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PRACTITIONER PERCEPTIONS ABOUT DOCUMENTING
SPECIAL EDUCATION BEST PRACTICES WITHIN A
STANDARD TEACHER PERFORMANCE RUBRIC

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education

Moira Aileen Coogan

College of Education and Behavioral Sciences
School of Special Education

August 2013

This Dissertation by: Moira Aileen Coogan

Entitled: *Practitioner Perceptions about Documenting Special Education Best Practices within a Standard Teacher Performance Rubric*

has been approved as meeting the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education in College of Education and Behavioral Sciences in School of Special Education,

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ABSTRACT

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Although 95% of the approximately six million students with disabilities aged 6 to 21 years of age are being served in regular schools, a substantial achievement gap continues to exist between these students and their peers in the general K-12 population. Recent studies indicate that an effective teacher is the single most important school-based factor influencing improved student achievement and students with disabilities are no less deserving than their peers of having effective teachers. Between 2009 and 2011, 36 states and the District of Columbia made changes to their teacher evaluation systems to enhance the identification of effective teachers. If the special educators who serve students with disabilities are to be included in these reformed teacher evaluation processes, it is highly likely that their evaluations will include use of a standard teacher performance rubric. However, these rubrics may not be differentiated to reflect the unique roles and responsibilities of special educators and the specialized best practices that they employ, although several researchers have recommend differentiated criteria for special education teachers where appropriate.

This study was a qualitative inquiry that engaged special education teachers, principals, and special education experts in focus group discussions to determine the extent to which they believed best practices in special education could be observed and documented using a standard teacher performance rubric without substantial inference or

interpretation of the performance indicators. Coding and analysis of over 20 hours of discussion revealed five majors themes: (a) that the unique roles of special educators must be acknowledged in their evaluations; (b) that curriculum may look different in special education; (c) that expected student behaviors may look different for students with disabilities; (d) that conferencing, to brief evaluators about the various delivery models and instructional strategies being employed to meet students' Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals, must be a prominent part of special educator evaluations; and (e) that teacher performance rubrics must contain indicators that document the Individualized Education Program (IEP) development and monitoring process and Response to Intervention (RtI) models.

This study can benefit both special education and educational leadership praxis by informing state and local education agencies that use standard teacher performance rubrics about the types of performance indicators that may not adequately document special educator effectiveness. This information can serve as the basis for training materials because having glossaries, interpretive guidelines, and illustrative special education "look fors" would enable both evaluators and special education teachers to share a common understanding of the unique performance expectations for special educators and minimize the amount of inference and interpretation.

DEDICATION

To my Momma, Mary Jo Kishel Coogan, who encouraged my curiosity from the day I was born, taught me to question as soon as I could speak, and introduced me to libraries even before I could read. This dissertation is hers as much as mine because, in all my endeavors, she has always believed that I could, that I should, and that I would.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In reality, the seeds of this dissertation were sown almost 15 years ago when, as a novice language arts teacher, I was assigned a class of at-risk students. Anxious to learn about strategies to support these hard-to-reach students, I enrolled in an on-line special education course taught by Dr. Francie Murry. As they say, "the rest is history." Francie became my master's and doctoral advisor, colleague, and friend. The value of her deep theoretical knowledge and critical insights about special education, her unfailing belief in my ability to be a scholar and researcher, and her endless empathy and patience with my idiosyncrasies have been inestimable.

I am also deeply indebted to the other members of my doctoral committee whose sage balance of encouragement and devil's advocacy enabled me to translate my practitioner's intuitions into a disciplined research inquiry. A recognized expert in educational policy, Dr. Linda Vogel taught me that knowing whether and how a policy works is as important as its theoretical basis, a mindset reflected in my dissertation topic. Dr. Stuart Omdal has always supported my outside-the-box "passion projects," giving me the confidence to attempt this cross-disciplinary research that integrates special education and educational leadership. Dr. Steven Pulos, as the faculty representative to the Committee, posed the hard questions that challenged me intellectually, imposed rigor on my analyses, and made me a stronger researcher.

Two other scholars contributed to making my dissertation technically robust and interpretively rich. Dr. Maria Lahman, University of Northern Colorado, patiently

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A major transformation of the educational process for students with disabilities occurred with enactment of the *Education for All Handicapped Children Act* (1975). Henceforth, children and youth who previously had been confined to institutions, taught in separate facilities, or not educated at all would be legally entitled to a free, public education in the least restrictive environment appropriate to their needs. Almost four decades later, 95% of the 5.78 million students with disabilities aged 6 to 21 years of age are being served in regular schools and 61% of these students are spending a majority of their day in regular classrooms (U.S. Department of Education, 2010a; U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

Although educational *access* for students with disabilities can be legally mandated, no legislation can guarantee successful academic or social-emotional outcomes for these children and youth and, regrettably, a substantial achievement gap continues to exist between students with disabilities and their peers in the general population (Harr-Robins, Song, Hurlburt, Pruce, Danielson, Garet, & Taylor, 2012). This gap has persisted despite four extensive amendments to the law—now known as the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act* (2004)—and a rich body of scholarship by special education researchers.

Public awareness of this disappointing outcome for students with disabilities, who

currently represent 13% of total public school enrollment (Snyder & Dillow, 2012), was

heightened with passage of the *No Child Left Behind Act* (2002) which requires states to

report achievement levels for various subgroups of the K-12 population. Because the law

also initially required every student to score "proficient" or better on standardized reading

and mathematics tests by school year 2013-14, a new wave of educational research was

undertaken during the last decade to identify the most promising means of increasing

student achievement across the board. The most recent studies indicate that an effective

teacher is the single most important *school-based* factor influencing student achievement.

As a result, the Obama administration has made teacher effectiveness a priority in the

Blueprint for Education (U.S. Department of Education, 2010b) and has provided

funding (through the Race to the Top program) to states that are reforming their teacher

evaluation systems to identify effective teachers (U.S. Department of Education, 2009).

Currently, 36 states and the District of Columbia have made legislative or policy changes

to their evaluation models and processes (National Center on Teacher Quality, 2012).

Students with disabilities are no less deserving than their peers of being taught by

effective teachers and, therefore, the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) supports

the principle that evaluation systems to identify teacher effectiveness should include

special educators. However, CEC (2012) also recommends that:

> [e]valuations must clearly identify and be based on a special education teacher's
> specific role and responsibilities . . . must take into account the population of
> children and youth and their range of exceptionalities . . . and must be conducted
> by evaluators with expertise in delivery models and teaching practices in special
> education (p. 11).

If special educators are to be included in these reformed teacher evaluation systems, it is

highly likely that their evaluations will include use of a performance rubric for observing

instructional practices and other professional contributions to the learning community—a widely adopted, although not the sole, method for measuring teacher effectiveness.

> Because teachers impact student learning and growth through the processes and practices they employ, it is reasonable to state that an effective teacher can be observed to be doing things that research has suggested are likely to lead to improved student learning (Goe, Bell, & Little, 2008, p. 9).

The majority of states and districts are employing standard teacher performance rubrics that make no distinction between general and special educators although Holdheide, Goe, Croft and Reschly (2010) recommend that they should "[i]dentify a common framework that defines effective teaching for all teachers . . . [and] . . . where appropriate, include differentiated criteria/expectations for special education teachers and ELL specialists" (p. 24). Therefore, this exploratory study engaged special education teachers, principals, and special education experts in focus group discussions to determine the extent to which they believed best practices in special education could be observed and documented using a standard teacher performance rubric applied to all teachers.

Background

Exploring the application of a standard teacher performance rubric to the evaluation of special educators integrated aspects of both special education and educational leadership and was prompted by the researcher's professional experiences within both disciplines. The following key considerations—about students with disabilities, teacher effectiveness, teacher evaluation, and the complexities of evaluating special educators' use of best practices—illustrate the context within which the research problem was identified and which informed the choice of research design.

Achievement Levels of Students
with Disabilities

Students with disabilities continue to lag behind their peers in both academic

achievement and social-emotional indicators of success (Harr-Robins et al., 2012). Four

comparative indicators—state level assessments, federal assessments, drop-out rates, and

graduation rates—are of prime importance because they represent the focus of most state

and district accountability systems.

State-level assessments. Each state is permitted to determine the standardized

test it will use to meet federal reporting requirements and, therefore, national average

scores for students taking state-level tests cannot be calculated. Rather, data about

students with disabilities and their peers are presented as a percentage of students scoring

at each proficiency level in each state.

During school year 2010-11, less than half of students with disabilities in grades 3

through 12 received a proficient score on the state grade-level reading assessment in each

of 44 states. Less than half of students with disabilities in 40 states received a proficient

score on the state grade-level mathematics assessment (U.S. Department of Education,

2011a).

National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). The National

Assessment of Educational Progress is administered to students in grades 4, 8, and 12.

Scores achieved by students with disabilities have been significantly lower than those of

their peers for the last 25 years and the gap becomes larger at each higher grade level

(Harr-Robbins et al., 2012).

Only 11% of students with disabilities in grade 4 scored at or above Proficient on

the 2011 reading test compared to 36% of non-disabled peers and 68% scored below

Basic compared to 29% of their peer group. Only 8% of students with disabilities in grade 8 scored at or above Proficient compared to 36% of the non-disabled students and 62% of students with a disability scored below Basic compared to 20% of their peer group.

On the 2009 reading test, only 12% of students with disabilities in grade 12 scored at or above Proficient compared to 40% of non-disabled peers and 62% scored below Basic compared to 23% of their peer group (U.S. Department of Education, 2011b).

Scores achieved by students with disabilities on the 2011 NAEP mathematics test were similarly poor. Only 17% of students with disabilities in grade 4 scored at or above Proficient compared with 43% of non-disabled peers and 45% scored below Basic compared to 14% of their peer group. Only 9% of students with disabilities in grade 8 scored at or above Proficient compared with 38% of the non-disabled students and 64% of students with disabilities scored below Basic compared to 22% of their peer group.

On the 2009 mathematics test, only 7% of students with disabilities in grade 12 scored at or above Proficient compared to 28% of non-disabled peers and 74% scored below Basic compared to 33% of their peer group (U.S. Department of Education, 2011c).

Drop-out and graduation rates. Compared to a national drop-rate rate of 7.4%, 22% of all students with disabilities aged 16-21 dropped out of school in 2009. Of all students with disabilities who exited special education in 2008-09, 61% graduated with a regular diploma compared to a national graduation rate of 75.5% (Snyder & Dillow, 2012).

Post-School Outcomes for
Students with Disabilities

A lack of academic proficiency may be one of several contributing factors to poor post-school outcomes for students with disabilities. With regard to college readiness and persistence, a report from the *National Longitudinal Study-2* (Sanford, Newman, Wagner, Cameto, Knockey, & Shaver, 2011) indicates that, when compared to their same age peers six years after leaving high school, students with disabilities are less likely to enroll in post-secondary education, especially in four year institutions, and are less likely to complete this schooling if enrolled.

Impact of Effective Teachers
on Student Achievement

General student population. In the 25-plus years since publication of *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983)—which demonstrated that American students were not learning even basic skills at a level needed for the United States to remain competitive globally—numerous educational reforms to increase student achievement have been researched and mandated by legislators. However, "[o]ne important lesson from these efforts has been the recurrent finding that teachers are the fulcrum that determines whether any school initiative tips toward success or failure" (Darling-Hammond, 2009) and recent studies have confirmed that an effective teacher plays a major role in improving the academic achievement and post-secondary outcomes of general education students. Researchers assert that, although many factors may have a positive correlation with academic growth, an effective teacher is the single most important *in-school* factor related to student achievement (Wright, Horn & Sanders, 1997). Further, Hanushek and Rivkin (2010) report that replacing an ineffective teacher

with an effective one can increase student scores from .1 to .2 standard deviations in a single year. Another study (Hanushek, 2008) demonstrates that effective teachers consistently grow students one-and-one half grade level equivalencies in one year compared to ineffective teachers who make only a one-half grade level equivalency in that same period of time. Finally, Konstantopoulos and Chung (2011) and Sanders and Horn (1998) report that these annual growth effects, positive or negative, persist over time and impact the remainder of a student's academic career. For example, with regard to post-secondary outcomes for general education students, a longitudinal study from the National Bureau of Educational Research (Chetty, Friedman, & Rockoff, 2011) found correlations between general education teacher effectiveness and increases in college graduation rates, increased earnings, and improvement in the quality of neighborhoods in which these students live as adults.

Students with Disabilities. Similar data are not available about the impact of special education teachers on either the achievement by students with disabilities while in school or on the long-term outcomes for these students (Feng & Sass, 2010). Only a few studies (Blackorby et al., 2005; Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 2002; Reynolds & Wolfe, 1999) have investigated factors that might correlate with increased performance on standardized tests by students with disabilities, but this research did not examine teacher effects. Rather, these studies addressed influences such as a student's participation in special education programs, curricular modifications, accommodations, and the amount of time spent in the general education classroom. Nonetheless, McLeskey and Billingsley (2008) contend that "[a]lthough a strong research base is lacking regarding the impact that special education teachers make in the lives of students with disabilities, it is logical

to assume that data related to general education teachers would generalize to special education teachers" (p. 294). Therefore, it is not unreasonable and may be prudent to examine the current thinking in general education about identification of effective teachers.

**Teacher Evaluation as a Means of
Identifying Effective Teachers**

Defining Effective Teachers. Defining the term "effective teacher" and developing measurements that will identify such individuals has been a persistent challenge for educational researchers and policymakers. In the most narrow sense, teacher effectiveness is the teacher's ability to improve learning as measured by student performance gains on standardized achievement tests. This simple definition has supported development of so-called value added models (Sanders & Horn, 1998) that use sophisticated mathematical techniques to estimate the relative contributions of effective teachers to increased individual student test scores. However, Little, Goe, and Bell (2009) maintain that "[a]lthough this is one important aspect of teaching ability, it is not a comprehensive and robust view of teacher effectiveness" (p. 1).

The value-added methodology was never intended to, and in fact does not, provide any information about the practices of effective teachers, which has prompted scholars, legislators, policy-makers, and state and local education officials to define teacher effectiveness not only in terms of the *product* (increased student achievement) but also the *process* whereby effective teachers contribute to positive student outcomes. Consequently, many current research inquiries about effective teachers are now focusing on exploring this "black box." For these scholars, an effective teacher meets "a set of teaching standards that describes in considerable detail what teachers know and should be

able to do" (Odden, 2004, p. 127). Thus, their definition of an effective teacher results from detailing each standard into specific instructional strategies and practices that teachers are expected to employ and characteristics (e.g., professionalism) that they are expected to exhibit (Kane, Taylor, Tyler, & Wooten, 2011). A well-known example of this standards-based approach to teacher evaluation is the *Framework for Teaching Evaluation Instrument* (Danielson, 2013) that delineates four domains of teaching and then describes specific features of each domain.

The most recent refinements to standard-based assessments of teacher performance have taken the form of complex rubrics for observing teachers' instructional practices and other professional contributions to the learning community. These rubrics not only provide highly specific details of teaching practices (performance indicators), but also differentiate between as many as five performance levels for each indicator in order to move evaluations beyond the binary approach (i.e. satisfactory or unsatisfactory) that traditionally has characterized most teacher evaluation models (Weisberg, Sexton, Mulhern, & Keeling, 2009).

Rubrics for observation of teacher performance. At the present time, most of the states and school districts that have reworked their teacher evaluation models are measuring teacher effectiveness through the use of rubrics to rate teacher performance coupled with student achievement data. In fact, the draft *Rubric for Evaluating Colorado's Teachers* (Colorado Department of Education, 2012)—used as a discussion tool for this exploratory study—is an example of the first component of such two-pronged teacher evaluation approaches (Appendix A).

A fundamental assumption in the creation of these teacher performance rubrics is that a detailed set of validated best practices exists, the presence of which constitutes "effective teaching." Large-scale research efforts, such as the Measuring Effective Teaching (MET) Project, funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, examined specific teacher observation protocols to determine how well they identify teachers who produce student achievement gains. Each of the five evaluation instruments that were being investigated by the MET Project define sets of observable indicators to measure the degree to which a teacher employs certain strategies, skills, and processes to guide student learning (Kane & Staiger, 2012).

Challenges in Evaluating Special Educators Using a Standard Rubric

No universally agreed-upon set of assumptions or performance indicators that reflect the complexity of the special educator's role has been adopted by states and districts to differentiate standard performance rubrics for special educator evaluations. Yet, "[w]ithout a clear understanding of these special skills and instructional methods, evaluators' capacity to distinguish between effective and ineffective special educators . . . is limited" (Holdheide et al., 2010, p. 1).

A special education teacher not only must be able to demonstrate an in-depth understanding of the core subject matter(s) required for student progress toward meeting grade-level standards, but also must be able to assess each student with a disability to determine his/her academic and social-emotional strengths and needed supports. Then, s/he must be able to select from an extensive variety of instructional delivery models and research-based interventions those environments and strategies that will be

operationalized in an individualized education program (IEP) for each student with a disability.

As guidance in understanding the complex roles fulfilled by special educators, one might turn to the professional standards and lists of recommended knowledge and skills that several national organizations have developed. The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC, 2009) publishes professional and ethical standards to "provide benchmarks to states, provinces, and nations for developing or revising policy and procedures for program accreditation, entry-level licensure, professional practice, and continuing professional growth" (p. xi). However, according to Blanton, Sindelar, and Correa (2006), "the standards do represent contemporary professional thought but, unlike process–product measures, lack empirical connection to student outcomes" (p. 122). As another example, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) provides criteria for scoring the portfolios submitted by teachers who seek the "Exceptional Needs Specialist/Early Childhood through Young Adulthood" certification (NBPTS, 2011). However, NBPTS certification is a voluntary credentialing activity for experienced teachers and is not related to state and/or district teacher evaluation models. Although both the CEC and NBPTS standards, knowledge, and skills documents might potentially serve as a reference for developing indicators of special educator performance, no such common understanding has yet emerged nationally.

Similarly, special education research does not provide a single, "gold standard" list of best practices in special education which might be used to develop performance indicators because the majority of these studies have been interventions focused on a specific disability category (e.g., severe learning disabilities, hearing impairment, etc.).

Special education scholar-researchers have created a robust body of specialized

knowledge including, but not limited to, new instructional delivery methods, academic

and behavioral interventions, modifications to general education curricula, and

appropriately modified assessments (Billingsley, 2007; Hockenbury, Kauffman, &

Hallahan, 2000; Landrum, Tankersley, & Kauffman, 2003; Mastropieri, Berkeley,

Scruggs, & Marshak, 2008; Vaughn & Linan-Thompson, 2003; Walker, Sprague, Close,

& Starlin, 2000). However, "[r]esearchers cannot just address a simple question about

whether a practice in special education is effective; they must specify clearly for whom

the practice is effective and in what context" (Odom, Brantlinger, Gersten, & Horner,

2005, p. 139).

Statement of the Problem

"Very few states and districts are addressing the unique challenges associated

with evaluating special education teachers, and this is an area where much work remains

(Council for Exceptional Children, 2012, p. 2). Thus, no longitudinal empirical data

currently exists to determine if evaluators using a standard teacher performance rubric are

able to accurately evaluate special educators—especially if the indicators in performance

rubrics are not differentiated to take into account their unique roles and responsibilities.

Unless evaluators can document the full range of special education best practices—

without substantial inference or interpretation of the performance indicators in these

rubrics—they run the risk of under-rating effective special education teachers and/or

maintaining the poor practices of ineffective special educators.

Importance of the Study

In the absence of longitudinal data about using a standard teacher performance rubric to evaluate special educators, it is nonetheless possible to solicit perceptual data from stakeholders about potential areas for misinterpretations, bias, and/or omissions in such rubrics. This study will make an important contribution to the knowledge base in special education and educational leadership by identifying the areas of greatest concern to the stakeholders most closely affected by use of a standard teacher performance rubric. "Only with a commitment to understanding the complexity of the special education function can administrators discover valuable and meaningful solutions to the evaluation dilemma" (Werger & Aldinger, 1987, p. 61).

The themes emerging from this study can inform both the special education and educational leadership research communities about areas for further investigation to guide the development or refinement of evaluation protocols for special educators. In addition, study results can assist practitioners at the state and local levels in creating a common understanding of performance expectations for special education teachers through development of interpretive guidelines, illustrative examples, and "look-fors" to use with undifferentiated rubrics. Finally, the findings can identify specific knowledge that evaluators should acquire—whether from administrator preparation programs or district trainings—to make appropriate interpretations of performance indicators in standard rubrics when evaluating special educators.

Theoretical Framework

The researcher initially developed a deep interest in the problem addressed by this exploratory study when she examined the teacher effectiveness movement through the

lens of the critical paradigm. This perspective, which she adopted during undergraduate studies in literary analysis, suggests that researchers should uncover the hidden assumptions about how narratives are constructed, read, and interpreted. Their inquiries should make visible the assumptions inherent in taken-for-granted educational knowledge, especially if actions resulting from these implicit values and norms have the potential to disempower or disenfranchise a group(s) of individuals. (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). As an education professional, she continues to employ this lens which Hargreaves (2003) contends is "a powerful framework for interpreting issues in the domain of educational change" (p. 182). Uncovering, interpreting, and reflecting about institutional constructions, such as curricula and teacher evaluation systems, can move schools ever closer to being ethical and inclusive environments (Beyer & Pagano, 1998).

Viewing the problem statement of this exploratory study through a critical lens is appropriate because a key tenet of this paradigm is the dialogic nature of discovery that gives voice to those whom the research will affect. Examining the performance indicators in a standard rubric relative to special education teachers asks what ways of thinking are encouraged and which are hampered, and which voices potentially may not be heard (Beyer, 1998; Beyer & Apple, 1998; Kumasi, 2011).

Evaluations serve as "message systems" by controlling what and whose knowledge is valued and taught (Conway & Artiles, 2005, p. 23) and they "communicate the norms for performance in the school even to those whose performance is not being evaluated directly" (Natriello, 1990, p. 41). Evaluation systems which continue to include lengthy checklists of behaviors emphasize "balance and value neutrality, on tallying up marks, when the important thing is to evaluate teachers' understanding of what they are

doing and why they are doing it" (Gitlin & Bullough, Jr., 1987, p. 231). Therefore, Sergiovanni (1984) recommends that "practical language (the language of the classroom and teacher, the language of particular instances and specific occasions) . . . dominate the [evaluation] process" (p. 363).

Using the critical paradigmatic lens, the researcher then asks—though does not hypothesize *a priori*—if the normative assumptions that are embedded in the language of performance indicators and the evaluative phrases themselves will become a privileged discourse that influences how an evaluator views the behavior being observed and makes decisions based on these views (Barnetson & Cutright, 2000). If performance indicators in a standard teacher performance rubric cannot reasonably take into account values, norms, and assumptions about the learning process in special education, and make distinctions between general and special education when warranted, the potential exists for the observation process to privilege and reproduce a discourse that does not elicit images of effective special education teaching. Such discourse could potentially disadvantage students with disabilities, disenfranchising them from access to effective teachers who employ specialized "best practices" developed to meet the unique needs arising from their disabilities.

Research Questions

As the problem statement suggests, it is currently impossible to know if evaluators using a standard teacher performance rubric will be able to evaluate special educators accurately (i.e., without over-or under-rating them)—especially if the performance indicators in such rubrics are not differentiated to take into account their unique roles and responsibilities.

Viewing this problem through a critical lens led the researcher to provide an opportunity for those individuals who would be most directly involved with use of such rubrics to voice their judgments about whether evaluators can document the full range of special education best practices without substantial inference or interpretation of the performance indicators in these rubrics by responding to the following questions:

Q1   In the judgment of principals, teachers, and special education leaders, do the indicators in the *Rubric for Evaluating Colorado's Teachers* capture the full range of best practices in special education? If not, what aspect of best practices in special education is omitted?

Q2   In the judgment of principals, teachers, and special education leaders, what indicators, if any, in the *Rubric for Evaluating Colorado's Teachers* are confusing or require substantial inference or interpretation?

Q3   What differences, if any, exist among the judgments of principals, teachers, and special education leaders about the *Rubric for Evaluating Colorado's Teachers?*

Scope and Delimiters of the Study

This study solicited practitioner perceptions about a single standard teacher performance rubric as it relates to documenting the best practices of K-8 special education teachers who support students identified as having either a specific learning disability (SLD) or an emotional/behavioral disability (E/BD). The reasons for delimiting the study in this manner are as follows:

K-8 Context

The study focused on perceptions about using the rubric within a K-8, rather than K-12, special education context primarily because 63% of school-aged students with disabilities are between the ages of 6 and 14 (Snyder & Dillow, 2012). In addition, the school structure (grade level classrooms in contrast to content area classrooms) and instructional programming differs between K-8 and secondary special education. In the

elementary and middle grades, special education teachers focus on the acquisition of foundational academic and affective knowledge and learning strategies and the initial application of these skills to specific, core subject areas such as reading and mathematics and behavior and self-management. Secondary special education is programmatically distinct, with interventions focusing primarily on facilitating student achievement toward meeting graduation requirements (credit orientation). In addition, to prepare students with disabilities for successful exiting, high school special education teachers are also responsible for transition planning and sometimes for the delivery of vocational or life skills curricula which usually do not exist at the K-8 level (Thousand, Rosenberg, Bishop & Villa, 1997). An attempt to solicit practitioner perceptions about both such disparate classroom practices could confound the results.

**Students with Specific Learning Disabilities
or Emotional/Behavioral Disabilities**

This study was delimited to focus on effective teaching of students who have been identified as having either a specific learning disability or an emotional/behavioral disability because these are the two high-incidence disability categories most often served by special educators in a traditional K-8 context. They represent 43.8% of the total number of students with disabilities age 6-21 served under the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act* (IDEIA, 2004) at 37.5% and 6.3% respectively (Synder and Dillow, 2012).

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Operational Definitions

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For purposes of this study the following definitions of terms were used, although a different definition of some terms (e.g., teacher quality standard) may exist in other contexts.

Rubric

The August 2012 draft edition of the *Rubric for Evaluating Colorado's Teachers* developed and promulgated by the Teacher Effectiveness Unit of the Colorado Department of Education and used as the discussion tool in this study. The rubric provides the criteria for rating teacher performance against five teacher quality standards (Colorado Board of Education [CBE], 2011) by defining elements for each standard and indicators of performance for each element.

Quality standards. The standards included used to guide the State Model Evaluation System for Colorado. They "outline the knowledge and skills required of an effective Teacher" (CBE, 2011, p. 1) A standard appears as the first level in the rubric.

Element. Within the context of the State Model Evaluation System, element "means the detailed description of knowledge and skills that contribute to effective teaching and leading, and which corresponds to a particular . . .Teacher Quality Standard" (CBE, 2011, p. 1). An element appears as the second-level in the rubric.

Indicator. The term "indicator" was not defined by the Colorado Board of Education during rule-making. For the purposes of this study, "indicator" will mean a specific teacher behavior or action, or a student behavior that, if present, provides evidence that the knowledge and/or skill expectations for an element are present. Individual indicators appear as the third level in the rubric and are "checked off" to indicate the presence of the expected behaviors.

Special Education Best Practices

Academic, behavioral and social interventions, accommodations, and/or curricular modifications provided to students who have an Individualized Education Program (IEP).

Individualized Education Program

In accordance with the Part B (Ages 6-21) of the *Individuals with Disabilities Educational Improvement Act* (2004), the written document which outlines the educational and related services that have been designed to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability.

Focus Group Participants

Special education teacher. An individual who holds either a Colorado Generalist License or a "grandfathered" categorical (Teacher Type II) license.

Principal. A building administrator who holds a Colorado Principal License and has responsibility for the formal evaluation of teachers in his/her building. This category normally will include only persons with the job title principal or assistant principal.

Special education expert. An individual, other than a special education teacher, whose professional role and responsibilities support special education in the schools through planning, programming, or teacher preparation. This category may include, but is not limited to: university and college faculty, district special education administrators/directors and assistant directors, and state or district central office personnel in departments of exceptional student services.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

In light of the abundant research literature about performance evaluation as applied to general educators, one might expect to find parallel research in the field of special education. However, a systematic search of academic research databases, books, peer-reviewed journals, and relevant professional organization websites, as well as footnote chasing, revealed a scarcity of studies that address the specific process and criteria for evaluating the performance of special education teachers. In addition, much of the literature that does exist is almost three decades old.

However, as the challenges inherent in assessing the performance of special education teachers has once again become a topic of renewed concern, new research investigations have been undertaken. This latest scholarship has been produced largely as dissertation research or by large, national organizations conducting nationwide surveys and only minimally by academic researchers in the field of special education.

The general lack of research about special education teacher evaluation confirms that this exploratory study of stakeholder perceptions about using a standard rubric to evaluate special educator performance is justified and that results of the study will make an original and meaningful contribution to the discipline of special education.

The following body of literature about special education teacher evaluation addresses one or more of the following categories: (a) evaluation processes differentiated for special educators; (b) concerns with using uniform evaluation instruments; (c) the

need for evaluator training; and (d) data included in evaluations of special education teachers.

Evaluation Processes Differentiated
for Special Educators

Several scholars have attempted to determine whether and to what extent differentiation is made in evaluation processes and/or whether evaluation instruments are modified for special educators. Moya and Gay (1982) examined the evaluation procedures for special educators in California, using a stratified random sample of 190 district-level special education directors to determine if their district provided a special education program and what procedures were used to evaluate special educators. Of the 146 responses, 122 districts (84%) provided special education services themselves, however the remainder contracted out services with local agencies. Only 13 districts made any modifications to their evaluations for special educators, and each of those districts simply added additional competencies to those used to assess general educators (e.g. the ability to compose and follow an IEP). Observation served as the primary method of evaluation in most of the districts. In 90% of the districts the principal was the primary evaluator of special educators and in 10% the directors of special education conducted the evaluation. The investigators did not explore the directors' perceptions about whether or not the evaluation systems were appropriate for assessing special educator job performance.

In another study, Fruddan and Manatt (1986) reported about their experience assisting a school district in New York to develop an evaluation instrument for special educators. The researchers worked with the local superintendent and the district steering committee to review the then-current literature about effective teaching and about best

practices in special educations. They asserted that, although many of the instructional practices outlined in the general education literature could be applied to special educators, the evaluation tool may need modification to address the unique needs of students with disabilities. To ensure that the evaluation tool was useful as both a professional development and accountability tool, the district convened a steering committee made of special educators and their administrators to develop the eighteen performance indicators that would be used in the evaluation instrument and the processes for observing them. The researchers reported that, as a result of the effort to ensure the evaluation tool reflected the distinct roles and responsibilities of special educators, it was well received by the majority of the special educators and administrators in the district with little or no disagreement among the stakeholders about the appropriateness of the tool. It is important to note, however, that no studies were conducted that either validated the instrument or empirically assessed stakeholder satisfaction with it.

More recently, Booth (2000) reexamined special education evaluation in California, given changes in special education licensing and in the state's evaluation code subsequent to the Moya and Gay study. Booth investigated the special education evaluation procedures used by 322 K-6 principals in California who were identified through random stratified sampling. Unlike Moya and Gay, she did not ask respondents to identify whether their districts used different instrumentation for the evaluation of special educators. Instead she focused on the modifications principals made when observing and evaluating special educators. Of the 209 respondents to the survey, 60% indicated that they "sometimes" or "almost always" used additional criteria in the evaluation of special educators, including expectations for IEP development,

modification of curricula, and the assessment of students' needs specific to their

disabilities. Due to the closed-ended nature of the survey questions, no information was

provided to determine if these additional expectations for special educators were part of a

separate instrument or if they were simply added by the individual administrator.

Demographics of the school, district, or individual principal did not seem to impact the

use of additional criteria for evaluating special educators. However, increases in the

principal's special education knowledge (as gained through training or experience)

seemed to impact the degree to which additional criteria were applied.

In an attempt to understand the current state of evaluation for special education

teachers, researchers from the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality

(Holdheide, Goe, Croft, & Reschly, 2010) surveyed over 1,100 state and district level

directors of special education. The survey was mailed to all of the state-level special

education directors and was also mailed to the membership of the CEC Council of

Administrators in Special Education, and was followed up by interviews with selected

participants. It is important to note that the researchers were interested in soliciting the

knowledge and opinions of *special education leaders* and therefore did not intend to

consult a representative sample of those specifically charged with evaluating special

education teachers. With regard to current practices in special education evaluation, most

state level directors indicated that there was some level of state involvement, either

because the state mandated the components of the evaluation system or because the state

provided guidance to districts. Most of the systems aligned to a set of published teaching

standards, whether these were developed by the states themselves or modeled after the

Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC), or those in the

Enhancing Professional Practice: A Framework for Teaching (Danielson, 1996).

However, none of the respondents indicated that any of the evaluations were aligned to

special education standards such as those published by the CEC (2009).

Concerns with Using Uniform
Evaluation Instruments

With one exception (Boone and Avila, 1992), the few scholars who have focused

on the evaluation of special education teachers have expressed concern that the processes

and procedures used in general education evaluation are either not sufficient, or in some

cases not appropriate, for judging special educator performance.

The principal concern was that instruments used to evaluate special education

teachers may not fully reflect the unique skills, knowledge, and responsibilities inherent

in this role (Billingsley, 1989; Booth, 2000; Fruddan, 1984; Fruddan & Manatt, 1986;

Holdhiede, et al., 2010; Moya and Gay, 1986; Widener, 2011). In addition, several

scholars have asserted that the myriad of special education teaching contexts (e.g.

resource rooms, co-teaching, consultation) make uniform evaluative criteria problematic

(Billingsley, 1989; Wilson, 2005). Billlingsley also highlighted the fact that special

education instruction may not resemble that occurring in general education classrooms

due the wide variety of ages and disability categories that a single special educator may

be serving.

Hill (1982) examined the content of the evaluation forms used for special

educators in Illinois to assess the extent to which changes on the forms between 1979 and

1982 reflected new special education responsibilities mandated under state special

education law. Special education directors (or designees) from all of the districts were

asked to provide a copy of the evaluation instruments used to evaluate special education

teachers in their programs. The results of the content analysis showed that, although there was some incorporation of new legal mandates, there was still a significant discrepancy between those mandates and the evaluation criteria, particularly in the areas of discipline, behavior management, and instruction.

Similarly, Lazzari and Bruder (1988) examined the criteria used in evaluating early childhood special educators to determine the extent to which evaluation procedures aligned with best practices in early childhood special education. In addition to providing information about the frequency and duration of evaluation, the seventy-five early childhood special education teachers surveyed were asked to prioritize fifteen teacher competencies specific to early childhood special education. In addition, they were asked to provide copies of the evaluation forms used by their district or program. Of the 41 evaluation forms returned, only three contained any items specific to working with young children with disabilities. The remaining forms contained very broad categories of teacher behaviors which could be applied equally to early childhood general and special education. However, when the forms were compared to the competencies ranked by the teachers, very few were addressed by the evaluation tools. In fact, two of the competencies were not addressed by any of the evaluation instruments and only two competencies were addressed by more than half of the tools.

