

**Section V – Use of Assessment Results to Improve Candidate and Program Performance**  
*KSC Undergraduate Special Education Certification Program*

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Data collection and analysis have coincided with revisions to Keene State College's undergraduate programs including: 1) revamping general education, 2) changing all teacher preparation certification options, and 3) adopting a four-credit model for courses. Feedback from CEC along with findings from assessments have offered faculty perspective and direction to discuss program strengths and gaps in light of evidence-based practices, prominent reforms in the field of special education, and regulations associated with the recent reauthorization of IDEA. As a result, the proposal for the courses in the revised undergraduate special education program continues to build on preparation offered through elementary and secondary teacher preparation programs, enhances current offerings in the special education option, and provides greater alignment with CEC Standards through expanded focus on content knowledge and development of professional and pedagogical skills.

As a result of CEC feedback, scoring guides for assessments were enhanced by expanding rating scale criteria into rubric formats; making distinctions clearer among the “exceed expectations, meets expectations, and needs improvement” categories. The increased clarity of the scoring criteria facilitated highlighting the predominant CEC Standards targeted by assessments and facilitated using data for evaluating both student outcomes and program effectiveness.

### **1. Content knowledge**

The data gathered through Assessments 1 and 2 provide evidence of the content knowledge candidates acquire during their course of study. The KSC undergraduate courses address the range of content knowledge emphasized in CEC Standards 1, 2, 3, and 6 through learning experiences, readings, research, and field placements. Assessment 1: *Portfolio* (from practicum/ methods and student teaching) serves as a summative tool for the program. The data generated indicate that candidates represent their content knowledge through their choice, organization, and identification of artifacts. The data suggest a need for candidates' reflections to more explicitly address CEC Standards and to punctuate connections among content knowledge and field-based artifacts that represent their thinking, competence, and practice. Therefore, more structure is being put in place to enhance candidates' articulation of how their content knowledge and practices are linked and demonstrated in Assessment 1.

Programmatically, attention is placed on helping candidates make connections among courses and trace the ways in which they understand content knowledge and then apply it to the range of professional tasks. One such link is illustrated in Assessment 8, which demonstrates how Standard 6 Language is targeted and how applications to case studies are systematically made. This lays the groundwork for candidates to use their knowledge of language to understand the academic and social challenges their students experience (see Assessments 2 and 6 for additional applications of Standard 6).

Assessment 2 is focused on the special education process and provides evidence of candidate competence and program effectiveness across CEC Standards. The data capture Standard 1

Foundations, in that the subtasks constitute the work done throughout the special education process in response to IDEA. The data suggest that some candidates struggle to plan assessment, analyze data and/or succinctly articulate components of the IEP. However, the data also demonstrate the quality of candidate work in response to completing the complex special education process. The data have provided direction for program improvement so course topics are more synchronized (for example in the assessment course and practicum/ methods) and emphasis is more focused on problem-based learning in earlier courses related to language (see Assessment 8), instructional planning, and learning environments (see Assessment 6) .

The comprehensive nature of the two assessment tools offers complementary samples of candidates' content knowledge, thinking, problem solving, reflection, and application of the range of CEC and program standards. The data from these assessments provide direction for enhancing candidate performance and informing program development and improvement.

## **2. Professional and pedagogical knowledge, skill, and dispositions**

Examination of the data generated provide solid evidence that candidates meet or exceed expectations across a number of criteria in Assessments 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6, thus demonstrating their preparedness to apply content knowledge to their professional responsibilities, including:

- engaging in the special education process in its entirety from assessment planning through writing constructive IEP documents (see Assessment 2)
- designing effective, targeted, and comprehensive lessons that include key tasks/ assessments to evaluate and document student progress toward desired learning outcomes (see Assessment 3, 4, 5)
- evaluating lesson effectiveness in terms of student responsiveness, behaviors, and academic gains; examining how teacher explanations, questions, activity, use of material and the environment contribute to student outcomes (see Assessment 5)
- conducting functional behavior assessments and developing behavior intervention plans that demonstrate clear use of data to inform development of proactive, instructional, and intervention approaches to address student needs (see Assessment 6)

