



TEAM Observation Considerations Special Education

Observing a special education (SPED) teacher allows an observer the opportunity to gather evidence of instructional practice in a setting where student work may look or sound different than what might be seen when observing a general education teacher. Special education teachers serve children who have an identified disability and require specially designed instruction or related services. To foster a respectful and inclusive environment, teachers and leaders should recognize special education as part of the continuum of services and supports rather than as a location where struggling students are sent. As a school leader, you play a crucial role in establishing a schoolwide mindset that regards special education as an integral part of the school community.

Special Education Beliefs:

- Special education is not a place. It is the most intensive intervention along the continuum of service defined by individual need, services, and placement.
- Strong leadership at every level is the foundation of a collaborative and inclusive environment that supports ALL students.
- All students are general education students first. Every student can learn, demonstrate growth, and must have access to high-quality, evidence-based instruction that maximizes their potential in the least restrictive environment.
- Educators are professionals, content experts, and the key to student success. They should be supported instructionally and professionally.
- All students can achieve postsecondary success.

Strong instructional practice leads to improved student outcomes, and special education services are no exception.

Through the collaborative process of observation, feedback, and support, every teacher can see areas to improve student learning, and every observer can support a rigorous vision of excellent instruction throughout a school. While this document focuses on SPED specific connections, the approach to using the TEAM rubric remains the same for any content area.

In this document, you will find information on:

- [Observer Considerations: Pre-Conference](#)
- [Teacher Considerations: Pre-Conference](#)
- [Observer Considerations: Evidence Collection](#)
- [Observer Considerations: Preparing for the Post-Conference and Using the Performance Level Guide](#)

Observer Considerations: Pre-Conference

The educator’s lesson plan should serve as the foundation for the pre-conference. Using the planning and environment rubrics to guide pre-conference questions helps focus the conversation on student outcomes and provides evidence for instructional practice. Educators should be encouraged to discuss the lesson plan’s components and how that plan supports successful student outcomes. Observers should consider the pre-conference the first stage of collecting evidence of instructional practice. With SPED plans, the student-specific Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), serve as the foundation for instructional decisions.

Possible Pre-Conference Question on Instructional Practice	Planning or Environment Rubric Connection	Instructional Rubric Connection
<p>How do you plan for instruction that addresses the individualized needs of each student? On what data do you base your decisions?</p> <p>When collaborating with the general education teacher, how do you plan to support instruction for your target students?</p>	Instructional Plans	Standards and Objectives Motivating Students Presenting Instructional Content Lesson Structure and Pacing Activities and Materials Grouping Students Teacher Content Knowledge Teacher Knowledge of Students
<p>Student work/student goals are often individualized. In what ways have you planned for students to demonstrate mastery? How do you ensure multiple access points and ways for students to demonstrate mastery?</p> <p>How do you work with the general education teacher to ensure you can provide multiple access points and methods for students to demonstrate mastery?</p>	Student Work Assessment	Motivating Students Presenting Instructional Content Activities and Materials Questioning Academic Feedback Teacher Content Knowledge Thinking Problem Solving
<p>What are some techniques you use to establish the environment of your classes? How do you help your learners manage their expectations? What strategies do you use to help students navigate positive engagement with classmates and adults?</p> <p>How do you ensure the classroom culture is positive for your students?</p>	Expectations Managing Student Behavior Environment Respectful Culture	Motivating Students Lesson Structure and Pacing Questioning Academic Feedback Grouping Students Teacher Content Knowledge Teacher Knowledge of Students

Teacher Considerations: Pre-Conference

During a pre-conference, SPED teachers should be prepared to share the lesson alignment to the requirements of student IEPs, the reasoning behind the plans for instruction, standards and objectives of the instructional plan, considerations for IEP goals, and how student success will be measured.

Considerations for Lesson Plans	Rubric Connections
Alignment and Rigor of Content and Standards	Instructional Plans Assessment Standards and Objectives Teacher Content Knowledge Teacher Knowledge of Students
Instructional Plan	Student Work Lesson Structure and Pacing Questioning Activities and Materials Teacher Content Knowledge Assessment
Instructional Technique	Managing Student Behavior Environment Expectations Motivating Students Presenting Instructional Content Grouping Academic Feedback Presenting Instructional Content Teacher Knowledge of Students
Differentiation/Access Points	Teacher Content Knowledge Teacher Knowledge of Students Questioning Grouping Academic Feedback Expectations Respectful Culture
Student Engagement	Student Work Lesson Structure and Pacing Questioning Teacher Knowledge of Students Thinking Problem Solving

Observer Considerations: Evidence Collection

Evidence for practice performance levels may come from pre-conference conversations, classroom observation, or conversations with the teacher after the observation but prior to the post-conference. In all cases, the observer should seek to understand the teacher's approach to instruction and, more importantly, the students' responses to the instructional practices implemented during instruction. Observers should gather evidence on how the learning lift is managed between the special education teacher, educational assistants (if appropriate), and the students.

