



# Standard 16: Instructional Design in Special Education

## What consumers need to know about teacher preparation

To learn more about how programs are scored on this standard, including how individual indicators are satisfied, please see its [scoring methodology](#).

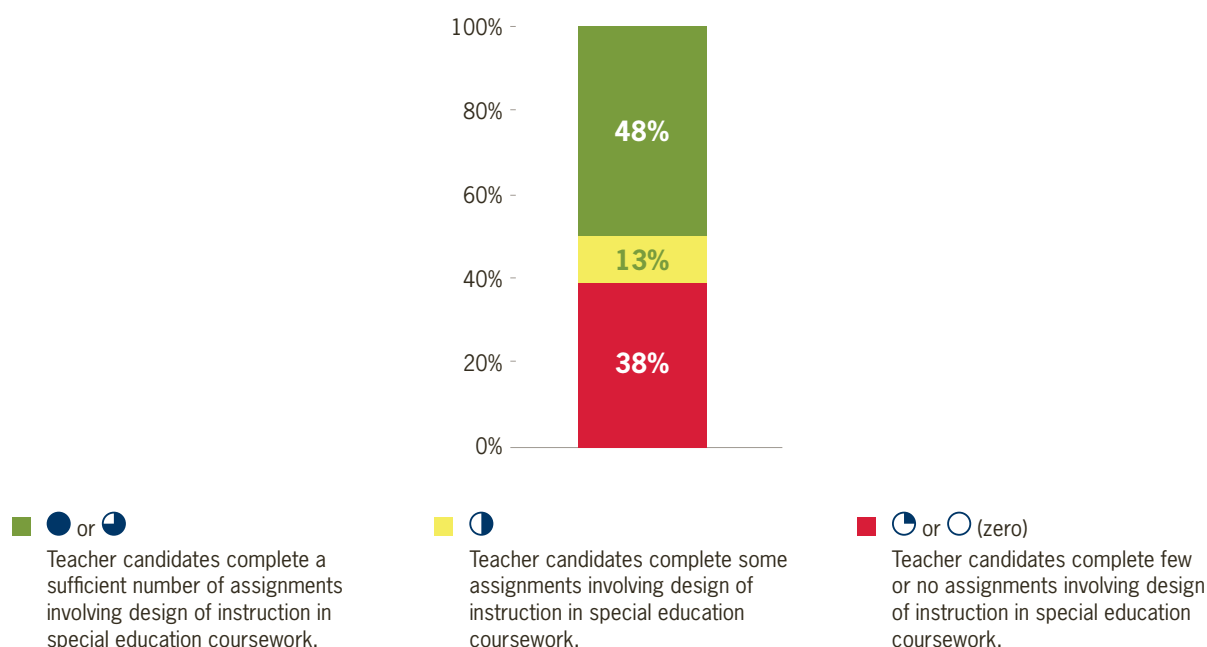
In designing instruction, exceptional special education teachers modify and enhance the core curriculum to give their students full access to it. Explicit coursework provides the training and practice special education teacher candidates need to develop expertise in this area.

This standard examines coursework offered by special education experts to ascertain if special education teacher candidates have sufficient practice designing instruction for students with the more common learning disabilities.

A sample of programs was selected for evaluation on this standard using selection principles outlined in an [appendix to the general methodology](#). Evaluations were completed on 63 special education programs (35 undergraduate and 28 graduate).

### Overview

Distribution of scores on Std. 16: Instructional Design in Special Education  
(N=60 special education programs)



## Sample for this standard

The original sample of 103 programs selected for evaluation under this standard was designed to include the largest producers of special education teachers. Only 61 percent of this sample could be evaluated. The primary causes of attrition were: 1) about one-fifth of the IHEs whose programs are in the original sample did not provide the data necessary for evaluation on this standard, and 2) some programs' syllabi do not clearly delineate the weight of instructional assignments in course grades, making evaluation impossible. The 35 undergraduate and 28 graduate programs in the sample differ only slightly in evaluations on this standard, with graduate programs having more programs that do not meet the standard, but also slightly more that meet the standard.

### Why do programs meet only a small part of the standard or fail to meet the standard on the Instructional Design for Special Education Standard?

