

CRITICAL COMPONENTS TOOL FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS



Date: _____

Team Members:

Purpose:

The Illinois State Board of Education has stated that “in successful districts and schools, there is a collective commitment to collaboratively identify, plan, implement, monitor, evaluate, and communicate changes necessary to continuously improve student learning for **all** students.” Further, it is essential to ensure that students with IEP’s have opportunities to benefit from high-quality instruction, to reach the same standards as all students, and to leave school prepared to successfully transition to post-school learning, living, and working. The *Critical Components Tool for Special Education Programs* was developed as a result of an extensive literature review to assist school leaders in facilitating conversations, reviewing, and improving the quality of special education programs, services and supports as a key component of continuous improvement efforts at both the District/Cooperative/School level.

The *Critical Components Tool for Special Education Programs (Critical Components Tool)* offers guidance to educators and administrators when developing, implementing, and evaluating quality programs and services for students with IEP’s. The *Critical Components Tool* identifies twelve domains to consider for effective programs. Under each domain is an indicator and below that are descriptors of the indicator that define quality school experiences with the goal of improving post-school outcomes for all students with IEP’s. The *Critical Components Tool* is designed to assist Districts/Cooperatives/Schools to review practice and to identify and act on areas where improvement is desired or needed and should not be interpreted as a policy or regulation.

This *Critical Components Tool* is meant to be used in conjunction with a continuous District/Cooperative/School improvement process that reviews multiple measures including a variety of data and other assessment tools. It can be utilized in conjunction with the Illinois Quality Framework as a companion tool to look deeper into the area of special education and special education programming. The team may choose to complete the *Critical Components Tool* in its entirety, select specific domains on which to focus, or complete the screener. Action plans resulting from this analysis should be integrated with the District/Cooperative/School improvement plan.

In summary, the purpose of the *Critical Components Tool for Special Education Programs* is to assist Districts/Cooperatives/Schools with the following goals:

- Identify a site’s current implementation level (baseline analysis)
- Identify areas that are effective and those in need of improvement
- Support the development of goals and action planning in critical areas of special education programming

Instructions for Administration:

Identify a team to complete *The Critical Components Tool for Special Education Programs*. This team should include a variety of stakeholder representative of both general and special education (e.g. administrators, teachers, support personnel, parents, students, a school board member etc.). This team could be an existing District/Cooperative/School leadership team, or an ad hoc team developed for this specific purpose.

Prior to meeting as a team, each team member must review the *Critical Components Tool* and independently rate each item on their copy of the *Critical Components Tool*. It should then be submitted to the facilitator for aggregating the scores identifying areas of agreement and disagreement. Each team member should think about evidence which would support their rating. Should an item not be used within the District/Cooperative/School, the team member and team should insert N/A in the evidence column the *Critical Components Tool*.

After each member has reviewed the *Critical Components Tool* independently, schedule approximately one to two hours to meet as a team to discuss individual responses and reach agreement on the rating that best represents the current status of implementation at the identified site. A team member should be identified as the notetaker to record the ratings for each item, supporting evidence, and team discussion. A facilitator to support administration of the *Critical Components Tool* should also be identified.

Complete the *Critical Components Tool*. The facilitator will identify each item and ask team members to indicate their individual rating by a show of fingers. (Not implementing = 0, Emerging = 1, Implementing = 2, Exemplary = 3) If everyone is in agreement, the notetaker will record that rating. If team members have varying responses, discussion will be held until a consensus regarding the rating is reached. Discussion will be documented in the notes section. Record evidence supporting the ratings of "Implementing" and "Exemplary" only.

Use the completed *Critical Components Tool for Special Education Programs* to analyze the results, identify areas of strength, and challenge. Prioritize areas of challenge and select items for further analysis and/or action planning. Develop goals to improve identified areas. Goals and action planning from your review should be integrated with the District/Cooperative/School improvement plan.

