatically.

2. IEP-mandated participants (e.g., general and special education teachers, related-service providers, parents, and student, if appropriate) are actively involved in developing IEPs. This will more likely lead to the implementation of the IEP's provisions.



3. All the student's teachers and related service providers have access to the IEP, if not a copy, and are informed of their respective responsibilities will better ensure IEP implementation.



4. Students are placed in the program identified in their IEP. (e.g., general education class with supports, resource center, special classes such as Behavioral Disabilities, Learning/Language Disabilities, Severe, Cognitive Disabilities - Mild, etc.) and class sizes are restricted by code-limits.





Teachers can then better focus on the educational needs of assigned students and the designated program. In fact, part of Newark's Roadmap includes the development and implementation of research-based model special education programs that can be visited and duplicated in other schools.

5. A student's programmatic and instructional needs and resources are identified on the IEP. Then the school-based needs assessment and budget can easily justify the IEP-mandated resources (e.g., special education teachers, aides, assistive technology, curriculum/program modifications, test accommodations, etc.)



6. Students are provided with IEP-mandated supplementary aids and services. These resources will increase the likelihood that teaching and learning activities will enable the students to achieve IEP goals, as well as succeed in the general education curriculum.

7. Parents and students have the knowledge and skills they need to advocate for IEP needs, resources, and implementation.



8. Principals supervise school-based resources to ensure that:

a. School-based staff thoroughly and accurately fill-out mandated forms (e.g., referral forms, IEP planners, etc.) to reflect student's

needs, weaknesses, and strengths so they are identified and utilized instructionally and programmatically.



b. School-based staff, who are required to participate in the various code-mandated meetings (e.g., ID, IEP, eligibility, etc.), are available and actively participate.



c. School-based staff is integrating IEP mandates into their respective lesson plans, schedules, plans, maintaining documentation, etc.

d. Related services providers (e.g., counselors, speech therapists, OT/PT, etc.), have an IEP-mandated schedule to provide these services and maintain logs of each session on the student's progress towards meeting IEP goals.



e. Related service providers have adequate space to perform their professional responsibilities during designated schedule.



f. Any failures to implement a student's IEP as written (e.g., placement, related services, assistive technology, etc.) is noted on bi-weekly Principal/CST form for possible school-based and/or central office intervention.

### LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENT (LEP) STUDENTS

The Newark Public Schools has a significant number of students and parents whose native language is other than English. Consequently, Newark's roadmap will continue to ensure that LEP students with disabilities have access to the general education curriculum and program. Newark's roadmap led to:

1. Establishing three full time bilingual Child Study Teams to address district-wide needs.
2. Hiring and deploying bilingual CST members in schools with significant bilingual needs.
3. Developing procedures that ensure LEP students' needs are identified and addressed in referrals, evaluations, and programs (e.g., IEPs - PLEP, related services, test accommodations, etc.; bilingual and/or ESL services, instructional materials & supplies, etc.). Each school's Needs Assessment Coordinator must be integrally involved in identifying an LEP student's needs and making instructional and programmatic recommendations.





**Newark's IEP Resource Guide provides a good deal of assistance in this area. The following briefly summarizes how the IEP components and mandates can be tied to the general curriculum/program:**



**PLEP - This IEP section utilizes an array of informational sources to identify:**

1. The student's weaknesses and needs related to the general education curriculum and program, which should lead to IEP goals, as well as programs and services to help the student achieve these goals.



2. The instructional strategies that have been effective or ineffective in helping the student gain access to and progress in the general education curriculum and program. These strategies can lead directly to instructional modifications and supplemental aids and services on the IEP.

3. The student's strengths, including interests and preferences related to the general education curriculum and program, can be utilized instructionally and programmatically to motivate the student in the general education curriculum and to identify supplemental aids and services to address IEP goals.



### IEP Goals and Objectives

Once the PLEP section identifies a student's weaknesses related to the general education curriculum, goals and objectives should be aimed toward acquiring these skills and competencies. To facilitate the achievement of these goals and objectives, as well as overcoming obstacles that impede access to the general education curriculum and program, the IEP could include:



### Supplemental aids and services

This section of the IEP delineates those resources the student needs to achieve IEP goals and/or overcome obstacles in accessing the general education curriculum and program.

