

[Online Learning](#)

[Make A Referral](#)



THE KEY TO SUCCESS FOR ALASKAN EDUCATORS SERVING STUDENTS WITH
LOW INCIDENCE DISABILITIES

www.sesa.org

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

February 2024

Special Education Curriculum



[SESA Library Resources](#)

[Resources & Articles](#)

[Join Our Team!](#)

*“ Curriculum should help children make deeper and fuller
understanding of their own experience.”*

- Lilian Katz

Letter from the Editor

Dear Readers,

Curriculum is an important piece of education, but it's frequently overlooked in special education. We have the IEP; what do we need a curriculum for? An IEP is not a substitute for a curriculum: the curriculum tells us what to teach and when to teach it, while the IEP tells us what a student needs to learn. The IEP does not focus on everything a student needs to learn. Just because a skill is not in the student's IEP does not mean he doesn't need to learn that skill. That's where the curriculum comes into play.

There are a lot of curriculums to choose from and it can be overwhelming to know where to start looking for what your student or students need. This newsletter will focus on various curriculums for students with differing abilities and needs. Remember that the Anne Freitag Library is a great resource for educators, families, and individuals. If you have questions or would like more information on a curriculum, contact your SESA specialist.

Stay safe and warm,

Kristina Bower

Multiple Disabilities Specialist/Newsletter Editor

Paraprofessional Spotlight



Meet Deanna, nominated for our paraprofessional spotlight.

Deanna is a phenomenal paraprofessional because she...

- Supports students where they are at and encourages them to keep learning
- Believes that all students can learn when given the right supports
- Allows students to watch and observe in order to be comfortable with new activities
- Encourages students to follow school rules and engage in positive behavior
- Supports bilingual/bicultural activities within the classroom
- Models a positive attitude and good work ethic for the students

Keep up the great work, Deanna!

Evidence-Based Autism Curriculums

by Kelly Maki, Autism Education Specialist

Selecting a curriculum for students with Autism can be challenging for special education teachers. Often, teachers find their students have varying abilities in how each student with Autism learns, processes information, and communicates. In addition to these factors, the special education teacher must consider any limited fine and gross motor abilities and behavioral challenges that will affect access to the curriculum. At times, using multiple curriculums and pulling components from each curriculum to meet individual student needs is necessary. Below are descriptions of evidence-based curriculums proven to benefit the learning needs of students with Autism to assist with choosing the best curriculum for your students with Autism.

Academic and Life Skills Curriculums:

Unique Learning Systems

Unique Learning Systems, ULS, is a web-based curriculum for students from Pre-Kindergarten through the twelfth grade and includes a component to plan for transitioning to post-high school. The interactive curriculum provides instructional lessons in all academic areas with a 3-level approach. When using ULS, the special education teacher will complete the Goals, Performance, and Skills (GPS) assessment. This will direct which level to use when implementing the provided lessons. The curriculum also includes a progress monitoring piece. This is significant as it can be used for data collection to develop IEP goals and show the progress of the IEP goals throughout the school year. The progress monitoring reports can be shared with parents, as well.

LINKS - Linking Assessment and Instruction for Independence

LINKS is a web-based curriculum for upper elementary, secondary, and post-secondary students with Autism. Its lessons are designed to teach students to be independent across school, community, and vocational routines. The curriculum includes pre- and post-assessments, detailed lessons, and visuals to support those lessons. This curriculum aims to teach students how to be safe and independent in their environment. A highlight of LINKS is its specific, individualized instruction for students. The teacher can use the assessments and lessons to create and monitor IEP goals for his/her students.

STAR - Strategies for Teaching Based on Autism Research

The STAR curriculum uses the Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) instructional methods. This includes discrete trial training, pivotal response training, and teaching functional routines. It includes three levels. The first level is for students who have difficulty understanding or following simple commands, have little to no verbal language, and moderate behavior challenges. Level two is designed for students who can follow at least two-step commands and use limited language or one-word pictorial communication. Finally, level three is for students who can communicate with two or more words using pictures and can label pictures, identify numbers and letters, and follow most classroom routines.

Social/Emotional/Behavior Curriculum:

ZONES of Regulation

This curriculum is designed to teach students increased self-awareness, problem-solving, and emotional understanding. Essentially, it identifies four zones: blue, green, yellow, and red. For each zone, there are identified emotions. Through the lessons, the students will learn to identify emotions by facial pictures, express their own emotions, understand how their emotions affect

others and themselves, and how to respond to emotional problems that could arise in their everyday lives.

Special Education Curriculum

by Amy Topmiller, Multiple Disabilities Specialist

When we think about curriculum, we often think about the general education curriculum and how we can modify it to meet the needs of our students. Sometimes, these curriculums may have additional features and some modifications already in place. During purchase, districts can sometimes negotiate with the company that is providing the curriculum to add additional modifications or features to promote access to a wide variety of learners. When we are looking to align the general education curriculum and its implementation with our students with low-incidence disabilities, the [Essential Elements](#) are an excellent roadmap for writing IEP goals and learning targets for reading, writing, and math goals. When the general education curriculum isn't appropriate for the student, it is important to dig deeper to find an evidence-based curriculum to meet the needs of our students. [The National Center for Intensive Intervention](#) has a wide variety of resources in the areas of evidence-based intervention and high-leverage practices.

