

# Integrating Assessment High-Leverage Practice 6 in Special Education Teacher Learning

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## Executive Summary

When special educators use assessment data to analyze instructional practices and make necessary adjustments that improve student outcomes, they not only increase the frequency and appropriateness of instructional decision-making, but they also improve student achievement (Stecker, Fuchs & Fuchs, 2005). Yet, special education teachers often do not include data-based decision making in their instructional routines. If outcomes for students with disabilities are to improve, then teacher educators need to provide pre- and in-service teachers with opportunities for practice with feedback on how to make instructional design decisions using assessment data to address individual student's unique learning needs.

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*“To determine the effect of instructional practices, special education teachers make instructional decisions based on data related to student progress toward well-defined goals.”*

—McLeskey et al.,  
2017, p. 47

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## Aim & Background

Although the majority of school-age students are well served when using evidence-based interventions, approximately 3 to 5% do not respond and require further individualization (Wanzek & Vaughn, 2009). To meet the unique learning needs of the 3 to 5% of students who do not respond, pre- and in-service special education teachers need to intensify instruction. Engaging in data-based decision-making provides evidence that can inform teachers when to intensify instruction and to determine whether their intensification efforts are effective.

This form of systematic, data-informed decision-making allows teachers to also determine which students are at risk for academic failure and to monitor the progress of students receiving intensive interventions. Though using assessment data to inform instruction is important, it is often a difficult strategy for pre- and in-service teachers to understand and carry out. As such, policy makers and researchers have endorsed efforts to increase pre- and in-service educators' knowledge and skills related to designing and implementing data-based individualization ([DBI]; Lemons, Otaiba, Conway, & Mellado De La Cruz, 2016). Beyond the scope of the content included in this brief, detailed information on DBI can be found on the National Center of Intensive Intervention (NCII) website, [intensiveintervention.org](http://intensiveintervention.org).

## Findings, Implications & Recommendations

Pre- and in-service teachers should use a systematic approach to teaching based, in part, on quantifiable data to monitor and modify their instruction according to student learning. As an important High-Leverage Practice (HLP), data utilization has been demonstrated to improve student learning (Stecker, Fuchs & Fuchs, 2005). When pre- and in-service teachers use student assessment data, it allows them to analyze their instructional practices and make necessary adjustments that improve student outcomes. Therefore, pre- and in-service teachers should focus on using student assessment data for instructional guidance. The data utilization cycle (depicted below and in Figure 1) includes the following steps:

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*“One of the greatest challenges is data use in education: The data must not only be collected and analyzed—they must be examined and interpreted and done so in a way to inform practice and policy.”*

*—Espin et al., 2017*

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- a) Identify an instructional “problem.” Pre- and in-service teachers should pinpoint the instructional issue or cause of the student’s difficulty.
- b) Develop a hypothesis about the cause of the instructional challenge, using information and data from diagnostic or classroom assessments to provide guidance and support.
- c) Create and implement an instructional plan to address the hypothesis. With a team if possible, develop a protocol that can be used to address the student’s instructional challenge.
- d) Set a goal and monitor student progress weekly, using suggested benchmarks or norms from a validated Curriculum-Based Measurement (CBM) tool.
- e) Establish decision rules to use when examining how student data compares to the goal that was set. For instance, comparing the trend of progress monitoring data to the established goal line after 6 to 8 data points and determining if trend is above, below, or the same as the goal line.
- f) Make instructional decisions using the decision rules. For instance, if the trend line is below the goal line, identify and carry out an instructional change.
- g) Carry out the instructional decision.
- h) Continue these steps until the student achieves satisfactory instructional performance.

For special education teachers and school teams, individualized decision-making based on assessment data is critical to the process of intensifying interventions to respond to students’ instructional needs. More information about intensification can be found on the NCII website. That said, because data-based instruction (DBI) aids pre- and in-service teachers in determining what works for whom and when to intensify instruction for students who are not responding to typical instruction, learning the DBI process should begin with pre-service educators. Refining and developing those skills should continue throughout one’s career. As such, teacher educators and professional learning providers need to provide instruction and practice opportunities with feedback on this topic (i.e., the data-based instruction [DBI] process for creating instructional routines and when necessary intensifying instruction for students that are specific to individual needs) in curriculum, clinical experiences, and professional development.