Based on the individual student's goals, the IEP team must choose an appropriate mix of adaptations, beginning with the least intrusive and can differentiate instruction by:

1. Reducing the number of items to be completed.
2. Altering time frames for work completion (i.e. additional time, more sessions but less time, etc.).
3. Increasing assistance to student (i.e. peer tutor, individual aide, etc.).
4. Adapting the way material is presented to the student and how they can respond to the material.
5. Altering the degree of difficulty of the material.
6. Providing samples of completed assignments to use as models.
7. Changing student's group, physi-

cal arrangement of classroom, behavioral management, instructional strategies, and/or modifications to testing settings and procedures.

8. IEP teams may also utilize the State's frameworks activities for all students, as well as those for students with disabilities, to teach the student the content and skills in the standards and the general education curriculum.

### **MONITORING AND FEEDBACK IS REQUIRED HERE!**

1. Teachers must ensure that necessary supplemental aids and services are delineated on the IEP and integrated into his/her respective lesson plans.
2. School-based administrators must ensure the supplemental aids and services are being provided.
3. The case managers must monitor the implementation of the supplemental aids and services.

### Support for school personnel

Supports for school personnel can be written into IEPs when the focus is to assist the child in advancement towards attaining annual goals and progress in the general education curriculum/program. These supports can include professional development for teachers, teacher aides, administrators, bus drivers, cafeteria workers, and others who provide services for a particular student with a disability.





These can include an array of supports such as:

1. Training teacher and aide on formal observations and behavioral charting.
2. Training teacher and aide on various assistive technology devices.
3. Training teacher on curriculum based assessment.
4. Training teacher and aide on a range of differentiated instructional strategies.

Test accommodations enable a student with a disability to demonstrate his/her knowledge in the general education curriculum despite his/her disability.

IDEA and NCLB mandate that students with disabilities are to be included in state and district-wide assessments and, if necessary, provided with appropriate accommodations. These accommodations are needed by students because of their disability, to assist them to more accurately demonstrate that they have learned the general education curriculum. Accommodations are changes in testing materials, procedures, or settings that are designed to eliminate barriers to performance related to a student's disability. Students should receive the same accommodations during testing that they receive during regular classroom instruction, as required by their IEPs. This not only gives the students the best opportunity to demonstrate what they have learned, but also helps familiarize

the students with the accommodations that will be provided during standardized testing. For the most part, allowable testing accommodations include:

1. Setting Accommodations;
2. Scheduling Accommodations;
3. Modifying Test Materials;
4. Modifying Responses;
5. Other considerations that address an array of medical and physiological needs.

New Jersey Department of Education's (NJDOE) allowable test accommodations are listed on the NJDOE's web page, test booklets, and in NPS's IEP Resource Guide.

An IEP team needs to be familiar with allowable testing accommodations, the format and content of the standards-based assessments, and weaknesses stemming from the student's disability, to decide on the accommodations a particular student requires.

**CONCERNS WITH CURRENT ALLOWABLE ACCOMMODATIONS IN NEW JERSEY**

**If the test developers did a better job of identifying the knowledge and skills each test item was assessing, additional accommodations might be permitted. For example, if a test item in the reading section of an assessment was seeking to determine a student's vocabulary, ability to identify main ideas, or details, the examiner might be able to read these passages to the student, if appropriate.**

Related services - There are many related services from which an IEP team can select.



The PLEP section of the IEP should identify the need for a related service and document how that need interferes with a student's participation and progress in the general curriculum and/or program.

1. Speech and language service is the most requested related service. Many learning and behavioral problems have a language component that impedes the student's participation in the general education curriculum and program, which speech and language services can assist in addressing.



