

Specific Considerations for Teachers of Students with Disabilities

About This Resource

Danielson’s 2013 *Framework for Teaching (FfT)* provides teachers and school leaders with a common language to describe and discuss effective teaching in order to achieve continuous growth in teacher practice and student learning. The *FfT* was created as an overarching framework that describes the commonalities in every classroom—those aspects of teaching that are common across grades, disciplines, and students’ backgrounds. Thus, the *FfT* is appropriate for use with and by teachers of students with disabilities.

New York State’s Education Law 3012-c requires that lead evaluators have appropriate guidance regarding specific considerations in evaluating teachers of students with disabilities. Also, many school leaders and teachers have requested additional support in using the *FfT* in classrooms in which student characteristics, subject content, or program models may differ significantly from other courses or subjects. In response, this document offers specific considerations for school leaders and teachers of students with disabilities through component-aligned questions. These questions may be discussed when providing feedback, engaging in pre- and post-observations, and planning next steps; they are not to be used for evaluating teacher practice. In addition, these questions can be used by teachers voluntarily as a resource to guide their thinking as they plan and reflect on their instructional practice in how they are meeting the needs of students with disabilities. Additionally, while these questions may be useful for informing teachers’ usual planning, preparation, and professional learning processes, teachers may not be required to provide written answers to these questions as an additional professional assignment.

This document is not a separate rubric for teachers of students with disabilities or to be used as a checklist in classroom observations. Each *FfT* component’s “Rationale,” “Performance Levels,” “Critical Attributes,” and many of the “Possible Examples”¹ are relevant to teachers of students with disabilities and should be used by school leaders when considering evidence of each component. This document only seeks to present additional context to consider, keeping in mind that not every question will be applicable depending upon the students’ needs and context.

Embedded in these questions are good instructional practices for students with disabilities; this document is not an exhaustive guide of those good instructional practices. Also, it should be noted that the questions refer to practices across a continuum of services including: general education classrooms that include students with an Individualized Education Program (IEP), classrooms in which students receive Special Education Teaching Support Services (SETSS), Integrated Collaborative Teaching (ICT) settings, and Special Classes (SC). For teachers of ELLs with disabilities, also refer to the Specific Considerations for Teachers of English Language Learners to use alongside this document.

¹ Every “Possible Example” in the *FfT* is not meant to be relevant to all teachers, including teachers of students with disabilities. Examples are included to assist teachers and observers in understanding concrete classroom practices that might serve as evidence for each component. The relevance depends upon the discipline and the students’ developmental levels.

The Office of Students with Disabilities, including District 75, contributed significantly to the creation of this document.² These specific considerations align with the work of the Office of Students with Disabilities to support teachers to create rigorous learning environments that focus on academic achievement, Common Core-aligned IEP goals, and skill development across a wide range of ability and disability.

Additional Resources and Support

Additional resources for teachers of students with disabilities and supervisors of teachers of students with disabilities include:

- [NYCDOE Division of Students with Disabilities: A Shared Path to Success](#) resources for increasing educational opportunities and improving outcomes for students with disabilities.
- [NYSED Resource Guides for Special Education Instructional Practices](#): “Look fors” in the areas of literacy, behavioral supports and interventions and delivery of special education services.
- [Council for Exceptional Children Professional Standards and Ethics for the Field of Special Education](#): This organization provides information about standards of practice for special education teachers.
- NYSED provides support around developing and implementing [Quality IEPs](#), as well as around [test access and accommodations](#).
- Schools can use [these quality indicators](#) for effective integration of assistive technology.
- Multi-Tiered System of Supports are a coherent continuum of evidence-based, system-wide practices to support a rapid response to academic and behavioral needs. Frequent data-based monitoring for instructional decision-making empowers each student to achieve high standards:
 - [Response to Intervention](#):
 - [PK-6 Interventions](#)
 - [Academic Literacy Instruction in the Content Areas](#)
 - [Phonological Awareness and Phonics, K-1](#)
 - [Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports](#):
 - [Critical Features of Classroom Management](#)
 - [Classroom Management Self-Assessment](#)
- [Universal Design for Learning](#): This site includes a set of principles for curriculum development that give all individuals equal opportunities to learn.
- [NYCDOE District 75 Web site](#): This site includes educational, vocational, and behavior support resources for teachers of students who are on the autism spectrum, have significant cognitive delays, are severely emotionally challenged, sensory impaired and/or multiply disabled.
- Educators can consult [this glossary](#) for definitions and explanations of special education terms.

Questions and suggestions about this document are welcome and valued. Please send feedback and queries to teachereffectiveness@schools.nyc.gov, and a member of the Office of Teacher Effectiveness will respond shortly.

² Design of this resource was also informed by similar guidance on best practices provided by the Houston Independent School District to its teachers and evaluators.

Domain 1: Planning & Preparation

1a: Demonstrating Knowledge of Content and Pedagogy

- How do you use knowledge of pedagogical strategies appropriate for a wide range of disability classifications to develop lesson and unit plans that ensure access, with meaningful progressions for students with disabilities?
- How do you demonstrate knowledge of appropriate supports, specialized instruction, co-teaching, and accommodations in order to plan lessons that are accessible for all students?