Rubric for Evaluation:

The following definitions describe each rating utilized on the *Critical Components Tool for Special Education Programs*:

Not Implementing (0)	No evidence of implementation
Emerging (1)	Inconsistent evidence of implementation
Implementing (2)	Implementation is occurring but requires ongoing support, professional learning, and/or further development
Exemplary (3)	Implementation is occurring consistently in all settings without support and is a part of the District/Cooperative/School culture

CRITICAL COMPONENTS TOOL FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS

I. LEADERSHIP					
Indicator and Descriptors					
	Not Implementing	Emerging	Implementing	Exemplary	Evidence
1. The District/Cooperative/School establishes a culture of shared leadership, teamwork, and collaboration focusing on continuous improvement.					
a. Special education staff are represented on district and building leadership teams.					
b. A continuous improvement plan that aligns with the District/Cooperative/School goals is developed and implemented.					
c. A professional learning plan that aligns with the continuous improvement plan is developed and meets the needs of the staff.					
d. District/Cooperative/School leadership and all District/Cooperative/School staff develop and communicate a common vision for specialized instruction in an ongoing and consistent manner.					
e. Leadership proactively track and analyze special education data.					
f. There are district and building specific goals inclusive of students with IEPs.					
g. District/Cooperative/School leaders allocate human and financial resources to support scheduling and planning time to ensure all students receive rigorous and appropriate instruction throughout the continuum of special education programs and services.					
h. Follow-up and support for implementation of new initiatives or programs and maintenance of established programs are evident.					
i. District/Cooperative/School leaders promote an atmosphere conducive to increasing achievement of students with IEPs.					
j. District/Cooperative/School leaders understand and support programs for struggling learners.					
k. A comprehensive coordinated program (literacy, math, behavior/SEL) for students with IEPs exists and is implemented with fidelity.					
l. District/Cooperative/School leaders ensure that curriculum, instruction and assessment expectations are communicated to staff and students.					

II. MULTI-TIERED SYSTEM OF SUPPORTS (MTSS)

Indicator and Descriptors					
2. The District/Cooperative/School implements a multi-tiered system of supports that integrates academic, behavior, and social-emotional instruction and intervention.	Not Implementing	Emerging	Implementing	Exemplary	Evidence
a. Educators collect and analyze data to identify individual students in need of additional supports and services.					
b. Evidence-based interventions are provided in a timely manner to students needing more support and programming.					
c. Progress monitoring data are collected and inform decisions about the effectiveness and/or need for modification to tiered based interventions/programs/practices/instruction/eligibility.					
d. A problem-solving process is in place for students with IEPs.					
e. Interventions are developed and implemented based on data.					
f. Educators actively engage families in MTSS.					
g. Documented intervention plans are developed based on verified reasons why students are not meeting expectations.					
h. A three-tiered model of instruction/intervention is clearly defined across content areas, behavior/social-emotional domains, and grade levels.					
i. Data on the fidelity of MTSS implementation are collected and analyzed.					
j. Data-based problem solving is utilized for students across content areas, behavior/social-emotional domains, and grade levels.					
k. Decision making guidelines are developed and utilized by problem solving teams at all tiers.					

III. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Indicator and Descriptors					
3. A professional development plan is developed based on the needs of the staff and students and is aligned with the District/Cooperative/School continuous improvement plan.	Not Implementing	Emerging	Implementing	Exemplary	Evidence
a. Professional development is outcome focused, ongoing and results driven.					
b. The District/Cooperative/School has established an internal procedure to research evidence-based practices focused on improving student					

performance and outcomes which results in the need for professional development.					
Indicator and Descriptors	Not Implementing	Emerging	Implementing	Exemplary	Evidence
c. Opportunities for professional development are differentiated and built into the regular school schedule.					
d. Participation is expected of every member of the school community including administration.					
e. Professional development activities are facilitated and supported.					
f. Professional development is provided for newly hired staff including continued skill development and follow-up.					
g. Job embedded technical assistance is a critical element of professional development.					
h. Monitoring of carryover of professional development into the classroom					

IV. LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Indicator and Descriptors	Not Implementing	Emerging	Implementing	Exemplary	Evidence
4. The District/Cooperative/School provides high quality, inclusive programs and activities in a positive learning environment.					
a. Special and general education teachers engage in intentional, collaborative lesson planning to meet the needs of each student with an IEP.					
b. The needs of the students are the primary consideration in the configuration of special education programs and services to be provided to students with IEPs.					
c. Special and general education staff and administration demonstrate a high level of knowledge about implementing effective programs for students with IEPs.					
d. Students with IEPs in inclusive settings are provided the accommodations and explicit, specially-designed instruction needed to progress in the curriculum.					
e. Students participate in the general education environment including curriculum and instruction, assessment, and social activities based on individual student needs.					
f. All students have access to field trips and extra-curricular activities, with supports as needed.					

