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ABSTRACT

This research brief examines trends at the federal and state levels in educational reform and implications for reform for students with disabilities. After briefly reviewing the historical background of standards-based school reform, the brief stresses the importance of a three-pronged reform strategy, involving: (1) a unifying vision and goals, (2) a coherent system of state policy guidance, and (3) a restructured governance system. It then discusses state standards-based reform links with federal and national efforts and federal legislation such as the "Goals 2000: Educate America Act," the "Improving America's Schools Act of 1994," and the "School-to-Work Opportunities Act." It reports on a survey of 18 states in terms of: the nature of state standards, the standards development process, policies that embody state standards, the use of content standards and curriculum frameworks across the states, and the inclusion of students with disabilities in standards-based reform. The paper finds that special education has not played a major role in the development of either state content standards or specific curriculum frameworks and urges special educators to participate on committees that develop content standards/curriculum frameworks. States are urged to uniformly define who "all students" are in their standards policies. (DB)

Issue Brief

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The Center for Policy Research on the Impact of General and Special Education Reform

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The Center for Policy Research on the Impact of General and Special Education Reform

In October 1994, the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) established a Center for Policy Research on the Impact of General and Special Education Reform (the Center) to study the interaction between current general and special education policies and their impact on students with disabilities. The Center is a joint endeavor of the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE), the Institute for the Study of Exceptional Children and Youth at the University of Maryland (UM), and the Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE) at the University of Pennsylvania, and is housed at NASBE.

Each Center partner is conducting interrelated three-year research studies that examine reforms in general and special education policies, their interactions, and their implications for students with disabilities. Areas being researched include standards and curriculum, assessment, accountability, teacher policy, finance, and governance, as well as state responses to federal programs such as Goals 2000 and the School-to-Work Opportunities Act. This issue brief uses data collected by the Center during its first year of research (1995) to 1) describe major trends in general education reform from a standards-based perspective across the 18 states in our study; 2) provide a preliminary assessment of the nature and involvement of special education in these reforms at the state level; and 3) discuss implications of these reforms for students with disabilities and related emerging issues.

STANDARDS-BASED SCHOOL REFORM AND STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Historical Background

Since 1983 when *A Nation at Risk* was published, education reform has been a major focus of policymakers at the local, state, and federal levels. States responded to this call for education reform by raising course work standards for high school graduation, implementing new and/or expanding existing assessment programs, and raising standards for prospective teachers (Coley & Goertz, 1990). A counter movement of "bottom-up" reform emerged later in the 1980s that focused on reforming and restructuring schools and on the professionalization of teachers.

The "top-down" mandates of the 1980s did little to change the content of instruction or alter the reigning notions of teaching and learning because, as some argued, fragmented and contradictory policies diverted teachers' attention and provided little or no support for the type of professional development necessary to change teaching. For example, states raised entry-level standards for teachers, while at the same time they issued emergency certificates to address teacher shortages. Some state-mandated or -recommended teacher evaluation instruments attempted to evaluate instruction, yet ignored content goals for students. This same fragmentation also made it difficult to sustain or spread the very promising reforms taking shape in individual schools or groups of schools as a result of bottom-up reform (Cohen, 1990; Cohen & Spillane, 1993; Smith & O'Day, 1991).

Three-Pronged Strategy of Standards-Based Reform

A more systemic approach to education reform emerged in the 1990s as one way of addressing policy fragmentation. The purpose of this *standards-based reform*, as it is sometimes called, is to provide top-down (state level) support of and direction to bottom-up (school-site based) reform.

The strategy has three major prongs (Smith & O'Day, 1991):

- a unifying vision and goals;
- a coherent system of state policy guidance; and
- a restructured governance system.

The first prong, ***a unifying vision and goals***, is intended to provide a coherent direction for education reform throughout the system. Under this strategy, states should establish student outcome goals that focus primarily on the core functions of the education system — teaching and learning — and these goals should encompass high standards. However, these new standards are not just higher rungs on the existing "achievement ladder." They differ from current practice in three critical ways:

1) They focus more on depth of understanding than on students' knowledge of isolated facts; *students are expected to reason with and use what they have learned in school.*

2) The new standards *reflect changing ideas of the types of knowledge and skills students will need* to be productive workers and citizens in the 21st Century. These changes include greater emphasis on complex thinking, communication skills, ability to work in groups, and technological knowledge and skills.