1b: Demonstrating Knowledge of Students

- How do you integrate deep knowledge of the students' strengths, IEP goals, instructional levels, interests, and needs into the lesson and unit plans to provide rigorous learning experiences?
- How do you use knowledge of how the students learn to plan in a way that ensures access and engagement?
- How do you anticipate and then plan for any potential barriers to student learning?

1c: Setting Instructional Outcomes

- How do you identify instructional outcomes that are Common Core-aligned and, as appropriate, include career development and occupational standards, vocational skills, and functional learning outcomes?
- How do you align students' IEP goals and objectives to the instructional outcomes?
- How do the lesson objectives require students to increase their independence, applying transferable skills across contexts over increasing periods of time?

1d: Demonstrating Knowledge of Resources

- How do you plan collaboratively with your co-teacher and/or support personnel?
- How do you incorporate the use of charts, highlighters, graphs, and illustrations to support access to lesson objectives?
- How do you plan for intentional use of instructional and/or assistive technology, and low or high tech augmentative/assistive communication devices or systems to support assessment and instruction?
- How do you plan to provide access to support equipment (e.g., switches, weighted vests, elevated easel or writing tray) to promote student access as appropriate?

1e: Designing Coherent Instruction

- How do you incorporate the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) to give all students access to the curriculum? For example,
 - How do you plan for various points of entry to text so that students gain access both at their instructional level and at grade level (e.g., digitized text, audio text)?
 - How do you plan various points of entry to content according to student need (e.g., activate or supply background knowledge, highlight big ideas via a BrainPop video, provide Braille)?
 - How do you plan scaffolds to support individual students and the whole class (e.g., creating a posted list of the members of instructional groups, picture cues, job charts, public timing of activities)?
 - How do you plan to differentiate the quantity of work for some students while keeping the same curricular outcomes for all (e.g., plan a math assignment that assesses the same standards but with fewer questions)?
- How do you plan specially designed instruction required for each student with a disability? For example,
 - In an ICT setting, how do you and your co-teacher design tasks that are rigorous for all students and select the appropriate co-teaching model(s) that match tasks, activities, and student needs?

- As a special education teacher who provides SETSS, how do you plan with general educators to ensure supplementary instruction and compensatory skill instruction meets the needs of individual students?
- As a general education teacher, how do you plan with the SETSS teacher to ensure supplementary instruction and compensatory skill instruction meets the needs of individual students?
- As the special education class teacher, how do you design instruction that is both aligned to the general education curriculum and appropriately tailored to the instructional needs of the students?
- How do you design lessons that identify groupings that support the instructional needs of individual students?

1f: Designing Student Assessments

- How do you plan accommodations (e.g., changes in timing, setting, presentation, response) for individual students, as necessary, to measure their achievement relative to standards (e.g., tape recording an extended response)?
- How do you plan assessment accommodations aligned with those accommodations that the student receives during classroom instruction (e.g., providing accessible text as part of a performance assessment)?
- How do you design assessments to reflect real world application of skills (e.g., an in-class math assessment requiring students to apply an understanding of angles and measurement to building shelves at their internship)?
- How do your planned assessments allow for evaluation of both the content/skill objectives and progress toward IEP goals?

Domain 2: The Classroom Environment

2a: Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport

- How do you create a safe, inclusive, and mutually responsive environment to engage students with disabilities in meaningful learning activities and social interactions?
- How do you demonstrate to students that diversity is expected, respected, and valued (e.g., the classroom seating and participation reflects full integration of all students)?
- How do you ensure students support each other and feel safe to take risks?

2b: Establishing a Culture for Learning

- How do you promote students' achievement of grade level standards and IEP goals with a belief that they can meet or exceed them?
- How do you use clear and explicit directions, prompts, restatements, wait time, native language assistance, and/or encouragement to support students to generate their own responses?

2c: Managing Classroom Procedures

- How do you ensure that students initiate the use of schedules and follow classroom routines with minimal prompting?
- How do you prepare your students in advance for any scheduled changes (e.g., related services, changes to daily routines)?
- How do you use verbal and non-verbal cues to signal transitions (e.g., warning time, pictures, gestures, sounds)?
- How do you collaborate with and guide classroom paraprofessionals (i.e., to support classroom-wide instructional and behavior management routines)?

2d: Managing Student Behavior

- How do you use surface management strategies to help students redirect behaviors before an initial scenario escalates (e.g., planned ignoring, proximity control, support from routines, diversion, and/or redirection)?
- How does your response to behavior show sensitivity to student needs and provide multiple opportunities for students to regulate their behavior in the learning environment?
- How do you use recommended strategies in the relevant aspects of a student's IEP, including Behavior Intervention Plans (BIPs) as appropriate?
- How have you participated in the process of conducting a Functional Behavioral Assessment that may inform a BIP (as appropriate)?

2e: Organizing Physical Space

- How do you arrange the classroom to maximize instruction for all students and allow for safe mobility and access to materials?
- How do you organize the classroom to meet the needs of your students (e.g., make it appropriately stimulating without over-stimulating, create "break " spaces within the classroom, provide students with individual learning areas, use of lighting)?