g. The District/Cooperative/School supports inclusion of all students by providing the whole educational community with training and ongoing assistance to support an inclusive environment.					
Indicator and Descriptors	Not Implementing	Emerging	Implementing	Exemplary	Evidence
h. Students are educated with their non-disabled peers in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) to the maximum extent possible as determined by the IEP team.					
i. Environmental access allows students with physical disabilities and/or sensory needs to participate in all activities.					
j. High expectations for all students are clearly articulated and defined.					
k. Programs are in place to help students make successful transitions of all types including but not limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o home to school o school system to school system o class to class o program to program o building to building o school to postsecondary 					

V. ASSESSMENT SYSTEM

Indicator and Descriptors					
5. The District/Cooperative/School establishes an assessment system that provides data for instructional planning and program evaluation.	Not Implementing	Emerging	Implementing	Exemplary	Evidence
a. Individual student data are used to inform and design instruction for students with IEPs to progress toward grade level standards.					
b. Rate of improvement data are used to project annual goals that will decrease the achievement gap.					
c. Data from multiple sources is used to disaggregate and analyze outcomes for students with IEPs to improve school-wide programs and interventions.					
d. Data are presented in visual displays to support evaluation of student learning goals.					
e. Data are used to determine the effectiveness of the instruction provided for all students and all student groups.					

f. Teachers are trained to administer, score, and interpret assessment measures they administer.					
g. Valid, reliable, efficient, and meaningful assessments are selected for specific purposes including screening, diagnostics, progress monitoring, and measuring outcomes.					

Indicator and Descriptors	Not Implementing	Emerging	Implementing	Exemplary	Evidence
h. Curriculum-based assessments (both formative and summative) are used to monitor student progress.					
i. Teachers use formative assessments aligned with the objectives of the lesson to inform instruction and monitor student progress.					
j. The assessment system includes academic, behavior, and social-emotional data sources that address the following purposes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Identify students at risk o Determine why a student is at risk o Monitor student progress o Inform academic and social emotional instructional planning o Determine attainment of goals 					

VI. INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES

Indicator and Descriptors	Not Implementing	Emerging	Implementing	Exemplary	Evidence
6. Special education personnel provide specially designed instruction using evidence-based practices to ensure the opportunity for participation and progress in the general education curriculum.					
a. All students receive instruction in curriculum aligned with the State’s Learning Standards.					
b. IEP’s are developed in consideration of grade level standards.					
c. Student data are used to support development of and changes to student IEPs					
d. A collaborative decision-making process is used by the IEP team to inform instruction and program decisions					
e. IEP’s are implemented and reviewed by educators, families, and students to ensure that students are meeting their annual goals.					
f. Evidence-based practices are implemented.					
g. Instruction is individually planned and continually assessed to maximize student learning					
h. Goal directed, explicit instruction is used to teach academic and social emotional content and skills.					
i. Instructional groups are appropriate to support learner outcomes.					
j. Individualized supports and structures are in place to meet the needs of students within the general education setting.					

Indicator and Descriptors	Not Implementing	Emerging	Implementing	Exemplary	Evidence
k. Students with IEPs receive instructional materials in alternative formats at the same time as other students in the class receive their instructional materials.					
l. Approved adaptations (accommodations and modifications) are individualized to meet each student's needs and used during instruction and assessment.					
m. The District/Cooperative/School supports principles of school-wide positive behavior practices with a proactive approach to behavior.					
n. Evidence-based intensive individualized interventions for students with chronic and severe behavioral difficulties are in place					
o. A comprehensive evaluation including a Functional Behavioral Assessment is conducted for each student with behavioral concerns to identify the function of the behavior.					
p. Students with behavior supports have individualized positive behavior intervention plans that include all the required components.					
q. Self-regulation and executive functioning are an integral part of instruction, compensatory strategies and effective habits of mind.					
r. Students' individualized needs for assistive technology devices and services are considered, accommodated, and incorporated into the daily instruction plan for each student.					
s. Students use technology with scaffolded supports building toward independence.					
t. Each student has a meaningful communication system (i.e., verbal/AAAC/sign/pictures) that is efficient, effective, functional, and understandable across a variety of people, environments and content.					

VII. FAMILY AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Indicator and Descriptors	Not Implementing	Emerging	Implementing	Exemplary	Evidence
7. The District/Cooperative/School establishes family and community partnerships that facilitate the development of students with IEPs.					
a. Families and community representatives are included in the process of District/Cooperative/School continuous improvement planning.					