The concern raised by the early researchers that uniform evaluation instruments are not appropriate for special educators has not diminished over the past twenty years. Widener (2011) asked district-level special education directors and coordinators in southwest Virginia whether they felt that their district evaluation systems were adequate for the evaluation of special education teachers. Twenty-six special education directors

from the region completed a qualitative survey and nine of those participants also completed a follow-up questionnaire. In the initial survey, respondents were asked if they felt that special educators should be evaluated with the same tool as general educators and what, if any, differentiation should be made for special educators in the evaluation process. Half of the special education directors believed that the same tool would be appropriate for general and special educators. Of the half that believed there should be a different instrument, responses indicated a belief that there were different and/or additional competencies that special educators must have that are not reflected in a general rubric. However, none of the respondents enumerated the specific competencies that they thought special educators should possess. Although half of the respondents stated that the same tool would be appropriate for all teachers, in answering a different question, 65.4% responded that evaluation instruments should be differentiated for special educators. However, only one of the districts represented actually modified the evaluation process for special educators.

These results were similar to those found by the Holdhiede et al. (2010) national survey of special education administrators. Although 91.7% of the respondents felt that special educators should be evaluated based on their use of specialized practices in special education, few of the respondents stated that their evaluations system allowed for differentiation of the process. In fact, 84.1% felt that there is specialized knowledge and set of skills that special education teachers must possess and almost half (49.9%) of the respondents believed that there should be evaluated using a different or modified evaluation system to account for this expertise. This was especially true for the respondents at the district level who indicated that using the same evaluation system for

special and general education students was "not a 'good fit'" (p. 10). Of those few

systems that did permit use of a different or modified evaluation for special educators,

most included all special education teachers, but others were specifically for low-

incidence disabilities or teacher consultants.

Need for Evaluator Training

Another significant area of concern raised by scholars is that special educators are

most often evaluated by the building principal (Billingsley, 1989; Moya & Gay, 1982)

who may have limited training in and understanding of special education practices. This

can result in an inability of evaluators to correctly identify effective practices, a

discrepancy in expectations between teacher and administrator, and/or teachers receiving

limited constructive feedback from evaluators. Bogdan (1986) conducted a Delphi study

with special education teachers, principals, special education directors, and university

personnel. Thirty two individuals, with equal representation from each category,

participated in a three phase process in which they brainstormed and then prioritized the

specialized knowledge a principal must possess to accurately evaluate a special educator.

The results of the study identified 15 categories of such knowledge, although consensus

about the priority of these categories was not reached. All of the participants indicated

that a specialized understanding, in addition to the knowledge needed to evaluate general

education teachers, was necessary to credibly evaluate special educators. With regard to

knowledge deemed unique to evaluating special educators, the participants felt that

principals needed to have an understanding of the following: "P.L. 94-142, characteristics

of handicapped learners, elements of instructional techniques [in special education],

mainstreaming: LRE, components of IEPs, related and supportive services . . . curriculum

related to special education . . . and unique problems associated with handicapped children" (p. 90). This research was limited to identifying areas for principal development, and therefore did not assess the degree to which principals evaluating special educators actually possessed this knowledge or whether any current training programs at the university, state, or district level were in place to develop this knowledge. A further indication of principals' potential misunderstanding of the job responsibilities of special educators was demonstrated by Friend and McNutt (1987). The researchers utilized data from a previous research study (McNutt & Friend, 1985) in which participants were asked to identify tasks they considered part of the job responsibilities of resource room teachers and also to provide the written job descriptions for those teachers. The researchers subsequently compared the tasks identified by the participants to the written job descriptions to determine the extent to which written expectations reflected the daily activities of resource teachers. Given that credible evaluation relies on a shared understanding of expectations between the evaluator and the evaluatee, this study asked principals to select (from the same list in the first study) the tasks they believed were part of a resource teachers job responsibilities. In all areas, there was a significant discrepancy between the tasks principals believed should be included in the evaluation of resource teachers and those actually contained in the written job descriptions.

In addition, lack of principal understanding may impact the type, quantity, and quality of feedback provided to special educators during the evaluation process. In two studies (Breton & Donaldson, 1991; Sweeney & Twedt, 1993), special educators were surveyed about their experiences with supervision. In both studies most of the respondents indicated that although they had a positive relationship with their evaluator;

their administrators lacked specific special education knowledge and thus were not able to provide directive feedback to help improve their teaching.

Mimms (2011) revisited the question of principals' understanding of special education in light of current policy efforts to revamp state evaluation systems. Specifically, she investigated principals' perception of their ability to accurately evaluate special educators against the new statewide teaching standards in North Carolina. Twenty nine high school principals were asked to complete a survey in which they rated their perceived level of competence in applying the new standards to observations and evaluation of special educators. In addition, participants were asked to complete a set of open-ended questions to elicit their perceptions about the evaluation standards and their role in the processes used to evaluate special education teachers. Although principals indicated that they felt somewhat to fully prepared to evaluate special educators in areas such as classroom management and instructional delivery, they demonstrated significantly less assurance in their ability to accurately assess other areas of special educator performance. Specifically they rated lower their ability to evaluate special educator content knowledge, IEP implementation, inclusion facilitation, and transition planning. Many of the respondents indicated that they did not feel the standards were appropriate for use in special education settings and that they had received little or no training on how to implement the standards when evaluating special educators.

Data Included in Evaluations of
Special Education Teachers

Another significant concern raised by researchers is the use of student achievement or progress measures in the evaluation of special educators. First, the progress that special education students make toward grade level measures—especially

on high stakes, one time tests—may not accurately identify the actual gains that students have made, either toward grade level standards or IEP goals (Burdette, 2011; Buzick & Cahalan-Latius, 2010, Werger & Aldinger, 1987). In addition, these scholars have raised concerns about the appropriateness of attributing student gains, or lack thereof, solely to a special educator if a student is served in any setting other than a self-contained classroom. That is, multiple professionals in addition to the special educator (general education teachers, related service providers, etc.) may have an impact on the progress made by a student (Burdette, 2011; Werger & Aldinger, 1987). This problem is exacerbated in co-teaching situations where it may be difficult for an evaluator to accurately attribute student gains to either the special or general education teacher (Salend, Gordon, & Lopez-Vona, 2002; Wilson, 2005).

The topic of including student outcomes in evaluations was also addressed in the Holdhiede et al. study referenced previously (2010) in which a majority of the respondents (60.4%) believed that student data should be included in the evaluations of special educators, and of this group, most (73.3%) supported the use of IEP goals as a student achievement measure, although a small number (20.8%) believed standardized test scores should be included.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This exploratory study was a qualitative inquiry that utilized focus groups to identify the perceptions of three categories of stakeholders about the possibility of documenting best practices in special education when using a standard teacher performance rubric. The choice of this approach reflected the researcher's application of a major tenet of the critical theoretical tradition: that "knowledge emerges in dialectic relationships. Rather than the voice of one authority, meaning is made as a product of dialogue between and among individuals" (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 209).

Rationale for a Qualitative Research Design

A qualitative research design was well-suited to this exploratory study because the inductive and interactive characteristics of qualitative methods (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, Lichtman, 2006;) facilitated the identification of emergent themes and the development of potentially new knowledge: in this case, the practical implementation issues associated with using a standard rubric for evaluating teachers other than general educators. In addition, qualitative research can "make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Denzen and Lincoln, 1994, p. 2). Therefore, using a qualitative approach supported securing robust answers to the research questions by capturing not only the detailed opinions and perspectives from the focus group participants, but also by giving "voice" to and elucidating the values and personal experiences that informed their judgments about the rubric. Finally, a qualitative inquiry

provided a powerful vehicle for examining taken-for-granted images and for envisioning alternatives beyond the *status quo* (Gitlin, 2005), a central tenet of the critical paradigm.

Rationale for Use of Focus Groups

The researcher selected a semi-structured focus group protocol using open-ended questions because such groups encourage a synergy among participants that results in more richly textured and nuanced data than may be obtainable from surveys, single participant interviews, or open-ended questionnaires (Morgan, 1996). Focus groups "bring together attitudes, opinions, and experiences in an effort to find out not only what participants think about an issue but also how they think about it and why they think the way they do" (Morgan, 1997, p. 20). That is, focus groups elucidate the normative understandings that participants draw on to reach the collective judgment whereby individuals accept or reject other's ideas (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas, & Robson, 2001).

These characteristics of focus groups are especially relevant to this exploratory study because the research questions not only suggest the need to unpack the norms embedded within the rubric but also call for the participants to reveal the theoretical and practical values from their lived experiences that constitute the particular lenses through which they view the rubric. "The situation of the focus group, in principle and with a fair wind, can provide the occasion and the stimulus for collectivity members to articulate those normally unarticulated normative assumptions" (Bloor et al., 2001, p. 5).

Finally, focus groups facilitate answering Research Question 3 about potential differences among the stakeholder categories. Morgan (1997) indicates that consensus of perspectives is best secured (if not solely available) through intra-group interaction, "the way that participants respond to each other: providing agreement and disagreement,

asking questions and giving answers" (p. 20).which he calls the "sharing and comparing" advantage of focus groups (p. 21).

Approval to Conduct Research

This research inquiry complied with all requirements enumerated in the *Procedures for Research Involving Human Participants* (University of Northern Colorado, 2009). An exempt application was submitted because the research involved adult volunteers and the nature of the inquiry did "not propose to disrupt or manipulate participants' normal life experiences, or incorporate any form of intrusive procedures" (p. 10). This application was approved on August 29, 2012 (Appendix B). No additional applications to institutional review boards of school districts, colleges/universities, or state agencies were necessary because the adult subjects would be participating in a volunteer capacity independent of their corporate or institutional affiliation.

Finally, no institutional review board approval was required from the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) because this study was neither sponsored nor endorsed by the Department and because the draft edition of the *Rubric for Evaluating Colorado's Teachers* (CDE, 2012) was in the public domain.

Focus Group Procedures

Number of Groups

Morgan (1997) advises researchers who use the focus group methodology that there is no prescribed number of groups to be used universally in every research design. Rather, the appropriate number of groups depends on the number of dimensions against which participant opinions will be examined for differences; that is, the number of focus groups needed will increase as the dimensions increase (Morgan, 1998). For example, a

greater number of focus groups will be needed if opinions will be examined on the basis of gender, place of residence, annual income, etc., than if the only dimension of interest is gender. This research study included only one dimension of interest: the professional role of the participant.

The number of focus groups also depends on reaching saturation, the point at which the researcher determines that participants' responses are yielding no additional insights. Therefore, although an initial set of three groups for each participant category was planned and meeting space reserved, saturation was reached after two groups in each category had met. Therefore, the third and last group planned for each category was not held.

Size and Composition of Groups

Each focus group consisted of between four and six individuals because Morgan (1998) suggests using groups of no more than six participants when the topic is complex, the participants are experts about the topic, and the goal is to solicit in-depth opinions and detailed rationales for the opinions. The groups were purposefully structured to be homogeneous with all individuals in a group belonging to the same functional category (e.g., principal) to facilitate answering Research Question 3 which calls for comparisons among groups. Furthermore, heterogeneity in a focus group can negatively impact the authenticity of the discussions because it may "affect adversely a member's willingness, confidence, or comfort to express their viewpoints" (Onwuengbuzie, Dickinson, Leech, & Zoran, 2009, p. 10).

Identification and Recruitment
of Potential Participants

Sampling technique. Purposive sampling (Strauss, 1987) was used to identify

potential participants for each focus group category. This sampling technique selects

persons or cases according to the needs of the study; that is, because they have specific

characteristics, knowledge, or experience that is directly relevant to the research data

being sought (Morse, 2003). In the case of this exploratory inquiry, the sole criterion

considered in identifying potential participants was their professional role (e.g., special

education teacher). Although meeting this criterion necessarily derived from an

individual's employment within a specific educational entity (e.g., school X or school

district Y), participants were considered only to represent their functional category, not

their respective employing organizations.

Recruitment process. The recruitment area was limited to the Colorado Front

Range—i.e., the Colorado Department of Education-defined North Central, Metro, and

Pikes Peak regions—for several reasons. First, according to a report by Reichardt (2003),

over three-quarters of Colorado teachers and principals were employed in these three

geographic areas. Although the report did not contain geographically disaggregated data

about special education teachers, it is not unreasonable to assume an analogous

distribution. Further, this area contains nine of the 11 public or private Colorado colleges

and universities whose faculty prepare students to obtain the Colorado Special Education

Generalist license. Therefore, it appeared that the potential pool from which to recruit

participants would be sufficiently large. In addition, if the focus groups were conducted

in the Denver Metro area, participants would not be unduly burdened with regard to

travel time and/or travel costs.

A master list of potential participants was compiled from a variety of sources: (a) from personnel lists in state agency and school district directories; (b) from staff directories on individual school websites; (c) through a presentation and request for participation at the Colorado Council for Exceptional Children Board meeting on September 22, 2012; (d) through inclusion of requests for participation on the agendas of higher education faculty meetings; and (e) from lists of recent graduates from programs in special education and educational leadership at the University of Northern Colorado.

Personal phone calls were made to individuals so identified and a formal invitation (Appendix C), including the *Consent Form for Human Participation in Research* (Appendix D) were emailed to those persons who expressed possible interest in participating during the phone call. The invitation included directions to log on to the *Survey Monkey™* website in order to choose the focus group date on which they would be available (Appendix E). Participants were also informed that a $15 Visa card would be provided to help defray travel expenses.

Confidentiality

The *Consent Form for Human Participation in Research* contained a guarantee of confidentiality, stating that participants were representatives only of their professional roles. That is, they would not be considered representatives of their organization, no organization-specific affiliations would be disclosed during the focus group; and no references to their organization would be made in the final report. This guarantee of confidentiality was intended to preclude (to the extent possible) any potential reluctance on the part of a participant to engage robustly in the focus group discussion. Neither the participants' names nor organizational affiliations were used to identify their comments

during the focus group discussions. Rather, each participant was assigned a numeric identifier at the beginning of the focus group. On the rare occasions (seven occurrences during 21 hours of discussion) when a participant inadvertently made an allusion to an identifiable school or district, this information was redacted from the record.

Pilot Focus Group

Prior to convening the first focus group, a simulated focus group was held to pilot the discussion format, protocols, and guiding questions developed by the researcher. Two individuals representing each participant category comprised the pilot group. These individuals were invited to the pilot simulation based on the researcher's personal knowledge of their expertise. All pilot participants had over 10 years' experience in education and a median of 6.5 years in their current roles. None of these individuals were subsequently recruited to participate in the actual focus groups because the authenticity of their dialogue at a later date could have been compromised by their participation in the pilot exercise.

At the conclusion of the simulated focus group, these volunteers debriefed with the researcher to offer recommendations about the discussion protocol and the guiding questions. They suggested that each focus group should begin with a brain-storming session about best practices in special education to set the tone for the remaining discussion. Further, they recommended that the contents of the rubric should be approached in "bits and pieces;" that is, the elements within each standard should be addressed one-at-a-time rather than approaching each standard as a unit. They also suggested that, before each element was discussed, time be provided for participants to review the element and to take notes. Finally, they recommended that, rather than using

the very broad Research Questions 1 and 2 to guide the focus group discussions, the researcher should develop more explicit and detailed discussion questions that clarified the intent of the research questions. They worked with the researcher to develop the final set of six focus group discussion questions. These questions and their relationship to Research Questions 1 and 2 are displayed in Figure 1.

The pilot group participants were also asked to evaluate whether or not the researcher had exhibited any positive or negative bias in her role as moderator. The pilot group participants agreed that the researcher functioned in a neutral capacity.

Conducting the Focus Groups

Schedule, location, and duration. The focus groups were held on various Saturday mornings during the period from September 15 through November 17, 2012. They occurred on neutral territory, namely rented meeting rooms in a Denver metro area hotel, to minimize any potential tentativeness about engaging robustly in the discussions if the groups were conducted in a facility associated with a school district or state agency. The focus groups began at 9:00 a.m. and concluded at 12:30 p.m., for a total duration of three-and-one-half hours. An assistant was stationed in the meeting room to deal with logistics (e.g., directions to restrooms, refilling water pitchers, etc.) thereby eliminating the need for the researcher to interrupt the discussions if such needs arose. The assistant signed a confidentiality agreement (Appendix F).

Discussion tool and supporting materials. Participants received a copy of the August 2012 draft edition of *The Rubric for Evaluating Colorado Teacher Effectiveness* (CDE, 2012) by email one week prior to the focus group. They were instructed to become familiar with the format and contents of the rubric but no additional information, such as

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RESEARCH QUESTION 1

In the judgment of special education teachers, principals, and special education leaders, can best practices for students with specific learning disabilities and/or emotional/behavioral disorders be documented using the indicators in the August 2012 draft edition of the *Rubric for Evaluating Colorado's Teachers*? Are there any best practices which cannot be documented using these indicators?

FOCUS GROUP QUESTION1

What specific best practices for students with SLD and/or E/BD which relate to this element can be documented using the indicators? Please be specific about both the best practice and the indicator.

FOCUS GROUP QUESTION2

What specific best practices for students with SLD and/or E/BD which relate to this element cannot be documented using the indicators?

RESEARCH QUESTION 2

In the judgment of special education teachers, principals, and special education leaders, can best practices for students with specific learning disabilities and/or emotional/behavioral disorders be documented using the indicators in the August 2012 draft edition of the *Rubric for Evaluating Colorado's Teachers*? Are there any best practices which cannot be documented using these indicators?

FOCUS GROUP QUESTION 3

Are there any indicators in this element that would require that evaluator to have in-depth background knowledge about special education programming to document best practices for students with SLD and/or E/BD?

FOCUS GROUP QUESTION 4

Are there any indicators in this element that would require that evaluator to have in-depth knowledge of the individual IEPs to document best for students with SLD and/or E/BD?

FOCUS GROUP QUESTION 5

Are there any indicators in this element that would require the evaluator to make substantial inference or interpretation in order to document best practices for students with SLD or E/BD?

FOCUS GROUP QUESTION 6

Are there any indicators in this element about which you have a particular concern?

Figure 1. Relationship between Research Questions and Focus Group Questions

the questions to be used to guide the focus groups, was provided to preclude advance preparation of responses (i.e., "reporting out" rather than engaging in the discussion spontaneously and organically). Potential participants were explicitly informed that this study was independent dissertation research and was neither sponsored nor endorsed by the Colorado Department of Education. The rubric would be used solely as a tool to facilitate discussion and participants would not be asked to provide input about or suggest changes to the rubric.

      Discussion format and protocol. A semi-structured discussion format was selected for this study to encourage maximum freedom of ideas and interaction among the participants, while nonetheless maintaining focus on the research questions (Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008). The degree of structure imposed on a focus group determines the level of involvement by the moderator (Krueger, 1998). For these semi-structured focus groups, the researcher served as an active moderator to keep the discussions within the parameters needed to address the research questions, but with a minimal level of intrusion into the conversational dynamics (Kreuger, 1998). The researcher did not stop dialogues that strayed into areas unrelated to the research questions (e.g. the adequacy of special education teacher training), but rather asked the participants to finish their exchange and then re-directed the discussion back to the focus group questions. The moderator asked follow-up questions only if needed for clarification.

      A consistent script (Appendix G) was used to establish the norms for the focus group and to ensure that the same guiding questions were used with each group. Morgan

(1997) recommends that such standardization is especially important when making comparisons across groups, a requirement for answering Research Question 3**.**

Data Collection

Contact and demographic information. When participants arrived at the focus group site they were asked to complete a short contact information form for use by the researcher to secure clarifying follow-up information, if necessary, as well as a short demographic questionnaire. Demographic information consisted of general information that the researcher believed *a priori* might be important in understanding and interpreting the study results, especially differences among the groups (e.g., years of teaching experience). The questionnaire is included as Appendix H.

Information from researcher field notes. The researcher kept field notes during each of the focus groups to record any initial impressions of key concepts that appeared to be emerging, any probes that were needed, and notations of any particular patterns of conversational dynamics. The researcher's field notes became an integral part of the data to be analyzed.

Information from participant discussions. Focus group discussions were recorded digitally to create a complete archive for analysis without requiring the researcher to take verbatim notes. Two audio-recording systems were used to provide redundancy in the event of technical problems. The 21 hours of recorded discussion were transcribed by an independent third-party specializing in transcription services who signed a the same confidentiality agreement as the assistant (Appendix F). The audio files and transcripts were stored in a locked file cabinet and will be kept for three years. Only the researcher will have access to these materials.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted as an iterative process of examining and re-examining both the transcripts and the researcher's notes from the focus group sessions in order to develop increasingly deeper concepts and their interrelationships (Merriam, 1998).

Transcript Verification

The researcher carefully read each transcript while listening to the digital recording to ensure completeness and to verify that the transcriptionist had made no errors. Reviewing the transcripts also provided an opportunity for the researcher to refamiliarize herself with the tenor and content of each group before undertaking the coding phase (Bloor et al., 2001).

Determining the Unit of Analysis

The first consideration in any qualitative inquiry is to determine the unit of analysis: "the level of abstraction at which you look for variability . . . the level at which you synthesize and compare data" (Guest, Namey, & Mitchell, 2013, p. 26). In qualitative research, the unit of analysis is usually an individual but it can be a group. Morgan (1996) recommends that the unit of analysis for focus groups should be the group itself because, unlike an individual interview where a participant's responses are not affected by others, each focus group participants' opinions are part of a larger conversational dynamic. Using the focus group as the unit of analysis, the researcher looked for the opinions of the group as a whole. However, she also followed the advice offered by Morgan (1997) to be aware of individual participant statements because discrepant opinions form a type of negative case.

Data Preparation

Transcripts were reviewed to identify any dialogues or single participant comments that unequivocally were not relevant to the study, such as commentary about the state legislative process (Bloor et al., 2001). These data were redacted from the transcripts before coding was undertaken, but were maintained in a separate file for peer review to confirm the appropriateness of their removal and to maintain a complete archive.

In light of the amount of data contained in the transcripts, manual coding would have been time-prohibitive and prone to error and omission. Therefore, the transcripts were upload to the *NVivo10™* computer software package for data management, coding, and generation of reports.

Coding the Transcripts

Codes provide an organizing structure for large amounts of data such as focus group transcripts. Several coding options are available to a qualitative researcher, the most common of which are the use of a pre-determined list of codes developed from the literature or open-ended coding in which a new code is created each time a new thematic concept emerges in a transcript (Strauss, 1987).

The researcher used line-by-line, open-ended coding and a constant comparison technique (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to reduce the large amount of the textual data in the transcripts. To the greatest extent possible, the codes were developed *in vivo*, using the words of the participants rather than researcher paraphrases (Strauss, 1987). The constant comparison technique was particularly well-suited because the study involved the analysis of multiple groups (Onwuengbuzie et al., 2009).

Although the transcripts were examined one line at a time, the smallest unit of text coded was considered to be a completed dialogue. The researcher made this coding decision to ensure that the textual units to be coded kept participant perceptions in context (Bloor et al., 2001). Therefore, textual units ranged from a few lines to several paragraphs of dialogue.

LeCompte (2000) suggests that coding should be driven by the purposes of the particular study and the specific research questions. Therefore, three codes were assigned to each dialogic textual unit: (a) the relevant portion of the rubric to which the statement(s) referred; (b) the focus group question which was answered by the dialogue; and (c) the unique thematic concept in the textual unit (Figure 2).

A code book was maintained as recommended by Merriam (1998) and updated when each successive transcript was coded. In addition, whenever a new thematic concept was mentioned, the researcher recursively reviewed all previously coded transcripts to verify that the concept had not been overlooked earlier and/or to refine the codes (e.g., disaggregating an original code, "training" into "principal training" and "teacher preparation" after the second transcript). Saturation, when no new thematic concepts emerged, was reached after coding the fourth transcript.

Peer Review

The researcher was the sole investigator for this study. Therefore, no co-researcher or research team existed to conduct concurrent review of the data reduction and interpretation steps. Instead, the researcher enlisted a special education expert who holds a doctorate in special education and serves as a faculty member and center program director at a major university in a neighboring state. She was not familiar with the

TEXTUAL UNIT FROM TRANSCRIPT

And I think that such a huge part of special education is that it is not one year's growth in one year. You have to have more than that. And how do I know that the materials that the teacher is using and the strategies that they are using are sufficient to do that? I feel that would – you would need special education knowledge to determine that. (Participant 21, Focus Group P-1)

LOCATION ON RUBRIC

Standard I: Element B

The Teacher: Provides literacy instruction that is: needs-based, intensive, of sufficient duration to accelerate learning.

FOCUS GROUP QUESTION

Are there any indicators in this element that would require that evaluator to have in-depth background knowledge about special education programming to document best practices for students with specific learning disabilities and/or emotional/behavioral disorders?

THEMATIC CONCEPT

Special Education Curricula

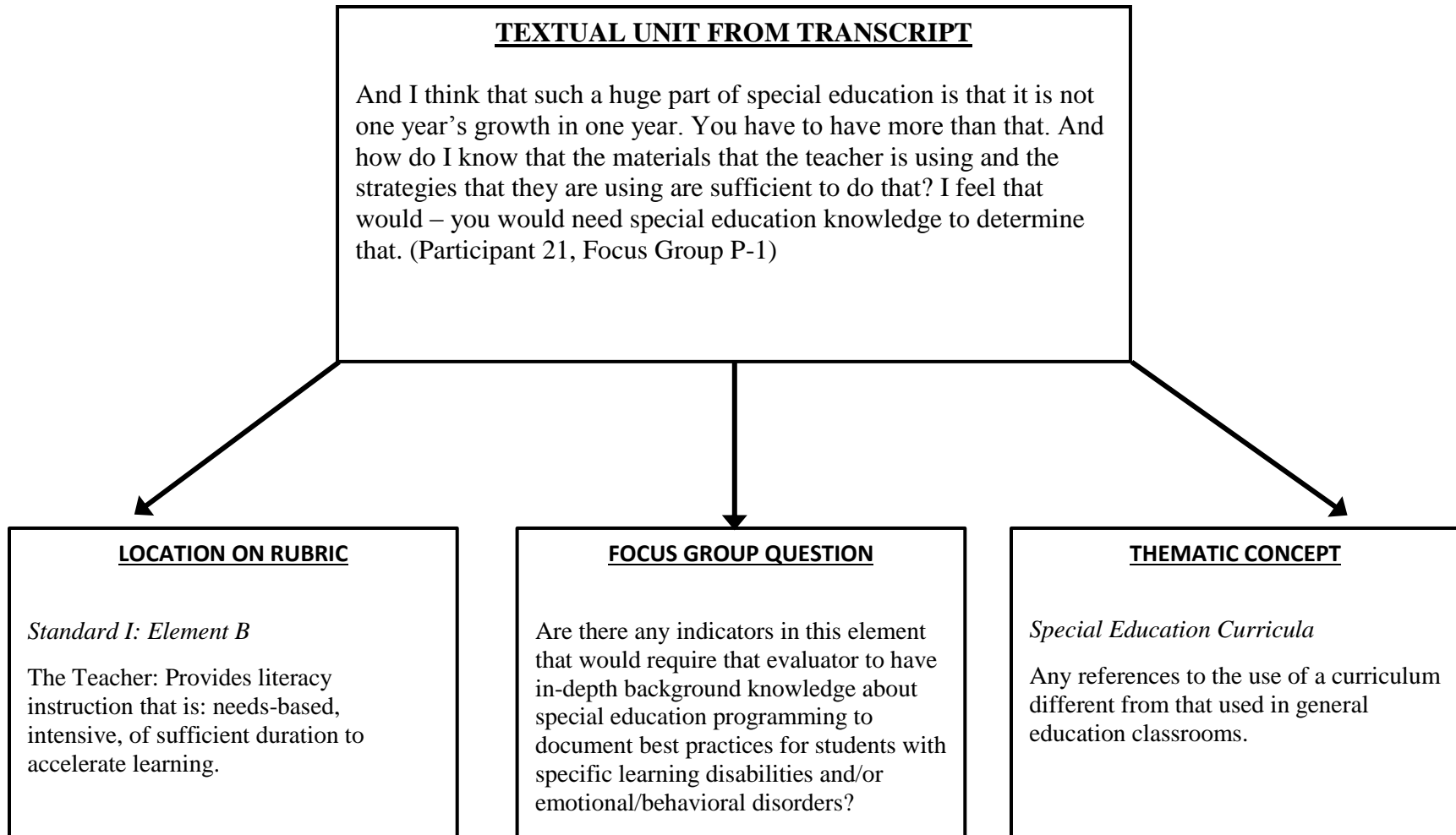Any references to the use of a curriculum different from that used in general education classrooms.

Figure 2: Three Dimensional Coding Scheme

Colorado rubric and, therefore, did not bring a preconceived perspective about the ideas discussed by the participants to the peer review.

The peer reviewer performed several activities: (a) review of the entire file of redacted text to ensure that all deletions from the transcript were justified; (b) review of a transcript to determine agreement or disagreement with the researcher's coding for place on the rubric; and (c) review of a transcript to determine agreement or disagreement with the researcher's categorical coding.

Member Checking

Upon completion of the coding, the set of thematic concepts for each focus group was retrieved using *Nvivo10*™ Report Builder and used to develop a questionnaire in *Survey Monkey*™. Members were contacted by email and asked to log onto the *Survey Monkey* ™ website where they could respond that the set of emergent themes was an accurate representation of their particular groups' perceptions and opinions or indicate topics to be added or deleted (Appendix I).

<div align="center">

Reporting Results

</div>

The results of the analysis were reported by Research Question within each section of the rubric. A robust and in-depth narrative was prepared not only to report the participants' perceptions of the rubric indicators in the context of special education best practices, but also to identify the major themes that emerged from each of the three participant categories, including any patterns within and/or between the groups. Consistent with the researcher's critical lens, extensive verbatim comments from the participants were included to ensure authentic voicing of their values, assumptions, and norms and to add richness and depth of meaning to the identified themes.

Analytic and Interpretive Rigor

"The applied nature of educational inquiry thus makes it imperative that researchers and others have confidence in the conduct of the investigation and in the results of any particular study" (Merriam, 1998, p. 199). Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that to engender such confidence in others, researchers must demonstrate that their methods and findings are trustworthy. They suggest four criteria for determining trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability. Steps taken by the researcher to meet these criteria are summarized in Figure 3 and described below.

Table 1

Summary of Actions Performed to Ensure Rigor

	Measures of Rigor			
Actions	Credibility	Transferability	Dependability	Confirmability
Triangulation	●		●	
Peer Review	●		●	●
Member Check	●			●
Negative Case	●			
Purposive Sampling	●	●		
Thick description		●	●	●
In vivo coding		●		●
Audit trail			●	

Credibility

Credibility is analogous to internal validity in quantitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Merriam (1998) defines credibility as the degree to which "the research findings match reality . . . Do the findings capture what is really there?"(p. 201). In order to meet the credibility criterion, the researcher took steps recommended by Creswell and Miller (2000). Data could be triangulated because six focus groups provided multiple

sources from which to collect data. In addition, multiple sources were available for triangulation because the data analyzed included transcripts, field notes, and memos.

Purposive sampling permitted identification of individuals who were knowledgeable and experienced in their professional roles and, therefore, able to speak authentically. Disconfirming evidence, also known as a negative case (Lincoln & Guba, 1986**),** was included by not eliminating any dissenting views from the transcripts. Member checking—"the process of continuous informal testing of information by soliciting reactions of respondents to the investigator's reconstruction of what he or she has been told" (Lincoln & Guba, 1986, p. 19)—was conducted by sending participants a summary of the themes and best practices that emerged in their respective groups and providing an opportunity for them to add or delete any information. Peer review was conducted by a disinterested professional peer (Lincoln & Guba, 1986), namely a faculty member from an out-of-state university with no involvement in this study but who holds a doctorate in special education.

Transferability

Transferability is analogous to external validity in quantitative research and is "the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations" (Merriam, 1998**,** p. 207). In order to meet the transferability criterion, the researcher took the following steps recommended by numerous scholars (Creswell & Miller, 2001; Lincoln & Guba, 1986; Merriam, 1998; Morgan, 1998). Thick rich description provided enough detail "so that judgments about the degree of fit or similarity may be made by others who may wish to apply all or part of the findings elsewhere (Lincoln & Guba, 1986) and was accomplished in this study by providing extensive quotes from the

participants. Explicit statement of the criteria used in the purposive sampling contributed to transferability by allowing potential users of this research to determine whether the participants were similar to their situations and, thus, how well the research would apply to their context or problem.

Dependability

Dependability is not completely analogous to reliability in quantitative research because it does not presume replicability. "[R]ather than demanding that outsiders get the same results, a researcher wishes outsiders to concur that, given the data collected, the results make sense" (Merriam, p. 206). The researcher met the dependability criterion by performing triangulation as described above and by developing an audit trail of every decision made about the data, including keeping memos and developing a codebook. In addition, the researcher was able to comply with 28 of the 32 recommendations in the *Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research (COREQ)* (Tong, Sainsbury and Craig, 2007) in order to provide a think, rich description..

Confirmability

Confirmability is the degree to which the research has been conducted objectively, "establishing the fact that the data and interpretations of an inquiry were not merely figments of the inquirer's imagination. It call[s] for linking assertions, findings, interpretations and so on to the data in readily discernible ways" (Schwandt, 2001, p. 259). The researcher met this criterion by coding *in vivo* and, therefore, minimizing researcher bias in developing the codes. Both member checking and peer review validated that the coding was performed objectively. Finally, when reporting results, the

researcher provided detailed quotations from participants to ensure that the conclusions

were authentic reflections of the participants' perspectives.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to solicit the perceptions of special education

teachers, principals, and special education experts about using a standard teacher

performance rubric to document the use of special education best practices. This chapter

provides detailed findings from six focus groups convened by the researcher to obtain

answers to the following research questions:

Q1 In the judgment of principals, teachers, and special education leaders, do the indicators in the *Rubric for Evaluating Colorado's Teachers* capture the full range of best practices in special education? If not, what aspect of best practices in special education is omitted?

Q2 In the judgment of principals, teachers, and special education leaders, what indicators, if any, in the *Rubric for Evaluating Colorado's Teachers* are confusing or require substantial inference or interpretation?

Q3 What differences, if any, exist among the judgments of principals, teachers, and special education leaders about the *Rubric for Evaluating Colorado's Teachers?*

As a result of recommendations from a pilot of the focus group protocol, six focus group

questions were developed to facilitate participant response to the broader research

questions (Chapter III, Figure 2).

