

Supervising a Struggling Student Teacher: A Midterm Action Plan

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Abstract

A large shortage of qualified special education teachers is one of the most serious and pervasive problems facing students disabilities. With both the quality and the quantity of special educators requiring improvement, teacher educators are becoming more aware of the necessity to train better-prepared special education teachers. In response to the problems, the Clemson University undergraduate program in Special Education has developed rigorous curricula and performance standards to prepare highly trained special educators. In addition to the standard program requirements, a systematic plan was developed to facilitate the improvement of struggling student teachers who are not meeting expected performance competencies. The purpose of this article is to describe Clemson University's special education teacher preparation program's field experience requirements and the systematic procedures used to provide additional support to struggling student teachers.

Introduction

The importance of students with special needs receiving their education from well-prepared and qualified special education teachers cannot be overstated. According to the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF, 1996), the knowledge and skills of a teacher have a substantial impact on student performance. Furthermore, researchers report that the quality of the teacher is one of the most influential factors impacting student learning and performance (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2002; Greenwood & Maheady, 1997; Wayne & Youngs, 2003). A well-prepared teacher is more capable of providing a higher caliber of special education services and programs to students.

Given the importance of well-prepared special education teachers, the shortage of qualified special education teachers in the United States is a serious and pervasive problem for school systems (Billingsley, 2004; McLesky, Tyler, & Flippin, 2004). It is estimated over 800,000 children with special needs receive their special education services from approximately 47,000 teachers who are not certified under special education licensing standards (Allbritten, Mainzer, & Ziegler, 2004; McLesky et al., 2004). It is estimated that 98% of the nation's school districts report shortages of special education teachers and almost 3,000 special education teaching positions remain vacant each year (Council for Exceptional Children, 2003; McLesky et al., 2004). The special education services and quality of programs provided by uncertified special education teachers is suspect (Billingsley, 2004). Clearly, there is a need for teacher preparation programs to train more and better prepared special education teachers to fill the void.

With such large shortages of qualified special education teachers, Institutions of Higher Education's teacher preparation programs are under increased pressure to prepare more special education teachers. However, teacher educators must exercise caution as not to sacrifice the quality for the quantity of special education teachers trained (e.g., alternate certification programs, elimination of field experiences). There is some evidence to suggest that the quality of preservice teachers impacts the likelihood of attrition; therefore, if teacher education programs are able to prepare content and instructionally sound special education teachers, attrition rates may decrease; there by increasing the number of qualified special education teachers (Darling-Hammond, 1999). To help teacher educators train more qualified special education teachers, the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) delineated a series of professional

standards for all teacher preparation.

Performance-based Professional Standards

As in most professions, professional standards and guidelines are set by strong national or international professional organizations to ensure candidates are prepared through rigorous and high quality licensing preparation programs before entering the professional field (Connelly & Rosenberg, 2003). CEC develops and maintains a series of professional standards required for all entry-level special education teachers. CEC developed new standards in 2001 to guide special education teacher preparation programs in the development of curricula and rigorous performance standards for their special education teacher candidates. For a complete description of the standards see the CEC Web Site: HYPERLINK "http://www.cec.sped.org" www.cec.sped.org.

Institutions of Higher Education teacher preparation programs are expected, and in most cases required by state accreditation agencies, to incorporate the CEC standards into the curricula and licensing requirements (Council for Exceptional Children, 2003) in order to be a nationally accredited teacher licensing program. CEC expects all preparation programs to acquire national program recognition. Teacher preparation programs receive national recognition from CEC only after completing a systematic and rigorous evaluation process. The CEC program evaluation procedures and requirements have drastically changed over the years. Currently, CEC has adopted a performance-based standards approach for the preparation of special education teachers. The evaluation system based on the CEC professional standards assesses the performance of the teacher candidates on a series of specified competencies (e.g., lesson planning and delivery, assessment, classroom management; Council for Exceptional Children, 2003).

The emphasis on performance is a fundamental shift from previous CEC expectations of teacher preparation programs. In the past, teacher preparation programs were primarily evaluated by course syllabi. For example, if evidence of a standard was found across several course syllabi, the program was considered to have adequately covered the standard and thus evaluated positively. However, the new CEC performance-based standards system requires teacher education programs to provide evidence that the standards are not only taught, but assessed. Additionally, candidates must complete the assessments (e.g., performance-based) at an acceptable level (Council for Exceptional Children, 2003). In other words, teacher preparation programs must now demonstrate by providing evidence (e.g., lesson observations, scored assignments, work samples) that their candidates have mastered the appropriate knowledge and skills required as a special education teacher.