Indicator and Descriptors	Not Implementing	Emerging	Implementing	Exemplary	Evidence
b. Parents/Guardians actively participate in the development of their child/young adult's IEP.					
c. Families and students are respected as essential team members.					
d. Parents understand what their child is expected to know and be able to do based on their individual needs.					
e. Parents and educators actively discuss the educational needs of the student on an ongoing basis.					
f. Parents have the information they need about effective strategies to support their child's/young adult's learning.					
g. Parents have the information they need to support their young adult with transition from school to post-school activities.					
h. Families, community providers, and school staff work together to assure appropriate individual plans for transitions experienced by students with IEPs.					
i. Parent input and needs are collected through a variety of data-collection tools.					
j. The District/Cooperative/School leaders work to sustain collaborative relationships with parents and community organizations to ensure that they are active members in the special education process including providing training on identified topics, as needed.					

VIII. TRANSITION-SELF ADVOCACY

Indicator and Descriptors

8. Special Education personnel engage students in self-advocacy, determination of their own educational goals/plans, opportunities for career development, participation in work-based learning and identification of necessary adult services and supports.	Not Implementing	Emerging	Implementing	Exemplary	Evidence
a. Students attend their individualized education program (IEP) meetings.					
b. The student actively participates in his/her IEP by providing input regarding decisions.					
c. Students facilitate their own individualized education program (IEP) meetings.					
d. Students provide input regarding the development of academic and social goals as well as reporting on progress toward those goals.					
e. Transition planning and exploration of postsecondary opportunities begins when students are 14 and one half.					

f. Students and their families actively participate in the transition planning process.					
Indicator and Descriptors	Not Implementing	Emerging	Implementing	Exemplary	Evidence
g. Students provide information on their choices, preferences, and interests during planning processes for the development of goals for adulthood.					
h. Students engage in career planning, age appropriate transition assessments, work-based learning opportunities, and the selection of courses of study to prepare them for post-secondary living, working, and learning.					
i. Students with IEPs have the opportunity for community-based instruction and work experiences that are linked to the general curriculum and classroom instruction.					
j. Students with IEPs and their families are provided early and clear information on graduation requirements and education to 22 years of age.					
k. Students are provided instruction to develop lifelong learning skills such as self-advocacy, social-emotional skills, higher order thinking, employability skills and consumer and life skills.					
l. Schools provide timely student and family connections to post-secondary supports and services through local and state agency programs and services.					
m. Community agencies and post-secondary schools are invited to actively participate in IEP meetings, as appropriate for individual students, in which transition services are discussed.					
n. Staff and students develop a summary of performance document that is distributed to necessary adult providers that outlines needed services and supports, as well as, current abilities.					
o. There is evidence of enrollment in postsecondary education or training, employment, and independent living.					

IX. HEALTH AND SAFETY

Indicator and Descriptors

8. The District/Cooperative/School plans for the health, safety, and well-being of students with IEPs.	Not Implementing	Emerging	Implementing	Exemplary	Evidence
a. Staff and administration receive specialized training in how to respond to mental health issues, including how to respond in non-academic settings and/or during out-of-school time.					

b. A health care plan is written for all students with documented medical/health care needs.					
Indicator and Descriptors	Not Implementing	Emerging	Implementing	Exemplary	Evidence
c. All staff working with students with health care plans are trained, understand the content of the plan, and their role in implementation.					
d. District/Building safety/emergency plans are developed to address the safety needs of all students and staff in the building.					
e. District/Building safety/emergency plans include the special needs of students and staff (e.g., evacuation plan for a second story classroom for a student who uses a wheelchair with route, equipment, and designated personnel).					
f. Students with special needs participate in all practice sessions for safety/emergency situations including drills for fire, tornado, evacuation, and lockdown, etc.					