3) *The new standards are to be applied to* ***all*** *students, not just those who are most academically able* (McLaughlin, Shepard, & O'Day, 1995).

The second prong of standards-based reform is a *coherent system of state policy guidance* that promotes these ambitious student outcomes. This entails the coordination of key state policies affecting teaching and learning: curriculum and curriculum materials, teacher preparation and professional development, and assessment. State-developed curriculum frameworks that set out the best thinking about what students should know and be able to do in core academic areas can provide the *direction for locally-developed curricula*, and for state *professional development and assessment policies*. States must then assure that prospective and practicing teachers have the content knowledge and instructional skills required to teach the content of the frameworks through *program certification and teacher licensure requirements*, and *programmatic and financial support of professional development* opportunities that are aligned with the new curriculum content standards. Finally, an *assessment system* designed to measure student knowledge of the new content standards would provide information on student progress and stimulate and support good instruction in the schools.

The third prong of the strategy is a *restructured governance system* that defines the responsibilities of the various levels of the system to facilitate classroom adoption of the new content and pedagogy. *State government's role* is to set system and student goals for the state, coordinate these long-term instructional goals across various state policies, and hold schools and school districts accountable for meeting these goals. *Schools* are then given authority to develop the specific curricula, programs and instructional approaches needed to achieve their goals. The main responsibility of *school districts* is to provide resources and support the efforts of schools to educate all of the district's children to meet state and district goals. States and school districts must also ensure that ***all*** students within their boundaries are treated fairly, especially regarding the allocation of resources.

Links with Federal and National Efforts

Standards-based reform builds on, and is embodied in, several national and federal activities. In 1989, President Bush and the nation's governors held an historic education summit in Charlottesville, Virginia. This meeting led to the adoption of six national education goals that address school readiness, high school completion, competency in nine academic areas, preparation for responsible citizenship and productive employment, and school safety. Congress codified these six goals in the *Goals 2000: Educate America Act* and added two more goals directed at teacher professional development and parental involvement in the schools. The Goals 2000 legislation, as well as programs like the National Science Foundation's Statewide Systemic Initiatives, provide grants to states and local school districts to establish challenging learner outcomes in several academic areas, and to align other policies such as assessment and professional development with these standards.

Other federal legislation also supports standards-based reform. The most recent reauthorization of the federal program for educationally disadvantaged children, Title I of the *Improving America's Schools Act of 1994*, reinforces these reforms by requiring states to include disadvantaged children in the implementation of higher standards. The *School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994* extends the focus on standards from education to labor by encouraging states and local communities to develop more systemic ways of providing ***all*** students with the knowledge and skills they will need to participate in rapidly changing workplaces.

In addition to the *federal* activity, many *national* associations have been involved in standards-based reforms. As states develop new and challenging standards for student learning, they can turn to the work of nearly a dozen national subject-matter associations for guidance. Since the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) issued new curriculum standards in mathematics in 1989, standards have been released in either draft or final form in the arts, civics, foreign language, geography, health, history, music, physical education, science, and social studies. Although national standards in areas such as history and language arts have become mired in controversy, others, like those in mathematics and science, have broad acceptance in their professional fields.

[1]The 18 states are California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, New Jersey, New Mexico, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Texas, Vermont, and Washington.

Content Standards and Curriculum Frameworks across 18 States

In the following sections of this brief, we use data from the 18 states in our study[1] to describe more specifically various state-initiated efforts in developing content standards and curriculum frameworks. These state examples are intended to illustrate points in the report, and are not exhaustive of all 18 study states with respect to any given point.

The keystones of the standards-based reform movement are *content standards*, broad descriptions of the knowledge and skills students should acquire, and *performance standards* that define and provide concrete examples of the desired levels of student achievement expected by the content standards (McLaughlin, Shepard & O'Day, 1995). Not only do content and performance standards delineate what students should know and be able to do in specific areas, but they also guide instruction and assessments at the classroom, school, district and state levels.