**NIKITA HOLT - SPEECH/LANGUAGE SPECIALIST - TECHNOLOGY, ARTS, AND WEEQUAHIC HIGH SCHOOLS**





**IEPS ARE NOT ALWAYS WRITTEN TO ENSURE THAT STUDENTS HAVE THE PROGRAMMATIC SUPPORTS AND SERVICES THEY NEED TO PARTICIPATE IN THE GENERAL CURRICULUM AND PROGRAM!**



2. Counseling is most often listed to address social and emotional problems that interfere with teaching and learning. However, districts, schools, and counselors must ensure that they utilize individual and/or group counseling techniques, with students and/or parents, that research demonstrates are effective in addressing social, emotional, and behavioral problems that impede teaching and learning. Newark's Roadmap identified these research-based group counseling techniques and this year will train a selected cadre of guidance counselors, psychologists, and social workers in them.

After receiving this training, the cadre of mental health professionals will pilot these research-based group counseling techniques in a selected number of schools. The counseling techniques will then be evaluated by their ability to reduce targeted challenging behavior(s), while increasing appropriate replacement behavior(s).

3. Other potential related services include physical therapy, occupational therapy, travel training, assistive technology, parent training and counseling, etc. We would refer you to Newark's IEP Resource Guide for a more comprehensive list and how related services can be best integrated into the IEP.

4. By adhering to the following legal mandates, the effectiveness of related

services should increase. The related service must:

- Be noted in the student's IEP as a related service including the goals/objectives, frequency and duration of service, professional providing the service, where the services are provided and whether services are provided individually or in groups. If in a group, the group size must be noted.
- Be oriented towards goals and objectives on the IEP;
- Maintain progress notes, which should be kept confidential;
- Include a periodic review between the student, parent, teacher, case manager and provider to reestablish goals, revise IEP if required and determine need for future sessions.

**Behavioral Intervention Plans (BIP) or Positive Behavioral Supports (PBS) can address the challenging behavior that interferes with the student's participation in the general curriculum and/or program!**

Minimally, these challenging behavior(s) limit the learning time of the student we are considering and frequently interfere with the overall teaching and learning process. Consequently, IEP teams, schools, and districts must ensure that the plans that are developed, utilize research-based strategies to decrease these identified challenging behavior and increase positive replacement behavior.

**NEW JERSEY HAS AMONG THE MOST RESTRICTIVE SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS IN THE COUNTRY**



Research demonstrates that the more time students spend in general education classrooms the better they tend to perform on the standardized tests. In fact, the first placement consideration for every classified student at each IEP meeting must be inclusion in the general education classroom with supports, services, accommodations, and/or modifications. Consequently, New Jersey's and Newark's restrictive special education programs suggest that IEP teams may not be utilizing the option sufficiently and/or students' achievement may suffer.

In addition, New Jersey's regulations allow for a 4-year age span in special education programs. With this age span, teaching and learning to each student's individualized needs, while meeting NCLB's rigorous proficiency standards, seems impossible.

**The road map offers some guidance for school-based staff and district administration to address the 4-year age span and reduce inappropriate restrictive placements:**

1. Analyze each student's identified needs and standardized test results to assist teachers, schools, and districts in grouping students according to strengths and weaknesses.

**Challenging student behavior can impede the participation and progress of a student with disabilities in the general curriculum and program, as well as interfering with the teaching and learning of classmates. Newark's Special Education Roadmap has already paved the way to prevent and address these challenging behaviors. NPS's IEP Resource Guide spells out a data-driven, step-by-step process to develop and implement IEPs that address challenging behaviors. For an electronic copy of this IEP Resource Guide, e-mail Mitchel Gerry at mg@ntuaft.com or mgerry@nps.k12.nj.us. In addition, the NPS, NTU, and SPAN produced a publication on "How to Address and Prevent Behavioral Problems" on our respective web pages- (<http://nps.k12.nj.us>, <http://www.ntuaft.com>, or <http://www.spannj.org>).**





Consequently, when filling out a special education referral form or an IEP planner, school-based staff must identify strengths and weaknesses related to participation and progress in the general curriculum and program, in observable and measurable terms.



In addition, special education evaluations and reports must also identify strengths and weaknesses in a similar manner. Teachers and school-based administration will then be in a better position to group students for teaching and learning activities.

