This webinar presented strategies to make the curriculum, instruction, and assessment more accessible for students with disabilities, including significant cognitive disabilities. This Q&A addressed the questions participants had for Dr. Jacqui Kearns following the webinar. The webinar recording and PowerPoint presentation are also available.

Questions

1. **How does the definition of an effective teacher differ for special educators?**

   Effective special education teachers ensure unique skills for their students. The research shows that outcomes for students who do not have functional reading and math skills are poor in college success, career success, and community participation. Communicative competence is the foundation for all functional skills, and maximized communicative competence should be the goal of an effective special educator. Special educators should also help students develop appropriate social skills and independent work skills by exposing students to a variety of environments. Effective special educators also help students develop support access skills so that they can learn what resources they have available to help themselves. Special educators should also strive to help students gain full access to academic content so that they can engage in lifelong learning. An effective special educator helps maximize student outcomes, whether it be engagement in a career, a community, or one of the many college programs for students with moderate intellectual disabilities. When unsure about whether a student may benefit, teaching is the least dangerous assumption.

2. **How is student growth measured differently for students with disabilities?**

   Several factors are unique to measuring the growth of students with disabilities. In typical children, student growth is measured by norm-referenced assessments. Most students with disabilities are not included in norm-referenced systems so they are not included in these growth models. Evaluators must consider several factors in measuring student growth such as "What is the best way to capture student growth that the teacher has the most control over?" "How should goals and objective be considered in terms of evaluation?" and "Will a once a year assessment be the best indicator of student growth over time?" For students with moderate and severe disabilities, growth may be best measured with progress monitoring, wherein a teacher collects ongoing information about students' progress on a previously identified target. Some tools used to measure growth for students with disabilities include classroom observation, portfolios, videotapes, classroom interactions, student outcomes, progress monitoring, and combinations of multiple measures.

3. **What strategies are recommended to support educators in meeting the needs of students with disabilities? Are there recommended practices for working with specific disabilities (e.g., sensory impairments) or multiple disabilities?**

   Special educators face the daunting task of meeting the needs of students on several different levels. Teachers need to have access to resources, evidence practices, and professional development for the disabilities specific to their students. With these resources, a teacher can focus on student profiles and the patterns they follow in learning progression frameworks, ensuring that the student is continuously progressing from grade to grade. With appropriate monitoring of the learning progression framework, a teacher should know where to go next when setting assessment targets in an IEP.

   In addition to support for academic progression, teachers should be provided with integrated supports for other skills such as self-determination, independence, and real-world application so that they can embed these skills in their classroom practices.

4. **How do strategies for teaching students with disabilities vary from those used with the general education population?**

   The classroom make-up for special educators is inherently different than that of general education classrooms. Special educators play diverse roles for a diverse group of students. The role of the teacher depends on the needs of the student, but all students need to develop a core set of skills. Special educators should aim to help students develop communicative competence as early as possible, since this competency is the foundation of academic learning and is crucial for all outcomes. Educators should also aim to help students develop age-appropriate social skills and the ability to work effectively in small groups. Skills in accessing support systems are essential for long- term success.

5. **How can teachers effectively accommodate classrooms with both general education students and students with disabilities?**

   The answer to this question is highly dependent on the situation and experience level of the teachers. In general, under Universal Design for Learning, teachers should be able to build lessons for all students (not just a specific kind of student). Teachers must be systematic in providing access to the big ideas we want for all kids and must think about strategies for embedding evidence-based practices for special education within Universal Design for Learning.

6. **How can a teacher best engage students with disabilities who might be disengaged in subject material?**

   Many students thrive in an environment with real-life engagement. Educators

should aim to teach using physical objects and build lessons that parallel life experiences.

7. **How can evaluators without a background in special education effectively evaluate special educators?**

Teachers, researchers, and evaluators should work to develop jargon-free resources and observation tools that are easily accessible to evaluators with little knowledge of special educators. These tools should be straightforward, explicit, and as easy to comprehend as possible. These resources should contain explicit questions such as "What should I look for in a classroom serving this type of need?"

8. **How do you collect progress monitoring data for evaluation when a teacher sees several students?**

Teachers can use the same sort of progress monitoring strategies for most special education students, with some variation depending on the type of special education population the teacher is working with. For students with severe disabilities, a range of expertise is involved, and service providers and teachers should work together and learn each other's disciplines so they can implement targets and measure those targets using systematic instruction.

Action Steps
Participants responded to the question "As a result of today's webinar, what action steps do you plan to take?" and some of their responses are listed below.

- *Have positive input on SPED* [special education] *teacher evaluation at state level whenever possible.*

- *I will be looking for new resources including some of the websites that were shared.*

- *Check out progress monitoring website. I work with new teachers and everyone is looking at ways to better monitor student progress for IEPs and making instructional decisions.*

- *I plan on meeting with the other special educators in my building and sharing this information and also meeting with my principal to clarify how different each area of special education [is] in our building and being sure the evaluations reflect these differences. Also, I want to look more into aimsweb and other progress monitoring tools.*

- *Share the info with my brother who is a high school principal.*

Additional Resources
- National Center and State Collaborative, http://www.ncscpartners.org/
- Center for Teaching Quality, http://teachingquality.org/

- Collaboration for Effective Educator Development, Accountability, and Reform (CEEDAR) Center (University of Florida), http://ceedar.com/

- aimsweb, http://www.aimsweb.com/about

- Council for Exceptional Children, www.cec.sped.org

- National Center on Student Progress Monitoring http://studentprogress.org/