Because there seem to be no widely accepted definitions of terms like "content standards," "curriculum guides," "objectives," or "curriculum frameworks," they are often used interchangeably. We use the term "content standards" in reference to a state's student standards, whether they are generic student outcomes or detailed academic standards. We apply the term "curriculum frameworks" to documents that go beyond a statement of standards to explain the content of the standards and provide suggestions for application to curriculum development, assessment, teaching practices, and/or use of materials. Because some states use their curriculum frameworks to communicate state standards while others have both kinds of documents, we will discuss curriculum frameworks and state standards together in this section.

Standards-setting activities differ across the 18 states studied by the Center in four ways: 1) the nature of the state standards; 2) the standards development process; 3) policies that embody state standards; and 4) the use of content standards and curriculum frameworks.

Nature of the State Standards

All of our states report that they have or are developing academically challenging standards. The substance of state standards varies, however, along several dimensions, including the content of the standards (generic vs. subject specific), focus (academic vs. comprehensive, disciplinary vs. interdisciplinary), and level of knowledge and skills.

Some states have adopted broad learner outcomes that emphasize general knowledge, skills, and attitudes that students should acquire by the time they graduate from high school. Vermont, for example, defined its initial set of student outcomes in terms of 21 generic student skills in *The Vermont Common Core of Learning* (1992). Students are expected to:

> "listen actively, for a variety of purposes;...ask meaningful questions;...develop a sense of unique worth and personal competence;...[and] learn by serving others."

This approach has allowed Vermont to stress the interdisciplinary aspects of the curriculum. The *Common Core of Learning* organizes these "vital results" under headings that apply across content areas, and the writing of the content standards was organized into three multidisciplinary teams: arts and humanities; history and social sciences; and science, mathematics and technology.

Other states, such as Connecticut and New Mexico, also have broad generic goal statements, but are developing curriculum frameworks in discrete academic areas. In contrast, Michigan and New Jersey have created only content-specific student outcomes. For instance, New Jersey expects "***all*** students to develop their number sense through experiences which enable them to investigate the characteristics and relationships of numbers, represent numbers in a variety of forms and use numbers in diverse situations" (Mathematics Standard #9, *New Jersey Mathematics Curriculum Framework*, 1995).

Some of the states in our sample that have subject-specific outcome standards have developed mechanisms for linking these disciplines. Maryland, for example, has established learner outcomes in five content

areas, but assesses students' ability through performance-based tasks that require integration of knowledge and higher-order skills across disciplines. Although California has distinct frameworks for each academic content area, it has produced reform initiative documents (i.e., *It's Elementary, Caught in the Middle*, and *Second to None*) and supports grade level networks which help teachers pull together the various threads of reform into a coherent strategy at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. These activities provide a common vision of pedagogy and facilitate interdisciplinary thinking about curriculum within grade levels.

State standards also vary on whether they are primarily academic or comprehensive — that is, whether they include affective domains and career standards as well as traditional academic disciplines. For example, Maryland's new High School Assessment Learning Goals include a set of Skills for Success that cover learning, thinking, communication, technology and interpersonal skills. In Pennsylvania, each student is expected to achieve learning outcomes in career and work education, wellness and fitness, and home economics, as well as in more traditional academic areas.

Many of the states are adopting and/or adapting high level national standards, such as those published by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) and the American Association for the Advancement of Science's (AAAS) Project 2061. According to a review conducted by the American Federation of Teachers (1995), Maryland, however, is the only state in our study that has actually taken steps to benchmark its content standards to international standards.

The Standards Development Process

The stage and pace of the standards-setting process can impact the rigor of what is expected of students. California, for example, has had challenging curriculum frameworks since 1985, and is now developing "second generation" standards in some disciplines. The new mathematics frameworks, for example, are intended to be more rigorous than the initial standards.