2. Utilize instructional activities that transcend grade levels:

a. Each subject's Core Curriculum Content Standard has Cumulative Progress Indicators, Framework activities, and district curriculum that transcend a number of grades;

b. All students need instruction, practice and reinforcement on the format of the standards-based assessments (e.g., multiple choice and open-ended questions, including scoring rubrics); and

c. All students need to increase engaged-time in teaching and learning activities; therefore, effective classroom management is required.

3. NPS's Office of Special Education's Placement Officer will attempt to provide a smaller age span.

4. NPS's OSE, in consultation with SLT and school-based administrators will develop and implement a num-

ber of model programs that will demonstrate how these special education programs can increase student participation in the general curriculum and program, while increasing student performance.



5. One of these model programs will be an in-class resource center. In this program, a limited number of special education students are placed in a general education class with the full time or part-time assistance of a special education teacher. This option also facilitates the ability of a:

a. Student's neighborhood school to provide the needed special education programs and services even when facilities limit the ability to open new classes. Also, since the neighborhood school is accountable for the student's test scores under NCLB, this program option would

enable the neighborhood school to control the quality of the special education program and services.

b. Student to interact with same age peers.

c. Program to meet the student's needs because of Special Education and Abbott limits on class sizes. For example, in a K-3 class, there is an Abbott limit of 21 students. If we placed 6 special education students in these classes, the number of regular education students would be limited to 15. The class would then have a full-time regular and special education teacher.

6. We can all request the state to change the 4-year age span allowable in the code, as this is inappropriate based on both academic and social considerations.

**PRIVATE SCHOOL PLACEMENTS**

New Jersey has the highest percentage of students placed in expensive and restrictive private schools exclusively for students with disabilities. Clearly, these restrictive programs limit the access of attending students to the general curriculum and program that the Roadmap steers towards.

1. By following the suggested directions in this Roadmap, school-based special education programs will improve so that IEP teams will not feel compelled to send students to these costly and very restrictive private school placements.

2. The NJDOE should report out how students as a whole in each of these private school perform on the standards-based assessments. This information would then help IEP teams decide on the quality of these programs and services.



**TEACHING AND LEARNING OCCURS IN THE CLASSROOM WITH THE TEACHER/AIDE INSTRUCTIONAL TEAM**

An effective instructional team - the teacher(s), principal, CST, related service provider(s), and teacher aide - is critical to ensuring student success. One key partnership is that of the teacher and the teacher aide.

The subject matter competence of special education teachers and teacher aides have been raised to meet NCLB's "highly qualified" criteria, which should have a positive impact on the performance of students with disabilities on the state's standards-based assessments. For example, the Roadmap included the development of a local rigorous assessment where Newark's teacher aides demonstrate their "knowledge of and ability to assist in the teaching of reading, writing, and math." Not only are these skills consistent with NCLB's mandates but they are closely aligned with the content of the state's standards-based assessments.

These activities reinforce Newark's belief that teachers aides are an integral part of our special education programs! There are approximately 600 teacher aides working in Newark's special education programs and the Roadmap guides school-



based staff on how they can be effectively utilized.

Much of this section of the Roadmap was in a previous joint NPS, NTU, & SPAN publication that demonstrates how teacher aides can be integrated into special education programs, utilizing research-based practices, while complying with NCLB and IDEA mandates, which can be accessed on our respective web pages. In addition, NPS's IEP Resource Guide provides significant guidance on how a teacher aide can be integrated into all IEP components. In this section of the document, we briefly summarize the respective responsibilities of school-based staff in this endeavor:

**The teacher's daily lesson plan must delineate the teacher aide's responsibilities, whether the aide is a capacity aide, a program aide, or an IEP aide:**

1. As the educational leader in the class and to meet NCLB's mandate that teacher aides work under the "direct supervision of the teacher," the teacher's lesson plan should clearly delineate the teacher aide's responsibilities. The lesson plans serve as a road map or guide, specifying who will perform each daily responsibility, thereby ensuring the teacher aide works under the direct supervision of the teacher.