## Conclusion

Using student assessment data allows pre- and in-service teachers to analyze their instructional practices and make necessary adjustments that improve student outcomes, in part, by implementing the DBI process. Using the basic steps, included in Figure 1, pre- and in-service teachers can positively impact K-12 student outcomes by being responsive to performance data and creating an instructional program that is tailored to meet individual student’s unique learning needs. Given the importance of data-utilization in a decision-making process, both pre-service and in-service teacher educators should consider how to use the steps and resources in this brief to elicit positive change from their students.

## References

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Figure 1. Data-Based Decision-Making Cycle

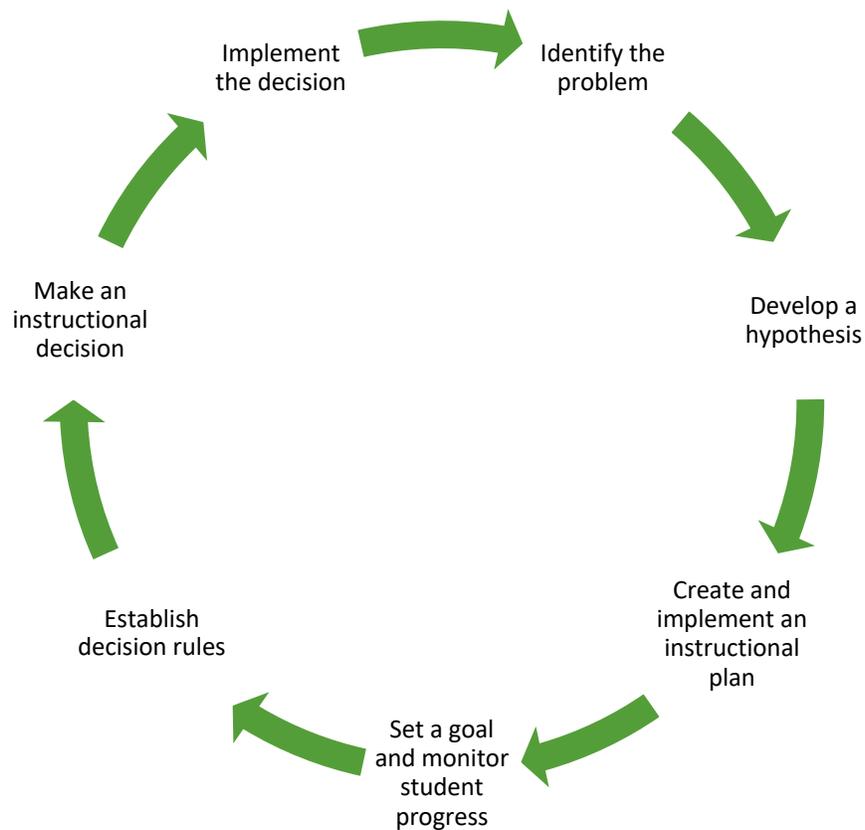


Figure 2. Resources Related to Assessment HLP 6

Resource	Description
National Center for Intensive Intervention <a href="http://www.intensiveintervention.org">www.intensiveintervention.org</a>	Provides tools charts for making judgments about the quality of assessments and interventions. Provides archived webinars on data-based decision making topics as well as slide decks. Provides sample lessons, agendas for team meetings, and rubrics for self-assessment of data-aligned processes.
DBI in Early Writing <a href="http://www.earlywritingproject.org">www.earlywritingproject.org</a>	Provides an overview of Data-Based Individualization in early writing. Provides links for additional resources. Would provide support for those seeking to implement data utilization into their early writing practices.
DBI in Algebraic Readiness—Project STAIR <a href="https://blog.smu.edu/projectstair/about-project-stair/">https://blog.smu.edu/projectstair/about-project-stair/</a> and <a href="https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCE2puwDtUSNXFONIOhmYmvA">https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCE2puwDtUSNXFONIOhmYmvA</a>	Provides an overview and resources for Data-Based Individualization in Algebraic Readiness. The YouTube channel provides videos to demonstrate math concepts and strategies for struggling learners. Would provide support for those seeking to implement data utilization into their mathematics practices.

Figure 3. Assessment High-Leverage Practice 6

After special education teachers develop instructional goals, they evaluate and make ongoing adjustments to students' instructional programs.  
 (McLeskey et al., 2017, p. 47)