Data Sources

The data for analysis and interpretation were collected from focus group

discussions and researcher field notes. Twenty-three educational practitioners

participated in six focus groups, with two groups each representing special education teachers, principals, and special education experts (i.e., special education directors and special education faculty). The participants' total experience in educational roles ranged from less than one year to 38 years, with a median of 14 years and in their current role from less than one year to 30 years, with a median of 8 years. Although participants were not selected on the basis of their organizational affiliations, diversity existed in the focus groups because they represented 11 school districts and two universities that prepare pre-service teachers. Participant demographic information is displayed in Figure 4.

The researcher kept contemporaneous field notes during each of the focus groups to record any initial impressions of key concepts that appeared to be emerging and notations of any particular patterns of conversational dynamics. A total of twenty two pages of field notes became an integral part of the data to be analyzed.

Data Reduction and Analysis

Data reduction and analysis were conducted as an iterative process of examining and re-examining both the transcripts and the researcher's field notes in order to develop increasingly deeper concepts and their interrelationships (Merriam, 1998).

The focus groups provided 21 hours of digitally recorded discussions which, when transcribed by an independent third party, produced 9, 612 lines of text. The transcripts were upload to the *NVivo10*™ computer software package for data management, coding, and generation of reports.

Coding

As indicated in Chapter III, the researcher employed an open-ended constant comparison coding technique (Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to examine each

Table 2

Participant Demographics

Focus Group	Member number	Role	Gender	Highest degree	District size	School size	Total years education	Total years current role
T-1	1	SPED Teacher	Female	MA	1,201-6,000	200-299	6	4
	2	SPED Teacher	Female	MA	601-1,200	400-499	.5	.5
	3	SPED Teacher	Female	BA	25,001 or more	600-699	3	3
T-2	12	SPED Teacher	Male	BA	6,001-25,000	600-699	5	5
	13	SPED Teacher	Female	MA	6,001-25,000	100-199	10	4
	14	SPED Teacher	Female	MA	25,001 or more	300-399	27	27
	15	SPED Teacher	Female	MA	6,001-25,000	600-699	4	4
	16	SPED Teacher	Female	MA	25,001 or more	400-500	8	8
	17	SPED Teacher	Female	MA	6,001-25,000	300-399	14	11
SE-1	4	SPED Expert-District	Male	PhD	6,001-25,000	NA	20	11
	5	SPED Expert-District	Male	MA	25,001 or more	NA	34	15
	6	SPED Expert-Faculty	Female	PhD	NA	NA	18	7
	7	SPED Expert-Faculty	Male	PhD	NA	NA	39	27
SE-2	8	SPED Expert-Faculty	Female	PhD	NA	NA	14	10
	9	SPED Expert-District	Female	EdS	25,001 or more	NA	33	10
	10	SPED Expert-District	Female	MA	1,201-6,000	NA	28	12
P-1	18	Principal/AP	Male	PhD	25,001 or more	500-599	18	11
	19	Principal/AP	Male	MA	25,001 or more	1,000 or more	10	5
	20	Principal/AP	Female	MA	25,001 or more	1,000 or more	36	30
	21	Principal/AP	Female	PhD	25,001 or more	500-599	14	8
P-2	22	Principal/AP	Female	MA	25,001 or more	400-499	16	6
	23	Principal/AP	Male	MA	25,001 or more	600-699	10	1
	24	Principal/AP	Female	MA	25,001 or more	1,000 or more	12	.5

transcript on a line-by-line basis. To the greatest extent possible, the codes were developed *in vivo*, using the words of the participants rather than researcher paraphrases. A unit of text to be coded was defined as being a completed dialogue about a single concept and these units ranged from a few lines to multiple paragraphs of dialogue. Each transcript contained over 100 textual units for each coding dimension (i.e., place on rubric, focus group question answered, and thematic concept). After each transcript was coded, previous transcripts were reviewed to determine if the new codes identified in the latest transcript had occurred previously and/or would suggest further refinement of an existing code. This process resulted in development of 64 initial conceptual codes, with saturation reached upon completion of coding the fourth transcript. Between the first and second transcript, 26 new concepts were identified, but only 15 emerged between the second and third, 6 between the third and fourth, and 0 between the fourth and fifth.

The researcher then compared, refined, and reduced the initial compilation of conceptual codes into a final set of 31 codes for analysis. A codebook which included definitions for every code was developed to serve as a reference for the both the researcher during the analysis and for use in peer review and member checking.

In addition to the conceptual code assigned to each unit of text, a code was also assigned to identify the relevant portion of the rubric to which the statement(s) referred and the focus group question which was answered by the dialogue. (as described previously in Chapter III, Figure 2). Finally, text which the researcher determined to be irrelevant to the research questions was redacted, but kept in a separate file to maintain the integrity of the total data set.

Member Checking

After the final coding categories were identified, members of each focus group were asked to review the set of codes and list of best practices developed in their respective focus group and to provide feedback via *Survey Monkey*™. Twelve participants replied for a 52% response rate, with at least one member of each focus group completing this member check. All respondents (100%) concurred with the statement "I agree that this list of major topics accurately reflects our focus group discussion." Similarly, 100% responded "Yes" to the statement "I agree that this list of best practices accurately reflects our focus group discussion." Four respondents each suggested one addition to the list of topics. These additions were: (a) culturally responsive special education and ethnic disproportionality; (b) aligning assessment with the Common Core; (c) student performance measures for Response to Intervention; and (d) potential negative impacts of school reform, especially on special education. These responses were reviewed by the researcher for relevance to the research questions and taken into consideration during the final analysis of the data.

Peer Review

A peer review was performed by a faculty member from an out-of-state university who holds a doctorate in special education. First, she conducted a review of data redacted from all the transcripts to confirm that these data were not relevant to the analysis and reached a 99% agreement with the researcher. In addition, she examined one complete transcript to determine if she agreed with the researcher's coding. After reviewing 1,465 lines of text in this transcript, with 107 dialogic units about the focus group questions and

132 dialogic units about the conceptual codes, she was in 92% agreement about the focus groups questions and 93% agreement about the conceptual codes.

Mitigation of Researcher Bias

Any research enterprise is conceived of, designed, and influenced analytically and/or interpretively by the researcher's experiences. However, to achieve rigor and trustworthiness of the research results, explicit efforts must be made to mitigate these influences whenever they may introduce bias. During the prior 15 years as an educational practitioner, the researcher has been a special education teacher, an assistant principal, and an adjunct faculty at two Colorado higher education institutions. Therefore, the researcher's experiences as both a special education professional and as an educational leader had a not-unexpected influence on identification of the problem to be investigated and on development of the specific research questions.

One might argue that the researcher, having served in all three capacities represented in the focus groups, would not be biased toward any particular participant category. On the other hand, based on positive or negative experiences in a particular role, the potential for a preferential orientation toward one participant group over another (e.g., special education teachers over principals) might exist. Therefore, proactive steps were taken to mitigate this latter possibility by using an identical discussion protocol for each focus group and by minimizing the moderator's involvement in the discussion. Further, as stated previously, the peer review and member checking provided third-party perspectives about the analysis.

Reporting Structure

Study findings traditionally are organized and reported by research question. However, for this study, the researcher chose to use the format of the rubric as the main organizing structure because examining each element in the rubric evoked responses to *both* research questions. For example, participants may have felt that some indicators within an element could document best practices (Research Question 1) but that other indicators within this same element might require interpretation (Research Question 2). As a result of using the rubric format as the organizing structure, the reader will have a simultaneous and integrated sense of all the considerations related to a particular element. The results of this process are contained in the section below entitled "Findings in Response to Research Questions 1 and 2."

A second review of the participant responses to each focus group question was arrayed by rubric element to determine if there were any significant differences among the three participant categories. The results of this analysis are contained in the section below entitled "Findings in Response to Research Question 3."

**Findings in Response to Research Question 1
and Research Question 2**

The draft edition *Rubric for Evaluating Colorado's Teachers* (Colorado Department of Education [CDE], 2012) provides the criteria for rating teacher performance by defining five teacher quality standards that "outline the knowledge and skills required of an effective teacher" (Colorado Board of Education, 2011, p. 1). These standards are provided in Figure 5. Elements within each standard describe the knowledge and skills in greater detail. Indicators within each element are the specific teacher or student behaviors and actions that, if present, provide evidence that the

expected knowledge and/or skill related to that particular element are present. The

following analysis follows the format of the rubric and provides focus group participants'

perceptions about each element and its related indicators within the five teacher quality

standards.

Teacher Quality Standards	
Quality Standard I	Teachers demonstrate mastery of and pedagogical expertise in the content they teach. The elementary Teacher is an expert in literacy and mathematics and is knowledgeable in all other content that he or she teaches (e.g., science, social studies, arts, physical education, or world languages). The secondary Teacher has knowledge of literacy and mathematics and is an expert in his or her content endorsement area(s).
Quality Standard II	Teachers establish a safe, inclusive and respectful learning environment for a diverse population of students.
Quality Standard III	Teachers plan and deliver effective instruction and create an environment that facilitates learning for their students.
Quality Standard IV	Teachers reflect on their practice.
Quality Standard V	Teachers demonstrate leadership.

Figure 3. Teacher Quality Standards. Source: Colorado Department of Education. *Rubric for Evaluating Colorado's Teachers*, p.2-21. August 2012

The Rubric as a Whole

Research question 1. Only two focus groups (SE-1 and P-2) proposed that, for

the most part, the rubric overall could be used to document best practices in special

education. The special education experts felt that there was no need for a differentiated

rubric for special educators because each discipline has unique aspects and a well-trained

evaluator would be aware of the distinctions.

- I think it depends on the quality of the principal. Quality principals will get this, they will understand why you are having to use multiple strategies, why you are having to teach students where they are. They will understand the importance of progress monitoring. They won't have to ask those types of questions. . . . Good principals will understand this and will apply it and adapt to special educators.

−   And I would say if they don't, then they are the same principals that don't understand orchestra when the next day they go into electives. It is the same principle (Participants 4 and 5, Focus Group SE-1).

The principals suggested that, although it might be more difficult for special educators to demonstrate the behaviors in certain elements—due to the complexity of their job—an undifferentiated rubric should be used to raise expectations for special educators.

−   The indicators make sense. Indicators are user friendly for lack of better words. You know what I mean?
−   You are advocating for the indicators?
−   I am advocating for the indicators.
−   I need the tools to make sure they are doing a good job. And that includes for our SpEd teachers. They have such an important role (Participants 23 and 24, Focus Group P-2).

Although members of focus group SE-1 did acknowledge that there might be some elements or indicators which would require inference or interpretation, they proposed that a pre-conference between the evaluator and special educator would eliminate these concerns. Therefore, the undifferentiated rubric could be used.

Well again, the preconference. If that is at all possible in the world then some of those issues can be dealt with when you are talking—when the principal is talking to the teacher and the teacher says, "Well, I have got four kids in my classroom who are on IEPs and one of them you know can't stand yellow and you gotta to keep yellow out of the environment" and—you know whatever it might be so that—so the observation is more realistic. You wouldn't necessarily, going in, have to have particular information about kids' IEPs but the teacher could set that person [the evaluator] up for situations they might see in the classroom (Participant 7, Focus Group SE-1).

I really believe what we are talking about is the professionalism of the individuals and whatever role they have, not the problem with the student learning. So [conferencing is] being able to communicate that and know that and have the plan to know what you are teaching is what the administrator should be able to look at. And so it is in that conversation and in that discussion that we use this. That is what is intended and if it [the evaluation system] fails it isn't because of this rubric. It is because of the practitioners (Participant 5, Focus Group SE-1).

Despite the overall acceptability of the rubric to members of some focus groups,

both groups of principals (P-1 and P-2) felt that there are a few key special education best

practices that are omitted and cannot be documented anywhere on this rubric. The

primary omission mentioned by these two focus groups was the coordination and

oversight of the IEP process, including interpreting data and writing a legally defensible

IEP.

> I think one of the biggest things you could do in special education is not only
> collect the data, which I think this [the rubric] talked about in some ways,
> collecting student data and using it, but to be to able present it in meaningful
> ways, for instance in an IEP. And I don't think that is minor. I think if you cannot
> explain what the data is saying to a parent then you just wasted an hour long IEP
> meeting. So that was one that I didn't see in there. And then writing IEPs and the
> goals that go with them and getting all that done in a timely manner and making
> sure they are compliant and all of that whole ball of wax. I didn't see anything
> that would tie it to that and that is a huge part of their job (Participant 21, Focus
> Group P-1).

Principals in focus group P-2 felt that the oversight of the IEP process also includes

ensuring that all of the teachers who work with the student have received the appropriate

information to make the accommodations and modifications outlined in the IEP. These

principals felt that, if the rubric will be used to document best practices in special

education, it would need to contain an element which measured this responsibility.

> Do those [general education] teachers have knowledge of that IEP? Have they
> been given the IEP early in the year or do they not get it until November? And
> then we get into the fact that, if you don't know the IEP, are you giving the
> accommodations needed? That are not only needed, required and you know
> legally needed to be provided to the student (Participant 24, Focus Group P-2).

Principals in both focus groups P-1 and P-2 also felt that, although there are indicators

about communicating with families, these measures do not adequately reflect the type of

continual communication that special educators must have with parents of students with a

specific learning disability (SLD) or emotional/behavioral disability (E/BD). One

participant in focus group P-2 explained the importance of quality communication with

parents during the development of the IEP.

> When you are on the parental side of the IEP team that is always a great celebration of what your child can't do. When you go to those meetings and when they skip that step about what your child can do, that is painful for a parent because then they start with, "let me tell you how your child is not measuring up." So that is something that we talk about at our school—don't skip over that phase just because you don't have to base your goals on it. I know you want to get right to your goal page. You want to get to your minutes. You want to get to the test data. But don't forget this is a kid. This is a person and what does that child do that is successful? And then put out what your hopes and dreams are for the child (Participant 24, Focus Group P-2).

Principals in focus group P-1 also suggested that establishing positive relationships with

parents is a critical best practice in special education and, in order to document this, the

rubric needs to include additional indicators about how the special educator interacts with

parents during the IEP process.

> I don't know how to say this in a concise way but we kind of alluded to this earlier. These parents are the highest need parents in our entire building and you can have the best special education teacher in the world—they are in there changing these kids' lives for the better—but if they cannot handle those high needs parents, you will end up in a lawsuit. They won't win the lawsuit but you are going to have to waste all your time on dealing with this because they couldn't handle or collaborate with you to handle those people. I have seen the pieces of that—that ability to communicate with those parents clearly and without judgment and interacting with them with compassion. Not being swayed by pushy parents to do things for kids that are not appropriate to best practice for special needs students. And again like some of these things are issues for gen ed too, but just not to the same level at all. I mean you can have—you mess up on that and you could derail one kid's entire educational experience because you couldn't stand up to this parent. So those were the things I felt like were absolutely critical to a special education teacher being not only proficient but anything above that. And I didn't see any opportunities to talk about that (Participant 21, Focus Group P-1).

Finally, principals in P-1 felt that another aspect of managing the IEP process is to

appropriately identify and, when appropriate, exit students. Therefore, they felt that the

rubric needs to include specific indicators about using data to determine eligibility,

progress monitoring, and transition planning.

- But for me what I would like to see is something about exiting kids out. . . . Where is the work around like getting kids out? There is a ton of research that says there are way more kids who are disproportionally diagnosed. I am always wondering who in the system is supposed to get kids out who have been mislabeled? And when does that work happen? How can it happen? And I would love to see in the standard where it talks about diversity and inclusiveness and things like that just a charge for exiting students out of the program.
- And you know what is so hard about it? Of course they need the kids in there to have a job so it is such a, there's a conflict there of—but if I get all the kids out who shouldn't be in there am I gonna still have a job in this school? Because at least in our district you are staffed by the number of—you have a job because of the number of kids on IEPs in your school (Participants 19 and 21, Focus Group P-1).

Research question 2. Members of every focus group agreed that using this rubric

would require the evaluator to make at least some level of inference or interpretation and

discussed various considerations related to interpreting the rubric properly for special

education.

Principals in P-2 stressed that, in order to accurately document best practices in

special education, the evaluator must always use the IEP as a guide for interpretation.

This is a little bit of an analogy: when I was a general ed teacher and when we would work on writing prompts if the fourth and fifth graders, if they wrote a writing response that was off topic it was a zero. This reminds me of this situation where if they don't incorporate the IEP goals at all or that IEP is not considered, it is almost like it negates so much else [on the rubric]. I mean it does make the IEP, like we said before, so much more crucial. That is, if they don't start with the IEP for those kid's goals, then so much of these other things don't count as much (Participant 23, Focus Group P-2).

However, participants in two focus groups (T-2 and P-1) questioned whether an

administrator's schedule and workload could realistically accommodate a detailed review

of all the IEPs for students in their building.

It would be, I would think, practically impossible, and I have a really good principal. It would be impossible for her to have the kind of in-depth knowledge on every single element that she would have to have because she would have to know all thirty-six IEPs. She would have to know every special circumstance, every time I had a contact with the parent, every time I had a meeting, you know. And if she were going to interpret this in a way that would be fair, she would have to have that in-depth knowledge on all twenty-three pages [of the rubric] (Participant 17, Focus Group T-2).

Teachers in focus group T-1 felt that, if evaluators are interpreting the indicators about appropriate instruction as well as expected student behaviors, they would need to understand the wide range of abilities and needs, even within a single disability category.

I mean you get the E/BD kids who are also—I mean they can have really multiple disabilities because they get the low cognitive and E/BD and it is kind of a—I mean really lines cross. So that is when I said this [the rubric] really may not be accurate because it does not really fit for low cognitive students necessarily. We get some of our mild-moderate students who are so on the cusp of whether or not they need that self-contained more intensive environment or if they can really hang in a mild-moderate stetting. My support for those students compared to my student who needs a half hour a day of math, it is so different. But if you look at it [the rubric] with a really broad lens, just teaching best practices [overall] yeah, it's okay. You just have to hope and pray that your evaluator can do the same. That's what it comes down to (Participant 3, Focus Group T-1).

Teachers in focus group T-2 suggested that, in addition to the variety of student needs, evaluators also need to understand that providing special education services is a complex process and that, in order to document best practices, it might be helpful for evaluators to seek additional input when interpreting the rubric.

Our jobs are very, very complex, our students are complex, they need a lot, they have a lot of different service providers. So I guess I would put out there that our evaluation should be a collaboration between a [special education] director, a principal, our classroom teachers, and maybe even some input from our parents. The reason—I think it is the same way we evaluate our students on an IEP. We are asking for parent input, we are asking for teacher input, you know. Sometimes we get district level people involved with a high behavior kid because they are just that complex. It is just a thought. I don't know how it would look but it might be what would make more sense for [evaluating] our positions (Participant 16, Focus Group T-2).

However, special education experts in focus group SE-2 as well as principals in focus

group P-1 questioned whether it would be reasonable to expect this collaboration given

the limited opportunities for interaction between principals and special education

directors in many districts.

> We [special education directors] have almost no contact with principals. You know, I attend the design team which designs our principal meetings which are very limited. They are a half day a month and to get on the agenda is pretty difficult. So I think for our particular district there will have to be a sense of urgency created about this and then the district will figure out how to do it but there isn't a venue currently for us to do that (Participant 9, Focus Group SE-2).

> And then you think about the size of the school district. You know we have a director for special ed but when you have thirty some elementary schools and I lost track, eight or nine middle schools and six high schools, I mean how often are they going to be—if you even need a support person it might be three days to get a hold of them (Participant 20, Focus Group P-1).

Teachers in focus group T-2 and special education experts in SE-1 believed that

when applying any of the elements which address specific grade level expectations

evaluators must have a background in special education or knowledge of individual IEPs

in order to make the appropriate inferences about student performance. Therefore, it is

crucial for evaluators and teachers to conference and to discuss the needs of individual

students.

> I think one thing that's like beneficial that our principal does, and I don't know if this is standard across the nation, is that that preconference really becomes meaningful. . . . That would be my opportunity to go in and say, "Here is a copy of the IEP for each kid in that group, here are their goals, here is what it looks like for this student, here is what it looks like for that student." And really using that time to my advantage so that my administrator has the knowledge they need before they go in (Participant 12, Focus Group T-2).

> — The administrator really has to feel like he or she has the latitude to have those kinds of conversations where the teacher can say, "Well, this is why I am working on a third grade standard."
> — Exactly right.
> — So that would be a very important point in that whole process.

– Right. The evaluator has to truly understand that that is important, that that is key. And not go in and say you are teaching a third grade standard but these are fifth grade kids. You are doing something wrong. "Well, I am teaching the standard that is appropriate for them so they can get the fourth grade standard and fifth grade standard eventually but we are not there yet." You just have to have those honest conversations with the evaluators in that regard (Participants 4 and 7, Focus Group SE-1).

The special education experts in SE-2 and teachers in T-2 indicated that, if evaluators need to have a special education background to accurately interpret any of the indicators in the rubric, they would need to receive high quality training from a special education expert. They also felt that it would be critical for the trainers to have had classroom experience in special education.

Making sure there are special ed teachers that are part of those [trainings] or you know special ed faculty. But emphasizing that they have had experience in the classroom. . . . If you have never been in the classroom you would say "yeah, this [rubric] makes sense." But, if you have been in the classroom, you can say this makes sense but let's make sure you do this [interpretation] (Participant 6, Focus Group SE-1).

And if as these principals or evaluators are being trained, you also have trainers who are special ed, that could help tremendously because there are a lot of people out there who have no clue what we do as special ed teachers and they don't want to know. Also, they are put into a position of evaluating and I think part of the training should have a special part for special ed. How to deal with them or how to deal with you know specials teachers or whatever. All different types of teachers. Not just the general ed (Participant 13, Focus Group T-2).

Teachers in focus group T-2 also believed that there were a number of places throughout the rubric where the expected student behaviors may be impacted by a student's disability and suggested two ways for evaluators to interpret these indicators in a consistent manner. The first suggestion was to not read the indicators literally, but to interpret the indicator phrase "Students will . . ." as "The teacher will support the students to . . ." or "The student will do this at their ability level."

> I really liked what you said about that, because in looking at and analyzing the last two columns [accomplished and exemplary], there is almost two things that we come up with that are key. One of them is that teachers support the students doing da, da, da, da, da and students will do this based on their abilities. So with those two little changes in there you could almost—you could almost use this rubric for special education (Participant 16, Focus Group T-2).

The other suggestion offered by the teachers in this focus group was to interpret the student behaviors from a growth perspective rather than applying them literally.

> So there are definitely some inherent issues in rating how your students perform—unless they change the wording. Unless they say "show growth." You know if we start talking about a growth model, yeah. Those low kids are absolutely showing growth. Let's look at where they started and where they ended instead of saying, you know, crazy things like exceeds expectations. Are the expectations the standards, because some of them are not going to exceed the standard (Participant 17, Focus Group T-2).

Standard I: Standard as a Whole

Standard one garnered a majority of the discussion for most of the focus groups, ranging from about a quarter to almost half of the total discussion in each group.

> Teachers demonstrate mastery of and pedagogical expertise in the content they teach. The elementary Teacher is an expert in literacy and mathematics and is knowledgeable in all other content that he or she teaches (e.g., science, social studies, arts, physical education, or world languages). The secondary Teacher has knowledge of literacy and mathematics and is an expert in his or her content endorsement area(s) (CDE, 2012, p. 2).

Participants did not comment on the standard as a whole, but rather addressed each element individually.

Standard I: Element A

Standard I: Element A - Teachers provide instruction that is aligned with the Colorado Academic Standards; their District's organized plan of instruction; and the individual needs of their students.	
Partially Proficient	The teacher: • Develops lesson plans based on: Colorado academic standards, district's plan of instruction, student needs
Proficient	The teacher: • Aligns instruction with: student learning objectives, district plan for instruction. Colorado Academic Standards, student need • Collaborates with other school staff to vertically and horizontally articulate the curriculum
Accomplished	Students: • Advance to the next level within the curriculum or next higher course in sequence • Interact with the rigorous and challenging content in meaningful ways
Exemplary	Students: • Discuss gaps in their learning with the teacher, families and significant adults

Figure 4. Standard I, Element A. Source: Colorado Department of Education. *Rubric for Evaluating Colorado's Teachers*, p.2. August 2012

Research question 1. All six focus groups indicated that there were portions of

this element which could be used to document best practices in special education, but

only one focus group (SE-2) expressed the belief that all of the indicators in this element

could be used without inference or interpretation. Members of this group believed that the

indicators, because they focused on aligning instruction to standards and individual

needs, were appropriate for special educators because this practice is required for the

development of standards-based IEPs.

> I think this is the IEP part and that it just adds another layer to this particular part of the evaluation because, you know, you start with the standards and then district expectations. And then you are looking at using the IEP to individualize that for kids. But all of those components need to be in there [the IEP]. So I do think this is probably the crux of where a special ed teacher will find the most connections (Participant 9, Focus Group SE-2).

In addition, participants in this group felt that the indicator "Collaborates with other

school staff to vertically and horizontally articulate the curriculum" (CDE, 2012, pg.2)

because was especially relevant because collaboration among the members of the IEP

team "is the crux of special education, so that one should be very easy for either a non-

special ed person or a special ed person to evaluate for that employee" (Participant 10, Focus Group SE-2).

However, members of other focus groups suggested that not all indicators could be used literally, although there were some parts of this element that were appropriate for documenting special education best practices. Three focus groups (T-1, SE-1, and P-2) felt that the indicatorx. "Students . . . interact with the rigorous and challenging content in meaningful ways" (CDE, 2012, p. 2) was appropriate because it ensures that special education students are being held to high expectations and being challenged.

> I really want to say focus on the word rigor, because I think sometimes with special ed you walk into rooms where rigor should be there too. Students [with disabilities] deserve rigor in that classroom but sometimes I think that is not what we look for (Participant 24, Focus Group P-2).

One participant in focus group T-1 felt that rigor would be easy to document, even in special education classrooms. However, it is important to note that the other participants in focus group T-1 believed that observing rigor in special education settings might require additional inference and interpretation on the part of the evaluator.

> But that is, I think, when you need to be in tune to the student behaviors because, you know, are they asking questions? Do they know to ask questions? Are they kind of having to grapple with the content or are they picking it up real quick? Because if they are—students should have to struggle with what they are learning a little bit. They should have to grapple a little bit, you know. So I keep going back to it, but I think a good evaluator will be in tune to the teacher and the student behaviors to pick up on that level [of rigor] (Participant 3, Focus Group T-1).

One group of special education experts (SE-1) felt that, because this element addresses instructional alignment, one aspect of special education best practices was omitted—namely the alignment between special and general education content. That is, since the focus of special education is to provide interventions that support students

access to the general education curriculum, special education teachers should be

evaluated on how well the content of their supplemental instruction for students with

SLD or E/BD connects to the grade level content in the general education curriculum.

> Here is another important thing to include, in my mind, is that special educators in my mind really should only be providing supplemental instruction and not to supplant instruction. And so they really shouldn't be in their own box teaching something completely misaligned with what is going on in the general classroom . . . . I think that needs to be included in this somehow. Are they providing appropriate supplemental instruction for kids? Not supplanting (Participant 4, Focus Group SE-1).

Research question 2. Although all of the focus groups indicated that there were

portions of this element that were appropriate for documenting special education best

practices, five focus groups identified portions of this element which would require the

evaluator to make significant inference or interpretation. First, three focus groups (SE-1,

T-2, and P-1) suggested that, in order to interpret the indicator "Aligns instruction with:

student learning objectives [and] . . . student needs" (CDE, 2012, p. 2), the evaluator

would need to have either a background in special education or knowledge of individual

IEPs. Participants in these focus groups argued that, although students with SLD or E/BD

need to have standards-based IEPs (IDEIA, 2004), an evaluator would need to know that

these students may be working at grade levels below their same-age peers.

> I think for special educators they have it partially right. This is very accurate, I think, for general ed teachers, but for special ed teachers it talks about, "teachers provide instruction that is aligned with the Colorado Academic Standards." I think what is most important for special educators is: Are they teaching the right standard? Because in a traditional system kids [with disabilities] are unfortunately being exposed to standards that are frankly too high for them in many cases or too low for them in many cases. And I think it is up to the interventionist, the SpEd interventionist, to really determine what the right standard is for them. Teaching where they are. Go figure right? You know. Teaching where they are. Using a standard that is appropriate for their level of understanding and then moving from there (Participant 4, Focus Group SE-1).

Teachers in T-2 expressed a similar sentiment, explaining that it would be important for the evaluator to understand—either through knowledge of the IEPs or through a conference with the teacher—that the focus of instruction may appear misaligned with the grade level content, but is appropriate for the learning needs of these students. Teachers felt that evaluator understanding is especially important when the instruction is addressing a behavioral goal rather than an academic one.

> And also they have to have a general understanding of what the specific goals are because truthfully my student may be participating in a math group and has math goals but maybe my primary focus is just to get that student to attend to a task for more than a couple minutes. So what does it look like for me if after that two minutes I am celebrating and my evaluator is wondering why this student is now doing a preferred activity (Participant 12, Focus Group T-2).

Special education experts in SE-2 suggested that concerns about evaluators misinterpreting student behaviors could be mitigated by having a pre-conference with the teacher to outline the specific needs for each student.

> I would hope that there would be a lengthy conversation between a principal and special ed teacher about their individual students and that maybe there is some sort of a reference that is provided so that as the principal does a walk through, drops in, has an observation, they know what they are expecting from here [the rubric] and they also have something else that says these are the kids that are in this classroom and my understanding of them. So I think it has to be very purposeful (Participant 9, Focus Group SE-2).

In addition to understanding that individual students may have different learning goals, participants in this group were concerned that evaluators may not understand, and therefore misinterpret, the fact that special education teachers may be supporting multiple content areas and that they may not possess the same level of content expertise as general educators. They felt that this was exacerbated by the fact that, unlike a teacher who teaches the same subject from year to year, the content they support changes each year because the students on their caseloads change.

Well then, it goes back to the evaluator. Are they knowledgeable about special ed? Are they knowledgeable about what they are actually observing and the kids' needs?. . .[I]f they don't have any special ed background, they are going to evaluate you on general ed. You know, like, this is what general ed teachers are doing so you should be doing the same thing. . . . Every year I might be working with different kids. So every year I have to learn new content (Participant 15, Focus Group T-2).

As discussed relative to Research Question 1, three of the focus groups (T-1, P-2, and SE-1) felt that the inclusion of the indicator "Students . . .interact with the rigorous and challenging content in meaningful ways" (CDE, 2012, p. 2) was important. However, members of the other three focus groups (T-2. SE-2, and P-1) felt that this indicator would require substantial interpretation to determine what "rigor" looked like for students with SLD or E/BD who may not be performing at grade level.

If my evaluator is willing to say rigorous for Billy is different than rigorous for Joe, if my evaluator is willing to say that, [then I am okay]. If my evaluator thinks that rigorous is this bar [general education standard], then I am out of luck (Participant 17, Focus Group T-2).

So the latter item about interacting with rigorous and challenging content in meaningful ways, I think the evaluator might need to have some idea about the needs of the students in that classroom because it might not appear it is rigorous or challenging content to an evaluator but to the students in a classroom it really could be (Participant 8, Focus Group SE-2).

Standard I: Element B

Standard I: Element B - Teachers demonstrate knowledge of student literacy development in reading, writing, speaking and listening.	
Partially Proficient	The teacher: • Makes complex reading accessible to students by: making necessary adjustments to content, integrating literacy skills and knowledge into lessons, • Demonstrates a deep understanding of literacy content and skills If the teacher is responsible for teaching language arts and/or reading: • Integrates literacy skills and knowledge into lessons and assignments across subject areas, including: phonological awareness, phonics, vocabulary, comprehension, fluency, writing, speaking, listening skills • Engages students in instruction that is: purposeful, direct, explicit, systematic
Proficient	The Teacher: • Provides literacy instruction that enhances: critical thinking and reasoning, information literacy, collaboration, self-direction, innovation • Focuses lessons on the reading of complex materials If the teacher is responsible for teaching language arts and/or reading: • Provides literacy instruction that is: needs-based, intensive, of sufficient duration to accelerate learning
Accomplished	Students: • Communicate orally and in writing at levels that meet or exceed expectations for their age, grade, and ability level If the teacher is responsible for teaching language arts and/or reading: • Apply literacy skills (reading, writing, speaking, and listening): across academic content areas, in everyday life, to new/unfamiliar material
Exemplary	Students: • Apply literacy skills: across academic content areas, to understand complex materials • Exceed expectations in: critical thinking, problem solving skills, literacy skills If the teacher is responsible for teaching language arts and/or reading: • Exceed expectations for their age, grade, and ability levels in: reading, writing, speaking, listening

Figure 5. Standard I, Element B. Source: Colorado Department of Education. *Rubric for Evaluating Colorado's Teachers*, p.3-4. August 2012

Research question 1. Although no focus group felt that the entire element, as written, could be used to document best practices in special education, two focus groups felt that there were some specific indicators which did capture them. Members of focus group SE-1 felt that having an indicator focused on literacy was important because many students with SLD or E/BD need intensive and direct instruction in literacy. "If they [special education teachers] are going to know how to intervene, then they are going to have to understand literacy" (Participant 5, Focus Group SE-1).

Teachers in focus group T-2 felt that the indicators in the proficient category were important for students with special needs because the could be used to document the best practice of individualizing instruction.

> [T]he part that—under proficient that says "needs based, intensive and sufficient duration"—I think that was a positive move because we are really looking at making our literacy instruction more needs based. Not everybody does textbook A for literacy. So that, I think that part I feel is positive (Participant 17, Focus Group T-2).

Research question 2. Nonetheless, all six focus groups felt that most of the indicators within this element would require significant interpretation or inference on the part of the evaluator. Three focus groups (T-1, T-2, and P-1) felt that an evaluator could not use these indicators literally, especially those in the accomplished and exemplary categories but, rather, would have to make judgments based on student IEPs. That is, the student's disability could have an impact on how s/he demonstrated learning in literacy. "They would either have to substantially interpret how the child is applying their literacy skills or they would have to have in-depth knowledge of that child's literacy goals" (Participant 17, Focus Group T-2). Principals in P-1 expressed a similar concern.

> What is trickier is some students that have issues that relate to how they express themselves. How do students, for example, show in the I-B under the proficient column critical thinking and reasoning and the collaboration and the self-direction? And some of those are directly influenced by their disability. So that again is where you have to really rely on that IEP to understand what is driven by the disability (Participant 23, Focus Group P-1).

Five focus groups (T-1, T-2, P-1, SE-1, and SE-2) expressed concerns that a teacher who was using an intervention curriculum designed to provide only basic literacy skills would be not be rated higher than partially proficient unless the evaluator understood that these curricula emphasize direct instruction and provide few opportunities for collaboration and group work.