2. By delineating teacher aide responsibilities on the lessons plans for all daily subjects and activities, possible conflicts between teacher & teacher aide will be minimized.



3. Teachers must fully integrate assigned aides into all lesson plans, for all subjects and time periods, during which the aide is assigned. The aide's assigned responsibilities must also be aligned with students' IEPs, Title I's allowable activities, best practices that improve student performance, and the district's grade level curriculum.



4. If a teacher aide is assigned to a class, or a particular student(s) in the class, they still work under the "direct supervision" of the teacher. Consequently, the teacher must include each of these teacher aides in their lesson plan for all subjects and activities, throughout the day.

5. If the teacher aide is assigned to certain students to ensure that specific assistance is provided, the teacher must also integrate those responsibilities in their lesson plans. However, if a student's IEP indicates that the aide is not required to work individually with that student, or with a specified group of students in the class, the teacher can then group students and have this IEP aide assist other students.



In addition, if the IEP specifies that the aide is assigned to the particular student only for certain periods or times of the day, that aide can then be assigned to other classroom responsibilities for the remaining periods or times, as per Title I's allowable activities and as per other students' IEPs.



**Principals must ensure:**

1. Responsibilities assigned to teacher aides are submitted to those delineated in the law and/or the IEP;

2. Teacher aides (capacity, program, and/or IEP aides) are working under the "direct supervision of a teacher, and his/her responsibilities are clearly delineated in lesson plan and IEP;

3. Teacher aides are carrying out assigned responsibilities delineated in the lesson plan through administrative observations;

4. Teacher's lesson plans:

a. Reflect teacher aides assignments throughout the school day;

b. Are aligned with IEPs, Title I's allowable activities, utilize instructional techniques that improve student performance, specifically designate responsibilities for teacher aide for all subjects and time periods during which the aide is assigned;



**HELEN WASHINGTON -  
TEACHER AIDE - BEL-  
MONT RUNYON SCHOOL**

5. Teachers and aides have time to plan & engage in staff development activities together; and

6. Teacher aides assigned to special education classes and or students because of code and/or IEP mandates **MUST** not be administratively reassigned to other responsibilities in the school.



The IEP teams, and particularly the CST case manager, must ensure that:



1. When a student with a disability needs a teacher aide to provide FAPE in the LRE, all appropriate parts of the IEP are filled out clearly. The IEP must clearly document the need for and the responsibilities of the aide. This IEP documentation can occur in a number of places throughout the IEP (e.g., PLEP, Related service, goals and objectives, supplementary aids and services, etc.). NPS's IEP Resources Guide, and/or our previous joint publication, provides significant guidance in this endeavor.

2. NPS's "Request for an Aide Form" is filled out fully and submitted to the administrator responsible for assigning the teacher aide. Because the need for the aide and his/her responsibilities are documented, copies of this form can be given to the teacher(s), school-based administrator(s), and the teacher aide so that everyone knows what is expected.



3. Clearly, based on the responsibilities assigned to an IEP aide, and/or any aide assigned to the classroom, they may need supports and training, which should also be included in the IEP, under "Supports for School Personnel".

OSE's resource teacher coordinators (RTC) will be integrally involved in this section of the Roadmap.



1. The RTCs will provide staff development to principals and teachers on integrating teacher aides into lesson plans based on IEPs, the general curriculum and program, and Title 1's allowable activities.

2. The RTCs will be available on a consultative basis to assist in this endeavor.

3. The RTCs will prepare a variety of lesson plans focusing on the teacher aide's responsibilities that can be referenced as templates.



**OSE'S RESOURCE TEACHER COORDINATORS PLANNING THEIR ACTIVITIES**



**A**ccording to research, the most accurate predictor of a student's achievement in school is the extent to which their family creates a home environment that encourages learning, expresses high expectations for their child's achievement and future careers, and becomes involved in their child's education.

Student self-esteem, behavior, attendance, and achievement increases directly with increased duration and intensity of parent involvement, regardless of parents' academic level, socioeconomic status, or ethnic or racial origin. (Mapp, 1997).