Indicator	Possible Evidence
Instructional Plans	Pre-conference notes should provide evidence on how the instruction aligns to IEP goals. Notes should reflect how skillfully the teacher articulates each student's knowledge/skill set as they enter the lesson and the unique support planned for each learner. Observers should note how frequently the teacher indicates opportunities for students to reflect and provide/be provided feedback for skill improvement as appropriate.
Student Work	Pre-conference notes should capture the planned student work, which in special education settings may be skill-based and may vary among students. Notes should reflect methods the teacher plans to use to support students as they progress toward the desired learning goals any appropriate adaptive, social, or behavioral skills. Evidence should reflect how effectively the teacher has planned and aligned the student work to the student's short- and long-term goals.
Assessment	Pre-conference notes should capture how students demonstrate mastery of the skill(s). Capture assessment evidence on how skillfully the teacher includes technology and/or uses multiple formats through which students can present progress.
Expectations	Observer notes should reflect how the teacher creates access points for each student. Observers should seek evidence of opportunities for every student to have successful engagement with both the content and classmates. Seek evidence from grouping, in the way the teacher provides support and guides students toward success. Note how effectively students independently manage themselves in the instructional space.
Managing Student Behavior	Observer evidence might include notes on how students engage in moments of competition, deal with loss/frustration, and interact with other students at different skill levels. Seek information on how students monitor selves, space, and disruptions. Note how effectively the teacher interacts with students in each situation and how effective rules and expectations have been established. Seek evidence of self-directedness through the task and self-monitoring of behavior so that all students engage in the activity and can use their voices. Note how effectively the teacher utilizes various techniques when responding to student behavior, including planned ignoring.
Environment	Seek evidence that students know how to use their space for individual and group work. Capture evidence on student-to-student engagement and how

	they support one another's attempts at progression. Capture evidence of how well students understand the rules of the classroom and abide by them. Note if students demonstrate a growth mindset, empathy, and the ability to effectively make good decisions.
Respectful Culture	Seek evidence on student interactions. Look for the frequency of accurate and useful student-to-student feedback and the level of student-to-student support in all aspects of the activity. Note the teacher's engagement with members of the classroom.
Standards and Objectives	Learning objectives should be aligned to the individual student goals within their IEPs, and therefore, may be focused on skill attainment vs. mastery of a grade level standard. Capture evidence of how clearly the teacher articulates the objectives of the day and how effectively the students can progress toward their short-term objectives to achieve their long-term goals.
Motivating Students	Record evidence of how often students engage, especially when presented with novel learning or tasks. Seek data for how effectively the teacher supports students to see relevance to other parts of their lives, including personal responsibility, empathy, the ability to risk-take, and/or decision-make. Note how the teacher and/or classmates reinforce and reward individual effort. Capture evidence that indicates the level of student independence and/or interdependence as they engage with the lesson.
Presenting Instructional Content	Note places in the lesson where students can engage in authentic situations to solve problems or face challenges that require a team approach. Capture data indicating success is achieved through creative thinking, problem solving, and teamwork. Note if students are encouraged to access their voices and beliefs. Gather information on how effectively students engage with the teacher during direct instruction and how modeling is used to support student learning. Seek evidence of individual student engagement with the lesson or task. Record evidence for how effectively the teacher uses visual supports and modeling.
Lesson Structure and Pacing	Seek evidence for student and teacher awareness of time needed vs. time spent in transitions such as grouping and regrouping for activities, and distribution/return of class supplies/equipment. Seek evidence that students are encouraged to assess their own skill set, reflect, and make timely adjustments to ensure successful completion of the objective. Note when students with disabilities are working with individualized timelines for completion.
Activities and Materials	Look for evidence that the tasks are aligned to the IEP goals. Seek evidence that students are given multiple ways/opportunities to demonstrate progress toward skill mastery. Seek evidence that students are interacting and providing feedback/support to each other that leads to group improvement. Capture data on the appropriateness of the technology/equipment being used to meet the requirements of the task/project.
Questioning	Capture question and answer sessions between teacher and students for evidence of the question types that are being used. Look for signs of student understanding that may be demonstrated through task completion