I mean I immediately thought of a literacy teacher who only gets to work with the kids in twenty to thirty minute chunks and so it is like drill, drill, drill, drill, drill. That is going to look completely different (Participant 21, Focus Group P-1).

However, one focus group of principals (P-1) suggested that, even if teachers were not able to address the group work indicators on the rubric, they would prefer that teachers deliver the literacy intervention with fidelity. One participant agreed that "if I know that the program works when it is used with fidelity then that is what I would want to see. But again that would require knowledge of special education" (Participant 21, Focus Group P-1).

In addition, participants questioned whether or not it was appropriate to evaluate special education teachers' literacy instruction in the same manner as that of general educators. Four focus groups (SE-1, SE-2, T-2, and P-1) suggested that special educators have a unique role as interventionists, not content area experts. As a result, their instruction may be focused primarily on basic, rather than higher order, reading skills.

> I think what I thought about when I read this was special ed teachers often are working on the basic skills for students and that higher order thinking and problem solving—the kids aren't totally ready for that step yet because they are trying to get those basic fundamental skills down so that they can move to that level. And so I think sometimes it might be that applying higher order thinking and problem solving may be more difficult to grasp for the special ed teacher because they are working on fundamentals and helping with the fluency and those kinds of things (Participant 10, Focus Group SE-2).

> I think that like the first one [in the proficient category]—critical thinking and reasoning, collaboration, self-direction—with certain kids that is just not possible. And/or the instruction is more small group or one-on-one [so] then there aren't those opportunities for collaboration and innovation. So the teacher potentially could be penalized because of the curriculum they are using, not because of their instruction. I mean I would hope that an evaluator wouldn't do that. But on the flip side it is hard to mark that if you are not seeing that {Participant 18, Focus Group P-1).

In fact, one participant in focus group SE-2 suggested that if students could demonstrate such higher order thinking, it would be "the point that we hand it back to regular ed" (Participant 9, Focus Group SE-2).

In addition to concerns about the content and structure of literacy instruction in special education, two focus groups (P-1 and SE-2) suggested that an evaluator would need to have training in special education to determine if the teacher had selected the appropriate curriculum for his/her students to meet the indicator "The teacher provides literacy instruction that is needs-based, intensive, and of sufficient duration to accelerate learning" (CDE, 2012, p. 3).

> [T]his is actually something that has bothered me for years as an evaluator. I feel you need special education knowledge to know if the instruction is sufficient and intensive to accelerate learning. And I think that such a huge part of special education is that it is not one year's growth in one year. You have to have more than that. And how do I know that the materials that the teacher is using and the strategies that they are using are sufficient to do that? I feel that would—you would need special education knowledge to determine that (Participant 21, Focus Group P-1).

> They are going to need to have a very good understanding of disability areas and then individual knowledge about the students that the special ed teacher is responsible for. So a student has a reading disability, well is it in learning to read? Is it in applying those reading skills and growing comprehension? How is it impacting other content areas? So they are going to need to understand generally what is the disability and then how does it impact this student? (Participant 9, Focus Group SE-2).

Finally, all six groups expressed concern about the indicator in the accomplished category which requires that students "Communicate orally and in writing at levels that meet or exceed expectations for their age, grade, and ability level" (CDE, 2012, p. 3). They felt that this indicator could not document best practices in special education without substantial interpretation because, even if the teacher is providing quality

instruction, the nature of the students' disabilities could preclude them from

demonstrating this behavior.

> I think that when I looked this element over, a lot of what I feel that I do falls in the partially proficient range being that I work with SLD students. Some carries over to the proficient range but I can see myself never being accomplished because it says, "communicate orally and in writing [at] levels that meet or exceed expectations for their grade level." And they're not on an IEP because they are meeting and exceeding their grade level expectations. So that really concerns me that, because I am a SpEd teacher, I am never accomplished (Participant 1, Focus Group T-1).

> I think the first one, it is not possible for a teacher to be accomplished because of where it says "meets or exceeds expectations for age, grade." You can't do that if a child is two years behind. It is impossible (Participant 18, Focus Group P-1).

> [O]ur students who are in fifth grade now, age ten and a half, are not meeting the norms established for their age nor are they on grade level. So they are completely exempt from that category. So in a way, I mean it is kind of harsh to say, but it kind of discriminates against them in their rubric and then just exempts us completely from that category (Participant 12, Focus Group T-2).

> I would say that [is appropriate] for a general ed teacher. Moving into accomplished from proficient and having your students apply their literacy skills—that is something I would want an accomplished general ed literacy teacher to be able to do. It is just for us—to say that your students can't do it therefore you are not a good teacher—is where it falls apart. Our students can't do it because they are disabled. It is not because we are not good teachers. . . . I think it really goes to the fact that our tool needs to be different or the wording on our tool needs to be different (Participant 17, Focus Group T-2).

Standard I: Element C

Standard I: Element C - Teachers demonstrate knowledge of mathematics and understand how to promote student development in numbers and operations, algebra, geometry and measurement, and data analysis and probability.	
Partially Proficient	The Teacher: • Emphasizes to students why they need to learn math content and skills • Uses instructional strategies that require students to apply and transfer mathematical knowledge to different content areas If the teacher is responsible for teaching math: • Presents topics in sequence and in a manner appropriate to students' age and grade • Helps students understand mathematics as a discipline • Provides a balance of teaching for conceptual understanding and teaching for procedural fluency
Proficient	The Teacher: • Emphasizes interdisciplinary connections to math If the teacher is responsible for teaching math: • Establishes an effective mathematics environment by: challenging students to think deeply about the problems, requiring students to explain their solutions, posing questions that stimulate students' curiosity and encourage them to investigate further, actively engaging students in doing math, using real-world examples for problems whenever possible
Accomplished	Students: • Share ideas and solutions to challenging problems • Strive to achieve the high standards set for them If the teacher is responsible for teaching math: • Learn to think mathematically by explaining their thinking to each other and to their teacher • Solve problems in a variety of ways and explain why they used specific strategies to classmates
Exemplary	Students: • Use the language of math to talk about what they are doing • Interpret mathematical information in ways that make it relevant to their learning If the teacher is responsible for teaching math: • Recognize when they make procedural errors and take steps to correct them • Build on mathematical concepts to expand their learning and move to the next level in the course sequence

Figure 6. Standard I, Element C. Source: Colorado Department of Education. *Rubric for Evaluating Colorado's Teachers*, p. 5. August 2012.

Research question 1. With one exception, members of all six focus groups felt

that this element, as written, could not be used to document best practices in mathematics

instruction for students with SLD or E/BD. The one participant who disagreed (a member

of SE-2) felt special educators would not be disadvantaged by this element as long as

they were evaluated in a co-teaching environment. In such a model, the special educator

would not be expected to be a content expert and therefore, would be rated as an interventionist.

> For math in particular we really have moved to a co-teaching model. So the [general education] teacher is providing the expertise and then you have the special ed and those two jointly then are responsible for the outcomes of those students. And I think that will help to some degree. Particularly in the math area (Participant 9, Focus Group SE-2).

Research question 2. As with the literacy element (Standard I: Element B), most focus groups (T-1, T-2, P-1, and SE-2) felt that the evaluator would need to have a background in special education to understand the difference between the interventions provided by the special education teacher and the content instruction being provided by the general educator. Specifically, they would need to interpret this element using the perspective that the special education teachers may be filling in gaps in mathematical knowledge by providing instruction in a variety of basic skills, rather than following a particular scope and sequence.

> I guess it would be beneficial for me to know what the evaluator is looking for because a lot of my SLDs, after testing down to know where their holes [are], we're jumping around to fill those holes. So we are not necessarily just moving through it like you would see in the curriculum in a general ed classroom. We are kind of jumping to fill in those holes (Participant 1, Focus Group T-1).

In addition, two focus groups (SE-1 and T-2) felt that it would important for the evaluator to have knowledge of the individual IEPs in order to assess if teachers are providing the appropriate instruction to address individual student gaps.

> − And I have to add that I am working through places where we don't have a curriculum. We write our own curriculum. So if you are in there teaching to what you think they need to know, are you teaching with fidelity and can they [the evaluators] understand that and can the evaluator see that what you are doing is meeting the needs of that student or are you just making something up off the top of your head?
> − And it goes back to the knowledge of the administrator (Participants 13 and 16, Focus Group T-2).

Principals in P-1 believed that the evaluator would need to have knowledge of the

IEPs in order to accurately assess whether or not the student was receiving the

appropriate level of intervention and to make the appropriate interpretation of the

indicator "Build on mathematical concepts to expand their learning and move to the next

level in the course sequence" (CDE, 2012, p. 5).

> And then over on the exemplary column, build on mathematical concepts to
> expand their learning and move to the next level, I guess that is the same next
> level issue. If I don't know their IEP goals are, how do I know if they are moving
> to the next level? That is what stood out on that page for me (Participant 21,
> Focus Group P-1).

These principals believed that in order for an evaluator to assess whether the

special education instruction "[p]rovides a balance of teaching for conceptual

understanding and teaching for procedural fluency" (CDE, 2012, p. 5), s/he would have

to have background knowledge in special education, although no additional explanation

was provided beyond, "I thought maybe you would need some SpEd knowledge or

inference there" (Participant 21, Focus Group P-1).

Similarly, teachers in T-2 believed that evaluators would need to have a

background in special education or knowledge of the intervention curriculum in order to

accurately interpret the indicators in the proficient category which require teachers to

incorporate higher order thinking and analysis. Teachers were concerned that some of the

mathematics intervention curricula do not always have these higher-order skills built into

daily lessons and that an evaluator would need to understand this to accurately rate the

teacher.

> So the program [Number Worlds] is designed for there to be days of explicit
> teaching and then days that are more critical thinking and challenging. I mean it is
> an intervention program itself so they have already done the research on how the

kids' brains work and they know how it goes. So if the [evaluator] comes on the
day that I am saying here's how we line our numbers up, hundreds and tens and
ones, then [she] is not going to see the kids asking each other questions. She is not
going to see them actively engaged in manipulatives. But if she comes two days
later then she will see those things (Participant 16, Focus Group T-2).

Standard I Element D

Standard I: Element D - Teachers demonstrate knowledge of the content, central concepts, tools of inquiry, appropriate evidence-based instructional practices and specialized character of the disciplines being taught.	
Partially Proficient	The Teacher: • Provides explanations of content that are: accurate, clear, concise, comprehensive • Uses instructional materials that are accurate and appropriate for the lesson being taught • Maximizes learning opportunities
Proficient	The Teacher: • Designs lessons to assure that student learning objectives are addressed • Engages students in a variety of explanations and multiple representations of concepts and ideas • Uses a variety of inquiry methods to explore new ideas and theories
Accomplished	Students: • Develop a variety of explanations and multiple representations of concepts • Build on the skills and knowledge learned in the classroom to engage in more complex concepts, ideas, and theories • Use a variety of inquiry tools and strategies to: learn content, understand central concepts, answer complex questions
Exemplary	Students: • Routinely: choose challenging tasks and instructional materials, apply newly learned content skills to unique situations and different disciplines, initiate discussions of intellectually challenging ideas and content

Figure 7. Standard I, Element D. Source: Colorado Department of Education. *Rubric for Evaluating Colorado's Teachers*, p. 6. August 2012.

Research question 1. Two focus groups highlighted one indicator each that they

felt documented best practices in special education. However, neither group indicated

whether they felt the rest of the indicators could be used to document best practices. A

member of focus group P-2 stated, "I like the fact that there is an entire piece of the

rubric on inquiry in the classroom" (Participant 24, Focus Group P-2). In addition, a

participant from focus group SE-1 said:

I love that term "maximizes learning opportunities." I feel like that's very special
ed . . . because I think that is definitely what we do, you know. No matter what

the ability is, that is what we try to do. At least that is what I hope (Participant 6, Focus Group SE-1).

Research question 2. All but one focus group felt that the evaluator would need to have knowledge of the IEP in order to interpret how the student's disability might impact the expected student behaviors in this element.

> Again I think that comes back to where the administrator would have to be knowledgeable about the IEP and accommodations in place. Because maybe, if you tell an student with an emotional disability student to pick a challenging task you would have to modify the expectation for that student so they will do the challenging task. So your administrator might say, "Well why does his look so much different than his [another student's] if he is on the same grade level?" (Participant 12, Focus Group T-2).

> You would need to know the student's developmental level to know what qualifies [as] a complex question. And I don't think that is a silly thing to point out because you know you could walk in on a teacher working with third graders who are operating at a kindergarten level and if you don't know what you are doing and see the level of questioning that is happening and are, like. those aren't complex. Those are third graders and she is talking to them like they are kindergarteners. Where for those kids it could be very complex because that is where they are at (Participant 21, Focus Group P-1).

Two focus groups (T-1 and SE-1) felt that the evaluator would need to make significant inference about the indicator "Students build on the skills and knowledge learned in the classroom to engage in more complex concepts, ideas, and theories" (CDE, 2012, p. 6). Because special education addresses gaps in student learning, an evaluator needs to understand that, if they observe a teacher addressing only basic skills, s/he is providing appropriate instruction for students who are not yet at a place to engage in higher order skills.

> [W]e do build on the skills that are taught in the classroom. However, we are also backfilling but I feel we are backfilling more than we are building on . . . I feel like I am using this same language that they [the general educators] use, the same type of strategies. But when it comes to "building on" I feel like I'm backfilling more than I am building on (Participants 1, Focus Group T-1).

Standard I Element E

Standard I: Element E - Teachers develop lessons that reflect the interconnectedness of content areas/disciplines.	
Partially Proficient	The Teacher: • Establishes an environment and uses instructional strategies to assure that instruction: addresses the full spectrum of learning needs, skill levels, and learning styles, articulates content and interdisciplinary connections
Proficient	The Teacher: • Carefully and clearly builds interdisciplinary connections for students • Provides instructional strategies that include literacy, numeracy, and language development across content areas
Accomplished	Students: • Reflect on their learning • Help set their learning objectives • Make connections between prior learning and the current lesson
Exemplary	Students: • Use current lesson to accelerate their learning, and advance to the next performance level

Figure 8. Standard I, Element E. Source: Colorado Department of Education. *Rubric for Evaluating Colorado's Teachers*, p. 6. August 2012.

Research question 1. Only one focus group (SE-1) felt that this element was

appropriate for capturing best practices; but they did not articulate their rationale.

- ― I think those are great.
- ― Those are great as in don't change a thing. Right?
- ― This is what we should be showing.
- ― Absolutely. I wouldn't change a thing for any of our special educators (Participants 4 and 6, Focus Group SE-1).

Research question 2. However, two focus groups (T-1 and P-1) indicated that the

student behaviors in the accomplished and exemplary categories would require the

evaluator to have knowledge of the individual student IEP. As with previous elements,

s/he would need to understand that the student's ability to demonstrate those behaviors

might be limited by his/her disability.

- ― In E, I think I just put, "Is that possible where it says students reflect on their learning, set learning objectives, make connections?" For some kids that is not possible. They just—they don't have the cognitive skills or wherewithal to be able to do that.
- ― Or it takes so much time to draw that out of them (Participants 18 and 21, Focus Group P-1).

However, one group of teachers (T-1) suggested that such concerns about a student's inability to demonstrate the behaviors expected in this element could be addressed in a conference between the teacher and the evaluator. One teacher asserted, "You would have to go back in and make your case. Well here is where they were and so here's how I am advancing them to their next level of performance" (Participant 1, Focus Group T-1).

One group of special education experts (SE-2) thought that the indicators that focused on making interdisciplinary connections would require collaboration between general and special education teachers and that the rating for both teachers should depend on the extent to which they were able to work together. Therefore, in order to equitably interpret those indicators, evaluators would need to be informed about the planning process agreed to by both teachers.

> As I read through this, I am wondering about what is the responsibility of the evaluator to bring the special ed teacher and the general ed teacher together and have some conversation with the two about the alignment, the collaboration. . . . Because if the special ed teacher isn't doing what they need to do, the accountability for that gen ed teacher will be diminished. And if the gen ed teacher isn't working with the SpEd teacher there isn't going to be the alignment and it is going to hurt both of them (Participant 9, Focus group SE-2).\

Standard I Element F

Standard I: Element F - Teachers make instruction and content relevant to students and take actions to connect students' background and contextual knowledge with new information being taught.	
Partially Proficient	The Teacher: • Designs lessons and units and uses instructional strategies that: helps students connect to their learning by linking curriculum with prior knowledge, experiences, and/or cultural contexts, employs appropriate services, resources, and materials to facilitate student engagement, is developmentally appropriate
Proficient	The Teacher: • Motivates students to make connections to prior learning • Designs lessons and materials to assure that student learning objectives are addressed in ways that are meaningful for diverse learners
Accomplished	Students: • Connect to their learning by: interacting with materials that are relevant to them, asking questions and solving problems that are meaningful to them, making connections to prior learning in order to facilitate understanding of current content
Exemplary	Students: • Are actively engaged in learning • Choose tasks that challenge and expand their skills and knowledge • Transfer knowledge to other theories, ideas, and/or content

Figure 9. Standard I, Element F. Source: Colorado Department of Education. *Rubric for Evaluating Colorado's Teachers*, p. 7. August 2012.

Research question 1. One group of teachers (T-1) and one group of special education experts (SE-1) felt that these indicators were appropriate for documenting best practices in special education. They did not feel that the evaluator would need any additional knowledge of individual student IEPs or any background in special education to assess the student behaviors in the accomplished and exemplary category because none of the indicators included any reference to students achieving a specific level of academic performance.

> Designs lessons and materials to ensure students' learning objectives that are meaningful for diverse learners. I think it is well written. I think it doesn't take as much of a conversation with your supervisor or your observer to be able to be exemplary or accomplished. I don't think it takes as much conversation time (Participants 3, Focus Group T-1)

Research question 2. The remaining four focus groups (T-2, SE-2, P-1 and P-2) felt that if the evaluator would have to make some inference in order to apply this

element to special education best practices. These groups felt that an evaluator would

need to know about the specific disabilities and the individual IEPs to interpret the

indicator "designs lessons [that are] developmentally appropriate" (CDE, 2012, p.7). In

addition, participants in these four focus groups raised concerns that the behaviors in the

accomplished and exemplary categories are ones that students with either SLD or E/BD

have difficulty demonstrating. For example, the inability to make generalizations and to

transfer new learning is often characteristic of students with SLD.

> Again, this is another page, F, where I feel like we are pretty much stuck at proficient. And proficient isn't too bad you know. Motivating students, you know, making sure your lessons are relevant to their learning objectives. We pretty much get stuck at the things that we have control over but when you try to move past that you always move into what are the students doing? And you know, I have so many issues with that because our students inherently are not going to transfer knowledge and other theories to their content. That is what makes them disabled (Participant 17, Focus Group T-2).

Another teacher agreed:

> I think about some of my highest learning disabled kids that are on the edge of staffing out . . . these are those things that they are struggling with. They have kind of mastered reading decoding. They are pretty good at detailed questions. They sometimes infer you know. But those are the things that I am trying to teach them and [the rubric] made this massive jump to transferring knowledge. And those are the things that I think will just take a long time for a kid who either was disabled or even is moving out of it [special education] to be able to do those kinds of things (Participant 14, Focus Group T-2).

Standard II: Standard as a whole

Research question 1. Both of the groups of special education experts (SE-1 and

SE-2) expressed that Standard II—"Teachers establish a safe, inclusive and respectful

learning environment for a diverse population of students" (CDE, 2012, p. 9)—was,

overall, very appropriate for documenting best practices in special education because the

focus of the standard is on inclusion and diversity. One participant stated that this

standard would be "where special educators really shine because that is the whole reason they are there [in the special education field]" (Participant 8, Focus Group SE-2). Other special education experts echoed similar sentiments.

> I vote for all of these elements and I don't think they have to be differentiated. I think that they can just go as is because they relate to individualization, I think, and they relate to sensitivity to kids' needs (Participant 7, Focus Group SE-1).

> I would hope this is the crux [of] what every special ed teacher does because to me this is special education, just this standard in itself. . . . [T]his is really a make it or break it standard for a special ed teacher because this is why they went into what they did, I would hope, is to work with those diverse [students] and work on the respect and all those kinds of individual differences. So I think they won't have any problems with this one at all (Participant 10, Focus Group SE-2).

In addition, the special education experts suggested that the focus on diversity and safe classrooms in this quality standard would help promote the special education best practice of inclusion. They believed that evaluators would be rating general education teachers on the extent to which they address the needs of students with disabilities when they are in the general education class.

> I have a personal vested interest in this because my research is in working with general ed teachers on how to provide socially accepting classroom environments for the students that are included because, as we talked earlier, oftentimes students who are included are the guest or the ghost. Right? They are just the person in the back that the paraeducator works with. . . . [This standard] is here and it recognizes something important, not just for students with special needs but for our English language learners, you know creating an inclusive environment that is respectful and is safe (Participant 6, Focus Group SE-1).

> I also think that this one implies that gen ed is seeking collaboration from special ed and others to ensure that all of their kids can do this. . . . [I]t implies, from the general ed side, that they are collaborating with people who know and have an understanding of kids who are not able to do this [the desired behaviors] (Participant 9, Focus Group SE-2).

One group of principals (P-2) thought that all the elements in this standard would be easy to observe without interpretation because evaluators could easily determine if a classroom was safe and orderly. They suggested that even if there were a few students

whose behaviors were problematic, an evaluator could make accurate judgments about

the teacher's ability to create a safe environment.

> I would say, as an evaluator, I am still going to be able to see that a teacher has set up a safe classroom that lends itself to collaboration, communication, you know celebrating differences, what have you, even if one of the students really struggles that day or daily on some issues. . . . We have all been trained and educated and given experience on that and common sense too. . . . I think that the indicators are still appropriate and still attainable for a teacher to do that even in an E/BD classroom (Participant 24, Focus Group P-2).

Research question 2. All of the focus groups felt that since this standard dealt

primarily with the classroom environment, evaluators could interpret this standard

without any background in special education. However, three groups (T-1, SE-2, and P-1)

felt that evaluators would need knowledge of the individual student IEPs in order to make

appropriate inferences regarding the expected student behaviors. That is, students with

SLD or E/BD may have specific behavioral deficits in the areas outlined in the rubric and

therefore, the evaluator could not use the indicators as written. One teacher suggested, "If

you only look at the things a teacher does. We do great. . . . Like I said, don't look at the

things they want the kids to do" (Participant 17, Focus Group T-2). One principal felt that

this concern would be exacerbated for students with E/BD.

> I mean I just kept picturing—you have even one ED kiddo . . . so many of these [the elements] would be compromised. And obviously what you are looking for as an evaluator is if the teacher is supporting that appropriately so it doesn't destroy the learning of the other kids. But even if you are seeing that at a very high level, if you have a kiddo who is struggling say with severe ADHD or ED issues, they are going to have major issues with all of the things that are in accomplished or exemplary all the way through this standard (Participant 21, Focus Group P-1).

Finally, three of the focus groups (T-1, T-2, and P-1) felt that it would not be feasible for

an evaluator to apply this standard to any teacher working in an inclusion or co-teaching

setting without substantial inference. A number of elements require the teacher to

establish classroom rituals and routines and the general education teacher would be the

one responsible for developing these practices within his/her classroom, not the special

educator being evaluated.

> [W]hen I read through this, all I pictured was me in my pullout setting. Not me in
> my in-class support or my inclusion [setting] because it is more like me
> supporting. . . . I am not necessarily doing all the leading. It doesn't look like I am
> doing any of the thinking. It doesn't look like I am doing any of the planning
> because I am just slowing it down and going through the steps with them a little
> slower (Participant 1, Focus Group T-1).

Standard II: Element A

Standard II: Element A - Teachers foster a predictable learning environment in the classroom in which each student has a positive, nurturing relationship with caring adults and peers.	
Partially Proficient	The Teacher: • Creates a classroom environment that: emphasizes mutual respect for and understanding of all students, encourages positive relationships between and among students, is conducive for all students to learn
Proficient	The Teacher: • Creates a classroom environment which values diverse perspectives • Models empathy and respect for diversity • Sets common goals for all students in order to build unity
Accomplished	Students: • Demonstrate respect for classmates and their teacher
Exemplary	Students: • Engage in respectful and open dialogue with each other and their teacher

Figure 10. Standard II, Element A. Source: Colorado Department of Education. *Rubric
for Evaluating Colorado's Teachers*, p. 9. August 2012.

Research question 1. Three focus groups (T-1, SE-1, and SE-2) felt that best

practices in special education could be documented through the specific focus on

diversity in this indicator. One teacher suggested that, "all of the respecting diversity and

. . . understanding of all students. I think that is definitely capturing best practices"

(Participant 2, Focus Group T-1).

One group suggested that the explicit focus on observable behaviors would

promote best practices in special education. In order to ensure that students were

demonstrating the expected behaviors in this indicator, teachers would have to provide

direct instruction about those behaviors. "I think this is a service they're [special education teachers] going to be providing. So you are going to see kids with some pretty significant behavioral needs shining in this area because we're going to be explicitly working on these things" (Participant 9, Focus Group SE-2).

Research question 2. Consistent with the discussion about the standard as a whole, three focus groups (T-1, T-2, and P-1) suggested that this element would require the evaluator to have knowledge of the IEPs in order to interpret the student behaviors in the context of his/her disability. In particular, participants were concerned that, without knowledge of the individual IEP goals, an evaluator might mistakenly assume that any behavior problems were due to the teacher's inability to establish a positive classroom environment, rather than being a result of the student's disability. In addition, participants were concerned that, without knowledge of the IEPs, an evaluator might incorrectly rate a special education teacher if s/he observed a problem behavior but did not recognize that this behavior represented significant progress towards the behavioral goals on the student's IEP.

> I was just thinking about. . . kids who are behavioral or E/BD. That [indicator] "demonstrates respect for classmates and their teacher"—if you know the kid and you are in there for an amount and you see that happen even if it is just once out of ten times, you know the kid is making progress and the teacher is being successful. It is a matter of your perspective too and again your time and knowledge of the classroom environment (Participant 18, Focus Group P-1).

In addition, participants in focus group T-1 expressed concern that some students may demonstrate negative behaviors as a result of academic frustration that is directly related to their disabilities. Therefore, it would be important for an evaluator to have knowledge of the individual IEPs.

I have one [student] that every time I give her a writing prompt or I help her with her writing she bursts into tears because it is so difficult for her. So to engage in a respectful and open dialogue—yeah she is always respectful. Sweetest little thing but for her to engage in a dialogue, she doesn't have that skill (Participant 1, Focus Group T-1).

Standard II: Element B

Standard II: Element B - Teachers demonstrate a commitment to and respect for diversity, while working toward common goals as a community and as a country.	
Partially Proficient	The Teacher: • Uses instructional approaches and materials that reflect students' backgrounds • Acknowledges the value of each student's contributions to the quality of lessons
Proficient	The Teacher: • Establishes routine processes that result in: a strong sense of community among students, effective interactions among students. respect for individual differences, positive social relationships
Accomplished	Students: • Respect the backgrounds of fellow students
Exemplary	Students: • Actively seek a variety of perspectives to complete group assignments.

Figure 11. Standard II, Element B. Source: Colorado Department of Education. *Rubric for Evaluating Colorado's Teachers*, p. 9. August 2012.

Research question 1. None of the focus groups felt that this element could document best practices in special education as written without inference or interpretation.

Research question 2. All six focus groups indicated that this element would require evaluators to have either a background in special education and/or knowledge of the IEPs to make the substantial inference necessary to assess whether both the materials and the classroom routines were appropriate for the students with SLD or E/BD. Principals in P-1 were concerned that teachers may not have a choice in the selection of intervention curricula and therefore evaluators may need to infer about the extent to which a teacher "[u]ses instructional approaches and materials that reflect students' backgrounds" (CDE, 2012, p. 9).

[I]f you are using a program like *Language!™* or something like that, for the teacher to be judged on "using instructional approaches and materials that reflect student's background," they don't get to select the materials in those cases. You know, are they responsible if the *System 44™* does not do those things or *Read 180™* doesn't do those things? That was a concern I had (Participant 18, Focus Group P-1).

Two focus groups (SE-2 and P-1) indicated that the evaluator would need to have knowledge of the individual IEP in order to interpret the student behaviors in the proficient, accomplished, and exemplary categories. In particular, it would be important for the evaluator to understand that students with E/BD may be focusing on these behaviors as part of their IEP and that teachers should be rated on the extent to which those students are demonstrating progress.

Under the proficient column under element B . . . it says the teacher establishes routine processes "that result in" these things. I think for a special education classroom or teacher it would be "that support" those things—especially the "effective interactions among students [and] positive social relationships." I mean that's what these kiddos have for all their goals. I mean many, many goals based on that (Participant 21, Focus Group P-1).

The positive social relationship things, they might take longer to see that [for students with E/BD] in a classroom than a student who doesn't have some of those emotional behavior issues and that the evaluator would need to be aware of that. That it might take the teacher a little bit of time to establish that relationship and their respect and to get a student to a place where they are demonstrating that (Participant 8, Focus Group 3).

Finally, two focus groups (T-1 and SE-1) suggested that this element may be more difficult to apply to special education teachers working in a pull-out setting without significant interpretation because traditional community building may be difficult to accomplish in a resource room. That is, the interactions between students and teachers may look different than those in a general education classroom because there are fewer students and instruction may be limited to short intervention groups.

[A] strong sense of community to me is—I pull them out of class. That's not necessarily their community. Their community is like all fifth graders. So to observe their community just in my classroom, I probably only have four or five kids. That is not necessarily how they interact in their community (Participant 1, Focus Group 1).

Standard II: Element C

Standard II: Element C - Teachers engage students as individuals with unique interests and strengths	
Partially Proficient	The Teacher: • Monitors students for level of participation • Encourages students to share their interests • Challenges students to expand and enhance their learning • Acknowledges students for their accomplishments
Proficient	The Teacher: • Asks appropriately challenging questions of all students • Scaffolds questions • Gives wait time equitably • Flexibly groups students • Ensures that all students participate with a high level of frequency
Accomplished	Students: • Actively participate in classroom activities • Seek opportunities to respond to difficult questions
Exemplary	Students: • Select challenging content and activities when given the choice in order to stretch their skills and abilities • Encourage fellow students to participate and challenge themselves • Participate in collaborative learning and appropriate group processes

Figure 12. Standard II, Element C. Source: Colorado Department of Education. *Rubric for Evaluating Colorado's Teachers*, p. 10. August 2012.

Research question 1. Two focus groups (T-1 and SE-2) felt that only the indicators in the partially proficient and proficient categories reflect best instructional practices for special education.

I agree that—I mean the special ed teacher scaffolds questions, gives wait time equitably, those are all things that we do and that's a big part of the training of a special education teacher. So I don't think there is anything special the evaluator would need to know and I think those teachers can easily demonstrate this standard or indicator (Participant 8, Focus Group SE-2).

Research question 2. Two focus groups (T-2 and P-1) felt that, as with the previous element, students with E/BD may not be able to demonstrate the behaviors in

the accomplished and exemplary categories as they are written and it would require the

evaluator to make significant interpretation.

> Students that have—that are ADD, ADHD, E/BD, whatever the acronym is, they are there because they have issues with behaving appropriately in certain settings. And that's what we are trying to teach them about. And now, for the teacher to be exemplary, she must or he must show that they [the students] participate in a collaborative learning and appropriate group process. Well that is the reason they are placed where they are placed. And I could go through each indicator and say the same thing (Participant 20, Focus Group P-1).

> I think the deeper you get into this the more particular issues you have especially with the E/BD kids on some of these, such as: actively participate in the classroom, advocate for yourself, reflect about your learning, stay on task, avoid interruptions, abide by the rules, help others stay on task, accept responsibly for your behavior (Participant 17, Focus group T-2).

The principals in P-1 were also concerned that an evaluator may not be able to use the

indicators in the proficient category without inference if s/he were using this rubric to rate

a teacher in a pull out setting because of the small number of students being served in

intervention groups.

> [F]lexibly grouping students—if you have four students who have been put in your room—I mean I feel like that is where, as the evaluator, you have to say well they can't flexibly group students but I am going to mark this anyway so they [the teachers] can get to accomplished or exemplary (Participant 21, Focus Group P-1).

Standard II: Element D

Standard II: Element D - Teachers adapt their teaching for the benefit of all students, including those with special needs, across a range of ability levels.	
Partially Proficient	The Teacher: • Designs instruction to address specific learning needs of all students • Monitors the quality of student participation and performance
Proficient	The Teacher: • Solicits input from colleagues and specialists to understand students' learning needs • Uses multiple strategies to teach and assess students • Adapts instructional strategies to meet student needs • Challenges and supports all students to learn to their greatest ability
Accomplished	Students: • Articulate an awareness of their learning needs • Advocate for themselves • Reflect about their learning
Exemplary	Students: • Seek ways to cope with learning differences • Apply coping skills to classroom situations • Share coping strategies with fellow students • Support fellow classmates by implementing peer supports

Figure 13. Standard II, Element D. Source: Colorado Department of Education. *Rubric for Evaluating Colorado's Teachers*, p. 10. August 2012.

Research question 1. Two focus groups (T-1 and SE-2) felt that parts of this element were appropriate for documenting special education best practices. The teachers in focus group T-1 and the special education experts in focus group SE-2 explained that teaching students to advocate for themselves and to understand their learning needs is a primary focus for special educators.

> I think it is something they need to work on. You are allowed to go to your teacher and ask for an accommodation but I think that's definitely something my population of students could definitely work on to get to accomplished because there is such a barrier between the students and teachers. . . . I think it is definitely great. I think that this is something we as a district, as a school, need to help work on: advocation [sic] skills (Participant 2, Focus Group T-1).

> [T]his is where our special ed teachers may be accomplished and exemplary because they do teach advocating—students advocating for themselves. They do teach kids how to reflect on their learning on a daily basis. That is what is special about specialized instruction is that those things are really worked into that component. So again I think this is where—I don't think the evaluator will need

training in this because I think it is more evident in the behavior and how they see the kids. So I think that they will see that more evidently—you know more easily (Participant 10, Focus Group SE-2).

In addition, the principals in focus group P-2 felt that this element promotes collaboration because the indicators explicitly ask teachers to seek input from others about their students. However, they felt that the rubric should also include indicators which measure the special educators' ability to communicate and present information to other teachers. That is, there should be a measure of how well the teacher advocates for the needs of their students, particularly those needs articulated in the IEP.

> Also in D, it says solicits input from colleagues or specialists, I don't think it should be solicit; I think it should be giving output as well. I really believe that it is the special ed teacher's role to not only ask teachers what they can do to better support the kids but then also to turn around and say here is the kid's needs. Now let's take a look at what you are learning about in your classroom. How might this be modified? So that communication goes both ways (Participant 22, Focus Group P-2).