In contrast, Georgia's Quality Core Curriculum, developed in the mid-1980s, was designed as a basic curriculum to be enriched or expanded at the discretion of local districts. Although the state's Quality Basic Education law calls for periodic review of the core competencies, limited funding and political support have slowed the development of new standards. Hence the current standards in place are not as rigorous as those in some other states. The New Jersey State Board of Education has recently approved rigorous curriculum standards in several academic areas, but until these are fully implemented, students are held accountable for more basic knowledge and skills in a limited number of fields.

State standards-setting is a dynamic process and, as such, is susceptible to changes in the political and fiscal environment of the states. In the 18 states in our study, two to four years generally passed between the enactment of standards-based reform legislation and final approval of standards. The development of supporting curriculum frameworks or guides often takes even longer. Several states have used this time to build public understanding and support for the new reform agenda. For example:

- Vermont took two and one-half years to develop its Common Core of Learning so it could directly engage citizens in the definition of the state's education goals.

- Colorado's content standards underwent two years of statewide feedback from a number of different constituencies before they were submitted to the State Board of Education.

- The New Jersey State Department of Education spent a year seeking the public's response to its core curriculum standards, which were developed by committees composed largely of educators.

Standards-setting activities and related education reform policies in these three states, as well as others such as Maryland and Missouri, have proceeded on course largely because of their stable political environments. Although many of the actors have changed, these states' governors, chief state school officers, and state boards of education have provided sustained support for the concept of standards-based reform. In other states, political support for standards-based reform has

been uneven. For example, Pennsylvania's strong anti-Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) movement has threatened the standards-setting process and has led that state to remove some affective domains from its standards. In California, public opposition, due in part to limited public understanding of and support for alternative forms of assessment, contributed to the demise of that state's pioneering assessment system. These new assessments were intended to provide instructional guidance to teachers on the state's content standards, as well as measure student performance on the outcomes.

In spite of political opposition in some states, standards-based reform has not been derailed. Standards remain instruments of reform, although opposition has modified the content of the standards in some states. While some states are downplaying affective domains, adding some basic skills into their standards (e.g., phonics, spelling) and recommending a variety of instructional strategies, they are not lowering the level of the standards themselves.

Policies That Embody State Standards

States' content standards are embodied in a variety of policy instruments, and often in more than one instrument in a state. For example, California's curriculum frameworks are the principal statement of its content standards. In contrast, New Jersey's and Maryland's content standards are currently operationalized by their states' assessment systems. Connecticut uses multiple instruments to communicate different kinds of standards. Generic student outcomes are contained in its *Common Core of Learning*. Standards in specific academic disciplines are embedded in the state's two assessment programs — Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) and Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT) — and in the state's curriculum frameworks, although revisions to the frameworks have lagged behind changes in the state's assessment program.

These differences reflect state preferences for the type(s) of policy instrument(s) that they use to drive reform. California's reform vision is embodied in, and its reform strategy is centered around, the state's curriculum frameworks, which are designed to provide ***all*** students access to a "rich and vigorous" core curriculum. Although adoption of the frameworks is voluntary, other state policies, such as the adoption of textbooks and other instructional materials, student assessment and teacher professional development, have been used to support the content of these frameworks. In states such as Connecticut, Michigan, and New Jersey, local communities have traditionally viewed the development of state curriculum frameworks as an unwarranted intrusion into their authority. Therefore, policymakers turned to student assessment programs as a way to influence the content of local curriculum and instruction.

Use of Content Standards and Curriculum Frameworks

The states in our sample appear to be using content standards and/or curriculum frameworks for three purposes:

1) to guide curriculum and instruction at the local school district level;
2) to design statewide and district-level assessments; and
3) to establish performance standards for a high school diploma.

States use different approaches to *guide local curriculum*. A few of the states in our study, such as Michigan and New Jersey, require school districts to incorporate state content and/or performance standards into their local curriculum. Other states, such as California and Nebraska, use content standards as models for local district curriculum development.

In several states in our sample, state content standards *guide the development of state and local assessments*. The Michigan Education Assessment Program (MEAP), for example, incorporates the state's Essential Goals and Objectives in each of the curricular areas that are assessed by the state — reading, mathematics and science. The test is rewritten each time the state's content standards are updated. Maryland has developed a criterion-referenced assessment, the Maryland School Performance Assessment Program (MSPAP), based on specific sets of desired learning outcomes in five content areas. In Colorado, both the state and local school

districts must develop assessment programs that measure that state's new model content standards.