Teacher Preparation Programs and Field Experiences

One especially important component of any special education teacher preparation program relating to performance-based standards is the field experiences required of teacher candidates. In the past, CEC specified 15 practicum standards delineating the type (e.g., self-contained, resource) and duration (i.e., days or weeks) for the field experiences provided by teacher preparation programs (Council for Exceptional Children, 2003). Now, CEC requires teacher preparation programs to provide appropriate and comprehensive practicum experiences to ensure teacher candidates are well-prepared for their numerous responsibilities as special education teachers. In most teacher preparation programs, the field experiences are designed to link the knowledge presented in university classrooms to the independent activities expected of beginning teachers (Rosenberg, O'Shea, & O'Shea, 1991).

During field experiences, teacher candidates have the opportunity to demonstrate (e.g., perform) their ability to translate the knowledge learned in their coursework to the special education classroom. Nowhere is the translation of knowledge into effective classroom practices more critical than during the student teaching experience (Buck, Morsink, Griffin, Hines & Lenk, 1992). By the nature of the student teaching experience, teacher candidates must demonstrate an acceptable level of competence in essential classroom activities and teacher behaviors. For example,

preservice teachers should demonstrate their ability to diagnose student learning prior to planning instruction, plan an appropriate instructional sequence based on the diagnosis, effectively teach the instructional sequence, conduct a formative assessment to determine and document student progress or lack of progress, and reflect on the instructional process to determine modifications to improve future student learning. It is not possible for preservice teachers to demonstrate competence in these essential features in the university classroom; therefore, a series of field experiences are completed concluding with a student teaching experience.

The student teaching experience is generally the major culminating activity for most teacher education programs and it is considered one of the best predictors of future success in the classroom. The student teaching experience is often viewed by program graduates, professional teacher organizations, and policymakers as the most important learning experience of preservice training (Buck et al., 1992; Tabachnick & Zeichner, 1984). The student teaching experience for most teacher candidates is positive and successful. Even though, most teacher candidates successfully complete the student teaching experience (Sudzina & Knowles, 1993), some candidates will struggle or will not successfully make the transition from theory to practice (e.g., performance-based standards).

Teacher candidates who struggle with this transition from theory to classroom practice during the student teaching experience often lack the necessary skills to plan and implement quality instruction for learners and use very limited resources and materials. Additional problems arise with struggling student teachers' inability to effectively and efficiently monitor student learning and appropriately plan future instruction.

In most cases, teacher educators identify two main reasons why a student teacher struggles and ultimately fails during the student teaching experience. In most cases, the majority of blame is placed on the student teachers' inability to perform certain specified essential and required teaching behaviors (e.g., lesson planning and delivery, classroom management, professional behavior) during the time spent in the classroom. Second, the cooperating teacher is sometimes identified as a contributing factor to the student teacher's poor performance (Sudzina & Knowles, 1993). The emphasis in most teacher education programs is on evaluating the student teacher's performance and very little time is allotted for coaching (i.e., corrective feedback) of students who are struggling (Rosenberg et al., 1996). Regardless of the specific reasons contributing to the poor performance of a student teacher, the teacher education program must accept responsibility. When student teachers are not performing essential teacher competencies at an acceptable level, the university supervisor along with the cooperating teacher must implement a plan to provide additional support and guidance in an effort to facilitate the improved performance of expected competencies to an acceptable level.

Purpose

Given the shortage of qualified special education teachers and the new performance-based standards required by CEC, preservice program educators should develop and implement a systematic and comprehensive plan to provide additional support to student teachers who are not demonstrating competence in essential teaching features. The purpose of this article is to describe Clemson University's special education teacher preparation program's field experience requirements and the procedures used to provide additional support to struggling student teachers through the use of a Midterm Action Plan (MAP).

Clemson University Special Education Program Description

The Council for Exceptional Children's standards are met through a series of performance-based assessments culminating with the senior year practicum and the student teaching experience. As in most teacher preparation programs, the first six semesters consist of teacher candidates completing required general education coursework. The coursework during the first six semesters for students in the special education program consists of 106 credit hours, during which students complete courses in English, Math, History, Foreign Language, Science, and educational foundations. During the six semesters leading to the senior year, students are given numerous field

experiences in both general and special education classrooms. The field experiences are designed to give preservice teachers a wide variety of experiences with students while also providing an opportunity to observe and interact with master teachers who have proven their ability to plan effectively for student instruction.