Research question 2. Nonetheless, these three groups (T-1, SE-2, and P-2) concurred with members of the other three focus groups (T-2, SE-1, and P-1) that other parts of this element an evaluator would need to have knowledge of the individual IEPs. Participants in three focus groups (SE-1, P-2, and P-1) suggested that the evaluator would need to have knowledge of the IEPs in order to assess the degree to which the teacher has correctly individualized instruction. One participant stated, "I see that as something they would either discuss or would be accessible, like, 'why are you doing that with this kid?' This is clearly stated in the IEPs." (Participant 6, Focus Group SE-1). Principals in P-2 suggested that this would apply to any teacher working with students with SLD or E/BD, including general educators. "I am expecting they [all teachers] are working with all their students. Whether it is their group of SpEd students or it is the inclusion piece or the

general ed with the SpEd students. That certainly is part of their job" (Participant 23, Focus Group 6).

One group (T-2) was concerned that evaluators would need to have significant knowledge of what collaboration has occurred between general and special educators in order to apply this element.

> [R]emember I said that [general education] teacher was like, "I want to check this box off." This is the one here, "solicits input from the colleagues." She was interested in getting that box checked. And in her mind that is what it was. It wasn't about really understanding the kids' accommodations. It was about checking this box on this rubric. But she wanted me to be able to say in the future if it ever came up that yes she collaborated with me (Participant 16, Focus Group T-2).

Four focus groups (T-1, SE-2, P-1, and P-2) felt that, like the previous two elements, the student behaviors in the accomplished and exemplary category are typically areas of need for students with E/BD. Therefore, participants suggested that an evaluator would need to interpret the indicators in terms of the progress that students have made and therefore would need to have knowledge of the IEPs to determine growth.

> I can think of one of my students who easily gets frustrated around math and he has an emotional disability. And one strategy I've taught him—because what he used to do was destroy his classroom or throw chairs or whatever, engage in harmful or self-harming behaviors—now he walks to his space in his classroom when he gets frustrated. To me that is a huge gain but to the administrator who is evaluating that general education teacher [without knowledge of the IEP] is going to be like why is this one student not participating? (Participant 12, Focus Group T-2)

Standard II: Element E

Standard II: Element E - Teachers provide proactive, clear and constructive feedback to families about student progress and work collaboratively with the families and significant adults in the lives of their students.	
Partially Proficient	The Teacher: • Maintains appropriate and respectful relationships with students, their families, and significant adults • Uses a variety of methods to initiate communication with families and significant adults • Is sensitive to the diverse family structures
Proficient	The Teacher: • Partners with families and significant adults to help student meet education goals • Coordinates information from families and significant adults with colleagues who provide student services • Seeks services and resources to meet the diverse needs of students
Accomplished	Students: • Communicate freely and openly with teachers Families and Significant Adults: • Initiate communication with teachers to discuss student needs • Participate in a variety of school-based activities • Willingly share information that may impact student learning
Exemplary	Families and Significant Adults: • Seek the teacher's assistance to find resources and services to support student needs • Partner with the teacher and the school for the benefit of their students

Figure 14. Standard II, Element E. Source: Colorado Department of Education. *Rubric for Evaluating Colorado's Teachers*, p. 11. August 2012.

Research question 1. Both groups of special education experts (SE-1 and SE-2) believed that this element was very appropriate for assessing best practices in special education because developing meaningful partnerships with parents was integral to being an effective special educator. One participant suggested that, "looking at element E, 'partners with families and significant adults,' as a special ed teacher, I mean, that is kind of our lives" (Participant 6, Focus Group SE-1). One member of focus group SE-2 echoed a similar sentiment: "It is pretty hard for a special ed teacher not to partner with parents. . . . [T]hat collaboration component is very clear in this one" (Participant 10, Focus Group SE-2).

Research question 2. Three focus groups (T-1, T-2, and P-1) expressed concern about the indicators in the accomplished and exemplary categories. All three groups acknowledged that communication with families is an important aspect of special education but felt that there were some factors which might impact the teacher's ability to partner with families and, therefore, would require the evaluator to make significant inference. First, two focus groups (T-1 and T-2) discussed how families from diverse cultures perceive disabilities differently and how, due to negative perceptions of disabilities, some families attempt to minimize their interactions with special educators. Participants felt that, in this instance, the evaluator would need to interpret the indicators as the degree to which the teacher made an effort to communicate and work with the families.

> What I have control over, you know, then I want to take responsibility over that. What I have control over. What I can try to impact, I am okay. . . . I do need to do a good job and I do need to be held accountable in some way for those pieces trying to share information, trying to encourage, trying to get my parents to come. I can't force them to go but I can try. And if a parent comes then yeah. That's my bonus you know (Participant 16, Focus Group T-2).

> — Well I think it's—because they see me as different than the gen ed teacher.
> — A lot of the parents don't want to acknowledge that their kid is in special education.
> — Yeah. I have had parents-
> — If they don't talk to the special ed teacher then it is not real until the annual [IEP review] (Participant 1 and 2, Focus Group T-1).

In addition, principals in focus group P-1 suggested that evaluators need to understand that special educators who serve students with E/BD may experience difficulty when working with these parents because some of those families often have challenges at home. Therefore, the evaluator may need to make inferences regarding the level of involvement these families demonstrate.

You know some of the things you were talking about inference—and I am going over to the accomplished and exemplary part on E. "Families and significant adults participate in a variety of school based activities." Now, some of those kids that are in E/BD . . . part of the reason it is problematic is because they don't have that full family support. Now, am I going to be penalized, punished, or whatever because their family is who they are? (Participant 20, Focus Group P-1)

I mean these are our most impacted families. . . . In some cases if they sent one email to the teacher it would be like, "Oh!" And that for that person would be "willingly sharing information." And then . . . I thought this, that whole section, was completely inappropriate because we cannot be judged on—we can't control others. So that I'm going to judge teachers on this I thought was very inappropriate (Participants 20, Focus Group P-1).

Standard II: Element F

Standard II: Element F - Teachers create a learning environment characterized by acceptable student behavior, efficient use of time, and appropriate intervention strategies.	
Partially Proficient	The Teacher: • Puts procedures in place to avoid interruption to instructional time • Posts class rules where they are readily available to all students
Proficient	The Teacher: • Makes maximum use of instructional time • Holds students accountable for adherence to school and class rules • Maintains a safe and orderly environment
Accomplished	Students: • Stay on task during class periods • Avoid interruptions to their work • Abide by school and class rules
Exemplary	Students: • Help other students stay on task • Accept responsibility for their behavior and use of time

Figure 15. Standard II, Element F. Source: Colorado Department of Education. *Rubric for Evaluating Colorado's Teachers*, p. 11. August 2012.

Research question 1. Only one group (T-1) stated that this element, as written, was appropriate for documenting best practices in special education. However, participants did not elaborate further about why they believed the indicators were appropriate.

Members of focus group SE-1 felt that a specific reference to the Response-to-Intervention process for students with E/BD was an important best practice that was

omitted in this element. That is, because the element includes the phrase "use appropriate intervention strategies" (CDE, 2012, p.11), there should be an indicator which measures the extent to which the teacher is using research-based interventions within the RtI three tier model.

> And then on F, I thought this was a great standard for general educators but we might want to beef it up a little bit more for special educators because it seemed sort of weak for—in terms of the work we do with many of our kids that are on that tier three level of intervention. You know kids with real significant emotional disabilities. So maybe some language to beef up the ability to know, understand and apply research-based interventions for kids with more significant social, emotional and behavioral disabilities (Participant 4, Focus Group SE-2).

Research question 2. Four groups (SE-2, T-2, P-1, and P-2) felt that, because the focus of this element was on-task behaviors and rule-following, an evaluator might need to make significant inferences when observing a teacher instructing students with E/BD. As was the case with previous elements, students with E/BD may have a more difficult time demonstrating the behaviors enumerated in the accomplished and exemplary categories. As one teacher said, "I think the deeper you get into this, the more particular issues you have especially with the E/BD kids on some of these" (Participant 17, Focus Group T-2). The principals in both focus groups (P-1 and P-2) expressed similar concerns.

> [A]gain, that accomplished one, "students stay on task, avoid interruptions and abide by school and class rules." Well, if they did all of those things they probably wouldn't have an IEP. And that they would help each other stay on task is ridiculous for many of the students with IEPs. And that "accepting responsibility for their behavior and use of it." Again, if they could do that they would not need that IEP. So I thought [applying the indicators literally] was very unfair (Participant 21, Focus Group P-1).

Participants in focus group SE-2 suggested that the need for interpretation would be even greater if the evaluator was observing a teacher in a self-contained room and it would be

important for the evaluator to have either a background in special education or knowledge of the individual IEPs.

> I mean kids are typically placed in those programs [self-contained settings] because of behavior . . . I think the evaluator would need to have an understanding of how kids come in and leave those particular environments. . . . You just would have different students at different places along the [behavioral] continuum. There should be some evaluator understanding of different environments and what you would expect to see in that environment (Participant 10, Focus Group SE-2).

Principals in focus group P-1 also suggested that the evaluator would need to conduct multiple observations in order to apply these indicators to pull-out and self-contained settings because students may not be demonstrating behaviors consistently and it would be important to determine if the problem behaviors were a result of a student's disability or of ineffective instruction.

> When I think about special education teachers it is more of like a body of evidence, a continuum, more so than other teachers I think. Because of that you know there are days when things are really crazy in the classroom. But knowing their thinking and where they are trying to go. I was thinking of a teacher that [another administrator] hired and I have seen her this year really pushing like trying to create leadership classes for the students in the ED classroom and there are still some days where it is a hot mess and it is real rough. But there are days that are great—like those glimmers of hope. . . . And then more so than with other teachers, you do have to know what the goals of the department are and what the thinking is behind the teaching (Participant 19, Focus Group P-1).

Standard III: Standard as a Whole

Research question 1. One group of special education experts (SE-1) believed that Standard III as a whole—"Teachers plan and deliver effective instruction and create an environment that facilitates learning for their students"(CDE, 2012, p. 13)—encompassed best practices for all instruction, including special education. Members of this focus group thought that the indicators in all of the elements were simply descriptors of how a teacher plans effective instruction and apply to both general and special education.

I think a lot of these just connect to an effective lesson plan if you will. You know: establishing your objective, checking for understanding, providing opportunities for problem solving, connecting lesson to prior knowledge in a significant way. I mean those are things hopefully we should be doing no matter what in an effective lesson. Whether it be a five minute or a fifty minute lesson. And then applying a variety of instruction strategies definitely gets back to our evidence-based, research-based intervention (Participant 6, Focus group SE-1).

One participant from this group suggested that applying this standard to a special educator might be easier than applying it to a general educator because special educators have more experience with and specific training about individualizing instruction to meet student needs. Therefore, special educators may feel more comfortable with this standard.

The general ed teachers I know would be more nervous about some of these than the special ed teachers I know. Not to say they aren't competent or even able to do this, but I know that there is this fear that a lot of them don't feel prepared enough to adjust their instruction and adapt to meet all the learning needs of students. I don't see it as much in a special ed classroom, that fear (Participant 6, Focus Group SE-1).

One focus group of teachers (T-2) felt that, throughout the standard, the indicators in the partially proficient and proficient categories were appropriate for all teachers and, therefore, could be used to document best practices in special education. One teacher stated, "Many of the things in proficient I think are right on and they are good" (Participant 17, Focus Group T-2) and another agreed, "I could see this one, of all the other standards, being manageable for me to get maybe in the accomplished and exemplary stages . . . I think I can make these things work in my favor" (Participant 12, Focus Group T-2).

Research question 2. Three focus groups (T-1, SE-1, and P-2) concurred with the previous sentiments that effective instructional planning applies to both general and special educators. However, they felt that those indicators which address individualizing instruction would require interpretation by the evaluator. In these instances, the

participants believed that the evaluator would need to view the indicators in light of the

accommodations, modifications, and goals outlined in the IEP. All three groups

suggested that the evaluator could get this information through a conference between the

evaluator and the teacher, either before or after an observation.

> And that [the conference] will cover a lot of the pieces of A through F here or A through H in standard three. . . . Be able to sit down and explain the rationale behind their systems. So okay just tell me how it works. What are you going to do? How often are you going to check that? Okay. Sounds good. I hope you implement it (Participant 23, Focus Group P-2).

A special education expert concurred, "I think that is a piece that goes back to those

conferences to be able to say here is the IEP goal . . . This is how and why I am doing this

kind of thing" (Participant 5, Focus Group SE-1).

> Participants in focus groups T-2 and P-1 thought that, in most of the elements, the

indicators in the partially proficient and proficient categories could be used to document

best practices for both general and special education. However, they were concerned that

the indicators in the accomplished and exemplary categories were not appropriate for

measuring special education without making significant inference. That is, as with the

previous standard, the expected student behaviors may be highly impacted by the

student's disabilities.

> Again, my criticism is that is where we get stuck because then it moves to what the students do. And that is always where I feel like—it was like they took the things that our students aren't very good at and they laid them all on a piece of paper. And that's also why they are not general ed students. I mean that would be the reasons they are struggling students. . . . So again to say that our evaluation is based on whether they are disabled or not disabled. So I have that same criticism over and over (Participant 17, Focus Group, T-2).

> I think the majority of the proficient and partially proficient areas address some of our needs as special education teachers. But I think what you said was the exemplary and the accomplished areas—these are standards based off of what

maybe a typical child would be able to do. We are not teaching the typical child (Participant 12, Focus Group T-2).

One teacher from this group suggested that evaluators should interpret the rubric by looking for improvements in student behaviors, rather than applying them literally.

> I think that where we are in a unique situation is that a typical student could do these things. . . . And it is seems like we said before, a little discriminatory against a student whose disability is paying attention to then be judged against paying attention. And so that's where I think some of the things would need to be adjusted. . . . Improve their level of engagement. Even that would be—or something that would give you the ability to work off of their IEP. I am not trying to say that we shouldn't be evaluated on what our kids do. I think we should, but I just think it should be a level that is appropriate for them (Participant 17, Focus Group T-2).

Standard III: Element A

Standard III: Element A - Teachers demonstrate knowledge of current developmental science, the ways in which learning takes place, and the appropriate levels of intellectual, social, and emotional development of their students.	
Partially Proficient	The Teacher: • Provides instruction that is developmentally appropriate for all students • Studies emerging research to expand personal knowledge of how students learn
Proficient	The Teacher: • Adapts lessons to address students' strengths and weaknesses • Applies knowledge of current developmental science to address student needs • Collaborates with colleagues with experience in developmental science to improve the quality of lessons
Accomplished	Students: • Articulate their learning needs • Seek materials and resources appropriate for their learning styles
Exemplary	Students: • Offer suggestions to the teacher regarding ways to adapt lessons to make them more engaging, challenging, and relevant • Seek to understand: how they learn, where their time and efforts are best used

Figure 16. Standard III, Element A. Source: Colorado Department of Education. Rubric for Evaluating Colorado's Teachers, p. 13. August 2012.

Research question 1. Two groups (T-1 and SE-2) felt that best practices in special education could easily be documented using the indicators in this element. Specifically, these participants felt that the indicators which asked teachers to provide "instruction that is developmentally appropriate" and to "adapt lessons to students

strength and weaknesses" (CDE, 2012, p. 13) encompassed the core of special education.

One participant summed up the discussion of this element by stating, "I feel like this one

just encompasses what special education is about. I do not really find anything about it

that I didn't agree with" (Participant 2, Focus Group T-1).

The special education experts in focus group SE-1 acknowledged that the student

behaviors in the accomplished and exemplary categories might be difficult to see

consistently in special education classrooms because students' disabilities may impact

their ability to demonstrate these behaviors. However, the members of focus group SE-1

felt that it would be good to have special educators "stretch" to meet these goals, which

could include providing direct affective instruction.

> And element A, seems at least—at least the wording seems very applicable to special ed. And I would agree with my colleagues here as far as I think it would be difficult for many of our special educators to show they are accomplished and exemplary but it increases the level of expectation for them. I don't think it is a bad standard at all. I think it is very applicable (Participant 4, Focus Group SE-1).

Research question 2. In contrast, the other group of special education experts

(SE-2) felt that in order to apply the indicators in this element, evaluators would need to

have either background knowledge in special education or knowledge of the individual

IEPs to assess whether curricular adaptations addressed a student's disability-specific

needs.

> I think we will have to go back to that evaluator training about specific disability areas and also the conversation about individual disabilities for an evaluator to be able to put this in the context of a special ed teacher. . . . I think there are some general things we can tell principals but then if all the right things are happening on the surface, you still would have to get to that individual student conversation to make sure it is not just willy-nilly. So just because it is different for kids or there is differentiation, is it the right one—and I don't know how you know that without understanding disabilities and individual kids (Participant 9, Focus Group SE-2).

Similarly, both groups of principals (P-1 and P-2) felt that the evaluator needed to be able to identify evidence that answers the question, "are you differentiating and are you differentiating effectively and often and meeting the needs of, you know, those students even though they are different?" (Participant 23, Focus Group P-2). Members of focus group P-1 suggested that the evaluators would need to have training in how to differentiate instruction for students with special needs in order to accurately interpret the indicators in this element.

> It is very possible that you could walk in and observe a teacher trying to teach a small group [composed] of a student who is cognitively delayed, a student with Down Syndrome, and a student who is ED and it could look great but if you actually knew what you were doing and knew the most current developmental science, it was actually terrible. But if you don't know that for those more difficult populations [participant shrugged shoulders] (Participant 21, Focus Group P-2).

> Both the second group of teachers (T-2) and the first group of principals (P-1) expressed concern that indicators about student behaviors in the accomplished and exemplary categories could not be applied literally.

> I think in almost all of these I struggled with the accomplished and exemplary sections with students. It just seems like a lot of them are based on higher order skills that many of these students aren't going to have. And so the teachers are again being penalized for lack of a better word, because of the students' limitations (Participant 18, Focus Group P-1).

Standard III: Element B

Standard III: Element B - Teachers plan and consistently deliver instruction that draws on results of student assessments, is aligned to academic standards, and advances students' level of content knowledge and skills.	
Partially Proficient	The Teacher: • Instructs and assesses required skills • Advances students' content knowledge and skills • Aligns instruction with academic standards and student assessment results
Proficient	The Teacher: • Monitors instruction against student performance and makes real-time adjustments • Encourages students to take academic risks • Makes sure students meet learning objectives while increasing proficiency levels
Accomplished	Students: • Monitor their level of engagement • Confer with the teacher to achieve learning targets
Exemplary	Students: • Strive to: address their learning needs, close gaps between their level of performance and that of other students, take academic risks.

Figure 17. Standard III, Element B. Source: Colorado Department of Education. *Rubric for Evaluating Colorado's Teachers*, p. 13. August 2012.

Research question 1. Participants in two groups (T-1 and SE-1) suggested that, as with Standard III: Element A, best practices in special education could be documented using these indicators. However, they did not offer a further rationale beyond saying, "Same with B" (Participant 4, Focus Group SE-1). Participants in focus group P-1 thought that best practices in special education could be documented but only in the proficient category. Again, no explanation was provided with one participant simply stating, "Under element B, under the proficient column, I thought I could observe—I could do that" (Participant 21, Focus Group P-1).

Research question 2. Members of two focus groups (SE-2 and P-2) expressed concern that an evaluator could not use these indicators without substantial inference or interpretation. Participants in focus group SE-2 argued that an evaluator would need to have knowledge of the individual IEPs or some understanding of special education assessment in order to determine if the teacher, "[a]ligns instruction with academic

standards and student assessment results" and "[m]onitors instruction against student performance and makes real-time adjustments" (CDE, 2012, p. 13). One participant was unsure to what degree evaluators would have the necessary background in assessment or special education, but felt that conferencing with the teacher might provide the evaluator with the necessary information about the individual students.

> [Y]ou would hope that a special education teacher monitors instruction against the student need and adjusting that. . . . Now for the evaluator to see that may be more difficult if they don't have that knowledge of what that student is working on. Again it goes back to that pre-planning and pre-working with the evaluator and the special ed teacher so that there is information there that they are sharing with their evaluator. Because I don't know how much—and I don't remember in my principal's program how much they really—how much evaluation or disability knowledge they get in that program. I know they get some, but is it enough? So it is going to go back to that working together with your individual staff and individual evaluator to work on that individual IEP data (Participant 10, Focus Group SE-2).

Principals in focus group P-1 expressed a similar belief that the evaluator would need to have knowledge of the individual IEPs to rate the teacher in the partially proficient category, specifically the indicator about aligning instruction to student needs.

> [I] would need to have knowledge of the IEPs. I felt like I would have to do those to know if they are aligning instruction with academic student assessment results. You can walk into a gen ed classroom and that is pretty obvious, but these students that we are talking about could be way off grade level wise and it should be based on their IEP goals and how those relate to the academic standards. So you would have to know the IEP goals (Participant 21, Focus Group P-1).

Standard III: Element C

Standard III: Element C - Teachers demonstrate a rich knowledge of current research on effective instructional practices to meet the developmental and academic needs of their students.	
Partially Proficient	The Teacher: • Makes lesson objectives clear to the students • Employs a variety of instructional strategies • Provides instruction that requires critical thinking, problem solving, and performance skills • Checks for student understanding of content
Proficient	The Teacher: • Facilitates learning by supporting students as they learn new material • Sets the expectation that students will reflect on and communicate about their learning
Accomplished	Students: • Articulate the importance of the lesson objective • Connect lesson objective to prior knowledge in a significant and meaningful way • Describe their level of performance in relation to lesson objectives
Exemplary	Students: • Apply skills and knowledge learned in the classroom • Articulate the ways in which they learn most effectively

Figure 18. Standard III, Source: Colorado Department of Education. Rubric for Evaluating Colorado's Teachers, p. 14. August 2012.

Research question 1. Two focus groups (T-1 and SE-1) believed that the indicators in element C could be used to document best practices in special education. However, the teachers did not provide any additional elaboration, but simply stated, "I agree with most of them if not all of them" (Participant 2. Focus Group T-1). Participants in focus group SE-2 felt that a comprehensive lesson plan would address all of these indicators. "[Y]ou would hope it [element C] can be documented. You would hope they had an appropriate lesson plan planned for the day they were being observed." Another participant in this focus group believed that the indicator "[a]rticulate the ways in which they learn most effectively" (CDE, 2012, p. 14) was important because it would ensure that students could be active participants in their IEP meetings.

> Students really should be able to articulate their goals and objectives and what they are working on. If there is that disconnect between what we are talking about and what we want the student to learn and do and they can't articulate it back, that's an issue. That is a problem. And I would say that that's more sort of the rule

than the exception that is happening now. But this again, it ups the ante for special educators to communicate that with not only the parents. The parents know and everybody else in the [IEP] meeting knows but the student doesn't always know (Participant 4, Focus Group SE-2).

Research question 2. One focus group (SE-2) agreed that the indicators in this element represented the components of a good lesson plan and they would be easily observed in a general education classroom. However, these participants felt that the evaluator would need to know whether or not the lesson objectives and instructional strategies were appropriate for the students with disabilities, and such interpretation would require knowledge of individual IEPs.

> I think these are just good teaching practice that we would expect to see in any teacher. So I think again on the surface all of this may be happening and the evaluator will have to go to that next level and make sure it is appropriate for that particular student (Participant 9, Focus Group SE-2).

One group of teachers (T-2) felt that the indicators focused on teacher behaviors in the partially proficient and proficient categories could be used to document best practices in special education. However, they felt that the indicators in the accomplished and exemplary categories (student behaviors) were not appropriate, stating simply, "Like I said, don't look at the things they want kids to do" (Participant 17, Focus Group T-2). Another member agreed, "Yeah. C is ridiculous" (Participant 15, Focus Group T-2). However, none of the participants provided further explanation.

The principals in focus group P-1 likewise asserted that the indicators in the accomplished and exemplary categories might be difficult to apply without the evaluator making substantial inference. Participants argued that the role of special educators is to address gaps in student learning so that they can access the general education curriculum. Therefore, asking students to "[a]pply skills and knowledge learned in the classroom"

(CDE, 2012, p. 14) would require the evaluator to know what the student had learned in

the special education setting and then to observe him or her in the general education

classroom.

> And then the last one I thought on C was that again, that's applying skills and
> knowledge learned in the classroom. To me, that is generalization again that many
> students have as an IEP goal and wouldn't you need to see the same student in a
> non-resource setting to really judge? (Participant 21, Focus Group P-1).

In addition, principals in this group felt that an evaluator might have to make significant

inference about the indicators in this element if the intervention curriculum being

employed does not include opportunities for teachers and students to demonstrate the

critical thinking and reflection called for in this element. That is, if the teacher is

following the script of a basic skills intervention, there will not be activities which

explicitly allow students to engage in these behaviors.

> On C, I noted in a couple spots that if they are following a prescribed program
> that some of these things might just not be part of the program. And again that tug
> between fidelity and doing what they need to do to get the good marks on the
> rubric might be challenging. Like under proficient, "the teacher sets the
> expectation that students reflect on and communicate about their learning," that
> may not part of the program that they are having to follow and will they be graded
> down because of that? (Participant 21, Focus Group P-1).

Standard III: Element D

Standard III: Element D - Teachers thoughtfully integrate and utilize appropriate available technology in their instruction to maximize student learning.	
Partially Proficient	The Teacher: • Employs strategies and procedures to ensure that all students have equal and appropriate access to available technology
Proficient	The Teacher: • Researches effectiveness of instructional technology approaches and activities • Uses available technology to: enhance student learning, develop students' knowledge and skills, enhance creative and innovative skills, provide engaging and motivating learning experiences
Accomplished	Students: • Engage in virtual or face-to-face learning activities enhanced by appropriate use of available technology
Exemplary	Students: • Use available technology to: accelerate their learning. apply team building and networking skills, deepen critical thinking skills, communicate effectively

Figure 19. Standard III, Element D. Source: Colorado Department of Education. *Rubric for Evaluating Colorado's Teachers*, p. 14. August 2012.

Research question 1. Members of all six focus groups felt that the indicators in element D could be used to document best practices in special education because the use of everyday technology (e.g. computers, SmartBoards, iPads, etc.) is appropriate for both special and general education classrooms. Teachers in focus group T-2 simply said, "[t]he technology one I think is okay. I do think our kids engage in technology fairly well" (Participant 17, Focus Group T-2).

Research question 2. Although all of the groups felt that the indicators could be used to document best practices in special education when observing the use of traditional technology, four of the focus groups (T-1, SE-1, SE-2, and P-1) believed that if these indicators were applied to assess the use of assistive technology it would be necessary for the evaluator to have knowledge of the individual IEPs, a background in special education, and/or a conference with the teacher. That is, evaluators needed to know whether or not the assistive technologies being employed were either necessary for or being used appropriately by the student.

And I just think it has to be purposeful that we make sure that our students with disabilities in the context of their disability are able to access technology in a way that they can show what they know like as any student would be able to do that. (Participant 9, SE-2).

So I could see if the observer is not seeing what is on the computer screen and the one student is there typing. Then I could say, "Hey I had one student who has writing difficulties and uses the laptop to type." I don't know if they need to go read the IEP but I do think they need to be aware that this one kid was not playing games. He was participating with us using his technology to participate (Participant 2, Focus Group T-1).

— It could almost be them [teachers] identifying how they supported a particular student with available technology versus us being able to come in and have a handle on that because if the kids—just because your kid has a Dynavox or Alphasmart if they have been using the thing for two years then they are not using it effectively.
— Yeah. And then I can think of situations where we have parents you know pushing, pushing, pushing that Dynavox and then I have my SLP saying he doesn't need it. He can do this and the more you use that Dynavox the less he is actually going to use his language. So that whole background knowledge of all of that assistive technology, I think that's a real issue (Participants 18 and 21, Focus Group P-1).

Standard III: Element E

Standard III: Element E - Teachers establish and communicate high expectations for all students and plan instruction that helps students develop critical-thinking and problem solving skills.	
Partially Proficient	The Teacher: • Sets student expectations at a level that challenges students • Incorporates higher order thinking, critical thinking and/or problem-solving skills into lessons
Proficient	The Teacher: • Clearly communicates high expectations for all students • Challenges all students to learn to their greatest ability • Systematically and explicitly teaches higher-order thinking and problem-solving skills • Allows time for responses and discussion
Accomplished	Students: • Strive to achieve expectations set by the teacher • Apply higher-order thinking and problem-solving skills to address challenging issues
Exemplary	Students: • Monitor their progress toward to achieving teacher's high expectations • Perform at levels exceeding expectations • Seek opportunities to test their problem-solving and higher-order skills

Figure 20. Standard III, Element E. Source: Colorado Department of Education. *Rubric for Evaluating Colorado's Teachers*, p. 15. August 2012.

Research question 1. Three focus groups (T-1, SE-1, and P-2) felt that best

practices in special education could be documented using the indicators in this element.

Participants in focus group T-1 particularly highlighted that this element addressed

setting and monitoring individual expectations which is a central focus for special

education.

- It is all about meeting the expectations and I think it is really good for students to know what their expectations are. How are you going to meet your expectations if you don't know what they are? So I think this element was well written.
- This to me encompasses special ed.
- Even the exemplary, the students monitor progress towards achieving. Well this says achieving the teacher's high expectations and really it should be teacher and student's high expectation. So really that is one thing they should add. (Participants 1, 2, and 3, Focus Group T-1)

Special education experts in SE-1 and principals in P-2 asserted that although

holding students to high expectations, having them articulate their own learning needs,

and having them monitor their progress are recommended best practices in special

education, these practices are not often employed by special education teachers.

> I am glad that this E is here because quite frankly I am tired of seeing special ed teachers that think their job is just to babysit. You know. I mean if I am being perfectly frank, I like the fact that we are telling them you have to have high expectations and stop saying things like my kids can't do that. . . . And so I feel they are being held accountable now for really trying something, you know. And then monitoring the progress. I mean that is a really difficult piece to have the students start monitoring their progress. I mean half of the teachers don't even monitor their [the students'] progress and now you are asking the students to help. But I think it is an important piece because that adds to that self-determination and independence of our students. Now they are able to see am I doing better on my reading? And am I doing better on—whatever it might be. And I think it is—I love this one because I wish all special ed teachers did this. If this is going to hold them accountable to start doing it, then I am all for that (Participant 6, Focus Group SE-2).

One principal related a conversation she had with a special education teacher in her

building which mirrored the sentiments of the special education experts.

> And one of the special ed teachers in the beginning of the year said, "Oh, I can't use the four C's [creativity, critical thinking, communication, and collaboration] in my classroom." And the conversation obviously started out on a bad note but turned into a really positive conversation on "How come you are not assessing your special ed students the same as we're are assessing ours?" (Participant 24, Focus Group P-2).

This principal continued to explain that the indicators were appropriate because the special educator should be holding students to the same high expectations as general education students. "The assessment may be different but are we still not looking for the growth? Are we still not using the data to show we are seeing the growth?" (Participant 24, Focus Group P-2).

Research question 2. The other three focus groups (SE-2, T-2, and P-1) expressed concerns that the indicators in this element could only be used to document best practices in special education if the evaluator made significant inferences or interpretations. The members of these groups believed that almost all of the indicators in this element required students to demonstrate higher order thinking skills and that those skills might be impacted by the students' disabilities. Participants felt that evaluators would need to interpret these indicators against the individual student's level of functioning and would, therefore, need to have knowledge of the IEP.

> [T]heir disability may be what is preventing it [demonstrating higher order thinking] so just because they have the foundation they still may not—without explicit instruction—be able to access that higher order. . . . [T]his is when I think the evaluator absolutely has to understand that disability and how it is impacting their learning because higher order thinking and problem solving skills for some of our kids is the disability (Participant 9, Focus Group SE-2).

> I think what I thought about when I read this was special ed teachers often are working on the basic skills for students and that higher order thinking and problem solving the kids aren't totally ready for that step yet because they are trying to get those basic fundamental skills down so that they can move to that level. And so I think sometimes it might be that applying higher order thinking and problem solving may be more difficult to grasp for the special ed teacher

> because they are working on fundamentals and helping with the fluency and those kinds of things (Participant 10, Focus Group SE-2).

> And the same with that systematically and explicitly teaching higher order thinking and problem solving skills. I mean if a kiddo, you know, can't even figure out the difference between [the sounds] "sh" and "ch" is that really necessary for them? Is that really best practice for them? (Participant 21, Focus Group P-1).

Teachers in focus group T-2 suggested that evaluators may even need to go beyond knowledge of the IEP and observe the students in multiple environments to understand how the teacher's instruction affects their level of engagement. That is, in order to interpret whether the student is truly engaged and is demonstrating higher order thinking, it would be important compare the student's engagement in both general and special education.

> Well, one way, like where it says element E, "monitor their level of engagement," . . . one way I think they could address that in a pull-out model is having the principal go in and observe the students that are going to be in your group and see what their behaviors and learning looks like in their general education environment and then what it look like in your environment. Because most likely you will see that you are more easily able to differentiate and meet their needs and the students in return are being engaged whereas in class if the teacher is not differentiating then they are just kind of there (Participant 12, Focus Group T-2).

In addition, three groups (T-1, SE-1, and SE-2) questioned whether these indicators would be appropriate for evaluating teachers who are providing intensive interventions for basic skills. That is, they wondered whether a teacher focused on building fundamental skills could also include activities intended to develop higher order skills. Special education experts in focus group SE-1 argued that it would be important for an evaluator to know that, in many cases, teachers may not be focused on higher order thinking because they have been instructed, in their pre-service training and/or by their districts, to write IEP goals which focus only on basic skills.

I think E, that's where I thought many of our special ed teachers are going to be hung up because when they write their goals and objectives —what do we talk about? We talk about writing them smartly. We use S.M.A.R.T. goals and objectives and it is measureable. . . . The higher order thinking [and measureable goals] don't always go hand and hand. And I think that's where we fail as a department. It is "specific measurable," not "specific higher order thinking." We don't really ask students to show how they can do it [higher order thinking] but if they can, you know, divide with single digit numbers. I mean that is what we ask them to do. I think that's going to be real difficult for special ed teachers (Participant 4, Focus Group SE-1).

Finally, teachers in focus group T-1 also expressed concern regarding the indicators which referenced students meeting or exceeding high expectations. They felt that it would be important for the evaluator to understand the individual student needs identified in the IEP when interpreting these indicators because students may be showing significant progress but their academic performance may still lag behind general education peers.

But the way I thought about high expectations is by the end of November I want you reading sixty words per minute. That is my expectations by the end of November. If you reach it great, we set a new expectation to help decrease the gap. I am not going to set their first expectation as you are reading at a first grade level and we are going to get to sixth grade reading level. So it is little goals. But if they are meeting my expectations which is a little step to the long-term goal that is how I see those high expectations (Participant 2. Focus Group T-1).