Families want to help their children succeed. To help families support their children's learning, we must help them understand the school system, as well as information specific to their child's learning and their important role as parents. The major types of family involvement are parenting, communicating, volunteering, supporting student learning, and decision making.

### **PARENTING**

In parenting, families maintain a home environment that encourages learning. To support families in this role, schools can provide workshops and information that helps families understand their child's development and how to support the challenges and developmental changes that their children face.

### **COMMUNICATING**

In communicating, families and schools stay in frequent touch with each other about school programs and student progress, not just academic or behavior problems, through ongoing, two-way communication involving an exchange of ideas and information.

Schools must ensure that information for families is understandable, welcoming, and in the family's language. Teachers should provide ongoing feedback to parents on their child's progress in the general education curriculum, program, and IEP goals. These communications should follow a set schedule and format that allows for parents' feedback and suggestions. Teacher feedback should include an assessment of the student's strengths and unique positive qualities; concrete, specific, focused assessment of the student's needs/challenges that is given with care and in the spirit of wanting to help the student rather than assigning blame; concrete follow-up action steps; and an opportunity for families to share their perceptions of their child, their concerns, and their suggestions to help their child.

### **VOLUNTEERING**

In volunteering, families help schools through mentoring, tutoring, viewing student work and performance, helping with administrative tasks, and helping with school beautification or safety. Schools must ensure that there are meaningful volunteer opportunities during and after school, and that families receive training and support.

### **SUPPORTING STUDENT LEARNING**

In supporting student learning, families are connected to their child's learning through homework assignments, curriculum projects that draw upon family history and culture as well as community resources, and parent-teacher conferences. Principals should provide families with information about state standards, annual state and district testing, the discipline policy, how to monitor their child's

progress and take part in decisions about their child's education, and specific ways to support their child's learning by monitoring attendance, homework, TV watching, and other non-school activities. The CST should ensure that parent concerns and opportunities for parent involvement are embedded in the IEP, as appropriate, for each student (e.g., in the PLEP, BIP, IEP progress reports, related services, etc.)

### **DECISION MAKING**

In decision-making, families have meaningful roles in making decisions about the school, and are provided with the training and information they need to participate effectively. Flexibility is key so that families have many avenues for input and involvement. Schools must ensure that families of children with disabilities are included on school-management teams.

### **PREPARING STAFF FOR PARENT PARTNERSHIPS**

Staff in the schools must also be prepared to partner with families, learning how to understand family perspectives and the challenges of raising a child with special needs, and how to communicate effectively with families from diverse backgrounds.

By helping families support their child's learning, and listening to the hopes, dreams, and expectations that families have for their children with disabilities, schools can maximize student achievement and the capacity of students with disabilities to become productive, independent, and contributing members of our communities and society.

**NEWARK'S ROADMAP WILL IMPROVE SCHOOL-BASED SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS AND SERVICES AND THE ABILITY OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES TO PARTICIPATE AND PROGRESS IN THE GENERAL CURRICULUM AND PROGRAM**



**N**ewark's Roadmap to improve school-based special education programs, services, and student performance provides directions on how to best access the road to the general curriculum and program. To reach that destination, the access routes we utilized were:

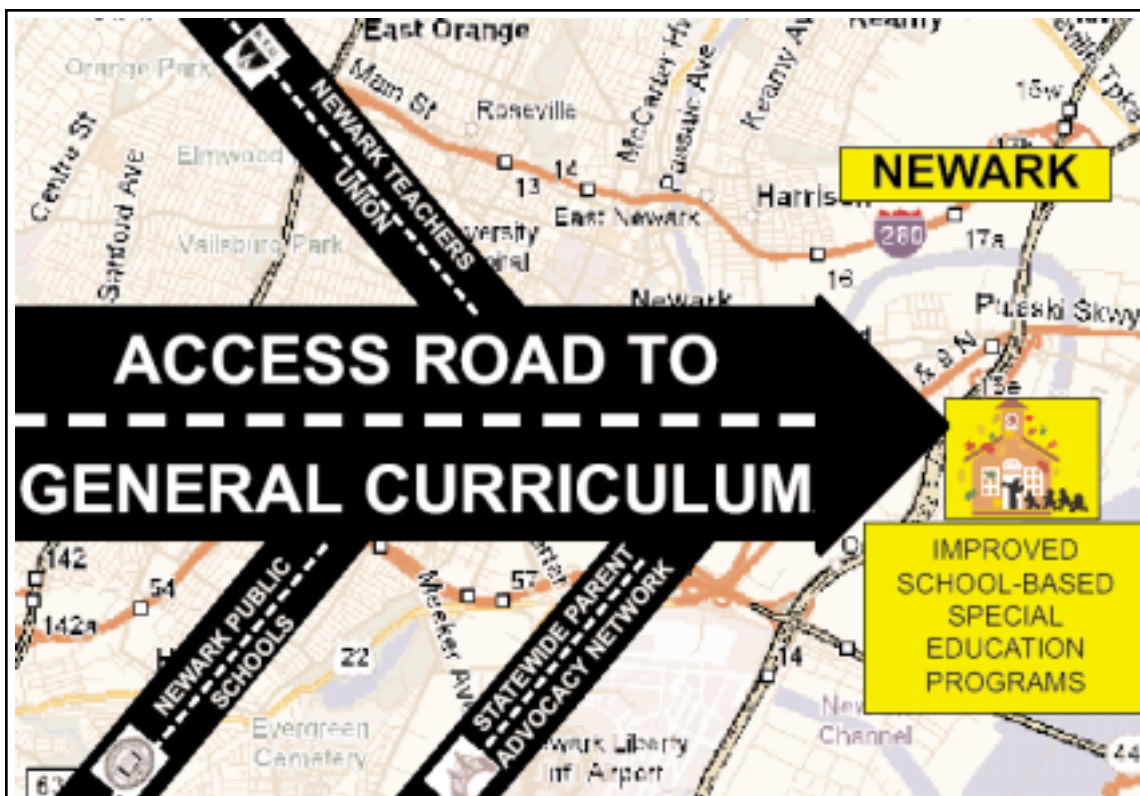
1. Collecting and utilizing student data relevant to student's participation and progress in the general education curriculum and program from referrals through IEP development.
2. Establishing a feedback loop to monitor compliance with code-mandates thereby better ensuring that students with disabilities are provided with the programs, services, and resources they need

to participate and progress in the general education curriculum and program.

3. Ensuring that IEPs are written to provide special education students with the programmatic supports and services they need to participate and progress in the general education curriculum and program.
4. Improving school-based special education programs and services by increasing the effectiveness of class room instructional teams.
5. Increasing parent involvement that is effective in improving student participation and progress in the general education curriculum and program.

The sections of the Roadmap presented in this document focused on improving the performance of students with disabilities on New Jersey's standards-based assessment by providing them with access to the general education curriculum.

This document did not focus on meeting all the individual needs of students with disabilities nor an array of "highstakes" options that IEP teams can legally make but could have a negative impact on a student's performance on the state's, as well as the school's/district's AYP. For example, an IEP team could legally limit the teaching and learning of the general curriculum, if it was appropriate. This action could result in modifications to grading and standards. In addition, IEP teams can make a decision that requires other than the state's allowable accommodations, but then the students would not be counted as achieving proficiency.





# BEST PRACTICES IN SPECIAL EDUCATION



## RESOURCES & CONTACT INFORMATION

### NEWARK TEACHERS UNION

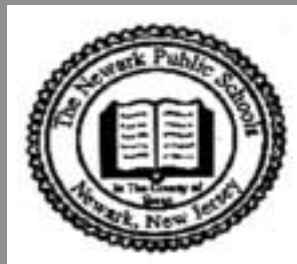


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**THE NEWARK TEACHERS UNION (NTU), THE NEWARK PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND THE STATEWIDE PARENT ADVOCACY NETWORK (SPAN) HAVE FORMED A COLLABORATION TO DEVELOP AND PUBLICIZE BEST PRACTICES IN SPECIAL EDUCATION. THESE PUBLICATIONS CAN SERVE AS A RESOURCE GUIDE FOR EDUCATORS AND PARENTS.**