Domain 3: Instruction

3a: Communicating with Students

- How do you present assignments and directions in multiple formats, including text, pictures, film, and audio?
- How do you use a variety of modalities to communicate the expectations of each lesson (e.g., beginning the lesson with a posted agenda on the board and checking off completed activities throughout the lesson)?
- How do you tailor modes of communication to meet the needs and abilities of students (e.g., oral, signs, gestures, auditory, written, and visual aids)?
- How do you clearly communicate the explanation of content based on students' needs (e.g., using a communication mode most accessible to students, at times repeating or rephrasing)?

3b: Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques

- How are the questions you ask specific, guiding, and open-ended as appropriate in order to scaffold students' critical thinking?
- How do you ensure that all students have access to questions and discussion?
- How do you present questions in varying modalities according to students' needs (e.g., presenting questions orally and in writing)?
- How do you present questions in an explicit manner, without extraneous language, and with pausing between questions?
- How do you ensure that students have the opportunity to respond in a variety of ways (e.g., kinesthetically, through visual representations)?
- How do you use augmentative and alternate communication systems to support students in responding, when appropriate (e.g., iPad, communication boards, Picture Exchange Communication System, Dynavox, sign language)?

3c: Engaging Students in Learning

- How do you implement instruction that is individually developed to address a specific child's needs that result from his or her disability?
- How do you use multiple representations of content and resources to engage students and allow for varied means of expression?
- How do you use differentiated resources to support all students in meeting IEP goals and lesson objectives, and how do you involve students in this process?
- In an ICT setting, how do you implement one of the established co-teaching models with the co-teacher to create access, to pre-teach, and/or to re-teach?
- How do you ensure that all students are engaged in academically and developmentally appropriate activities related to the instructional outcome?
- How do you ensure that students with disabilities are given appropriately rigorous tasks (e.g., in a lesson on analyzing immigration patterns, a student records her analysis with a speech-to-text program versus being given the task of coloring a map)?
- When do you provide guided notes to promote active engagement or full and accurate notes for use as a study guide; how do you help students to identify the most important information?

3d: Using Assessment in Instruction

- How do you elicit evidence of learning appropriate for individual students (e.g., invite students to demonstrate understanding in a variety of ways such as responding orally or creating a concept map)?
- How do you use assessments to evaluate mastery of content/skill objectives and monitor progress toward IEP goals?
- How do you use assessment information to identify supports and accommodations required for students with disabilities to access curriculum and participate in assessments?
- How do you use multiple types of assessment information in making instructional decisions and service recommendations for students with disabilities?

3e: Demonstrating Flexibility and Responsiveness

- How do you teach flexible, responsive curriculum that offers options for how information is presented, how students respond or demonstrate knowledge and skills, and how students are engaged in learning?
- How do you use a variety of instructional strategies to adjust the lesson in order to ensure the content is accessible to all students?
- How do you maximize the paraprofessionals or other support personnel and position them to be active participants in assessing individuals and small groups when relevant (e.g., through data collection)?

Domain 4: Professional Responsibilities

4a: Reflecting on Teaching

- How do you articulate areas in need of improvement in your lesson delivery for all students and specifically those with disabilities, and then identify a plan of action?
- After teaching a lesson, how do you identify strategies to try to better support students with disabilities and rationales for how those strategies will increase their learning?

4b: Maintaining Accurate Records

- How do you monitor student progress toward IEP goals (as well as grade level content standards)?
- How do you maintain records for all areas of the IEP (i.e., behavioral goals, transition plans, completing the IEP in a timely manner)?

4c: Communicating with Families

- How do you ensure frequent communication with families about progress toward IEP goals, in English or in the parents' preferred language?
- How do you make use of [translation resources](#) to share updates with the families of ELLs?
- How do you communicate regularly with families regarding students' progress and opportunities to engage in community-based resources, as appropriate?
- How do you engage the family as a full partner in developing the IEP, ensuring that the family understands and contributes meaningfully to all components of the document?

4d: Participating in the Professional Community

- How do you engage in ongoing collaboration with the special education teacher and/or content area teachers to develop units of study, design lessons, and select appropriate materials and instructional strategies for all students?
- How do you communicate with all stakeholders to ensure continuity of service (e.g., speech provider, occupational therapist, guidance counselor)?
- When do you meet with colleagues to discuss IEP progress and plan for multiple opportunities to reinforce new learning?
- How do you utilize paraprofessionals and other support personnel appropriately (i.e., for instructional support)?

4e: Growing and Developing Professionally

- When do you attend professional development on best practices for teaching students with disabilities?
- How do you stay current regarding research-based practices, using a variety of resources (e.g., journals, critical friends, professional development sessions, coursework) about teaching students with disabilities and how best to employ those strategies in your classroom to the benefit of students?

4f: Showing Professionalism

- How do you contribute to a culture in which students with disabilities are included fully as members of the class and school community, including participation in all school-wide activities?
- How do you advocate for students with disabilities to receive standards-based, rigorous instruction in all classes?
- How do you have professional, collaborative relationships with members of the staff who work with your students?