Standard III: Element F

Standard III: Element F - Teachers provide students with opportunities to work in teams and develop leadership qualities.	
Partially Proficient	The Teacher: • Plans lessons that: require students to work individually and in groups, provide opportunities for students to participate using various roles and modes of communication.
Proficient	The Teacher: • Provides students with opportunities to work in teams • Adjusts team composition based on lesson objectives and student needs • Varies group size, composition, and tasks to create opportunities for students to interact and learn from each other
Accomplished	Students: • Assume leadership roles in their teams whenever possible • Accept and fulfill their assigned roles within the team
Exemplary	Students: • Utilize group processes to build trust and promote effective interactions among team members

Figure 21. Standard III, Element F. Source: Colorado Department of Education. *Rubric for Evaluating Colorado's Teachers*, p. 15. August 2012.

Research question 1. None of the focus groups believed that the indicators in this element, as written, could be used to document best practices in special education.

Research question 2. All six focus groups felt that the indicators in this element would require some type of interpretation or inference in order to document best practices in special education. Teachers in focus group T-2 expressed concern regarding the student behaviors in the accomplished and exemplary categories, but did not provide any rationale for their concern.

One of the focus groups (SE-1) asserted that the required student behaviors—collaboration, leadership, fulfilling group roles—could be directly impacted by the student's disability. Therefore, the evaluator would need to have knowledge of the IEP in order to interpret the indicators accurately. One participant provided an example from her teaching career.

There is something about having that knowledge right? So the evaluator having the knowledge of the special needs or the specific student. I think about a student

that I had that used a voice communication device. She could speak, she had cerebral palsy, but it was really difficult unless you knew her. And she was also in a wheelchair so she couldn't get out and engage. But I wanted her to still try to be a leader. So when I put her in groups I made her the leader. So she didn't color the poster or do the writing but she said use blue or use this or use that. So she said one or two words with her voice communication device which to me helped her look like a leader but would an outside perspective person understand that without the knowledge of special ed? I don't know (Participant 6, Focus Group SE-1).

Members of three focus groups (SE-2, T-1, and P-1) argued that the curriculum

for and the size of intervention groups might impact the ability of teachers and students to

demonstrate the behaviors in this element. That is, because many interventions are

performed in small groups and focus on direct instruction, the amount of various group

interactions may be limited. Therefore, it would be important for the evaluator to have

knowledge of the individual interventions to interpret these indicators accurately. One

teacher stated, "Well if you are doing LLI [*Leveled Literacy Intervention*™] or *Wilson*™

as written you are not going to see these things [points to indicators in element F]. You

are just not because they are not in the program" (Participant 3, Focus Group T-1).

Principals expressed a similar feeling:

- And then in F, I just, in proficient, thinking about that last bullet where it says varies group size, composition and task. If they are working one-on-one or one- on-two, you don't have those opportunities. And sometimes there are kids that many times don't benefit from large or varied group size.
- And same with opportunities to work in teams.
- Uh huh.
- It could actually be inappropriate depending on the student (Participants 18 and 21, Focus Group P-1).

Standard III: Element G

Standard III: Element G - Teachers communicate effectively, making learning objectives clear and providing appropriate models of language.	
Partially Proficient	The Teacher: • Models effective communication skills • Sets expectations and employs strategies so students can communicate effectively
Proficient	The Teacher: • Models and teaches effective skills in listening, presenting ideas, and leading discussions • Provides opportunities for students to practice communication skills
Accomplished	The Students: • Apply effective written and oral communication skills in their work • Demonstrate a respectful and sensitive approach toward fellow students and teachers
Exemplary	The Students: • Participate in teams in ways that build trust and ownership of ideas among team members • Model formal communications in academic settings

Figure 22. Standard III, Element G. Source: Colorado Department of Education. *Rubric for Evaluating Colorado's Teachers*, p. 16. August 2012.

Research question 1. Two focus groups (SE-1 and P-1) thought that the indicators in this element could be used to document best practices in special education. The special education experts believed that "G is good practice for any teacher" (Participant 9, Focus Group SE-2). However, they did not provide any additional explanation for their belief. Similarly, principals in focus group P-1 stated that they felt the teacher behaviors could be used to document best practices, but the student behaviors were potentially problematic. One participant stated, "On G, I was mostly okay with partially proficient and proficient. Accomplished and exemplary—I just could not even envision that happening" (Participant 21, Focus Group P-2). Again, no additional information was provided.

Research question 2. Although participants in focus groups T-2 and P-1 stated that they thought this element would require inference or interpretation, only one group articulated a specific concern regarding the application of this element to documenting

best practices in special education. Teachers in focus group T-1 felt that, because this

element addresses interpersonal skills, students with E/BD may not be able to

demonstrate the behaviors in the accomplished and exemplary categories. They suggested

that the evaluator would need a background in special education or knowledge of the

individual IEPs.

> I thought it was good. I thought for E/BD kids the participating in trust building is
> going to look different in that it's going to be baby steps for trust with a lot of my
> E/BD kids. . . . I mean it just looks different—it is going to look different. So you
> might not see a huge amount of trust but it is for them. So that goes back to the
> observer knowing my students, knowing their IEPs, knowing their background
> (Participant 1, Focus Group T-1).

Standard III: Element H

Standard III: Element H - Teachers use appropriate methods to assess what each student has learned, including formal and informal assessments, and use results to plan further instruction.	
Partially Proficient	The Teacher: • Establishes consistent and appropriate strategies for assigning grades • Bases grades on multiple measures that provide a comprehensive and consistent picture of student skills and knowledge • Includes goal setting and documentation of student progress toward mastery of state content standards in assessment plans
Proficient	The Teacher: • Requires students to complete assessment tasks similar to those on state (e.g., CSAP) and national (e.g., SAT, NAEP) assessments • Uses a variety of assessment methods • Provides frequent, timely, specific and individualized feedback about the quality of student work • Teaches students to use feedback in their learning
Accomplished	The Students: • Self-assess on a variety of skills and concepts • Articulate their personal strengths and needs based on self-assessment • Effectively use formal and informal feedback to monitor their learning
Exemplary	The Students: • Assume ownership for: evaluating and monitoring their progress, setting learning goals, compiling portfolios of their work, applying teacher feedback to improve performance and accelerate their learning

Figure 23. Standard III, Element H. Source: Colorado Department of Education. *Rubric
for Evaluating Colorado's Teachers*, p. 16. August 2012.

Research question 1. Three focus groups (T-1, SE-1, and SE-2) believed that the

indicators in this element could be used to document best practices in special education.

Participants asserted that collecting formal and informal assessment data and using it to

individualize instruction is a principal tenet of special education. Therefore, these groups

felt the indicators could be used to evaluate special education best practices with no

inference or interpretation.

> I feel like we do this or I do this. . . . I feel like this is SpEd. Like, "uses a variety of assessment methods." Yeah. "Completing portfolios of their work." Yeah. I mean across the board it is very in tune to what we do as special ed teachers and what our students do as special ed students (Participant 1, Focus Group T-1).

> — And I think H is special ed.
> — Uh huh. And that is about assessment.
> — It is about assessment and using assessment and feedback to kids and kids using that information. I think our teachers will shine. I mean there are a number of elements in here where I think they will be off the charts in what they are doing.
> — I think this is where their training actually lies.
> — Uh huh. This is their expertise.
> — This is their training. This is how they are trained. They are trained in assessment. Maybe not so much formative but summative and progress monitoring. And this is what they do every day (Participants 9 and 10, Focus Group SE-2).

> — I like that they're basing grades on multiple measures. For element H, not just one.
> — Yeah a variety of assessments.
> — I like that they included personal strengths and it is not assessing just to determine deficits but also students can know what they are good at as well. That really ups the ante I think where special ed is such a deficit model and it changes that mindset a bit, that piece of the standard.
> — And it is asking again the students to evaluate their own learning, to set their own goals, you know. Teaching them that life skill of compiling a portfolio which I think is something we teach in the credential programs right? So we might need a little bit of help in the content area but these are the things we are teaching our teachers hopefully. And thus, they should be doing this (Participants 4, 6, and 7, Focus Group SE-1).

Research question 2. Both groups of principals felt that the indicators in this

element could not be used as written, but rather would require significant inference or

interpretation to document best practices in special education. While the principals in

focus groups P-1 and P-2 agreed that using continuous assessment to inform instruction is

a special education best practice, they argued that the evaluator would need to have

background knowledge in special education to determine if the assessments being used

were appropriate for the student. One principal stated, "And then also that developmental

appropriateness of requiring students to complete assessment tests similar to those on

state assessments. . . . I just kept thinking about the developmental appropriateness

(Participant 21, Focus Group P-1). Another commented:

> [A]ssessments need to be to the standard not just I am going to teach this. . . . But again that requires the principal to really know what is on those standards and what should be on there and to hold the teachers accountable. . . . It really does require a leader knowing a lot about that (Participant 22, Focus Group P-2).

Principals in focus group P-1 felt that evaluators would also need knowledge of

the individual IEPs to accurately apply the indicator "Includes goal setting and

documentation of student progress toward mastery of state content standards in

assessment plans" (CDE, 2012, p. 16). However, they did not provide any additional

explanation, simply stating, "I think the last bullet in H you would have to have some

knowledge of IEP goals and objectives. It talks about goal setting and that

communication and progress" (Participant 18, Focus Group P-1). Finally, principals in

this group noted that evaluators would need to understand that portions of this element

might require special education teachers to spend time providing direct instruction to

students about how to use assessment results.

> And under proficient I struggled with the providing frequent, timely, specific, and individualized feedback about the quality of student work. And then, that it teaches students to use that feedback in their learning. I just struggled with those two as far as seeing that in a resource setting. . . . I was specifically thinking of time limitations on that third box and explicitly teaching students to use feedback in their learning. I just feel like that is higher order and that is not necessarily appropriate depending on who the students are (Participant 21, Focus Group P-2).

Standard IV: Standard as a Whole

  Research question 1. All six focus groups indicated that Standard IV—"Teachers

reflect on their practice" (CDE, 2012, p. 18)—could be used to document non-

instructional best practices in special education (e.g. communication with general

education). All the participants felt that they would expect to see the same professional

behaviors from all staff members, including special educators. Principals in focus group

P-1 suggested that, of all the standards, this one would be the most "feasible for a special

ed teacher to attain, even in accomplished and exemplary" (Participant 18, Focus Group

P-1). Teachers in focus group T-2 echoed similar thoughts, "They like all of a sudden

shifted gears and gave you a chance to really show what you can do. And I think this is

also inherent in our job because these are the leadership and collaborative ones"

(Participant 17, Focus Group T-2). Special education experts in focus group SE-2 best

articulated the sentiment expressed by all six groups.

> – I see this as this is just a good teacher and it is not whether it is special ed or it
> is something else that this is a good teacher. And we would expect this of any
> teacher in our building. And that, separate from what it is that they teach, we
> should be able to observe, know about and measure these types of activities. I
> would expect to see this from any teacher whatever grade level, what they are
> teaching, who they are teaching, what type of program they are in, I would
> expect all of this to be to some degree—
> – Because it is not about pedagogy.
> – It is not. It is about what we would expect professionally from any staff
> member in our building (Participants 9 and 10, Focus Group SE-2).

  Research question 2. None of the focus groups felt that the overall focus of the

standard would require substantial inference or interpretation. However, two focus groups

had concerns about specific elements which are detailed below.

Standard IV: Element A

Standard IV: Element A - Teachers demonstrate that they analyze student learning, development, and growth and apply what they learn to improve their practice.	
Partially Proficient	The Teacher: • Understands the importance of knowing how student learning occurs and what can be done to improve student growth • Dialogues with colleagues to make connections between school and classroom data and research-based practices
Proficient	The Teacher: • Applies knowledge of student learning, development, and growth to the development of: lesson plans, instructional strategies • Collects multiple examples of student work to determine student progress over time
Accomplished	The Teacher: • Modifies instruction to assure that all students: understand what is expected of them. are challenged to meet or exceed expectations, participate in classroom activities with a high level of frequency and quality, take responsibility for their work, have the opportunity to build on their interests and strengths
Exemplary	The Teacher: • Monitors and evaluates personal behavioral changes to determine what works for students • Develops student learning plans based on multiple examples of student work and information gathered from students, families and significant adults, and colleagues

Figure 24. Standard IV, Element A. Source: Colorado Department of Education. *Rubric for Evaluating Colorado's Teachers*, p. 18. August 2012.

Research question 1. One focus group (P-1) felt that the last indicator in this

element, "Develops student learning plans based on multiple examples of student work

and information gathered from students, families and significant adults, and colleagues"

(CDE, 2012, p. 18) was very appropriate for documenting best practices in special

education, saying, "On exemplary, the last little box, 'develops student learning plans

based on multiple examples'—that is the first one that sounds like special ed more so

than [anything else]" (Participant 20, Focus Group P-1). However, no additional rationale

was provided.

Members of focus group T-1 felt that, although this element had indicators which

required students to demonstrate self-determination, the indicators were appropriate for

evaluating special educators because they were written broadly.

— I liked how it said in the accomplished part [students] are challenged to meet or exceed. I thought that was good for all of our kids from SLD to E/BD.
— Again these are all kind of written really broadly I think. Take responsibility for their work. I mean that's pretty broad. Understand what is expected of them. Like it is written in umbrella language (Participants 1 and 3, Focus Group T-1)

Research question 2. However, one member of focus group T-1 felt that the broadness of this element could be problematic depending on how the evaluator interpreted the indicators in the accomplished and exemplary categories. If these indicators are applied literally, some behaviors will not be demonstrated by students with disabilities. One participant felt, in this case, that it would be important for the evaluator to interpret this indicator as progress towards the behavior. "This [gesturing toward the indicators in the accomplished category] is a goal and this is something to accomplish. Not something we have accomplished. . . . It is all to the interpretation of the observer (Participant 1, Focus Group T-1).

Principals in focus group P-1 asserted that although the indicators in this element would be appropriate for documenting best practice in special education but that some conferencing between the teacher and the evaluator would be required.

I think it would involve a conversation with the teacher to make sure we are on the same page but almost all of it is the teacher providing evidence of these things. As long as we talked ahead of time about what these look like. It seems like most of these in my mind are pretty feasible for a special ed teacher to attain, even in accomplished and exemplary (Participant 18, Focus Group P-1).

Standard IV Element B

Standard IV: Element B - Teachers link professional growth to their professional goals.	
Partially Proficient	The Teacher: • Seeks high quality professional development opportunities to meet professional goals • Learns new skills to improve professional practice • Applies knowledge and skills learned through professional development to instructional decisions
Proficient	The Teacher: • Engages in professional development activities based on: likelihood of having a positive impact on student learning, alignment with content standards and school and district initiatives, current research, student needs
Accomplished	The Teacher: • Shares lessons learned with colleagues • Develops and follows a long-term professional development plan
Exemplary	The Teacher: • Willingly tries new and different ways of teaching new skills

Figure 25. Standard IV, Element B. Source: Colorado Department of Education. *Rubric for Evaluating Colorado's Teachers*, p. 18. August 2012.

Research question 1. Only three focus groups (T-1, SE-1, and P-1) discussed this element specifically and all three indicated that they thought participation in quality professional development was a best practice in special education. One group, the special education experts in focus group SE-2, thought that special education teachers should participate in additional professional development designed specifically for them, particularly in the area of literacy.

> I think it is really important that staff participate in school-wide [professional development] but then sometimes they go off and they go over and above and do some individualized PD. So maybe they need to do some *Language*!™ or *Wilson*™ training. Something that is specific to special education. But if they are not part of that school-wide PD—because I am hoping school-wide PD is about bullying and behavior management and good classroom practices and literacy and numeracy. Because our staff don't get enough literacy and numeracy in their teacher prep programs. So we have to make sure that they [special educators] are a part of that so they can develop those skills. . . . They need the school-wide and then a little extra for the special part of them (Participant 10, Focus Group SE-2).

Research question 2. The teachers in focus group T-1 and the principals in focus group P-1 agreed that special education teachers should be seeking out professional

development which is targeted to their unique needs. However, both groups indicated

that, if the teacher is selecting his/her professional development activities, conferencing

between the teacher and the evaluator might be necessary interpret this element correctly.

That is, if the evaluator is unfamiliar with special education s/he should meet with the

teacher to determine exactly how the training connects to student needs, especially if the

training is happening outside the evaluator's building. One teacher stated that this

element "revolves around a lot of discussion" (Participant 1, Focus Group T-1).

The principals in focus group P-1 felt that, when special educators participated in

specialized professional development activities not provided by the school, evaluators

would need to infer the applicability of these activities. That is, these principals expressed

concern that, if the evaluator did not have a background in special education, s/he might

not be able to accurately interpret whether or not the professional development was

improving the teacher's professional practice.

> [I]n our school district professional development activities are primarily designed and delivered by the school district for our special education staff. It is not necessarily the case for gen ed. They have a little bit more flexibility. But I think there is so—there is so much that special education teachers are required to do by our district that they wouldn't have a lot of choice. . . . But for them to be able to do any other PD, it would be very challenging and therefore they could potentially be judged poorly. Basically I feel that is one place where I just check the boxes because they can't really control it. I have to just assume that my school district is setting it up so that it does all of those things [listed in the rubric] (Participants 21, Focus Group P-1).

> — Unless I am in the professional development they are in, so I know exactly what they learned, I can't really say whether they are applying it or not. But that is not—the only reason it would be specific to special ed teachers is in the sense that, you know, for a lot of our building PD it is not for special ed. It is for gen ed, so special education has to leave to go to other PD that I am not a part of. Then maybe I do know more about my gen ed teachers just simply because I am delivering their PD and I am obviously not going to do that for my special ed teachers.

− But then it is up to them to show you. I think that they have to provide that evidence, [It] is, "okay I took this and this is how I am using it" (Participants 18 and 21, Focus Group P-1).

Finally, these principals were concerned that keeping track of the professional development activities for individual teachers might unduly add to an administrator's workload.

> [They have a] professional growth plan, but tracking how they are doing that? Because our school offers a series of professional development. The district offers professional development and then their own professional growth plan, how are they getting that? Are they attending the district ones or ours? Is it on them to go seek it out? And then that again is a lot of work to understand how it aligns. Where is the repository of that information? Does it come through the conversation with the teacher? (Participant 19, Focus Group P-1).

Standard IV: Element C

Standard IV: Element C - Teachers are able to respond to a complex, dynamic environment.	
Partially Proficient	The Teacher: • Contributes to school committees and teams • Maintains a positive, productive and respectful relationship with colleagues
Proficient	The Teacher: • Initiates and leads collaborative activities with colleagues to: analyze student data and interpret results, apply findings to improve teaching practice, support struggling and/or advanced/above grade level students
Accomplished	The Teacher: • Serves as a critical friend for colleagues, both providing and receiving feedback on performance
Exemplary	The Teacher: • Strengthens teaching practice by adapting instructional practices based on colleague feedback and other types of performance data • Seeks specific feedback on areas of professional practice that are in need of improvement.

Figure 26. Standard IV, Element C. Source: Colorado Department of Education. Rubric for Evaluating Colorado's Teachers, p. 19. August 2012.

Research question 1. With the exception of one participant, no focus group commented specifically about documenting best practices within this element beyond agreeing that it was fine as written.

Research question 2. One participant from focus group T-1 questioned how evaluators would interpret the indicators which required teachers to solicit feedback regarding their practices when, in some buildings, the teacher may be the only special educator.

> Under exemplary, "specific feedback on areas of professional practice that are in need of improvement"—I am the only special ed teacher in the building. I am lucky I have a director if I can find the time to sit down and say, "Hey this isn't working". . . . So I think if you are the only special ed teacher in the building it could be hard to find somebody who knows—who has the knowledge base of what you need (Participant 2, Focus Group T-1).

Standard V: Standard as a whole

Research question 1. Special education experts in focus group SE-1 felt that this entire standard—"Teachers demonstrate leadership" (CDE, 2012, p. 21)—is highly applicable to special educators because, if they become active members of their school learning communities, it will facilitate the best practice of maximum inclusion of students with disabilities.

> That is how to become that effective member [of the school community] so students are welcomely [sic] accepted in that inclusive environment. And so many of our special ed teachers aren't doing that. They are just saying well I want them included and I want them to do this but I am just going to stay in my classroom and I don't want to go to that meeting and I don't want to do this. Well, then you don't want your kids included. I mean that's how I see it (Participant 6, Focus Group SE-1).

> **Research question 2.** Principals in focus group P-1 felt that the majority of this element could not be applied to documenting best practices in special education without significant inference or interpretation. These principals argued that an evaluator would have to interpret special education-specific activities (e.g. IEP meetings) as a form of school leadership because otherwise there are limited opportunities for these teachers to provide leadership or to participate on teams within the building.

As much as I thought [quality standard] four was applicable, standard five is not. I mean I struggled to—I would struggle to rate any special ed teacher even proficient because I think for them to take leadership roles on teams and professional growth activities and revisions to policies and procedures [would be difficult]. As much as I would like to see that happen they are pretty isolated and when we have professional development a lot of times they are not even there because they are doing stuff unique to their own group. . . . They don't even have opportunities to do that [provide leadership]. . . . I would feel bad but they would be partially proficient. Not from any fault of their own. And it goes back to the time thing too. Like even if they said, "Oh I really want to do this," how are you going to do this? Or even if you want to do it, I don't know if I have time to fit it into our professional development. It sounds great but we have these other things we have to get done (Participant 18, Focus Group P-1).

Members of this focus group also felt that special educators may have too many time obligations related to ensuring compliance with the IEP and, therefore, should not be expected to take on additional duties in their building.

I was worried about the contributing to school committees and teams and all that stuff related to that. As I said earlier they already have no time. They are using every available minute they possibly have to collaborate with gen ed, collaborate with each other, to meet with district stuff, to meet with me. . . . I actually had a tenured teacher in the past few years—because our school has a lot of leadership teams—and she was really stressed out. She would come to me and be like I have to go to one of those teams because otherwise I know that my evaluation is not going to be good. And I would be like I don't want you on a team. You are already working nine to ten hours a day (Participant 21, Focus Group P-1).

Standard V: Element A

Standard V: Element A - Teachers demonstrate leadership in their schools.	
Partially Proficient	The Teacher: • Contributes to school committees and teams • Maintains a positive, productive and respectful relationship with colleagues
Proficient	The Teacher: • Provides leadership to school-based teams in order to harness the skills and knowledge of colleagues
Accomplished	The Teacher: • Shares knowledge of helpful practices with colleagues • Confers with school administrators to improve teacher working and student learning conditions
Exemplary	The Teacher: • Initiates and leads collaborative activities with colleagues to: analyze student data and interpret results, apply findings to improve teaching practice. share ideas to improve teaching and learning, contribute to school goals, support struggling students

Figure 27. Standard V, Element A. Source: Colorado Department of Education. *Rubric for Evaluating Colorado's Teachers*, p. 21. August 2012.

Research question 1. The teachers in both focus groups T-1 and T-2 suggested that this element was primarily about being a professional member of the school community and "pulling your weight in the school" (Participant 2, Focus Group T-1). They argued that contributing to school teams and collaborating with other teachers is a best practice in special education and is an area where an effective special educator could demonstrate behaviors in the exemplary category with no additional inference or interpretation on the part of the evaluator,

> I also think that I spend an enormous amount of time on this so I am happy to see that I am going to get some kind of credit for it. . . . [F]or us who are already spending a lot of time on it [collaborating about student needs], this is where we kind of get those glowing marks (Participant 17, Focus Group T-2).

Research question 2. No focus groups thought that this element required interpretation or inference.

Standard V: Element B

Standard V: Element B - Teachers contribute knowledge and skills to educational practices and the teaching profession.	
Partially Proficient	The Teacher: • Collaborates with colleagues to: support student growth and development. contribute to school goals, enhance opportunities for professional growth, provide input into the management of the school
Proficient	The Teacher: • Leads professional growth and development activities whenever possible
Accomplished	The Teacher: • Participates in district wide decision making processes that impact the school
Exemplary	The Teacher: • Advocates for the inclusion of teachers in education and government decision making processes

Figure 28. Standard V, Element B. Source: Colorado Department of Education. *Rubric for Evaluating Colorado's Teachers*, p. 21. August 2012.

Research question 1. None of the focus groups felt that this element, as written, could be applied to documenting special education best practices.

Research question 2. Members of focus group SE-1 acknowledged that it would be appropriate to measure the contribution the special education teacher makes to the collaborative school environment. However, they argued that an evaluator would have to interpret leadership to include informal assistance to one's peers or active participation in professional organizations. "But I would define it in such a way to be able to say you are a leader when you helped Mary over here and you are showing her how. You are doing leadership" (Participant 5, Focus Group SE-1). Another participant suggested, "knowing if I went to something for CEC, Council for Exceptional Children, that is something. And that the person evaluating knows that" (Participant 6, Focus Group SE-1).

Principals in both focus groups P-1 and P-2 indicated that they were concerned about rating special education teachers on this element without inference and interpretation. The primary concern of most principals was that special education teachers may be providing assistance to other teachers, but that opportunities for formal leadership

of professional growth activities are limited. Therefore, evaluators would need to

interpret activities such as directing IEP teams as a form of leadership.

> Perfect example. I know our SpEd teacher is in sense limited to what directly correlates say to her SpEd department and partly because it is time limitations between IEP staffings and between the help she gives with RTI, she is not going to have help for our teaching-learning process and our standards-based grading that is kind of getting off the ground because her time is full. So that I could see that you have to understand that within her sphere I want her to be a leader with her students, but she definitely has a sphere. And not that she—not that obviously we say don't participate—but we just simply know before and after school she's already got stuff going on (Participant 23, Focus Group P-2).

The teachers in focus group T-1 expressed concern about this element because, while

they acknowledged that collaboration is a best practice in special education, evaluators

must interpret this element to take into account the factors which might limit a teacher's

ability to collaborate. Teachers discussed that in many buildings special educators lack a

common planning time with general educators which would, therefore, limit the

evaluator's ability to observe a special educator's collaboration skills. One teacher

summarized the problem saying:

> Special ed teachers never get to participate in it [grade level planning] because you know we have kids all day and that is always an issue. . . . It doesn't work. They can plan. Like they have the same planning but it doesn't really work for us to plan with them just because of schedule (Participant 3, Focus Group T-1).

Standard V: Element C

Standard V: Element C - Teachers advocate for schools and students, partnering with students, families and communities as appropriate.	
Partially Proficient	The Teacher: • Contributes to and/or participates in school and district task forces and committees to advocate for students
Proficient	The Teacher: • Implements school and district policies and procedures with fidelity • Discusses potential revisions to policies and procedures with administrators in order to better address student and school needs
Accomplished	Students: • Suggest changes to their school experience that affect their ability to acquire a high quality education. • Articulate their support of practices that improve their access to learning opportunities
Exemplary	Students: • Advocate for curricular, school climate, and instructional improvements

Figure 29. Standard V, Element C. Source: Colorado Department of Education. *Rubric for Evaluating Colorado's Teachers*, p. 22. August 2012.

Research question 1. None of the participants in any focus group, even when prodded by the moderator, could identify any special education-specific best practice to which this element would apply.

Research question 2. Although members of focus group P-1, along with all other participants, believed that this element was not special education specific, they did note that an evaluator might need to interpret the student behaviors in the accomplished and exemplary categories in a manner that takes into account the impact of a student's disability.

> Well then on the one that is C, the students. All the things that the students are going to do. I was like in what reality? One of my special ed teachers actually is the co-advisor for student council so that she can get some of her students into student council. . . . And their involvement is they are not doing any of these things but the fact that she even has them in the room and is encouraging this should make her accomplished (Participant 21, Focus Group P-1).

Standard V: Element D

Standard V: Element D: Teachers demonstrate high ethical standards.	
Partially Proficient	The Teacher: • Demonstrates ethical behavior, including honesty, integrity, fair treatment, and respect for others
Proficient	The Teacher: • Maintains confidentiality of student and fellow teacher interactions as well as student and personal data
Accomplished	The teacher: • Demands ethical behavior on the part of students • Encourages colleagues to demonstrate ethical behavior
Exemplary	Students: • Adhere to ethical principles and demonstrate ethical behavior such as honesty, integrity, and respect for others

Figure 30. Standard V, Element D. Source: Colorado Department of Education. *Rubric for Evaluating Colorado's Teachers*, p. 22. August 2012.

Research question 1. Participants in every focus group stated that ethical behavior should be an expectation for all teachers and, therefore, they could not identify any unique special education practices that would need to be documented with this element.

Research question 2. However, one focus group (P-1) suggested that the expected student behaviors in the accomplished and exemplary categories might be impacted by a student's disability and, therefore, an evaluator might need to make significant inferences.

> Same with D, like obviously honesty and integrity and respect for others. I mean these are IEP goals that the kids have because they struggle so much with them. I mean obviously I am thinking of one of my ED kids. If he was ever honest like for twenty seconds, I would find a way to give that teacher a raise, you know, because it is so impossible (Participant 21, Focus Group P-1).

Findings in Response to Research Question 3

Consistent with the protocols for semi-structured focus groups (Kreuger, 1998), participants were guided but not obliged to provide commentary about every element in the rubric before moving to the next section. As displayed in Figures 32 and 33, this

protocol resulted in only one instance in which all six focus groups addressed Research

Question 1 for the same element and only seven instances in which all six focus groups

addressed Research Question 2 for the same element. In addition, as illustrated repeatedly

throughout the element-by-element analysis, intra-category consensus (e.g., "all

principals believed . . .) did not always exist. Therefore, a comprehensive comparative

analysis required to answer Research Question 3 (What differences, if any, exist among

the judgments of principals, teachers, and special education leaders about the *Rubric for

Evaluating Colorado's Teachers*?) could not be conducted.

| | Research Question 1 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Focus Group Question 1 | | | | | | Focus Group Question 2 | | | | | |
	T-1	T-2	SE-1	SE-2	P-1	P-2	T-1	T-2	SE-1	SE-2	P-1	P-2
WHOLE RUBRIC			●			●						●
STANDARD I	●					●						
Element A	●	●		●	●	●			●			
Element B		●	●		●	●						
Element C	●			●	●							
Element D	●		●			●						
Element E	●		●									
Element F	●		●			●						
STANDARD II	●		●	●		●						`
Element A	●			●								
Element B												
Element C	●			●								
Element D	●			●								●
Element E			●	●								
Element F	●											
STANDARD III		●	●									
Element A			●									
Element B	●		●		●							
Element C	●		●									
Element D	●		●		●							
Element E	●		●									
Element F												
Element G				●	●							
Element H	●		●	●								
STANDARD IV			●	●	●							
Element A	●				●							
Element B	●			●								
Element C												
STANDARD V			●	●								
Element A	●											
Element B	●		●								●	
Element C												
Element D	●											

Figure 31. Focus Group Comments by Research Question 1 and Section of Rubric

	Research Question 2																							
	Focus Group Question 3						Focus Group Question 4						Focus Group Question 5						Focus Group Question 6					
	T-1	T-2	SE-1	SE-2	P-1	P-2	T-1	T-2	SE-1	SE-2	P-1	P-2	T-1	T-2	SE-1	SE-2	P-1	P-2	T-1	T-2	SE-1	SE-2	P-1	P-2
WHOLE RUBRIC	•	•	•				•			•	•		•						•					•
STANDARD I				•			•	•		•	•	•	•			•				•	•		•	•
Element A	•	•		•	•		•	•	•	•	•	•		•			•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Element B	•	•		•	•	•				•	•	•		•		•			•	•	•	•	•	•
Element C	•	•	•		•		•	•		•						•					•	•	•	
Element D				•	•	•	•	•		•	•	•	•							•			•	
Element E		•			•		•						•			•						•	•	
Element F	•						•	•			•		•							•			•	
STANDARD II							•	•	•			•		•		•				•	•		•	•
Element A							•	•			•		•		•	•		•	•	•			•	
Element B				•						•	•		•		•				•	•				
Element C										•	•			•		•			•	•				
Element D				•			•	•	•		•	•		•		•			•	•			•	
Element E		•		•				•			•			•		•	•		•	•			•	
Element F			•	•						•	•			•		•	•		•		•		•	
STANDARD III							•		•			•	•							•				
Element A			•	•	•		•			•			•		•					•			•	
Element B										•	•				•	•							•	
Element C				•						•	•								•	•			•	
Element D			•	•			•		•	•	•								•		•	•	•	
Element E			•	•			•			•	•					•					•	•	•	
Element F			•	•			•		•	•	•		•						•	•	•		•	•
Element G							•																•	
Element H						•				•							•						•	
STANDARD IV																							•	
Element A													•										•	
Element B																							•	
Element C													•										•	
STANDARD V																								
Element A																							•	
Element B		•																	•		•			
Element C											•								•				•	
Element D		•		•							•										•		•	

Figure 32. Focus Group Comments by Research Question 2 and Section of Rubric

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Until large-scale longitudinal data is available, it will be difficult to determine

whether evaluators can accurately assess special educators' professional practices when

the indicators in teacher performance rubrics are not differentiated to take into account

the unique roles and responsibilities of these teachers. Therefore, this exploratory study

provided an opportunity, in a focus group setting, for special education teachers,

principals, and special education experts to voice their beliefs about the extent to which

best practices in special education could be observed and documented using a standard

rubric. Their extensive and detailed comments were coded, reduced, and analyzed to

enable the researcher to answer the following questions:

Q1 In the judgment of principals, teachers, and special education leaders, do the indicators in the *Rubric for Evaluating Colorado's Teachers* capture the full range of best practices in special education? If not, what aspect of best practices in special education is omitted?

Q2 In the judgment of principals, teachers, and special education leaders, what indicators, if any, in the *Rubric for Evaluating Colorado's Teachers* are confusing or require substantial inference or interpretation?

Q3 What differences, if any, exist among the judgments of principals, teachers, and special education leaders about the *Rubric for Evaluating Colorado's Teachers?*

It bears repeating that the draft Colorado rubric was used solely as a discussion tool. The

focus group participants were not asked to suggest revisions to the rubric because this

study was independent dissertation research that was neither sponsored nor endorsed by the Colorado Department of Education.

Major Themes and Conclusions

After summarizing the participant comments in Chapter IV, the simple response to Research Questions 1 and 2 is that special education best practices cannot be documented using a standard teacher performance rubric without substantial inference and/or interpretation. Furthermore, two essential practices in special education— management of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) process and the consistent use of evidence-based interventions as part of the Response to Intervention (RtI) model— cannot be documented at all.

These overall conclusions were not unexpected in light of several salient themes that repeated throughout the focus group discussions (Figure 35). These themes should be considerations whenever a standard teacher performance rubric is applied to special educators.