Field Experiences

Practicum experience. During the seventh semester, a Clemson University preservice teacher in the special education program completes a practicum experience in a rural special education classroom. Students work in their assigned placement for fifteen weeks, reporting to their placement for three hours of each day and attending methods classes (i.e., language arts, mathematics, classroom management, secondary strategies) in the afternoon. Throughout the experience, preservice teachers plan and deliver instruction from individual to whole group. Students are placed in an array of classroom models, spanning the service delivery continuum from the self-contained to the inclusive classroom.

In addition to planning and delivering small and whole group instruction, students in the practicum must implement curriculum-based measures in reading, mathematics, or spelling; behavioral interventions; participate in professional development; and reflect on their strengths and weaknesses in a daily journal. The training model consists of eight formal observations during the practicum experience, four from the cooperating teacher and four from the university supervisor. A grade of C or higher is required for a student to enroll in the student teaching experience.

Student teaching experience. The observation criteria used for preservice teachers is a combination of the South Carolina system for Assisting, Developing and Evaluating Professional Teaching (ADEPT) and CEC performance-based standards (see www.cec.sped.org). ADEPT standards consist of ten performance dimensions including long and short range planning, progress monitoring, providing content for learners, maintaining an environment that promotes learning, classroom management, using instructional strategies, maintaining high expectations for learners, and professional development (see [HYPERLINK "http://www.scteachers.org/adept/perfdim.cfm"](http://www.scteachers.org/adept/perfdim.cfm) <http://www.scteachers.org/adept/perfdim.cfm>).

During the eighth semester, preservice teachers complete a fifteen week student teaching experience in an opposite classroom setting than during their practicum experience (e.g., an elementary placement in practicum and a middle or high school placement during student teaching). While in the classroom, students are responsible for all daily teaching responsibilities as well as developing a long-range plan and two units of instruction. Students are also required to implement a peer assisted learning strategy, curriculum-based measures, and develop a teaching portfolio. A minimum of eight formal observations are completed for each student teacher by both the university supervisor and the cooperating teacher.

Following the first two observations by both the cooperating teacher and the university supervisor, a midterm conference is held. Prior to the midterm conference, the cooperating teacher and the university supervisor each complete a midterm summary in which they rate the student's performance in all ten of the ADEPT performance dimensions. When the university supervisor, cooperating teacher, and student teacher meet for the conference, the group discusses the student teacher's strengths and weaknesses in each performance dimension. Throughout the discussion, the cooperating teacher and university supervisor provide specific performance-based examples to support the summary results. At the conclusion of the conference, the cooperating teacher and university supervisor reach consensus on the results of the midterm, and the student teacher is given an overall rating for each of the ten performance dimensions. Students who fall into the unsatisfactory range in more than one performance dimension are identified as struggling to meet the observation criteria of ADEPT and CEC performance-based standards. As a result, a Midterm Action Plan is developed.

Midterm Action Plan

The Midterm Action Plan (MAP) is a formal document that outlines the procedures for additional support and guidance, as well as a plan for improving deficient areas. The MAP is a written document that allows the university supervisor and cooperating teacher to develop specific written goals and objectives and a set of procedures to provide additional guidance and support to student teachers who are not meeting expectations. Table 1 contains an example of a completed MAP document in a condensed format.

MAP Components

The MAP consists of four sections: (a) Current Strengths, (b) Areas to Develop, (c) Additional Comments, and (d) Signatures. The first section of the MAP document is the Current Strengths section. This section provides an opportunity for the university supervisor and cooperating teacher to describe and list any strengths the student teacher has demonstrated up to this point. It is important to identify positive instances of the student teacher's performance to develop a good rapport with the student teacher and cooperating teacher. Many cooperating teachers develop a sense of responsibility for the student teacher. Identifying the student teacher's strengths can reduce the cooperating teacher's apprehension and sense of responsibility; there by promoting a positive theme for the MAP process.