[High-Leverage Practices](#) in special education are defined through the collaboration of the CEDAR Center and the Council for Exceptional Children. Those practices are embedded within four main areas:

- Collaboration
- Assessment
- Social/Emotional/Behavioral
- Instruction

Once you understand the basic principles of High-Leverage Practices, you might say to yourself, now what? How do I know where to start with finding intervention programs that meet the needs of my students? The [academic intervention tools chart](#) is a great place to start. It is not an exhaustive list of interventions; however, it gives a nice breakdown of many factors to consider when selecting an intervention program.

It may be challenging to find an evidence-based intervention program that meets your students where they are. When faced with this challenge, our focus should be implementing evidence-based instructional practices in the areas of [reading, writing, and math](#). [The Iris Center](#) is an online resource that provides professional development modules, resources, and articles to help support the team and their learning.

Your SESA Specialist can also help support teams in implementing High-Leverage Practices and selecting instructional resources to use with students based on their instructional needs.

Additional Resources:

[Evidence Based Intervention Network](#)
[Evidence for ESSA](#)



Expanded Core Curriculum

by Angel Black, M.S.Ed., TSVI, COMS, Vision and O&M Specialist

The Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) is a specialized educational framework designed to address the unique needs of blind and visually impaired students. Unlike the general education curriculum, the ECC goes beyond traditional academic subjects and focuses on developing skills that are essential for independence, mobility, and successful participation in various aspects of life.

It recognizes that blind and visually impaired students require additional instruction in areas that their sighted peers may learn incidentally. As educators, we have a legal and ethical responsibility to ensure that students with visual impairments, including blindness, have sufficient opportunities to gain skills in the ECC.

The ECC covers nine essential skill areas that are crucial for the holistic development of blind and visually impaired students:

1. **Compensatory Skills:** This area includes Braille literacy, auditory skills, and the use of assistive technology to access and gather information. Developing proficiency in these skills enables students to compensate for the lack of visual information.
2. **Orientation and Mobility:** O&M skills are essential for safe and efficient travel. Students learn to use mobility aids, navigate different environments, and understand spatial concepts. This fosters independence and confidence in their ability to move about in the world.
3. **Social Interaction Skills:** Building social skills is crucial for students to interact confidently with their peers and adults. This includes understanding non-verbal cues, developing effective communication strategies, and building self-advocacy skills.
4. **Independent Living Skills:** Teaching daily living skills such as personal hygiene, cooking, cleaning, and managing personal finances empowers blind and visually impaired students to live independently and contribute to their communities.

5. **Recreation and Leisure Skills:** Blind and visually impaired students should have access to a range of recreational and leisure activities. This includes both adapted and mainstream activities to ensure a well-rounded and enjoyable lifestyle.

6. **Career Education:** Preparing students for successful entry into the workforce involves developing vocational skills, exploring career options, and fostering a sense of responsibility and work ethic.

7. **Assistive Technology:** Proficiency in using assistive technology is crucial for academic and professional success. Students learn to use screen readers, magnification software, Braille displays, and other tools to access information and navigate digital environments.

8. **Sensory Efficiency Skills:** This area focuses on maximizing the effective use of the remaining senses. Students learn techniques to enhance their hearing, touch, taste, and smell to gather information from the environment.

9. **Self-Determination:** Encouraging self-determination helps students become active participants in decision-making processes related to their education and future. This involves setting goals, advocating for their needs, and developing a sense of autonomy.

Educators and professionals working with blind and visually impaired students tailor instruction within each of these skill areas to meet individual needs. The goal is to provide a comprehensive and well-rounded education that equips students with the tools and skills necessary for a successful, independent life. The Expanded Core Curriculum plays a crucial role in ensuring that blind and visually impaired individuals can thrive academically, socially, and professionally.



Additional ECC Resources:

[Perkins School for the Blind](#)

[American Printing House for the Blind](#)

Braille Curriculums Available to Checkout in the Anne Freitag Library:

Braille Fundamentals

Building on Patterns

I-M-Able

Braille Beginnings

Sensee

Mangold Reading Program

BrailleBlazer **coming soon*



Accessible Education Material (AEM) Does Not Always Mean Specialized Curriculum by Meriah Cory, Alaska Center for Accessible Materials (AKCAM) Coordinator

A specialized curriculum can help students who have print disabilities, especially if they are struggling in areas like phonemic awareness, comprehension, etc. Some examples of curriculum that can be helpful are:

Edmark – A sight word-based program that allows readers to become functional readers without having to sound out every letter.

ALL Accessible Literacy Learning – For readers who are non-verbal or have a hard time showing what they know, this can be a great curriculum.