Assessment 4: *Student Teaching* indicates the extent to which the program meets its goals based on how candidates have demonstrated the range of competencies during their final field placement (student teaching). The data report that candidates meet or exceed expectations with regard to taking on the role of special educator; serving as evaluators, instructional planners, instructors, program coordinators (to the extent possible, given site and program possibilities), and collaborators/ professionals. Based on reviewer feedback, the original rating scale used in this assessment has been reworked into a rubric and provides more detailed criteria against which to judge candidates' performance. Additionally, two years of data have been collected (and feedback from the field) which will be used to revise the tool to work with and guide cooperating teachers and candidates at the student teaching level.

Assessment 7: *Dispositions* demonstrates that candidates meet or exceed expectations with regard to personal and professional attributes and actions required of special educators. However, the evidence falls short of generating direct insights with regard to the competencies relative to *Standard 10 Collaboration* in terms of working with parents/ caregivers, facilitating meetings, co-

planning with colleagues, co-teaching in general education settings, and/ or advocating for students. While Assessments 2 and 5 supplement the Dispositions data, faculty feel that it is important to address collaboration in ways that more directly approximate what candidates are expected to do as special educators. In response, the data have encouraged faculty to add more experiences to address the critical area of collaboration – in all of its applications in the field. These experiences will appear in the new program in the Practicum/ Methods course and again in Student Teaching with an assignment and rubric that directly measures candidates' collaboration competence through simulations of facilitating evaluation, IEP, and parent/caregiver meetings and co-planning and co-teaching with general education teachers. The data generated will be used to document program and candidate effectiveness.

### **3. Student learning**

*Assessment 5: Lesson Delivery, Supervision, and Reflection* provides the program with the most concrete evidence of candidates' attention to student learning. Candidates meet or exceed expectations in attending to student outcomes as evidenced by the multiple assessments used during lessons to track student understanding and progress and at the end of lessons to document outcomes. The supervision process allowed for documenting the ways in which candidates check for student understanding throughout lessons, use assessment data they collect, reflect on their performance, and respond to constructive feedback.

In addition, *Assessment 6: Functional Behavior Assessment and Behavior Intervention Plan*, provided data that elaborate on candidates' attention to student outcomes with a focus on social competence as a participant in the learning environment and community member in the classroom environment. Data show that most candidates meet or exceed expectations in figuring out what is impacting student behavior and determining how to support student participation, use of pro-social behaviors, and responsiveness to classroom demands. Candidates meet or exceed expectations in documenting student progress to track the effectiveness of intervention plans, demonstrating their commitment to evaluating student learning. The data further demonstrate that there is more work needed to address student challenges; candidates are encouraged to expand intervention plans, particularly related to designing a graduated set of interventions (universal, tertiary, and intensive) to promote engagement in general education classes as well as other settings.

#### Summary

Using assignments as sources of data allows us to substantiate student achievements, evaluate the effectiveness of instruction and learning experiences, and examine program effectiveness. The results gathered per semester have served as formative data, guiding our work to document candidate progress and competence, and informing us about the clarity of the assignments and rubrics and quality of our preparation of teachers of students with special needs.

- For candidates, there is documentation that most have met expectations for the key tasks required of special educators.
- For program evaluation and development, analysis of data allows us to examine whether preparation in foundation standards leads to applications in authentic contexts, whether direct instruction related to the performance-based assessments builds sufficiently, and whether there are direct connections among courses to facilitate candidates' progress. And

finally, they help us determine whether the assessment tools, corresponding rubrics, and data generated are constructively informative.

Data have informed our approach about what to retain and improve within and across our courses in our current and proposed programs. The data have provided direction for reconfiguring course content and linkages with field placements, emphasizing the impact of language on academic and social competence of candidates (Standard 6), and extending content to more directly address different forms of collaboration (Standard 10). The identified program improvements are also designed to strengthen candidates' consideration of instructional planning, materials, and opportunities (Standards 4, 7), proficiency in working with challenging behaviors (Standard 5), and effectiveness as evaluators (Standard 8). We are committed to engaging in ongoing data collection and dialogue among faculty as a track for continuous improvement.