The next section, Areas to Develop, is the most important part of the MAP document and contains three components: (a) a description of the problematic areas, (b) goals and objectives, and (c) progress monitoring procedures. A description of each area in which the student teacher is struggling, or not demonstrating competence in the classroom, is provided and communicated to the student teacher. The problematic areas should align with the CEC standards and the corresponding performance assessments. It is important to provide very specific and detailed examples of the problem areas. Generally, the areas identified include, but are not limited to problems with classroom management, instructional planning, lesson delivery, appropriate assessment techniques, and professionalism. In some cases, a student teacher struggles with simply arriving to school on time and this requires a goal and objective.

The relationship between the university supervisor and the cooperating teacher is a key component when identifying areas in need of improvement. When the MAP is completed, the university supervisor may provide placement specific opportunities to strengthen specific areas of concern, and as the individual most often in contact with the student teacher, the cooperating teacher may also deliver important feedback as to the student teacher's performance in certain areas.

Each area identified for improvement is then written into a goal for the student teacher to demonstrate improvement during the remaining time in the semester; ultimately performing at an acceptable level. A minimum of two objectives are written for each goal. When writing the goals and corresponding objectives, it is important the objectives are specific and written with measurable terms. In order for effective corrective feedback to be provided to the student teacher, the specific areas of weakness must be fully described and explained. It is well established that in order for individuals to improve future behavior, corrective feedback must be very specific and readily available (Riccomini, 2002; Scheeler et al., 2004).

The third section in the MAP is Additional Comments. This section allows the university supervisor, cooperating teacher, and student teacher to delineate any other comments relevant to the student teacher's performance. In this section, the university supervisor or cooperating teacher may describe any previous informal support provided to the student teacher along with any instances of poor performance. Often, this section becomes additional formal documentation of the student teacher's inability to perform certain essential teaching features at an acceptable level. At the completion of the semester the comments in this section can be used as evidence to terminate student teachers who are not making sufficient improvements or supporting evidence for failing student teaching.

The MAP document concludes with a signature page. This section contains a listing of all parties involved with the student teacher's program and requires everyone to sign the now, completed document. Generally, the signature page includes the student teacher, university supervisor, and cooperating teacher signatures; however, it could include any other individual involved with the training of the student teacher (e.g., faculty advisor, department head, principal). Although, sometimes considered a formality, the signatures serve to highlight the importance and seriousness of the MAP document and helps set the tone for the remainder of the semester.

MAP Procedures

A MAP is completed and implemented for any student teacher who is struggling to meet expectations as determined by the university supervisor and cooperating teacher. The MAP is generally enacted at the midpoint of the student teaching semester; however, it can be implemented at any point the university supervisor or cooperating teacher deem appropriate. At the completion of the midterm conference, the goals and objectives are written based on input gathered from the university supervisor, cooperating teacher, and student teacher. After the goals and objectives are discussed, explained, and agreed to, everyone signs the MAP document.

Once the MAP is signed, it becomes the "official" guide for the student teacher. It serves to unify and focus the efforts of the university supervisor, cooperating teacher, and student teacher on the specific areas in need of improvement. Given the new emphasis of performance by CEC, it is imperative that university supervisors and cooperating teachers provide additional guidance with the intent to improve student teachers' performance on essential teaching features. Another benefit of the MAP is the very specific description of the progress monitoring procedures. It not only serves to focus the student teacher, but also the university supervisor. Unfortunately, university supervisors devote the majority of their time to assessing student teachers and very little time is devoted to coaching and correcting problematic areas. The MAP document forces the university supervisor to provide additional support and guidance to the student teacher by the nature of the document itself.

The MAP is reviewed and progress is monitored weekly by the cooperating teacher, university supervisor, and student teacher. The MAP document provides a plan for more university supervisor and cooperating teacher observations as well as after school meetings to review lesson plans and activities for the subsequent days. Frequent communication by phone and e-mail between the cooperating teacher and university supervisor is very important at this stage. If adequate progress is not observed in all or some of the targeted areas, even with the additional support and feedback, immediate removal from the placement is an option. However, if adequate progress is observed in all critical areas, the additional support and feedback is decreased until the student teacher is functioning independently as required of a special education teacher.

At the conclusion of the student teaching experience a final review of the MAP is completed and mastery of all goals is expected. Depending on the observed performance, grades are calculated accordingly. It is important to note that improved performance will not guarantee successful completion of student teaching. The MAP document can serve as official documentation in the unfortunate event a student teacher is either removed or fails student teaching due to inadequate progress in the critical areas identified in the MAP document. In this case, the university supervisor can provide documentation of inadequate progress in specified areas. Given the specificity, the MAP document helps to reduce or prevent the unpleasant surprise of failure often expressed by student teachers and even some cooperating teachers at the completion of the experience. The following narrative illustrates the MAP process. Refer to Table 2 for excerpts of John's MAP.