Several states in our sample require that *students meet state standards as a condition of graduating from high school*, or receiving a subject area endorsement on their diploma. In some of these states, student performance is assessed on a statewide test (e.g., Maryland and New Jersey); in others, local districts are responsible for determining whether and how students meet the state's student objectives (e.g., Minnesota and Pennsylvania).

While the adoption of content standards may be voluntary in some states, the alignment of state standards with other policies, such as state assessments and graduation requirements, heightens the importance of these standards at the local level for ***all*** students, including students with disabilities.

The Inclusion of Students with Disabilities in Standards-Based Reform

Standards-based reform raises a number of issues for educators regarding students with disabilities and their educational program. As previously stated, standards-based reform calls for educators to help ***all*** students meet the new standards, not just those students who are most academically able. Many states include statements to this effect in their standards documents. In addition, the increasing student diversity in the nation's public schools has widened the band of "typical" students with whom general education teachers are working. This broader definition of the typical student, coupled with the increased expectation that students with disabilities have a right to an education leading to the same outcomes as the general student population, has prompted educators to begin examining how to include special education and students with disabilities in standards-based reform.

To date, special education has not played a major role in the development of either state content standards or specific curriculum frameworks in the study states. Rather, special education's involvement has most often been limited to a review of standards and curriculum documents prepared by other educators, and development of strategies or position statements regarding how such students could and should be included in the standards. However, there is some evidence that those states that embarked upon the standards development process comparatively later tended to include special educators to a greater extent than those states that were pioneers in the standards-based reform movement.

Among our study states in which special education was more substantively involved, we found two approaches involving increased participation of special educators in the standards-setting process:

- Special educators participating on committees that developed the content standards/curriculum frameworks (e.g., Nebraska); and

- Special educators providing sample instructional activities for how performance standards could be used with students with disabilities (e.g., Missouri).

Thus, Nebraska and Missouri provide two examples of how special education has been substantively involved in the standards development process. (See box on page 9.)

Several key issues emerged from the first year of our research concerning the inclusion of students with disabilities and special education in the development and application of standards and curriculum frameworks. These include:

- To what extent do states *plan* to include students with disabilities in the standards-based reform movement?

- Are the standards being developed by states relevant and *appropriate* for a broad array of students?

- To what extent *can* and *should* special educators and advocates for students with disabilities be involved in developing state standards and curriculum frameworks?

And, indeed, as states grapple with how to include students with disabilities in standards and the related assessments, the tensions among these issues have become the focal point of debate. That is, educators are attempt-

Involving Special Education in Standards Development: The Experiences of Two States

In **Nebraska**, curricular frameworks, which will set the standards, are developed through collaboration of advisory councils, writing teams, and review teams in each of the subject area disciplines. Since January 1995, a special education Liaison has served as an active member of the various groups which are developing the frameworks. The Liaison is a new position within the Nebraska Department of Education, created to bridge general curriculum areas and the Special Populations office and to connect content area experts with special educators skilled in addressing the unique needs of individual learners. The Liaison role varies by framework effort. Sometimes the Liaison participates as an advisor or reviewer; in other cases, the Liaison participates in writing frameworks. In addition to the Liaison, the Nebraska Special Populations office is developing a number of technical assistance documents to accompany the curricular frameworks that will identify practical strategies for the inclusion of students with disabilities in curriculum activities.