X. EDUCATOR QUALITY

Indicator and Descriptors

10. The District/Cooperative/School employs highly qualified, licensed special education personnel that demonstrate expertise in working with students with IEPs.	Not Implementing	Emerging	Implementing	Exemplary	Evidence
a. Staff hold full credentials/licensure and advanced degrees in content areas.					
b. Staff roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and implemented.					
c. All staff working with students with IEPs are knowledgeable about their responsibilities in implementing the individualized education programs (IEPs).					
d. Staff collaborate with specialized instructional support personnel as specified in a student's IEP or as needed.					
e. All staff working with students with IEPs share and communicate common instructional outcomes.					
f. There are systems in place that provide para-educators with instructional plans, training, and the necessary information to successfully support students with IEPs (e.g., disability specific, IEP goals and objectives, adaptations).					
g. Fading para-educator support is pre-planned and outlined in a student's IEP.					

h. All staff involved with students are trained in nonviolent crisis intervention techniques and District/Cooperative/School policy for the use of restraint and time out including the reporting procedure.					
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XI. ACCOUNTABILITY

Indicator and Descriptors

11. The District/Cooperative/School is in compliance with federal and state identified indicators/mandates.	Not Implementing	Emerging	Implementing	Exemplary	Evidence
a. Educators use the full continuum of services to ensure that students with IEPs are educated in the least restrictive environment.					
b. Staff proactively track special education data and monitor for equity.					
c. The District/Cooperative/School conducts ongoing review of programs and services and, where needed, implement reform to ensure alignment with department and District/Cooperative/School goals.					
d. The District/Cooperative/School engages strategically with federal and state agencies, cooperatives, other local entities, grantees and outside organizations to assure that the needs of student's with IEPs are met.					
e. Facilities of the school district, special education cooperatives, or joint agreements used for special education services shall be comparable to those provided to the students in the general education environment.					
f. Systematic procedures for identifying and evaluating the provision and need for special education and related services is in place.					
g. The District/Cooperative/School understands and implements special education policies, laws and regulations with integrity, fairness and in an ethical manner.					

XII. RESOURCE ALLOCATION

Indicator and Descriptors

12. The District/Cooperative/School allocates finances and resources necessary and appropriate for the provision of equitable services for students with IEPs.	Not Implementing	Emerging	Implementing	Exemplary	Evidence
a. The District/Cooperative/School provides adequate resources to support key initiatives.					
b. Grant expenditures reflect excess costs necessary to provide equitable services to students with IEPs.					
c. Administrators take proactive steps to coordinate and identify funding for special education programs and services within the larger school budget.					

d. Funding for special education is understood to be an integral part of the whole school budget.					

Indicator and Descriptors	Not Implementing	Emerging	Implementing	Exemplary	Evidence
e. The District/Cooperative/School has a fiscally responsible process to determine if special education services, supports, and program outcomes match the intended purpose of the expenditure.					
f. The District/Cooperative/School maximizes special education revenues.					
g. The District/Cooperative/School ensures that all purchases are completed in a cost-effective manner.					
h. Each building allocates and leverages available resources (e.g. funding, personnel, time, facilities, technology) to respond to the needs of student's with IEPs.					

TEAM DISCUSSION NOTES

LEADERSHIP

The District/Cooperative/School establishes a culture of shared leadership, teamwork, and collaboration focusing on continuous improvement.

MULTI-TIERED SYSTEM OF SUPPORTS (MTSS)

The District/Cooperative/School implements a multi-tiered system of supports that integrates academic, behavior, and social-emotional instruction and intervention.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

A professional development plan is developed based on the needs of the staff and students and is aligned with the District/Cooperative/School continuous improvement plan.

LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

The District/Cooperative/School provides high quality, inclusive programs and activities in a positive learning environment.

ASSESSMENT SYSTEM

The District/Cooperative/School establishes an assessment system that provides data for instructional planning and program evaluation.

INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES

Special education personnel provide specially designed instruction using evidence-based practices to ensure the opportunity for participation and progress in the general education curriculum.

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The District/Cooperative/School establishes family and community partnerships that facilitate the development of students with IEPs.

TRANSITION-SELF ADVOCACY

Special Education personnel engage students in self-advocacy, determination of their own educational goals/plans, opportunities for career development, participation in work-based learning and identification of necessary adult services and supports.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

The District/Cooperative/School plans for the health, safety, and well-being of students with IEPs.

EDUCATOR QUALITY

The District/Cooperative/School employs highly qualified, licensed special education personnel that demonstrate expertise in working with students with IEPs.

ACCOUNTABILITY

The District/Cooperative/School is in compliance with federal and state identified indicators/mandates.

RESOURCE ALLOCATION

The District/Cooperative/School allocates finances and resources necessary and appropriate for the provision of equitable services for students with IEPs.