John, a fifth year senior who transferred into the special education program enters the classroom where he will complete his student teaching experience. John is an average student academically. Since transferring to the university he has struggled in his methods classes, but has maintained a GPA high enough to begin student teaching.

He is a bit nervous, but very excited. John is welcomed by his cooperating teacher, who is experienced and familiar with the responsibilities placed on student teachers. After one week of becoming acclimated to the classroom daily routines, John takes responsibility for the planning and instruction of math. He will continue to take responsibility for one class each subsequent week until he assumes full control of all classes. During the next 2-3 weeks, John's cooperating teacher is very supportive and provides him with specific guidance and all necessary instructional materials.

In the third week of student teaching, John's university supervisor visits for the first official instructional observation. The university supervisor has made several site visits by week three to meet the cooperating teacher and ensure that all was running smoothly. As John begins his lesson, it is immediately obvious John is unorganized and unsure of the content. His 5th grade students are off task and unable to complete the tasks John required. Additionally, during the lesson, John incorrectly solved a math problem and did not realize his mistake until after the lesson had ended. The lesson was a disaster. During the post observation interview, John expressed confusion and frustration regarding his lesson. It was clear John was struggling with his instructional responsibilities and did not understand how to plan and implement effective instruction.

The cooperating teacher also expressed frustration and confusion as to John's poor performance. She had observed him when he implemented her lesson plans, and was pleased. She also described how she had provided John with all the necessary instructional content and materials. Another lesson observation was immediately scheduled for the next week. John was provided very specific feedback and directions for improving his instructional lessons. Although, his next two instructional lessons did show marginal improvement, his performance was still not acceptable.

By the midterm conference, it was obvious John was struggling in all aspects of his student teaching responsibilities. His cooperating teacher was frustrated with John's lack of progress and was beginning to attribute John's poor performance to a lack of devotion to becoming a special education teacher. It was also disclosed in the midterm conference that John was arriving late to school, leaving early and he was not completing his university assignments. At this point, following the special education program policy, a Midterm Action Plan (MAP) was completed.

At the completion of the midterm conference, the MAP was written by the university supervisor with input from both the cooperating teacher and John. It was determined that John would focus on three main areas for improvement: (a) instructional planning, (b) classroom management, and (c) professional responsibilities. A goal and 4-5 short term objectives were written for each area. Refer to Table 1 for excerpts of the completed MAP document. A timeline for monitoring of progress was established and agreed upon. The document was then signed.

In the weeks following the implementation of the MAP, John demonstrated steady improvement in all areas. His lessons were better organized and effectively delivered. His students responded very positively to his new classroom management plan. He carried through on all of his professional responsibilities (e.g., arriving to school on time, communicating with his cooperating teacher). Additionally, his cooperating teacher was very pleased with his improvement and continued to provide John with relevant and specific feedback. John was able to complete all of his student teaching responsibilities and improved in all areas outlined in the MAP. John has since graduated with a special education certification and is currently a successful middle school resource teacher.

Table 1

Excerpts from John's Student Teaching MAP Document

Student: John Smith

Cooperating Teacher: Mrs. A. White

Supervisor: Dr. J. W. Black

Date of Meeting: 3/11/01

STRENGTHS:

John has shown brief moments of enthusiasm, energy, and a generally good attitude.

With the exception of his first instructional observation, John's pre-arranged lesson observations have improved.

AREAS TO DEVELOP: Instructional Planning, Classroom Management, and Professionalism,

GOAL ONE: John will improve his overall professionalism.

John will communicate with Mrs. A. White (before school and after school) on the daily instructional and non-instructional activities planned and completed each day.

John will arrive and leave school each day at the designated time (7:40AM-morning and 3:00PM afternoon). He is not to arrive one minute late without making prior arrangements directly with Mrs. A. White and his supervisor, Dr. J.W. Black

Person Responsible: John Smith

Duration of Goal: remainder of semester

Evidence of Proficiency: daily & weekly checks

Date of Illustration: ongoing

GOAL TWO: John will improve his overall instructional planning by:

having scripted daily lesson plans and all necessary materials for each class.

incorporating real-life activities into his daily instruction.