Reading Mastery – For readers who need systematic instruction that is very explicit and visuals to help support understanding.

Structured Literacy – Great for students who have learning disabilities like dyslexia.

But most of the time, students who have print disabilities just need better ways to access the general education curriculum. It is not the content that they are struggling with but rather the way the information is presented.

Built-in accessibility features: Many of the curriculums that districts use have built-in accessibility features to help with access, which means teachers just need to know what they are but do not have to do anything special to create access. Here are a few curriculums used across the state and their built-in accessibility features. This is not an exhaustive list of the accessibility features but rather a snapshot based on information provided on the curriculum websites.

CKLA - Core Knowledge Language Arts - Amplify

- Within the Amplify CKLA and Amplify Caminos digital experience, a user is able to go from start to finish using only their keyboard.
- All components of the Amplify CKLA and Amplify Caminos digital experience are screen readable and have been specifically tested in JAWS, VoiceOver, and NVDA.
- Amplify CKLA and Amplify Caminos digital experience: a user can turn on closed captions at any time during the video, and the video will resume with captions from that point.

- In the Amplify CKLA and Amplify Caminos digital experience, all images have alt text students can use to decipher meaning.

Into Reading - HMH

- Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) to evaluate accessibility needs.
- Screen Reader Functionality
- Keyboard Navigation
- Alternative Text and Audio Description
- Refreshable Braille compatible
- Magnification and Color Contrast
- Highlighter and Eraser Tools

Benchmark Advance

- Interactive eBooks with audio, live annotation, and zoom features
- Accessibility Toggle helps teachers and students to use the eBook Reader's tools with keyboards and screen readers
- Teachers can customize and assign eBooks, and students can save and share their annotations
- Optimized for popular screen readers like VoiceOver, NVDA, and ChromeVox
- Keyboard to navigation

Remember that even if the curriculum does not have that many built-in resources, there may be assistive technology out there that can help with access. Feel free to reach out at akcam@sesa.org if you have questions.

Social-Emotional Learning and Behavior Development Curriculums and Resources by Lyon Johnson, Emotional Disabilities Specialist

Social and emotional learning (SEL) encompasses the acquisition and application of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that enable individuals to develop healthy identities, manage emotions, establish supportive relationships, and make responsible decisions. Weissberg and colleagues (2015) have identified five core clusters of social and emotional competencies (SECs) that form the basis of SEL: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. These competencies provide individuals with a comprehensive toolkit to navigate the complexities of their emotions, relationships, and decision-making processes.

While SEL skills are essential, their effectiveness depends on the learning environment's context. Students feel a sense of belonging and trust when schools foster a safe, respectful, and supportive environment. Without such an environment, attempts by staff to teach self-regulation skills without this foundation will be less effective than those that do. For instance, if students constantly experience unaddressed bullying, their ability to engage in self-regulation strategies like abdominal breathing or mindfulness may be hindered. Schools wishing to look further into SEL programs should consider visiting the [Collaborative for Academic Social Emotional Learning \(CASEL\)](#) website to review evidence-based SEL programs most appropriate for their needs. SESA's Anne Freitag Lending Library houses a variety of curriculums and materials focusing on social-emotional and behavioral development that benefits students with various disabilities and needs.

A sample can be accessed by clicking [HERE](#). Also, the Emotional Disabilities team regularly reviews, curates, and publishes newsletter articles about online social-emotional and behavior development resources, which can be accessed [HERE](#).



Curriculums Designed with Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Students in Mind

by Abby Steer, Deaf and Hard of Hearing Specialist

A common question is, “What curriculums are made for Deaf and hard-of-hearing students”? Below are a few with descriptions directly from the curriculums and links to their websites for more information.

Bedrock Literacy: “Our materials focus on visually based strategies that are grounded in building concepts first and applying language second.”

Fingerspelling Our Way to Reading: “The fingerspelling program enhances phonological awareness of fingerspelled words, which increases expressive and receptive fingerspelling skills and identification of printed words. The reading comprehension program provides additional reading opportunities using fingerspelling words in sentences and stories that are used in each unit.”

Foundations for Literacy: “Targeted learning objectives include vocabulary, narrative skills, alphabetic knowledge, phonological awareness, and reading decodable words and short connected text.”

This article is for convenience and informational purposes only. It does not constitute an endorsement or approval by SESA of any products, services, or opinions that may be offered by third-party providers.

The Alaska Traditional Transition Skills

The Alaska Traditional Transition Skills is a project intended to improve the quality of life, connection to local community, and increase work-related skills for teens and young adults with disabilities who live in rural Alaska. It provides tools teachers can use to incorporate traditional values and knowledge into Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and Transition Plans.

For more information, go to: [Alaska Traditional Transition Skills](#)

Sign up for all of our quarterly newsletters to stay up to date on all of our SESA adventures, including new library materials, special events, newsletters, and much more!

[Newsletter Sign-Up](#)



[View as Webpage](#)