**The Unique Role of Special
Educators Must Be
Acknowledged**

Substantial focus group dialogue centered on the over-arching question: "Are special educators being evaluated as interventionists, content area experts, or both?" Clearly, the assumptions made about special educators' expected role(s) and responsibilities will determine how an evaluator views their performance against indicators in the rubric. Most often, special educators do not replace general educators as the primary content instructors. Rather, they support the general curriculum by providing interventions across a variety of instructional delivery models (e.g., co-teaching, small

	Major Themes				
	The unique role of special educators must be acknowledged in evaluations	Curriculum may look different in special education	Expected student behaviors may look different for students with disabilities	Conferences must be a prominent part of special educator evaluations	Indicators must document the IEP process and RtI model
Rubric As A Whole		●	●	●	●
Standard I	●	●	●	●	
Element A	●	●	●	●	●
Element B	●	●	●	●	
Element C	●	●	●		
Element D	●	●	●	●	
Element E		●	●	●	
Element F			●	●	
Standard Ii	●		●	●	
Element A	●		●	●	
Element B		●	●		
Element C		●	●		
Element D	●		●	●	
Element E	●		●	●	
Element F	●		●	●	
Standard Iii	●		●	●	
Element A	●		●	●	
Element B			●	●	
Element C		●	●	●	
Element D	●		●	●	
Element E	●		●	●	
Element F	●	●	●	●	
Element G			●	●	
Element H		●	●		
Standard Iv				●	●
Element A			●	●	
Element B				●	
Element C			●		
Standard V	●		●	●	●
Element A					
Element B	●				
Element C			●		
Element D			●		

Figure 33. Major Themes and Section of Rubric

group pull-out, self-contained classes, etc.) that reinforce content. As interventionists, special educators "fill in the gaps" by providing intensive instruction about basic skills because, without such instruction, students with disabilities would be unable to access the general curriculum. In addition, special educators are responsible for collaborating with general education teachers to develop curricular modifications and accommodations for students with disabilities. Finally, special educators may be responsible for explicit instruction of social-emotional skills and behavioral strategies, in addition to teaching academic lessons.

Ideally, teacher performance rubrics would include indicators that reflect the distinct function(s) a special educator performs. However, in the absence of such differentiation, evaluators must take into account how the unique interventionist role influences a special educator's rationale for the particular instructional delivery model selected, the specific learning objectives and types of lessons, and the division of responsibilities between the general and special educators.

**Curriculum May Look Different
in Special Education**

In order to assess any teacher's instructional performance accurately, the evaluator needs to have a general understanding of the curriculum for the particular content area and grade level being taught, including the scope and sequence of instruction. These parameters are straightforward in general education because, normally, the district or building will have selected a single curriculum for each general education content area (e.g., *Everyday Math*™ for grades 1 through 6).

However, special educators deliver instruction aligned with the individual student needs articulated in the IEP and, therefore, they employ a variety of instructional

programs and intervention approaches. Special education teachers frequently are "backfilling holes" in a student's skill set and an evaluator may not see lessons focused on mastery of grade-level standards, application of higher order thinking skills or student-initiated discovery. In addition, many intervention programs such as *Wilson Reading*™—if delivered with fidelity—involve substantial direct instruction and, therefore, provide only limited opportunities for critical thinking, creativity, and/or accelerated learning. Therefore, instructional indicators in a standard teacher performance rubric may not always be the most appropriate measures of special educator effectiveness unless evaluators have at least a basic familiarity with the major intervention curricula being used in their schools and can interpret the indicators in light of the instructional protocols required by each curriculum.

Expected Student Behaviors May
Look Different for Students
with Disabilities

It is not unusual for teacher performance rubrics to contain student behaviors as outcomes that are assumed to derive from the teacher's instructional and classroom management strategies. However, due to their disabilities, students receiving special education services may not evidence academic or social-emotional behaviors at the level expected from their same age peers. This does not imply that students with disabilities or their teachers "get a pass." In fact, a long-term goal in most IEPs is the eventual development of a student's ability to demonstrate behaviors such as articulating their learning goals and strategies, working in cooperative groups, staying on task, being respectful toward others, etc. Therefore, evaluators need to be aware that behaviors which they may judge to be below average actually could represent significant progress against

baseline behaviors in the students' IEPs. As a result, indicators of student behavior in a standard rubric may not always be the most appropriate measures of special educator effectiveness. This is especially true when observing instructional strategies employed for students with an emotional/behavioral disorder, whose highly charged behaviors often can bring their academic instruction to a halt. In these cases, the special education best practice may be to work on behavior management skills until students are able to return to the academic instructional setting.

Conferences Must Be a Prominent
Part of Special Educator
Evaluations

Teacher and evaluator dialogues are essential for special education teacher evaluation because pre-conferences will mitigate, if not eliminate, many of the interpretation and inference issues inherent in using a standard rubric to evaluate special educators. In a pre-conference, the special educator can alert his/her evaluator about areas in the rubric which might be misinterpreted if the evaluator is unfamiliar with special education best practices or individual student IEPs. During pre-conferences, special educators can brief evaluators about their special education rosters and instructional environments; each student's IEP goals; each student's current achievement levels (in comparison to grade-level peers); special education best practices that the teacher is employing for each student; and any other student-specific information (e.g., behavioral concerns) that would enable the evaluator be an informed observer.

Indicators Must Document
the IEP Process and RtI Model

Ideally, teacher performance rubrics would provide specific indicators to document two major special education best practices: the process for developing and

monitoring an IEP for each student with a disability and the consistent used of evidence-based interventions in the RtI model. There are no equivalents to these practices in general education and, therefore, standard teacher performance rubrics frequently do not include indicators that are adequate to document them.

The IEP is the legal document that describes the special educational programming and related services that will be provided to a student with a disability to facilitate his/her access to the general education curriculum in the least restrictive environment. Special educators are charged with ensuring that all facets of the IEP development process are completed in compliance with federal and state regulations. Specific components of this process include: (a) assembling an IEP team which includes the student and his/her parents, general educators, administrators, and related services personnel; (b) formally assessing the student's academic and social-emotional needs; (c) defining specific and measurable goals that will be met by the student; (d) describing in detail the curricular areas that will be modified and interventions that will be provided (or alternative curricula that will be followed); (e) identifying related services and any other supports needed to assist the student in meeting these goals; and (f) monitoring student progress (U.S. Department of Education, 2006).

Ideally, teacher performance rubrics would include indicators to explicitly document a special educator's performance related to the IEP process. The foremost rationale for including such indicators is to ensure that students with disabilities receive the most appropriate education in the least restrictive environment. In addition, documenting that a special educator conducts the IEP process in compliance with the federal and state requirements is necessary in order to avoid legal liabilities.

The RtI Model is a schoolwide, multi-tiered initiative to provide increasingly more intensive interventions to *any* student identified as being at-risk academically or behaviorally. Tier I includes proactive strategies and extra instruction within the general education classroom, provided primarily by general educators in consultation with special educators. In Tier II, special educators or other specialists provide more intensive interventions to those students who have not responded to previous strategies. Finally, if the Tier II interventions are unsuccessful, special educators assess students for special education eligibility, develop IEPs, and provide a full array of special education instructional and behavioral strategies (Council for Exceptional Children, 2008).

Therefore, a teacher performance rubric should have indicators that can explicitly document performance of RtI-related activities by *both* general and special educators. These should include: (a) how general education teachers perform the Tier I pre-testing, special instructional delivery, and progress monitoring; (b) the special educator's consultative activities to general educators performing these Tier I functions; (c) the special educator's provision of more intensive, evidence-based interventions in Tier II; and (d) the special educator's conduct of the eligibility determination process that staffs students into special education and the provision of the interventions.

Limitations and Areas for Further Research

The primary limitations of this research was that a comparison between participant categories could not be conducted because intra-category consensus was not always achieved and because there were only eight instances in which all six groups addressed the focus group questions. Although six focus groups were sufficient to reach theoretical saturation, having only two groups per participant category was not sufficient

to making definitive generalizations about each stakeholder category (e.g., "all principals believed that . . ."). In addition, the semi-structured nature of the focus groups did not require participants to address *every* rubric element in its entirety before moving on to the next section. A further limitation of the study was that it examined only one rubric and, therefore, the findings may not be generalizable to all standard teacher performance rubrics.

Further research might include conducting a larger number of focus groups in each participant category and/or using a more structured focus group protocol. Researchers might also select a different methodology and use the themes identified by this inquiry as a point of departure for constructing surveys or in-depth interviews about a particular theme or issue. Finally, using the same research questions to examine multiple teacher performance rubrics might reveal additional concerns and considerations.

Implications for Practice

As reported by the National Center for Teacher Quality (2012), almost three-quarters of the states and the District of Columbia had changed their policies about teacher evaluation between 2009 and 2011. Although these revamped teacher evaluation systems are currently in the pilot or actual implementation stages, data about the successes, problems, and any needed refinements of these models is still probably five years into the future. Nonetheless, this study can benefit special education and educational leadership praxis in the interim. Study results can inform state and local education agencies that use standard rubrics about the types of indicators that may not adequately document special educator effectiveness and this information can serve as the basis for the development of training materials. Having glossaries, interpretive

guidelines, side-by-side comparisons between general and special education instructional strategies, and illustrative special education "look fors" would enable both evaluators and special education teachers to share a common understanding of the performance expectations and could minimize the amount of inference and interpretation needed.

Mandate for the Future

Albert Einstein is reported to have cautioned against judging a fish by its ability to climb a tree. While not a perfect analogy, this admonition applies to judging the performance of special educators against a set of practices derived from assumptions about the general education instructional paradigm. If special educators provide, with fidelity, the evidence-based interventions that are aligned with individual student needs— but which differ from general education practices—they risk the possibility of being assessed as not "performing to the rubric" and, thus, of not being identified as an effective teacher.

Therefore, all stakeholders involved in both the development and use of teacher evaluation systems must be committed to developing an in-depth understanding of the complexities of the special education function in the nation's public schools. Further, they must incorporate this knowledge in the design and implementation of teacher performance rubrics that can explicitly document the special education best practices that students with disabilities deserve. Otherwise, if the evaluation process for special educators does not provide "accurate and credible information about individual teachers' instructional performance. . . . it gambles with the lives of students" (Weisberg et al., 2009, p. 4).

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APPENDIX A

Rubric for Evaluating Colorado's
Teachers: August 2012 Draft

IMPORTANT

Draft Version: August 1, 2012

The CDE Model Evaluation System is to be piloted and tested during the 2011-12 and 2012-13 school years. Statewide rollout of the evaluation system is scheduled for the 2013-14 school year.

This draft rubric will be used with 27 CDE Pilot Districts. The rubric will be revised throughout the pilot test based on lessons learned and feedback from pilot participants and the field.

Below is the timeline of implementation.

| Year 1: 2011-12 Development and Practice | Year 2: 2012-13 Use Study in Pilot Districts | Year 3: 2013-14 Validation and Implementation of Statewide Rollout | Year 4: 2014-15 Statewide Implementation |
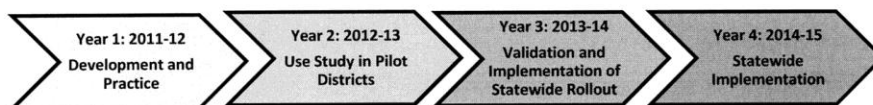
*Note that during Years 1 and 2, there will be opportunities for further revisions of the rubric, and it will be important to be sure you are working from the **latest rubric version**.

Past Rubric Revisions:
Dec. 31, 2011
Feb. 24, 2012
March 12, 2012
March 31, 2012
April 10, 2012

This version of the Rubric for Evaluating Colorado's Teachers reflects changes made based on feedback from pilot districts, teachers, principals, instructional leaders as well as education leaders across the state. This is the rubric that will be used by pilot districts during the 2012-13 school-year. We will be collecting feedback during the 2012-13 school-year to inform refinements for validation and implementation during 2013-14. Please send feedback for consideration directly to Dr. Jean Williams, Evaluation Design Specialist, at Williams_j@cde.state.co.us.

DRAFT – August 1, 2012*

Rubric for Evaluating Colorado's Teachers

Effective Teachers in the state of Colorado have the knowledge, skills, and commitments needed to provide excellent and equitable learning opportunities and growth for all students. They strive to support growth and development, close achievement gaps and to prepare diverse student populations for postsecondary and workforce success (See Appendix A). Effective Teachers facilitate mastery of content and skill development, and employ and adjust evidence-based strategies and approaches for students who are not achieving mastery and students who need acceleration. They also develop in students the skills, interests and abilities necessary to be lifelong learners, as well as for democratic and civic participation. Effective Teachers communicate high expectations to students and their families and utilize diverse strategies to engage them in a mutually supportive teaching and learning environment. Because effective Teachers understand that the work of ensuring meaningful learning opportunities for all students cannot happen in isolation, they engage in collaboration, continuous reflection, on-going learning and leadership within the profession.

The Teacher Quality Standards outline the knowledge and skills required of an effective Teacher and will be used to evaluate Teachers in the state of Colorado. All School Districts and BOCES shall base their evaluations of licensed classroom Teachers on the full set of Teacher Quality Standards and associated detailed Elements included below, or shall adopt their own locally developed standards that meet or exceed the Teacher Quality Standards and Elements.

Quality Standard I: Teachers demonstrate mastery of and pedagogical expertise in the content they teach. The elementary Teacher is an expert in literacy and mathematics and is knowledgeable in all other content that he or she teaches (e.g., science, social studies, arts, physical education, or world languages). The secondary Teacher has knowledge of literacy and mathematics and is an expert in his or her content endorsement area(s).

Not Evident	Partially Proficient	Proficient (Meets State Standard)	Accomplished	Exemplary
Element a: Teachers provide instruction that is aligned with the Colorado Academic Standards; their District's organized plan of instruction; and the individual needs of their students.				
There is inadequate evidence that the Teacher: O Plans instruction on a daily basis. O Includes a defensible progression of learning in instructional plans. O Uses instructional objectives that are appropriate for all students.	**The Teacher:** Develops lesson plans based on: O Colorado Academic Standards. O District's plan of instruction. O Student needs.	**. . . and** **The Teacher:** Aligns instruction with: O Student learning objectives. O District plan for instruction. O Colorado Academic Standards. O Student needs. ☐ Collaborates with other school staff to vertically and horizontally articulate the curriculum.	**. . . and** **Students:** ☐ Advance to the next level within the curriculum or next higher course in sequence. O Interact with the rigorous and challenging content in meaningful ways.	**. . . and** **Students:** Discuss gaps in their learning with: O Teacher. O Families and significant adults.
O Professional Practice is **Observable** during a classroom observation. ☐ Professional Practice is **Not Observable** during a classroom observation.				

DRAFT – August 1, 2012*

Quality Standard I: Teachers demonstrate mastery of and pedagogical expertise in the content they teach. The elementary Teacher is an expert in literacy and mathematics and is knowledgeable in all other content that he or she teaches (e.g., science, social studies, arts, physical education, or world languages). The secondary Teacher has knowledge of literacy and mathematics and is an expert in his or her content endorsement area(s).

Not Evident	Partially Proficient	Proficient (Meets State Standard)	Accomplished	Exemplary
Element b: Teachers demonstrate knowledge of student literacy development in reading, writing, speaking and listening.				
This section describes professional practices that should be demonstrated by ALL TEACHERS, regardless of grade level or subject taught.				
There is inadequate evidence that the Teacher: O Emphasizes literacy connections while teaching content other than reading, English, and/or language arts. O Has knowledge of how to integrate literacy across content areas.	**The Teacher:** Makes complex reading accessible to students by: O Making necessary adjustments to content. O Integrating literacy skills and knowledge into lessons. O Demonstrates a deep understanding of literacy content and skills.	. . . and **The Teacher:** Provides literacy instruction that enhances: O Critical thinking and reasoning. O Information literacy. O Collaboration. O Self-direction. O Innovation. O Focuses lessons on the reading of complex materials.	. . . and **Students:** O Communicate orally and in writing at levels that meet or exceed expectations for their age, grade, and ability level.	. . . and **Students:** Apply literacy skills: O Across academic content areas. O To understand complex materials. Exceed expectations in: O Critical thinking. O Problem solving skills. O Literacy skills.
This section describes professional practices that should be demonstrated by ELEMENTARY TEACHERS responsible for teaching language arts and/or reading.				
There is inadequate evidence that the Teacher: O Teaches students how to apply literacy skills in subjects other than reading, English, and/or language arts. O Emphasizes literacy connections to content other than reading or language arts.	**The Teacher:** Integrates literacy skills and knowledge into lessons and assignments across subject areas, including: O Phonological awareness. O Phonics. O Vocabulary. O Comprehension. O Fluency. O Writing. O Speaking. O Listening skills. Engages students in instruction that is: O Purposeful. O Direct. O Explicit. O Systematic.	. . . and **The Teacher:** Provides literacy instruction that is: O Needs-based. O Intensive. O Of sufficient duration to accelerate learning.	. . . and **Students:** Apply literacy skills (reading, writing, speaking, and listening): O Across academic content areas. O In everyday life. O To new/unfamiliar material.	. . . and **Students:** Exceed expectations for their age, grade, and ability levels in: O Reading O Writing O Speaking O Listening

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Quality Standard I: Teachers demonstrate mastery of and pedagogical expertise in the content they teach. The elementary Teacher is an expert in literacy and mathematics and is knowledgeable in all other content that he or she teaches (e.g., science, social studies, arts, physical education, or world languages). The secondary Teacher has knowledge of literacy and mathematics and is an expert in his or her content endorsement area(s).

Not Evident	Partially Proficient	Proficient (Meets State Standard)	Accomplished	Exemplary
Element b: Teachers demonstrate knowledge of student literacy development in reading, writing, speaking and listening.				
This section describes professional practices that should be demonstrated by SECONDARY TEACHERS responsible for teaching English, language arts and/or reading.				
There is inadequate evidence that the Teacher: O Teaches students how to apply literacy skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening) in other subjects. O Emphasizes literacy connections to content other than reading or language arts.	The Teacher: Integrates literacy skills and knowledge into lessons and assignments across subject areas, including: O Vocabulary. O Comprehension. O Fluency. O Writing. O Speaking. O Listening skills. Engages students in instruction that is: O Purposeful. O Direct. O Explicit. O Systematic.	. . . and The Teacher: Provides literacy instruction that is: O Needs-based. O Intensive. O Of sufficient duration to accelerate learning.	. . . and Students: Apply literacy skills (reading, writing, speaking, and listening): O Across academic content areas. O In everyday life. O To new/unfamiliar material.	. . . and Students: Exceed expectations for their age, grade, and ability levels in: O Reading. O Writing. O Speaking. O Listening.
O Professional Practice is **Observable** during a classroom observation. ▢ Professional Practice is **Not Observable** during a classroom observation.				

DRAFT – August 1, 2012*

Quality Standard I: Teachers demonstrate mastery of and pedagogical expertise in the content they teach. The elementary Teacher is an expert in literacy and mathematics and is knowledgeable in all other content that he or she teaches (e.g., science, social studies, arts, physical education, or world languages). The secondary Teacher has knowledge of literacy and mathematics and is an expert in his or her content endorsement area(s).

Not Evident	Partially Proficient	Proficient (Meets State Standard)	Accomplished	Exemplary
Element c: Teachers demonstrate knowledge of mathematics and understand how to promote student development in numbers and operations, algebra, geometry and measurement, and data analysis and probability.				
This section describes professional practices that should be demonstrated by **ALL TEACHERS.**				
There is inadequate evidence that the Teacher: O Includes math topics in discussions that do not have math as the primary focus. O Promotes and encourages students to make explicit math connections across content.	**The Teacher:** O Emphasizes to students why they need to learn math content and skills. O Uses instructional strategies that require students to apply and transfer mathematical knowledge to different content areas.	. . . and **The Teacher:** O Emphasizes interdisciplinary connections to math.	. . . and **Students:** O Share ideas and solutions to challenging problems. ☐ Strive to achieve the high standards set for them.	. . . and **Students:** O Use the language of math to talk about what they are doing. O Interpret mathematical information in ways that make it relevant to their learning.
This section describes professional practices that should be demonstrated by **All teachers responsible for teaching math.**				
There is inadequate evidence that the Teacher: Focuses math instruction beyond: O Recall of facts. O Development of computational skills. O Math as a series of rote procedures. Models: O Appropriate mathematical communication. O A variety of mathematical practices. O Use of mathematical skills in subjects other than math.	**The Teacher:** O Presents topics in sequence and in a manner appropriate to students' age and grade. O Helps students understand mathematics as a discipline. O Provides a balance of teaching for conceptual understanding and teaching for procedural fluency.	. . . and **The Teacher:** Establishes an effective mathematics environment by: O Challenging students to think deeply about the problems. O Requiring students to explain their solutions. O Posing questions that stimulate students' curiosity and encourage them to investigate further. O Actively engaging students in doing math. O Using real-world examples for problems whenever possible.	. . . and **Students:** O Learn to think mathematically by explaining their thinking to each other and to their Teacher. O Solve problems in a variety of ways and explain why they used specific strategies to classmates.	. . . and **Students:** O Recognize when they make procedural errors and take steps to correct them. ☐ Build on mathematical concepts to expand their learning and move to the next level in the course sequence.
O Professional Practice is **Observable** during a classroom observation. ☐ Professional Practice is **Not Observable** during a classroom observation.				

DRAFT – August 1, 2012*

Quality Standard I: Teachers demonstrate mastery of and pedagogical expertise in the content they teach. The elementary Teacher is an expert in literacy and mathematics and is knowledgeable in all other content that he or she teaches (e.g., science, social studies, arts, physical education, or world languages). The secondary Teacher has knowledge of literacy and mathematics and is an expert in his or her content endorsement area(s).

Not Evident	Partially Proficient	Proficient (Meets State Standard)	Accomplished	Exemplary
Element d: Teachers demonstrate knowledge of the content, central concepts, tools of inquiry, appropriate evidence-based instructional practices and specialized character of the disciplines being taught.				
There is inadequate evidence that the Teacher: O Breaks down concepts and teaches each part using appropriate, effective strategies and/or tools. O Uses appropriate instructional resources. O Employs a variety of instructional strategies to address student need.	**The Teacher:** Provides explanations of content that are: O Accurate. O Clear. O Concise. O Comprehensive O Uses instructional materials that are accurate and appropriate for the lesson being taught. O Maximizes learning opportunities.	. . . and **The Teacher:** O Designs lessons to assure that student learning objectives are addressed. O Engages students in a variety of explanations and multiple representations of concepts and ideas. O Uses a variety of inquiry methods to explore new ideas and theories.	. . . and **Students:** O Develop a variety of explanations and multiple representations of concepts. O Build on the skills and knowledge learned in the classroom to engage in more complex concepts, ideas, and theories Use a variety of inquiry tools and strategies to: O Learn content. O Understand central concepts. O Answer complex questions.	. . . and **Students** routinely: O Choose challenging tasks and instructional materials. O Apply newly learned content skills to unique situations and different disciplines. O Initiate discussions of intellectually challenging ideas and content.
Element e: Teachers develop lessons that reflect the interconnectedness of content areas/disciplines.				
There is inadequate evidence that the Teacher: O Monitors learning during instruction. O Highlights key concepts and connects them to other powerful ideas. O Implements instruction that communicates a purpose for learning.	**The Teacher:** Establishes an environment and uses instructional strategies to assure that instruction: O Addresses the full spectrum of learning needs, skill levels, and learning styles. O Articulates content and interdisciplinary connections.	. . . and **The Teacher:** O Carefully and clearly builds interdisciplinary connections for students. O Provides instructional strategies that include literacy, numeracy, and language development across content areas.	. . . and **Students:** O Reflect on their learning. O Help set their learning objectives. O Make connections between prior learning and the current lesson.	. . . and **Students:** O Use current lesson to accelerate their learning, and advance to the next performance level.

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O   Professional Practice is **Observable** during a classroom observation.
☐   Professional Practice is **Not Observable** during a classroom observation.

Quality Standard I: Teachers demonstrate mastery of and pedagogical expertise in the content they teach. The elementary Teacher is an expert in literacy and mathematics and is knowledgeable in all other content that he or she teaches (e.g., science, social studies, arts, physical education, or world languages). The secondary Teacher has knowledge of literacy and mathematics and is an expert in his or her content endorsement area(s).

Not Evident	Partially Proficient	Proficient (Meets State Standard)	Accomplished	Exemplary
Element f: Teachers make instruction and content relevant to students and take actions to connect students' background and contextual knowledge with new information being taught.				
There is inadequate evidence that the Teacher: O Motivates students to make connections to their learning. O Selects instructional materials and strategies with regard to relevance, central contexts, or foundational evidence base. O Consistently and appropriately links content and prior knowledge.	The Teacher: Designs lessons and units and uses instructional strategies that: O Helps students connect to their learning by linking curriculum with prior knowledge, experiences, and /or cultural contexts. O Employs appropriate services, resources, and materials to facilitate student engagement. O Is developmentally appropriate.	. . . and The Teacher: O Motivates students to make connections to prior learning. O Designs lessons and materials to assure that student learning objectives are addressed in ways that are meaningful for diverse learners.	. . . and **Students** connect to their learning by: O Interacting with materials that are relevant to them. O Asking questions and solving problems that are meaningful to them. O Making connections to prior learning in order to facilitate understanding of current content.	. . . and **Students:** O Are actively engaged in learning. O Choose tasks that challenge and expand their skills and knowledge. O Transfer knowledge to other theories, ideas, and/or content.
O Professional Practice is **Observable** during a classroom observation. ☐ Professional Practice is **Not Observable** during a classroom observation.				

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Examples of Artifacts that may be used to provide evidence of performance:	Evidence of performance provided by artifact:
☐ Student Achievement Data	
☐ Student feedback	
☐ Parent feedback	
☐ Lesson plans/units of study	
☐ Feedback from walkthrough observations	
☐ Instructional activities schedules	
☐ Student journals/learning logs	
☐ Student work	
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Ratings (# Points per rating at this level)	NE (0)	PP (1)	P (2)	A (3)	E (4)	Total Points
a. Provides instruction that is aligned with the Colorado Academic Standards; their District's organized plan of instruction, and the individual needs of students.						
b. Demonstrates knowledge of student literacy development in reading, writing, speaking and listening.						
c. Demonstrates knowledge of mathematics and understands how to promote student development in numbers and operations, algebra, geometry and measurement, and data analysis and probability.						
d. Teachers demonstrate knowledge of the content, central concepts, tools of inquiry, appropriate evidence-based instructional practices and specialized character of the disciplines being taught.						
e. Develops lessons that reflect the interconnectedness of content areas/disciplines.						
f. Makes instruction and content relevant to students and takes actions to connect students' background and contextual knowledge with new information being taught.						

0 to 5 Total Points = Not Evident	Overall Rating for Standard I:
6 to 9 Total Points = Partially Proficient	
10 to 14 Total Points = Proficient	
15 to 19 Total Points = Accomplished	
20 to 24 Total Points = Exemplary	

Evaluator Comments (Required for Ratings of "Not Evident" or "Partially Proficient" and recommended for all rating levels). Please indicate the element for which the comment applies if not for the standard as a whole.

Comments of person being evaluated. (Optional)

DRAFT – August 1, 2012*

Quality Standard II: Teachers establish a safe, inclusive and respectful learning environment for a diverse population of students.				
Not Evident	**Partially Proficient**	**Proficient (Meets State Standard)**	**Accomplished**	**Exemplary**
Element a: Teachers foster a predictable learning environment in the classroom in which each student has a positive, nurturing relationship with caring adults and peers.				
There is inadequate evidence that the **Teacher** creates a classroom environment in which: O Diversity is acknowledged and used to further student learning. O The importance of student and family background is considered in developing lesson plans. O Students build positive relationships with each other.	**The Teacher** creates a classroom environment that: O Emphasizes mutual respect for and understanding of all students. O Encourages positive relationships between and among students. O Is conducive for all students to learn.	. . and **The Teacher:** O Creates a classroom environment which values diverse perspectives. O Models empathy and respect for diversity. O Sets common goals for all students in order to build unity.	. . and **Students:** O Demonstrate respect for classmates and their Teacher.	. . and **Students:** O Engage in respectful and open dialogue with each other and their Teacher.
Element b: Teachers demonstrate a commitment to and respect for diversity, while working toward common goals as a community and as a country.				
There is inadequate evidence that the **Teacher** creates a classroom environment in which: O Student diversity is valued. O Student and family background characteristics are considered in developing lessons.	**The Teacher:** O Uses instructional approaches and materials that reflect students' backgrounds. O Acknowledges the value of each student's contributions to the quality of lessons.	. . . and **The Teacher** establishes routine processes that result in: O A strong sense of community among students. O Effective interactions among students. O Respect for individual differences. O Positive social relationships.	. . . and **Students:** O Respect the backgrounds of fellow students.	. . . and **Students:** O Actively seek a variety of perspectives to complete group assignments.

O Professional Practice is **Observable** during a classroom observation.
□ Professional Practice is **Not Observable** during a classroom observation.

DRAFT – August 1, 2012*

Quality Standard II: Teachers establish a safe, inclusive and respectful learning environment for a diverse population of students.

Not Evident	Partially Proficient	Proficient (Meets State Standard)	Accomplished	Exemplary
Element c: Teachers engage students as individuals with unique interests and strengths.				
There is inadequate evidence that the Teacher: O Has high expectations for all students. O Uses data for instructional decision making. O Holds students accountable for their learning. O Considers student interests in planning lessons.	The Teacher: O Monitors students for level of participation. O Encourages students to share their interests. O Challenges students to expand and enhance their learning. O Acknowledges students for their accomplishments.	. . . and The Teacher: O Asks appropriately challenging questions of all students. O Scaffolds questions. O Gives wait time equitably. O Flexibly groups students. O Ensures that all students participate with a high level of frequency.	. . . and Students: O Actively participate in classroom activities. O Seek opportunities to respond to difficult questions.	. . . and Students: O Select challenging content and activities when given the choice in order to stretch their skills and abilities. O Encourage fellow students to participate and challenge themselves. O Participate in collaborative learning and appropriate group processes.
Element d: Teachers adapt their teaching for the benefit of all students, including those with special needs, across a range of ability levels.				
There is inadequate evidence that the Teacher: O Adapts lesson plan to address individual student needs. ☐ Uses recommendations made by specialists and colleagues to understand student needs.	The Teacher: ☐ Designs instruction to address specific learning needs of all students. O Monitors the quality of student participation and performance.	. . . and The Teacher: ☐ Solicits input from colleagues and specialists to understand students' learning needs. O Uses multiple strategies to teach and assess students. O Adapts instructional strategies to meet student needs. O Challenges and supports all students to learn to their greatest ability.	. . . and Students: O Articulate an awareness of their learning needs. O Advocate for themselves. O Reflect about their learning.	. . . and Students: O Seek ways to cope with learning differences. O Apply coping skills to classroom situations. O Share coping strategies and with fellow students. O Support fellow classmates by implementing peer supports.

O Professional Practice is **Observable** during a classroom observation.
☐ Professional Practice is **Not Observable** during a classroom observation.

Quality Standard II: Teachers establish a safe, inclusive and respectful learning environment for a diverse population of students.

Not Evident	Partially Proficient	Proficient (Meets State Standard)	Accomplished	Exemplary
Element e: Teachers provide proactive, clear and constructive feedback to families about student progress and work collaboratively with the families and significant adults in the lives of their students.				
There is inadequate evidence that the Teacher: O Establishes a classroom environment that is inviting to families and significant adults.	**The Teacher:** O Maintains appropriate and respectful relationships with students, their families, and significant adults. ☐ Uses a variety of methods to initiate communication with families and significant adults. ☐ Is sensitive to the diverse family structures.	. . . and **The Teacher:** ☐ Partners with families and significant adults to help student meet education goals. ☐ Coordinates information from families and significant adults with colleagues who provide student services. ☐ Seeks services and resources to meet the diverse needs of students.	. . . and **Students:** O Communicate freely and openly with Teachers. **Families and Significant Adults:** ☐ Initiate communication with Teachers to discuss student needs. ☐ Participate in a variety of school-based activities. ☐ Willingly share information that may impact student learning.	. . . and **Families and Significant Adults:** ☐ Seek the Teacher's assistance to find resources and services to support student needs. ☐ Partner with the Teacher and the school for the benefit of their students.
Element f: Teachers create a learning environment characterized by acceptable student behavior, efficient use of time, and appropriate intervention strategies.				
There is inadequate evidence that the Teacher: O Has rules to guide students to behave appropriately in the classroom. O Holds students accountable for school and/or class rules. O Provides structures or transitions at the beginning of each class.	**The Teacher:** O Puts procedures in place to avoid interruption to instructional time. O Posts class rules where they are readily available to all students.	. . . and **The Teacher:** O Makes maximum use of instructional time. O Holds students accountable for adherence to school and class rules. O Maintains a safe and orderly environment.	. . . and **Students:** O Stay on task during class periods. O Avoid interruptions to their work. O Abide by school and class rules.	. . . and **Students:** O Help other students stay on task. O Accept responsibility for their behavior and use of time.

O Professional Practice is **Observable** during a classroom observation.
☐ Professional Practice is **Not Observable** during a classroom observation.

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Examples of Artifacts that may be used to provide evidence of performance:	Evidence of performance provided by artifact:
☐ Student Achievement Data	
☐ Student feedback	
☐ Parent feedback	
☐ Lesson plans/units of study	
☐ Feedback from walkthrough observations	
☐ Instructional activities schedules	
☐ Student journals/learning logs	
☐ Student work	
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	Ratings (# Points per rating at this level)	NE (0)	PP (1)	P (2)	A (3)	E (4)	Total Points
a.	Fosters a predictable learning environment in which each student has a positive, nurturing relationship with caring adults and peers.						
b.	Demonstrates a commitment to and respect for diversity, while working toward common goals as a community and as a country.						
c.	Engages students as individuals with unique interests and strengths.						
d.	Adapts teaching for the benefit of all students, including those with special needs across a range of ability levels.						
e.	Provides proactive, clear and constructive feedback to families about student progress and works collaboratively with families and significant adults in the lives of their students.						
f.	Creates a learning environment characterized by acceptable student behavior, efficient use of time, and appropriate intervention strategies.						
					Total Points		

0 to 5 Total Points =	**Not Evident**	**Overall Rating for Standard II:**
6 to 9 Total Points =	**Partially Proficient**	
10 to 14 Total Points =	**Proficient**	
15 to 19 Total Points =	**Accomplished**	
20 to 24 Total Points =	**Exemplary**	

Evaluator Comments (Required for Ratings of "Not Evident" or "Partially Proficient" and recommended for all rating levels). Please indicate the element for which the comment applies if not for the standard as a whole.