Person Responsible: John Smith

Duration of Goal: remainder of semester

Evidence of Proficiency: lesson observations

Date of Illustration: 3/19/01

GOAL THREE: John will implement a classroom management plan in all of his classes.

John will plan a specific and well-organized positive classroom management plan to be implemented on 3/15/01 after approval from Mrs. A White and Dr. J. W. Black.

The classroom plan will help John establish a positive classroom atmosphere by encouraging students to behave appropriately.

Person Responsible: John Smith

Duration of Goal: spring semester 2001

Evidence of Proficiency: classroom observations

Date of Illustration: 3/29/01

Signatures:

Dr. J. W. Black

Mrs. A. White

John Smith

University Supervisor

Cooperating Teacher

Student Teacher

Note: All names and dates are fictitious.

Discussion

The importance of highly trained special education teachers is vital to the educational success of students with disabilities. Content knowledge, together with pedagogical processes and skills (e.g., instructional design and classroom management) are critical components for preservice teacher preparation programs to instill in teacher candidates. Some student teachers, as illustrated with John, require more guidance and support to develop the critical knowledge and skills for success than others. During the student teaching experience, struggling student teachers may need extra time allocated for supervision with more systematic and individualized feedback, as well as specific procedures for monitoring progress. The MAP document offers university supervisors, cooperating teachers, and student teachers a systematic plan to help improve performance to acceptable levels.

There are two important considerations for individuals charged with the responsibility of improving the training for special education teachers. First, the redesign of a supervision model that encourages more guidance and support from university supervisors and cooperating teachers is needed. The redesign of current supervision models must consider at least three components: (a) case load, (b) placement location of student teachers, and (c) continued professional development for university supervisors and cooperating teachers. If struggling student teachers are to receive extra guidance and support required to demonstrate competence, the university supervisor must have time to allow for this additional supervision. The additional time is often very difficult for university supervisors to find. There is a limited amount of time in a school day and the placement location and case load for a university supervisor affects the amount of time available for additional supports. Increased efforts are essential to maximize the effectiveness of the university supervisor. This can be accomplished through careful consideration of the number of student teachers assigned to a university supervisor and the placement location of each student teacher. Additionally, the specific procedures used to provide guidance and support to the struggling student teacher, and the allocation of time to provide support are of equal importance. Therefore, professional development opportunities for university supervisors and cooperating teachers are essential. If university supervisors and cooperating teachers are expected to provide efficient and effective guidance and support, appropriate training must be available.

Second, university supervisors should develop and use more systematic plans to identify and monitor areas in need of improvement and provide appropriate corrective feedback to struggling student teachers (Gersten, Morvant, & Brengleman, 1995). For the student teacher who struggles in the field, the most difficult step is often the transition from the university setting to the K-12 classroom (i.e., knowledge to classroom application). A student teacher may struggle to apply the knowledge and skills learned in the university classroom, regardless of the amount of guidance and feedback given by the cooperating teacher and university supervisor. Therefore, further investigations into the most effective and efficient strategies for providing corrective feedback and guidance to support the translation of theory into classroom practice for student teachers are needed (e.g., Scheeler et al., 2004).

As both the demand for higher teaching standards and the shortage of qualified special education teachers continue to rise, student learning and performance are placed in jeopardy. The role of teacher preservice education programs is vital in the efforts to improve the quality of special educators and in turn improve the quality of student learning and performance. Demand at the federal and state levels for school districts to employ the most highly qualified teachers (e.g., No Child Left Behind Act) reiterates the need for preservice teacher education programs to prepare greater numbers of better trained and qualified special education teachers.

Highly qualified teachers demonstrate content knowledge in the area of certification and a high level of performance in key teaching behaviors. At the very least, when teacher candidates successfully exit a preservice education program, the candidate should have demonstrated the ability to: diagnose student learning prior to planning instruction, plan an appropriate instruction based on the diagnosis, effectively teach the instructional material, conduct a formative assessment to determine and document student progress, and reflect on the instructional process for future improvement. Student teachers must have every opportunity to develop and demonstrate the key skills required of highly qualified special education teachers. When student teachers struggle, as illustrated in John's scenario, it is imperative that university supervisors use systematic procedures to strengthen and develop these essential teaching skills to ensure special education teachers are adequately prepared and highly qualified.

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