For the past two years, **Missouri** teachers, including special educators, have been involved in the development of performance standards. In January 1996, the Missouri State Board of Education adopted the "Show-Me Standards." To demonstrate how the standards apply to students with disabilities, the Division of Special Education within the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) developed a sample curriculum activity for presentation to the State Board of Education. This "Chocolate Box" activity demonstrated how the proposed performance standard in mathematics:

"... *students in Missouri public schools will acquire a solid foundation which includes knowledge of geometric and spatial sense involving measurement (including length, area, volume), trigonometry, and similarity and transformations of shapes.*

could be taught to students with a range of abilities. At one end of the continuum, more advanced students apply geometry and trigonometry principles in designing and packaging chocolates. At the other end of the continuum, students choose the correct template for the box, based on shape and size, and fill the box with the proper pattern of chocolates. In addition, DESE staff provided a number of other specific modifications that could be used in presenting the lesson to students with a variety of disabilities. This activity demonstrated that the "Show-Me Standards" truly are intended to be achievable milestones and that ***all*** students can be accommodated.

ing to balance the relevancy of state standards for ***all*** students with the overall flexibility and content of the standards documents themselves, to ensure their applicability to a wide range of student abilities.

Extent Students with Disabilities Are Intended to be Included in Standards-Based Reform

As mentioned above, many state documents, as well as state applications for *Goals 2000* planning monies, specify that the standards and curriculum frameworks are to apply to ***all*** students. Yet, states do not uniformly define who "***all***" students are, leaving to interpretation who should and should not be included in the reform. States are grappling with the issue of applying generic standards to the wide range of student abilities represented in special education[2], particularly with how to include the approximately 1-2 percent of the student population with the most significant cognitive disabilities.

Some states, like Kentucky and Vermont, make no specific reference to students with disabilities in reform documents, yet their reform legislation was designed to apply to *all* children. Inherent in the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) and Vermont's Act 230 is a belief that *all* children can learn, including those with disabilities. While accommodations are made in instruction and assessments, these states expect almost all students with disabilities to meet the same standards as their non-disabled peers.

Department of education officials in another study state confirmed that the standards applied to ***all*** students, including students with disabilities. Yet when queried, state legislative staff reported that policymakers had yet to determine just who was to be included in standards-based reform. Still another state in our sample, Michigan, has developed separate standards for special education students and has yet to determine how or if these standards will be incorporated into their assessment system or other reform activities. Overall, states are wrestling with how to be inclusive while acknowledging that for a small percentage of students, high academic standards are not relevant to their lifelong goals.

States also signal their intentions about which students will be included in their standards-based reforms through their assessment and accountability policies. Some of the states in our study are working to include larger numbers of students with disabilities in their assessment programs. Kentucky, Maryland and Vermont, for example, include most or all students with disabilities in their current assessment programs, making adaptations that are consistent with those made for the delivery of instruction. Kentucky and Maryland have also developed alternative assessment approaches for students with the most severe disabilities for whom the regular curriculum is inappropriate.

In addition to policies pertaining to assessment participation or exclusion, accountability policies that relate to the use of assessment results also reflect the extent to which students with disabilities are included in the state's assessment program. While Kentucky includes the test scores of ***all*** students in their accountability process, most of the eighteen states in our sample allow school districts and schools to determine which students with disabilities will be assessed, and whether their test scores will be reported. Thus, although a state may make provisions for students with disabilities in their assessment instruments and accommodation policies, their accountability policies may actually provide for the liberal exclusion of students with disabilities.

The Applicability of Content and Performance Standards to a Broad Array of Students

The growing use of more rigorous state standards to drive curriculum, instruction and assessment raises issues about the appropriateness of these standards for students with disabilities, and for which students within the special education student population.

- *First, are the standards relevant to the educational goals of students with disabilities?* The National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO) has identified multiple outcomes for students with disabilities, including academic and functional integrity, responsibility and independence, contribution and citizenship, physical health, personal and social adjustment and satisfaction (NCEO, 1994). The inclusion of students with disabilities in reform initiatives will be determined by the extent to which state standards align with outcomes that are appropriate for students with diverse learning needs. For example, state standards that focus primarily on academic skills have the potential of excluding those students with disabilities whose educational goals are focused more heavily on functional outcomes.

