Research Brief

Special Education

Question:
What are the components of a successful special education program at the high school level?

Summary of Findings:

In a Nutshell

Meeting the needs of every student so that they can be successful in the real world and life is one of the primary goals of education. In this era of high stakes standardized testing and No Child Left Behind, it is expected that all students should achieve at the same academic levels. Yet, no two students are identical so it makes logical sense that their needs and achievement levels will not be the same. According to IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004), students who have been identified with special needs are expected to achieve and be successful in the least restrictive environment that is as inclusive as possible. " …school districts are required to educate students with disabilities in regular classrooms with their nondisabled peers, in the school they would attend if not disabled, to the maximum extent appropriate" (*Inclusion, least restrictive environment [LRE], mainstreaming*). With this in mind, students with disabilities could be receiving their education in the regular education classroom, a mainstream setting, an inclusive setting or a self-contained classroom. What can be done, regardless of their educational setting, to help high school students with special needs be successful and achieve at their highest levels?

The literature recommended the following instructional strategies:
•   learning tasks should have meaningful entry points
•   the strengths and weaknesses of the student should be taken into account when making assignments and giving tasks
•   vary groupings in the class so that students have opportunities to work with a variety of students who have different strengths, weaknesses, learning styles and interests
•   when possible, allow for student choice in assignments (i.e. performance, portfolio, project, etc.)
•   provide activities where students must think for themselves
•   develop work that builds on the students' prior knowledge
•   make certain that the activities accomplish worthwhile learning
•   provide homework experiences that are reasonable and tie directly to the instructional program
•   use auditory and visual cues regularly
•   create work that is meaningful, specific, manageable, attainable and has a bit of growth built in
•   provide a realistic timeline for work to be completed

- create a classroom environment that is free from distractions (i.e. use of a study carrel, have students remove unnecessary materials from their work space, etc.)
- provide a check list of what and when things need to be done in order to successfully complete the assignment
- chunk work and tests into small and meaningful bits, so that it is doable
- model appropriate work habits
- show examples of successfully completed assignments
- use visuals with directions and with lessons (i.e. topical outlines, glossaries, graphic organizers, study guides, colorful pictures)
- limit the concepts being taught, so it is not overwhelming and confusing
- allow students to retake a test or have a scribe write out their answers
- grade grammar and spelling separate from content
- use multiple sources of information, especially if the students have auditory, attention and/or comprehension problems
- make certain students can hear and see well
- recognize successes and help students build on those
- provide a transition program that builds a strong bridge between school and adult life

Teaching and Organizational Approaches
- Team teaching: Two teachers (usually one regular educator and one special educator) work together as equals, teaching the class interchangeably
- Co-teaching: Two or more educators (usually one regular educator and one special educator or special education aide) working together with one teacher being the "lead" and the other providing support as directed by the primary teacher. This is also known as "complimentary teaching" or "station teaching."
- Parallel teaching: Two teachers (usually one regular educator and one special educator) teach the same concept, but each does so with half of the class

Resources:
- Are you promoting learning?
  This piece briefly explores the question of what determines if an assignment is worthwhile.
  http://specialed.about.com/od/teacherstrategies/a/learning.htm

- Differentiated instruction and assessment
  A succinct article that lists basic reasons for providing a differentiated instructional program and gives an example of what one topic might look like when differentiated.
  http://specialed.about.com/od/teacherstrategies/a/differentiated.htm

- Differentiated instruction towards academic standards

A definition of and purposes for differentiation are provided along with a rich collection of various differentiated strategies for use in the classroom.
http://www.pattan.net/files/EffInstruct/DiffInst.pdf

- Effective instructional strategies
  This site provides brief descriptions of 10 different instructional strategies that can be used in the classroom to help students with special needs.
  http://www.pattan.net/teachlead/EffectiveInstructionToolKitSearch.aspx

- Improving student performance
  A brief description for response cards and guided notes is provided.
  http://www.pattan.net/files/Bookmarks/ImprStudntPerform2006.pdf

- Inclusion, least restrictive environment (LRE), mainstreaming
  The definitions for inclusion, LRE and mainstreaming along with responses to frequently asked questions are included in this site.
  http://www.wrightslaw.com/info/lre.index.htm

- Inclusive practices
  A definition of inclusion is given in this piece.
  http://www.pattan.net/teachlead/InclusivePractices.aspx

- IDEA website
  This is the U.S. Department of Education's home site for information on IDEA.
  http://idea.ed.gov/explore/home

- Instructional practices for an effective classroom
  This is a short survey/checklist to help assess how effective a teacher's instructional program currently is.
  http://www.pattan.net/files/Instruction/InstrPrac.pdf

- Practical strategies for the classroom
  This article provides lists of strategies in the areas of environment, time management, presentation of materials, assessment and behavior.
  http://specialed.about.com/cs/teacherstrategies/a/Strategies.htm

- Secondary programming
  This is chapter 8 from a book on inclusion (*Collaborative Teaching: Special Education for Inclusive Classrooms*). It includes background on the structure of secondary schools and gives some suggestions on meeting the needs of students with disabilities in the high school classroom.
  http://www.parrotpublishing.com/Inclusion_Chapter_8.htm

- Secondary transition
  A brief definition of secondary transition is provided in this article.
  http://www.pattan.net/teachlead/SecondaryTransition.aspx

- Team Teaching
  This piece provides a definition for team teaching and the questions that should be asked and explored before doing this type of teaching.
  http://www.vanderbilt.edu/cft/resources/teaching_resources/activities/team_teach.htm

- 10 research-based effective teaching principles
  This is a concise list of effective teaching tips, most of which are common sense, but can serve as good reminders.
  http://www.pattan.net/files/Bookmarks/EffectTchBkmrk060407.pdf

- Types of co-teaching
  This provides very brief descriptions of several different types of co-teaching models.
  http://www.specialconnections.ku.edu/cgi-bin/cgiwrap/specconn/main.php?cat=collaboration&section=main&subsection=coteaching/types

- Who team teaches really? Building successful high school team teaching.
  This article was written by two special educators at East High School in WI and describes their findings of and experiences with team teaching at their high school.
  http://www.madison.k12.wi.us/east/ (home site for the high school)
  Site for article
  http://www.madison.k12.wi.us/sod/car/abstracts/51.pdf