- *While coursework may address instructional design, practice is insufficient.* A program's teacher candidates may have coursework in which lectures and/or reading address the design of instruction for students with special needs, but the candidates are not required to design such instruction.
- *Practice designing instruction for the general education student does not satisfy the standard.* A program's teacher candidates may have assignments involving design of instruction, but such coursework is not specifically focused on special education, nor is it taught by special education faculty.
- *Practice designing instruction related to life-skills curricula does not satisfy the standard.* This standard does not evaluate coursework that prepares special education teacher candidates to deliver the content of curricula for independent living skills, such as money management. Coursework evaluated must pertain to delivering the academic curriculum designed to meet K-12 state learning standards.

## Programs of distinction

- ✓+ Coursework in the undergraduate education program at **Western Washington University** is well-designed to prepare candidates, with four special education courses (in reading, math, effective teaching and written expression)<sup>1</sup> that have numerous instructional design assignments. Additional instructional design practice is assigned in a clinical course.
- ✓+ Coursework in the graduate special education program at the **University of Maryland-College Park** is also well-designed to prepare special education teacher candidates. This program requires four special education courses (one in general curriculum and instruction — which addresses lesson planning in science and social studies explicitly — one in math and two in reading and writing) that have numerous instructional design assignments. As is the case at **Western Washington University**, additional instructional design practice is assigned in a clinical course.

1 Two other courses — one in curriculum-based evaluation and one in learning problems — also address instructional design, but the weight of assignments in grades could not be determined for either course so they could not be evaluated for this standard.

## More information on instructional design for special education

With our sample's focus on large producers, our findings may paint a more favorable picture of special education teacher candidate preparation than would be found in a more representative sample. Small producers may be more likely to have special education teacher candidates take a higher proportion of coursework designed for elementary teacher candidates rather than special education teacher candidates. Given our general approach — that special education teacher candidates need coursework specifically designed to meet their needs — programs that lean on elementary coursework to train special education teachers in designing instruction would fare poorly.

The score for each program on this standard reflects the significance<sup>2</sup> of assignments related to instructional design for academic content in non-clinical *special education* coursework addressing high-incidence disabilities. However, two-thirds of the programs supplied sufficient data to report more broadly on their preparation in this area. The two reports below may be of use to programs seeking to better structure instruction and practice on instructional design.

### Report 1: Outsourcing preparation to other programs

We examine the significance of instructional design assignments in courses required of special education candidates that address instructional design but are *not* overseen by the program's special education faculty. These courses are either not designed *specifically* for special education teacher candidates (i.e., they are designed for candidates in other preparation programs) or, to a much lesser extent, they are entirely clinical and rely on regular classroom teachers for supervision.<sup>3</sup>

Courses not overseen by special education faculty contribute significantly to preparation in instructional design in 85 percent of the undergraduate programs for which a comprehensive review of coursework is possible. In fact, in more than three-quarters of these programs, the significance of assignments in instructional design in coursework *not* specifically designed for special education teacher candidates outweighs the significance of assignments designed for them. It appears that these undergraduate programs outsource preparation in this area to other programs, most often to the elementary program.

Interestingly, such outsourcing of instructional design preparation is far less common in graduate programs. Only about 35 percent of graduate programs have assignments in instructional design courses not specially designed for special education teacher candidates. This may be because education schools that offer graduate degrees in special education have more capacity and need not rely on faculty without expertise in this area.

### Report 2: Missed opportunities in clinical courses

We examine the significance of instructional design assignments reviewed by special education faculty (rather than classroom teachers) in courses that are required of special education candidates but that do *not* have an instructional design for content focus as indicated by lectures, classwork, and/or required reading. Most of these courses are clinical, and assignments, particularly culminating assignments in student teaching courses, offer a valuable opportunity to practice skills learned in coursework.

In general, such assignments are found in few undergraduate and graduate programs: Only about one-third (30 percent) of undergraduate programs and one-fifth (19 percent) of graduate programs have clinical courses providing significant assignment practice.

<sup>2</sup> By “significance” we mean the aggregate weight of the assignments in course grades.

<sup>3</sup> Most often this coursework is designed for elementary teacher candidates.