Second, does the way in which states benchmark the standards provide the flexibility needed for students with disabilities? Across our study states, academic content standards vary from broad goals to specific topic and skill objectives for each grade span. In the latter case, it is expected that students and teachers will build on defined experiences in the preceding grade(s). While some argue that detailed standards are necessary to form the basis for a core curriculum for ***all***

[2]There is actually a greater difference in student abilities within special education than between general and special education.

students in a state (AFT, 1995), many students with disabilities may benefit from a more goal-oriented curriculum that requires students to demonstrate mastery of the goal itself rather than to master a multitude of specific topic and skill objectives leading to the overall goal. In addition, academically-demanding content and performance standards may not be appropriate for students who have significantly different cognitive abilities. For example, many students with mental retardation can benefit from instruction in problem-solving, but not of the sort embedded in high-level mathematical content.

Third, are the instructional approaches embodied in, or implied by, the new standards appropriate for students with disabilities? Many of the new standards are based upon constructivist theories of learning. Constructivist theory defines the student as an active learner who relies on present knowledge and understanding to assimilate new ideas and concepts. The role of the teacher is to create learning situations in which the student can begin with what is known and develop new meaning through inquiry, analysis, and synthesis.

Special education curriculum and instruction, however, have traditionally relied heavily on a behavioralist model of learning, where the role of the teacher is to determine what skills students should acquire, analyze the requisite components of each skill, and teach these components in isolation to "add up" to the complete skill. Although students with disabilities can benefit from a more enriched curriculum with more demanding cognitive tasks, in some areas they may learn best starting with basic skills instruction. For example, current curriculum research in special education shows that, for some students with disabilities, more explicit, formal phonics instruction produces greater gains in reading production than does the constructivist approach of whole language instruction. Reconciling these two very different instructional approaches, specifically if standards require a specific orientation to how students learn, will be instrumental in determining how students with disabilities fit into standards-based reform.

Extent to which Special Educators Can and Should Be Involved in Developing State Standards and Curriculum Frameworks

Unresolved is the extent to which special educators can and should be involved in developing state standards and curriculum frameworks. In most states, special education teachers do not learn in-depth subject matter knowledge in their teacher preparation programs. By definition, special educators are taught to be experts in *how to teach* (i.e., assessment and instructional accommodations), not *what to teach* (i.e., curriculum content).

As mentioned earlier, very few special educators have been involved in the standards development process, and their involvement has generally been limited to a review of standards and curriculum documents that were prepared by other educators. While review is helpful, not including special educators in the process from the beginning may contribute to narrow, academically-based standards that are not appropriate for a variety of students, students with disabilities among them. If state curriculum standards are really going to apply to ***all*** students, states will need to tap special educators' expertise in how to teach the curriculum embedded in the standards to students with diverse learning styles, including a range of students with special needs. Consequently, it would be beneficial for special educators to actively participate in both the development and the implementation of curriculum standards and frameworks.

Concluding Comments

This article summarizes standards-based reform and potential implications for students with disabilities. The overarching issue is not whether special education should become part of the standards-based reform movement, but how. Instrumental to successfully including students with disabilities will be the degree to which policymakers understand:

- the complexities of including ***all*** students in the standards-based reform; and

- The necessary contributions of special educators to the process.

> *"If state curriculum standards are really going to apply to **all** students, states will need to tap special educators' expertise in how to teach the curriculum embedded in the standards to students with diverse learning styles, including a range of students with special needs. Consequently, it would be beneficial for special educators to actively participate in both the development and the implementation of curriculum standards and frameworks."*

Truly including ***all*** students in standards-based reform is not simple. ***All*** students represent an extraordinary range of ability, learning styles, and interests. State standards must encompass the needs of a full range of students, from those whose post-secondary plans include attending a college or university to those enrolling in vocational training programs, to students who plan to move directly into the work place. And, the intricate interplay of policies will determine the extent to which students with disabilities are included in the reform. For example, assessment accommodation policies may be thwarted through liberal assessment exclusion policies; narrowly defined, academic standards may exclude students for whom a functional curriculum, with instruction geared toward applied skills, is more appropriate.

Thus far states have not utilized the skills and knowledge of special educators to the extent necessary to ensure that standards-based reform includes students with disabilities as well as other students who have traditionally not fared well in the schools. That is, to the extent that special educators can broaden the debate of the content, coverage and type of state standards, as well as show how those standards may be taught to diverse learners, the reform movement holds more promise of success for ***all*** students.

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