	or classroom conversation. Capture evidence of teacher wait time and purposeful application of student knowledge to answer questions. Capture the types of questions students ask as an indicator of how deeply they understand the topic. Note how the teacher encourages student wait-time. Seek evidence that students authentically connect to each other and the topic through discussion.
Academic Feedback	Capture evidence of the corrections and adjustments provided by the teacher as well as interactions in which students are supporting each other's improvement. Capture frequency of feedback, types of feedback, and repetitiveness of the feedback shared. Note if the instructor provides more or different feedback to different teams or individuals. Seek evidence that the feedback aligns to the IEP goals. Note when feedback is motivational only. Capture evidence of the effectiveness of performance cues to self-correction and/or improvement in outcomes (including behavioral).
Grouping Students	Note the composition of the student groups and their applicability to ensuring group and/or individual success. Seek evidence that all students have a role in the group and the expectations of all roles are met. Note how students engage with each other and if the team members work in tandem to meet the goal of the day's activity. Note how efficiently conflicts are resolved among classmates. Note how whole group time is used to support student progress to the goals in the IEPs.
Teacher Content Knowledge	Seek evidence of how the teacher leverages different strategies to ensure students are both supported and allowed to work independently. Capture evidence of how effectively the teacher is adjusting the pace of the lesson to reflect the learners' needs. Seek evidence that the teacher provides opportunities for students to apply insight and use more complex logic to address problems as applicable. Note how the teacher challenges the learners but provides support to encourage the learner to risk take, wonder, and possibly be incorrect.
Teacher Knowledge of Students	Seek information on how the SPED teacher supports students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, not only with academic needs but also social-emotional, adaptive, or behavioral needs. Seek evidence that the teacher designs lessons that encourage creativity for each student in the classroom. Note the techniques used by the teacher to ensure each student remains highly engaged.
Thinking	Capture evidence of how successfully students self-analyze their progress toward individual goals. Look for evidence of how effectively a teacher helps students generate alternate strategies to achieve success. Capture evidence around the students' abilities to understand why they are focused on a given task and why they might choose one strategy over another to meet their goals. Capture evidence of the specific types of thinking taught by the teacher to promote a deeper understanding of the content.
Problem Solving	Seek evidence of how well a teacher provides students the opportunity to engage in problem solving, which might include students self-identifying non-solutions along with solutions. Note how effectively the teacher supports or allows time for students to experiment with the content and

	understand when a strategy is aligned or misaligned with mastery of the goal.
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Observer Considerations: Preparing for the Post-Conference and Using the Performance Level Guide

After the observation, observers should ask clarifying questions as needed **prior** to the post-conference. This opportunity for questions might happen immediately after the observation or occur later after reviewing evidence notes. Questions might include:

- How were the groups created for this lesson, and how often do they change and why?
- How do you determine the speed of acceleration or compacting of the curriculum for special education students?
- How do you engage students in determining mastery of their own learning?
- What types of individualized support do you include in your classes? How do you determine what strategies to use and when?
- How did you select the projects/tasks for the students? How do you involve them in that selection process?
- How do you measure the impact of this work on overall student outcomes?

Observers should **always** analyze student work after every lesson in any classroom. For a special education teacher observation, this work might involve reviewing pictures or videos of students in action. Consider:

- Do the activities in which students were engaged assess the standards or skills presented, which may vary across the classroom?
- To what extent does the student work provide evidence of individual mastery of the lesson's objectives?
- To what extent does the student work require thinking and/or problem solving?
- How does the educator use the data from student work to inform future lessons?
- How does the teacher capture data on the progression of each student toward his or her individual goals?
- How does the student work reflect the needs of learners to engage in accelerated or enhanced learning?

Using the Performance Level Guide

Observers should use the performance level guide and appropriate general educator rubric to support alignment of evidence (coding) to scores. Each Performance level has nuanced differences, described below. This guide helps identify the expertise in implementing the practice. Note that both consistency and impact are considered when determining Performance level.

Performance Level Guide

1	Significantly Below Expectations: A teacher at this level has limited knowledge of the instructional skills, knowledge, and responsibilities described in the rubric and struggles to implement them. The teacher has little to no impact on student outcomes .
2	Below Expectations: A teacher at this level demonstrates some knowledge of the instructional skills, knowledge, and responsibilities described in the rubric but implements them Inconsistently . The teacher's impact on student outcomes is below expectations .
3	At Expectations: A teacher at this level understands and implements most of the instructional skills, knowledge, and responsibilities described in the rubric. The teacher's impact on student outcomes meets all expectations .
4	Above Expectations: A teacher at this level comprehends the instructional skills, knowledge, and responsibilities described in the rubric and implements them skillfully and consistently . The teacher makes a strong impact on student outcomes .
5	Significantly Above Expectations: A teacher at this level exemplifies the instructional skills, knowledge, and responsibilities described in the rubric and implements them adeptly and without fail . The teacher meets ambitious teaching and learning goals and makes a significant Impact on student outcomes . Performance at this level should be considered a model of exemplary teaching .

After evidence gathered throughout the observation process has been coded and scored, the observer will **design the post-conference**. This conference should focus on three things:

- Identified areas of reinforcement and refinement.
- Resources for the teacher to use as they hone their refinement area practice.
- A follow-up plan for the leader to support teacher progress and success.

More detailed support for post-conferences may be found in the [Teacher Evaluation Handbook](#).

With additional questions, please contact TEAM.Questions@tn.gov.