Comments of person being evaluated. (Optional)

DRAFT – August 1, 2012*

Quality Standard III: Teachers plan and deliver effective instruction and create an environment that facilitates learning for their students.				
Not Evident	**Partially Proficient**	**Proficient** (Meets State Standard)	**Accomplished**	**Exemplary**
Element a: Teachers demonstrate knowledge of current developmental science, the ways in which learning takes place, and the appropriate levels of intellectual, social, and emotional development of their students.				
There is inadequate evidence that the Teacher: O Understands how to differentiate instruction. O Modifies content to assure that students are able to work at their ability levels. O Understands the interrelatedness of students' intellectual, social, and emotional development.	**The Teacher:** O Provides instruction that is developmentally appropriate for all students. ☐ Studies emerging research to expand personal knowledge of how students learn.	. . . and **The Teacher:** O Adapts lessons to address students' strengths and weaknesses. O Applies knowledge of current developmental science to address student needs. ☐ Collaborates with colleagues with experience in developmental science to improve the quality of lessons.	. . . and **Students:** O Articulate their learning needs. O Seek materials and resources appropriate for their learning styles.	. . . and **Students:** O Offer suggestions to the Teacher regarding ways to adapt lessons to make them more engaging, challenging, and relevant. Seek to understand: ☐ How they learn. O Where their time and efforts are best used.
Element b: Teachers plan and consistently deliver instruction that draws on results of student assessments, is aligned to academic standards, and advances students' level of content knowledge and skills.				
There is inadequate evidence that the Teacher: ☐ Uses assessment feedback to guide adjustments to instruction. O Has explicit student outcomes in mind for each lesson.	**The Teacher:** O Instructs and assesses required skills O Advances students' content knowledge and skills. O Aligns instruction with academic standards and student assessment results.	. . . and **The Teacher:** O Monitors instruction against student performance and makes real-time adjustments. O Encourages students to take academic risks. O Makes sure students meet learning objectives while increasing proficiency levels.	. . . and **Students:** O Monitor their level of engagement. O Confer with the Teacher to achieve learning targets.	. . . and **Students:** Strive to: O Address their learning needs. ☐ Close gaps between their level of performance and that of other students. O Take academic risks.
O Professional Practice is **Observable** during a classroom observation. ☐ Professional Practice is **Not Observable** during a classroom observation.				

DRAFT – August 1, 2012*

Quality Standard III: Teachers plan and deliver effective instruction and create an environment that facilitates learning for their students.

Not Evident	Partially Proficient	Proficient (Meets State Standard)	Accomplished	Exemplary
Element c: Teachers demonstrate a rich knowledge of current research on effective instructional practices to meet the developmental and academic needs of their students.				
There is inadequate evidence that the Teacher: O Understands how to match instructional practices to student academic needs. O Incorporates evidence-based strategies into lessons. O Adapts instructional practices to changing student needs.	The Teacher: O Makes lesson objectives clear to the students. O Employs a variety of instructional strategies. O Provides instruction that requires critical thinking, problem solving, and performance skills. O Checks for student understanding of content.	... and The Teacher: O Facilitates learning by supporting students as they learn new material. O Sets the expectation that students will reflect on and communicate about their learning.	... and Students: O Articulate the importance of the lesson objective. O Connect lesson objective to prior knowledge in a significant and meaningful way. O Describe their level of performance in relation to lesson objectives.	... and Students: O Apply skills and knowledge learned in the classroom. O Articulate the ways in which they learn most effectively.
Element d: Teachers thoughtfully integrate and utilize appropriate available technology in their instruction to maximize student learning.				
There is inadequate evidence that the Teacher: O Uses available technology to facilitate classroom instruction. O Monitors the use of technology in the classroom.	The Teacher: O Employs strategies and procedures to ensure that all students have equal and appropriate access to available technology.	... and The Teacher: ☐ Researches effectiveness of instructional technology approaches and activities. Uses available technology to: O Enhance student learning. O Develop students' knowledge and skills. O Enhance creative and innovative skills. O Provide engaging and motivating learning experiences.	... and Students: O Engage in virtual or face-to-face learning activities enhanced by appropriate use of available technology.	... and Students use available technology to: O Accelerate their learning. O Apply team building and networking skills. O Deepen critical thinking skills. O Communicate effectively.

O   Professional Practice is **Observable** during a classroom observation.
☐   Professional Practice is **Not Observable** during a classroom observation.

DRAFT – August 1, 2012*

Quality Standard III: Teachers plan and deliver effective instruction and create an environment that facilitates learning for their students.				
Not Evident	**Partially Proficient**	**Proficient** (Meets State Standard)	**Accomplished**	**Exemplary**
Element e: Teachers establish and communicate high expectations for all students and plan instruction that helps students develop critical-thinking and problem solving skills.				
There is inadequate evidence that the Teacher: O Understands that students need to employ critical thinking and problem solving skills. O Incorporates practical application of higher order thinking and/or problem solving skills into lessons.	**The Teacher:** O Sets student expectations at a level that challenges students. O Incorporates higher order thinking, critical thinking and/or problem-solving skills into lessons.	**...and** **The Teacher:** O Clearly communicates high expectations for all students. O Challenges all students to learn to their greatest ability. O Systematically and explicitly teaches higher-order thinking and problem-solving skills. O Allows time for responses and discussion.	**...and** **Students:** O Strive to achieve expectations set by the Teacher. O Apply higher-order thinking and problem-solving skills to address challenging issues.	**...and** **Students:** O Monitor their progress toward to achieving Teacher's high expectations. O Perform at levels exceeding expectations. O Seek opportunities to test their problem-solving and higher-order skills.
Element f: Teachers provide students with opportunities to work in teams and develop leadership qualities.				
There is inadequate evidence that the Teacher: O Groups students to maximize learning. O Includes all students in individual and group activities.	**The Teacher** plans lessons that: O Require students to work individually and in groups. O Provide opportunities for students to participate using various roles and modes of communication.	**...and** **The Teacher:** O Provide students with opportunities to work in teams. O Adjusts team composition based on lesson objectives and student needs. O Varies group size, composition, and tasks to create opportunities for students to interact and learn from each other.	**...and** **Students:** O Assume leadership roles in their teams whenever possible. O Accept and fulfill their assigned roles within the team.	**...and** **Students:** O Utilize group processes to build trust and promote effective interactions among team members.
O Professional Practice is **Observable** during a classroom observation. ☐ Professional Practice is **Not Observable** during a classroom observation.				

DRAFT – August 1, 2012*

Quality Standard III: Teachers plan and deliver effective instruction and create an environment that facilitates learning for their students.

Not Evident	Partially Proficient	Proficient (Meets State Standard)	Accomplished	Exemplary
Element g: Teachers communicate effectively, making learning objectives clear and providing appropriate models of language.				
There is inadequate evidence that the Teacher: O Communicates effectively with students.	The Teacher: O Models effective communication skills. O Sets expectations and employs strategies so students can communicate effectively.	. . . and The Teacher: O Models and teaches effective skills in listening, presenting ideas, and leading discussions. O Provides opportunities for students to practice communication skills.	. . . and Students: O Apply effective written and oral communication skills in their work. O Demonstrate a respectful and sensitive approach toward fellow students and Teachers.	. . . and Students: O Participate in teams in ways that build trust and ownership of ideas among team members. O Model formal communications in academic settings.
Element h: Teachers use appropriate methods to assess what each student has learned, including formal and informal assessments, and use results to plan further instruction.				
There is inadequate evidence that the Teacher: ☐ Provides adequate feedback to students, families, and significant adults. O Involves students in monitoring their learning. O Understands the expected outcomes of learning experiences in order to assess them appropriately.	The Teacher: ☐ Establishes consistent and appropriate strategies for assigning grades. ☐ Bases grades on multiple measures that provide a comprehensive and consistent picture of student skills and knowledge. ☐ Includes goal setting and documentation of student progress toward mastery of state content standards in assessment plans.	. . . and The Teacher: O Requires students to complete assessment tasks similar to those on state (e.g., CSAP) and national (e.g., SAT, NAEP) assessments. O Uses a variety of assessment methods. O Provides frequent, timely, specific and individualized feedback about the quality of student work. O Teaches students to use feedback in their learning.	. . . and Students: O Self-assess on a variety of skills and concepts. O Articulate their personal strengths and needs based on self-assessment. O Effectively use formal and informal feedback to monitor their learning.	. . . and Students assume ownership for : O Evaluating and monitoring their progress. O Setting learning goals. O Compiling portfolios of their work. O Applying Teacher feedback to improve performance and accelerate their learning.

O Professional Practice is **Observable** during a classroom observation.
☐ Professional Practice is **Not Observable** during a classroom observation.

DRAFT – August 1, 2012*

Examples of Artifacts that may be used to provide evidence of performance:	Evidence of performance provided by artifact:
☐ Student Achievement Data	
☐ Student feedback	
☐ Parent feedback	
☐ Lesson plans/units of study	
☐ Feedback from walkthrough observations	
☐ Instructional activities schedules	
☐ Student journals/learning logs	
☐ Student work	
☐ Anecdotal records	
☐ Formative and summative assessments of student work	
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	Ratings (# Points per rating at this level)	NE (0)	PP (1)	P (2)	A (3)	E (4)	Total Points
a.	Demonstrates knowledge of current developmental science, the ways in which learning takes place, and the appropriate levels of intellectual, social, and emotional development of their students.						
b.	Plans and consistently delivers instruction that draws on results of student assessments, is aligned to academic standards, and advances students' level of content knowledge and skills.						
c.	Demonstrates a rich knowledge of current research on effective instructional practices to meet the developmental and academic needs of students.						
d.	Thoughtfully integrates and utilizes appropriate available technology in their instruction to maximize student learning.						
e.	Establishes and communicates high expectations for all students and plans instruction that helps students develop critical thinking and problem solving skills.						
f.	Provides students with opportunities to work in teams and develop leadership qualities.						
g.	Communicates effectively, making learning objectives clear and providing appropriate models of language.						
h.	Uses appropriate methods to assess what each student has learned, including formal and informal assessments, and use results to plan further instruction.						
						Total Points	

0 to 5 Total Points =	Not Evident	Overall Rating for Standard III:
6 to 12 Total Points =	Partially Proficient	
13 to 19 Total Points =	Proficient	
20 to 26 Total Points =	Accomplished	
27 to 32 Total Points =	Exemplary	

Evaluator Comments (Required for Ratings of "Not Evident" or "Partially Proficient" and recommended for all rating levels). Please indicate the element for which the comment applies if not for the standard as a whole.

Comments of person being evaluated (optional).

DRAFT – August 1, 2012*

Quality Standard IV: Teachers reflect on their practice.

Not Evident	Partially Proficient	Proficient (Meets State Standard)	Accomplished	Exemplary
Element a: Teachers demonstrate that they analyze student learning, development, and growth and apply what they learn to improve their practice.				
There is inadequate evidence that the Teacher: ☐ Understands the importance of knowing how student learning occurs. ☐ Collects and analyzes student data to inform instruction. Uses data to: ☐ Support student learning. ☐ Inform practice.	**The Teacher:** ☐ Understands the importance of knowing how student learning occurs and what can be done to improve student growth. ☐ Dialogues with colleagues to make connections between school and classroom data and research-based practices.	... and **The Teacher** applies knowledge of student learning, development, and growth to the development of : ☐ Lesson plans. O Instructional strategies. ☐ Collects multiple examples of student work to determine student progress over time.	... and **The Teacher** modifies instruction to assure that all students: O Understand what is expected of them. O Are challenged to meet or exceed expectations. O Participate in classroom activities with a high level of frequency and quality. O Take responsibility for their work. O Have the opportunity to build on their interests and strengths.	... and **The Teacher:** O Monitors and evaluates personal behavioral changes to determine what works for students. ☐ Develops student learning plans based on multiple examples of student work and information gathered from students, families and significant adults, and colleagues.
Element b: Teachers link professional growth to their professional goals.				
There is inadequate evidence that the Teacher: ☐ Uses performance feedback from supervisor and/or colleagues to improve practice. ☐ Completes required professional development. ☐ Understands which professional development activities will help to address student and school needs.	**The Teacher:** ☐ Seeks high quality professional development opportunities to meet professional goals. ☐ Learns new skills to improve professional practice. ☐ Applies knowledge and skills learned through professional development to instructional decisions.	... and **The Teacher:** Engages in professional development activities based on: ☐ Likelihood of having a positive impact on student learning. ☐ Alignment with content standards and school and district initiatives. ☐ Current research. ☐ Student needs.	... and **The Teacher:** ☐ Shares lessons learned with colleagues. ☐ Develops and follows a long-term professional development plan.	... and **The Teacher:** ☐ Willingly tries new and different ways of teaching new skills.

O Professional Practice is **Observable** during a classroom observation.
☐ Professional Practice is **Not Observable** during a classroom observation.

Quality Standard IV: Teachers reflect on their practice.

Not Evident	Partially Proficient	Proficient (Meets State Standard)	Accomplished	Exemplary
Element c: Teachers are able to respond to a complex, dynamic environment.				
There is inadequate evidence that the Teacher collaborates with colleagues to: ☐ Consider new ideas to improve teaching and learning. ☐ Support struggling students. ☐ Contribute to campus goals.	**The Teacher:** ☐ Contributes to school committees and teams. ☐ Maintains a positive, productive and respectful relationship with colleagues.	... and **The Teacher** initiates and leads collaborative activities with colleagues to: ☐ Analyze student data and interpret results. ☐ Apply findings to improve teaching practice. ☐ Support struggling and/or advanced/above grade level students.	... and **The Teacher:** ☐ Serves as a critical friend for colleagues, both providing and receiving feedback on performance.	... and **The Teacher:** ☐ Strengthens teaching practice by adapting instructional practices based on colleague feedback and other types of performance data. ☐ Seeks specific feedback on areas of professional practice that are in need of improvement.

O Professional Practice is **Observable** during a classroom observation.
☐ Professional Practice is **Not Observable** during a classroom observation.

Examples of artifacts that may be used to provide evidence of performance:	Evidence of performance provided by artifact:
☐ Self-Reflection Templates	☐
☐ Lesson Plans	☐
☐ Assessment Plans	☐
☐ Professional Growth Plans	☐
☐ Data Analysis Record	☐
☐ Responses to Feedback	☐
☐ Student Portfolion	☐
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☐	☐
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☐	☐

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Ratings (#Points per rating at this level)	NE (0)	PP (1)	P (2)	A (3)	E (4)	Total Points
a. Demonstrates that he/she analyzes student learning, development and growth and applies what he/she learns to improve practice.						
b. Links professional growth to professional practice.						
c. Is able to respond to a complex, dynamic environment						
					Total Points	

			Overall Rating for Standard IV:
0 to 1 Total Points	=	Not Evident	
2 to 4 Total Points	=	Partially Proficient	
5 to 7 Total Points	=	Proficient	
8 to 10 Total Points	=	Accomplished	
11 to 12 Total Points	=	Exemplary	

Evaluator Comments (Required for Ratings of "Not Evident" or "Partially Proficient" and recommended for all rating levels). Please indicate the element for which the comment applies if not for the standard as a whole.

Comments of person being evaluated (Optional)

DRAFT – August 1, 2012*

Quality Standard V: Teachers demonstrate leadership.

Not Evident	Partially Proficient	Proficient (Meets State Standard)	Accomplished	Exemplary
Element a: Teachers demonstrate leadership in their schools.				
There is inadequate evidence that the Teacher: ☐ Participates in school activities beyond those expected of all Teachers. ☐ Recognizes opportunities to develop leadership skills. ☐ Works collaboratively for the benefit of students. ☐ Supports school goals and initiatives.	**The Teacher:** ☐ Contributes to school committees and teams. ☐ Maintains a positive, productive and respectful relationship with colleagues.	. . . and **The Teacher:** ☐ Provides leadership to school-based teams in order to harness the skills and knowledge of colleagues.	. . . and **The Teacher:** ☐ Shares knowledge of helpful practices with colleagues. ☐ Confers with school administrators to improve Teacher working and student learning conditions.	. . . and **The Teacher** initiates and leads collaborative activities with colleagues to: ☐ Analyze student data and interpret results. ☐ Apply findings to improve teaching practice. ☐ Share ideas to improve teaching and learning ☐ Contribute to school goals. ☐ Support struggling students.
Element b: Teachers contribute knowledge and skills to educational practices and the teaching profession.				
There is inadequate evidence that the Teacher: ☐ Is willing to share expertise with colleagues. ☐ Understands the importance of supporting colleagues.	**The Teacher** collaborates with colleagues to: ☐ Support student growth and development. ☐ Contribute to school goals. ☐ Enhance opportunities for professional growth. ☐ Provide input into the management of the school.	. . . and **The Teacher:** ☐ Leads professional growth and development activities whenever possible.	. . . and **The Teacher:** ☐ Participates in district wide decision making processes that impact the school.	. . . and **The Teacher:** ☐ Advocates for the inclusion of Teachers in education and government decision making processes.

O   Professional Practice is **Observable** during a classroom observation.
☐   Professional Practice is **Not Observable** during a classroom observation.

DRAFT – August 1, 2012*

Quality Standard V: Teachers demonstrate leadership.				
Not Evident	**Partially Proficient**	**Proficient** **(Meets State Standard)**	**Accomplished**	**Exemplary**
Element c: Teachers advocate for schools and students, partnering with students, families and communities as appropriate.				
There is inadequate evidence that the Teacher: ☐ Participates in activities designed to improve policies and procedures that affect school climate and student learning. ☐ Reaches out to students, families, and the community in order to understand their needs.	**The Teacher:** ☐ Contributes to and/or participates in school and district task forces and committees to advocate for students.	**. . . and** **The Teacher:** ☐ Implements school and district policies and procedures with fidelity. ☐ Discusses potential revisions to policies and procedures with administrators in order to better address student and school needs.	**. . . and** **Students:** ☐ Suggest changes to their school experience that affect their ability to acquire a high quality education. ☐ Articulate their support of practices that improve their access to learning opportunities.	**. . . and** **Students:** ☐ Advocate for curricular, school climate, and instructional improvements.
Element d: Teachers demonstrate high ethical standards.				
There is inadequate evidence that the Teacher: ☐ Maintains confidentiality of student records as required by law. ☐ Understands the need to hold high standards for himself/herself and others. ☐ Adheres to standards of professional practice.	**The Teacher:** ☐ Demonstrates ethical behavior, including honesty, integrity, fair treatment, and respect for others.	**. . . and** **The Teacher:** ☐ Maintains confidentiality of student and fellow Teacher interactions as well as student and personal data.	**. . . and** **The Teacher:** ☐ Demands ethical behavior on the part of students. ☐ Encourages colleagues to demonstrate ethical behavior.	**. . . and** **Students:** ☐ Adhere to ethical principles and demonstrate ethical behavior such as honesty, integrity, and respect for others.
O Professional Practice is **Observable** during a classroom observation. ☐ Professional Practice is **Not Observable** during a classroom observation.				

DRAFT – August 1, 2012*

Examples of Artifacts that may be used to provide evidence of performance:	Evidence of performance provided by artifact:						
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Ratings (# of Points per rating at this level)	NE (0)	PP (1)	P (2)	A (3)	E (4)	Total Points
a. Demonstrates leadership in the school.						
b. Contribute knowledge and skills to educational practices and the teaching profession.						
c. Advocates for schools and students, partnering with students, families and communities as appropriate.						
d. Demonstrates high ethical standards.						
					Total Points	

0 to 2 Total Points =	Not Evident	Overall Rating for Standard V:
3 to 5 Total Points =	Partially Proficient	
6 to 9 Total Points =	Proficient	
10 to 13 Total Points =	Accomplished	
14 to 16 Total Points =	Exemplary	

Evaluator Comments (Required for Ratings of "Not Evident" or "Partially Proficient" and recommended for all rating levels). Please indicate the element for which the comment applies if not for the standard as a whole.

Comments of person being evaluated (Optional)

APPENDIX B

Institutional Review Board Approval
to Conduct Research

UNIVERSITY *of*
NORTHERN COLORADO

Institutional Review Board

August 15, 2012
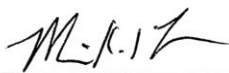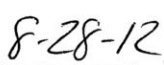
TO: Maria Lahman
Applied Statistics and Research Methods

FROM: The Office of Sponsored Programs

RE: Exempt Review of *Practitioner Perceptions about Using a Uniform Performance Rubric to Document Best Practices in Special Education,* submitted by Moira A. Coogan (Research Advisor: Francie Murry)

The above proposal is being submitted to you for exemption review. When approved, return the proposal to Sherry May in the Office of Sponsored Programs.

I recommend approval.

_____   8-28-12
Signature of Co-Chair   Date

The above referenced prospectus has been reviewed for compliance with HHS guidelines for ethical principles in human subjects research. The decision of the Institutional Review Board is that the project is exempt from further review.

IT IS THE ADVISOR'S RESPONSIBILITY TO NOTIFY THE STUDENT OF THIS STATUS.

Comments:

25 Kepner Hall ~ Campus Box #143
Greeley, Colorado 80639
Ph: 970.351.1910 ~ Fax: 970.351.1934

APPENDIX C

Formal Invitation to Participate
in Focus Groups

Dear Colleague:

My name is Moira Coogan and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Northern Colorado conducting dissertation research about the evaluation of elementary and middle level special education teachers. This topic has been a professional priority for me during my fifteen years as a special education teacher and school administrator and is assuming increased importance as new teacher effectiveness models are implemented. Your perspectives about using a performance rubric to document best practices for students with specific learning disabilities and/or emotional/behavioral disorders would be a valuable part of my research.

My research is a qualitative inquiry that will be conducted using focus groups, each of which will have no more than ten individuals with similar professional roles. The groups will utilize the August 2012 draft edition of *Rubric for Evaluating Colorado's Teachers* as a basis for the group discussions. (Please Note: My research is an independent inquiry and is not affiliated with any Colorado Department of Education pilot implementation activities nor is it intended to solicit recommended changes to the rubric.)

The focus groups will be held in a neutral and centralized location easily accessible from I-25. At the completion of the focus group, you will receive a $15 Visa card towards partial reimbursement of travel expenses. In addition, you will be entered into a drawing for a $50 Visa card.

For additional details about the focus groups, please see the attached Consent Form which all participants will be asked to complete.

If you are willing to participate, the available and RSVP can be found at the following link: https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/SN9GKDX. Please RSVP no later than October 31, 2012.

If you have any additional questions, please do not hesitate to contact me (coog6234@bears.unco.edu or 720-746-8855) or my research advisor, Dr. Francie Murry (Francie.Murry@unco.edu).

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

APPENDIX D

Consent Form for Human Participation
in Research

UNIVERSITY *of*
NORTHERN COLORADO

CONSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Project Title: Practitioner Perceptions about Documenting Special Education Best Practices
                   within a Standard Teacher Performance Rubric
Researcher: Moira A. Coogan, Doctoral Candidate, School of Special Education
Phone: 720-746-8855   E-mail: coog6234@bears.unco.edu
Advisor: Francie Murry, Ph.D.   E-mail: Francie.Murry@unco.edu

Purpose and Description: The purpose of my dissertation research is to explore the perceptions of special education teachers, principals, and special education leaders regarding the evaluation of elementary and middle level special education teachers. Specifically, I am interested in your opinions about whether best practices for students with specific learning disabilities and/or emotional/behavioral disorders can be documented using indicators in a standard teacher performance rubric and whether distinctions between general and special education can be made where appropriate.

My research is a qualitative inquiry which will be conducted in focus groups and will utilize the August 2012 draft edition of *Rubric for Evaluating Colorado's Teachers* as a basis for the group discussions. However, my research is an independent inquiry and is not affiliated with any Colorado Department of Education pilot implementation activities. This study is not intended to solicit recommended changes to the rubric.

You will be in a focus group with no more than ten individuals whose current professional role is similar to yours (special education teacher, principal/assistant principal, special education faculty/state- or district-level/BOCES exceptional services personnel). You will receive a copy of the rubric by email no later than one week prior to the focus group and you will be asked to familiarize yourself with the format and contents. You will not be required to provide any comments prior to the focus group.

When you arrive at the focus group site, you will be asked to sign a copy of this document—which is the standard University of Northern Colorado Consent Form. You will also be asked to complete a form with your contact information and the following demographic information (gender, current professional role, level of education, years of educational experience, district/school size). The contact information will enable me to solicit your feedback after the focus groups. Demographic information will be collected in order to identify possible trends associated with participant characteristics.

I will take every precaution to maintain confidentiality. When you arrive you will be assigned a numeric identifier. Only my research advisor and I will know the name connected to the identifier. During the discussions, you will be asked to identify yourself using the numeric identifier and your name and identifying information will not be used when I report results. In addition, the focus groups will be held on neutral territory and not in any building belonging to a school district, institution of higher education, or state educational agency.

Focus groups will semi-structured; that is, a specific agenda of questions will be asked to meet the purposes of this research inquiry. The duration of the entire focus group process is estimated to be three hours. The agenda for the focus group will as follows:

- Sign-in and questionnaire completion (20 minutes)
- Orientation to focus group format and questions, norms, and rubric review (30 minutes)
- Focus group discussion (90 minutes)
- Debrief (30 minutes)
- Closing (10 minutes)

I will serve as the moderator for the focus groups to keep the discussion on topic, but will do so with a minimal level of intrusion into the dynamics of the discussion.

The focus group sessions will be recorded on audiotape and I will be taking field notes for later qualitative analysis. The audio recordings will be transcribed by a third party who has signed a confidentiality agreement. Following data analysis, all data collected—including consent forms, contact and demographic information, audiotapes, transcripts, researcher field notes, and the disk containing computer files of the data analyses—will maintained for the required three year period in a locked filing cabinet available to only me and my dissertation advisor.

After I have completed the data analysis, you will receive a draft copy of the themes identified from the dialogue within your focus group and you will be welcome to provide feedback.

Potential risks for participants in this project are minimal. Your risks should not be any greater than those that you would experience by participating in group activities normally associated with your professional role. That is, the primary, if not sole, potential risk to you could be mild discomfort in sharing your views and/or having them challenged in the focus group dialogue. However, you may benefit from the opportunity for collegial sharing, learning, and reflection about professional practices.

Light refreshments and non-alcoholic beverages will be provided at the focus group site. At the completion of the focus group, you will receive a $15 Visa card towards partial reimbursement of travel expenses. In addition, you will be entered into a drawing for a $50 Visa card.

Participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate in this study and if you begin participation you may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your decision will be respected and will not result in loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Having read the above and having had an opportunity to ask any questions, please sign below if you would like to participate in this research. A copy of this form will be given to you to retain for future reference. If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact the Office of Sponsored Programs, Kepner Hall, University of Northern Colorado Greeley, CO 80639; 970-351-2161.

_____
Subject's Signature   Date

_____
Researcher's Signature   Date

APPENDIX E

Response to Invitation
on *Survey Monkey™*

Moira Coogan Focus Group RSVP

Welcome!

Thank you for your willingness to participate in my dissertation research project: Practitioner Perceptions about Documenting Special Education Best Practices Within a Standard Teacher Performance Rubric

Please provide the following information so that I can assign you to the appropriate focus group. An email confirmation will be sent to you no later than September 5, 2012.

Contact Information

*1. What is your first name?

*2. What is your last name?

*3. At what email address would you like to be contacted?

*4. At what phone number would you like to be contacted?

Professional Role

5. What is your current professional role?

◯ Special Education Teacher serving students with specific learning disabilities and/or emotional/behavioral disabilities

◯ Principal/Assistant Principal

◯ District/BOCES Level Exceptional Student Services Personnel

◯ State Level Exceptional Student Services Personnel

◯ College/University Faculty

Dates Available to Participate

Moira Coogan Focus Group RSVP

6. Please indicate your first, second, and third preference for the focus group you would be willing to attend. if none of these dates work with your calendar, please go to question 7.

Rank

Focus group 1: September 15, 2012; Doubletree Hotel, Thornton, CO; 9am - 12:30pm

Focus group 2: October 6, 2012; Doubletree Hotel, Thornton, CO; 9am - 12:30pm

Focus group 3: October 27, 2012; Doubletree Hotel, Thornton, CO; 9am - 12:30pm

7. SKIP THIS QUESTION IF YOU ANSWERED #6 ABOVE:

None of the above dates worked for me, but I am interested in participating, if additional sessions are scheduled, please contact me..

( ) Yes

( ) No

Dates Available to Participate

8. Please indicate your first, second, and third preference for the focus group you would be willing to attend. if none of these dates work with your calendar, please go to question 7.

Preference

Focus group 1: October 13, 2012; Doubletree Hotel, Thornton, CO; 9am - 12:30pm

Focus group 2: November 3, 2012; Doubletree Hotel, Thornton, CO; 9am - 12:30pm

Focus group 3: November 17, 2012; Doubletree Hotel, Thornton, CO; 9am - 12:30pm

9. SKIP THIS QUESTION IF YOU ANSWERED #6 ABOVE:

None of the above dates worked for me, but I am interested in participating, if additional sessions are scheduled, please contact me..

( ) Yes

( ) No

Dates Available to Participate

Moira Coogan Focus Group RSVP

10. Please indicate your first, second, and third preference for the focus group you would be willing to attend. if none of these dates work with your calendar, please go to question 7.

Preference

Focus group 1: September 29, 2012; Doubletree Hotel, Thornton, CO; 9am - 12:30pm

Focus group 2: October 20, 2012; Doubletree Hotel, Thornton, CO; 9am - 12:30pm

Focus group 3: November 10, 2012; Doubletree Hotel, Thornton, CO; 9am - 12:30pm

11. SKIP THIS QUESTION IF YOU ANSWERED #6 ABOVE:

None of the above dates worked for me, but I am interested in participating, if additional sessions are scheduled, please contact me..

◯ Yes

◯ No

THANK YOU!

Again, thank you for your willingness to participate in this dissertation research study.

APPENDIX F

Confidentiality Agreements for
Assistant and Transcriptionist

Confidentiality Agreement
Transcriber/Focus Group Assistant

I, _____, do hereby agree to maintain full confidentiality in regards to any and all audiotapes, videotapes, and oral or written documentation received from Moira A. Coogan related to her research study titled *Practitioner Perceptions about Documenting Special Education Best Practices within a Standard Teacher Performance Rubric*

Furthermore, I agree:
1. To hold in strictest confidence the identification of any individual that may be inadvertently revealed during the transcription of audio-taped or live oral interviews, or in any associated documents;
2. To not disclose any information received for profit, gain, or otherwise;
3. To not make copies of any audiotapes, videotapes, or computerized files of the transcribed interview texts, unless specifically requested to do so by Moira Coogan;
4. To store all study-related audiotapes, videotapes and materials in a safe, secure location as long as they are in my possession;
5. To return all audiotapes, videotapes and study-related documents to Moira Coogan in a complete and timely manner.
6. To delete all electronic files containing study-related documents from my computer hard drive and any backup devices.

Please provide the following contact information for the researcher and the transcriber and/or translator:

For Transcriber/Focus Group Assistant: For Researcher:
Address: _____   Address: _____
            _____   _____
Phone: _____   Phone: _____

I am aware that I can be held liable for any breach of this confidentiality agreement, and for any harm incurred by individuals if I disclose identifiable information contained in the audiotapes, videotapes and/or paper files to which I will have access. I am further aware that if any breach of confidentiality occurs, I will be fully subject to the laws of the State of Colorado.

Transcriber name   _____

Transcriber/Assistant signature _____

Date:_____

APPENDIX G

Script for Focus Group Moderator

Protocol for Focus Group

Once again, thank you so much for participating in today's focus group. Before we begin discussion, I would like to describe the protocol for today and review format of the rubric.

PROTOCOL
Today's protocol will consist of three steps:
First, to set the context, I will you ask you to brainstorm a list of both best practices in special education and a list of instructional environments for students in special education.
Second, I will ask you to look at the indicators under one standard and answer the posted questions regarding documenting best practices. We will go through the rubric one standard at a time.
Finally, we will have a short wrap-up to solicit any other comments that you have.

MATERIALS
In your black folder you have a summary of the quality standards and elements as well as a copy of the complete rubric, both of which I sent to you previously.

The summary has been included to help you organize your brainstorming and so that you do not have to flip through the entire rubric. It is on white paper.

The rubric document has been divided into the five Teacher Quality Standards with each standard on a different color of paper.

There is a copy of the discussion questions in your folder on pink paper.

Please feel free to spread out your materials in whatever manner is most useful to you.

So let us begin.

BRAINSTORMING
This research centers on the documenting special education best practices using a standard teacher performance rubric. Therefore, as guide, please take five minutes to silently think about the best practices you believe should be demonstrated by an effective special education teacher serving students with specific learning disabilities and/or emotional/behavioral disabilities at the elementary or middle level. In addition, please think about the various instructional environments where these students would receive special education services so that we do not overlook any best practice that might occur in a specific environment. Then I will ask you to report out.

You may want to use the summary document to identify the various areas of teacher performance in which the best practice would need to be demonstrated.

This activity is meant to jumpstart your thinking, it is not to create an exhaustive list. During the discussion, please feel free to bring up any best practices that occur to you, even if they weren't in the original brainstorming.
Please begin.

SHARE OUT

DISCUSSION
We will now begin our discussion of the indicators in the rubric. Please take out Standard 1 from your folder (it is on blue paper). As you will see, the standard is shaded in black and the specific elements are shaded in gray. The measurable performance indicators are listed below each element and are divided into those that can be observed in a classroom (the ones with circles) and those that cannot be directly observed in a classroom (those with squares).

For our discussion, we will be focusing only on the performance indicators to answer the posted questions and we will only be looking at the indicators under the partially proficient though exemplary categories. We will go through the standard element by element.

Please take ten minutes to silently review the indicators under each element in standard 1 as they relate to the posted questions. Please feel free to make notes, color code, or use sticky notes to organize your thinking.

We will have approximately 20 minutes to discuss this standard.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION
1) What specific best practices for students with specific learning disabilities and/or emotional/behavioral disorders which relate to this element can be documented using the indicators? Please be specific about both the best practice and the indicator.

2) What specific best practices for students with specific learning disabilities and/or emotional/behavioral disorders which relate to this element cannot be documented using the indicators?

3) Are there any indicators in this element that would require that evaluator to have in-depth background knowledge about special education programming to document best practices for students with specific learning disabilities and/or emotional/behavioral disorders?

4) Are there any indicators in this element that would require that evaluator to have in-depth knowledge of the individual IEPs to document best practices for students with specific learning disabilities and/or emotional/behavioral disorders?

5) Are there any indicators in this element that would require the evaluator to make substantial inference or interpretation in order to document best practices for students with specific learning disabilities and/or emotional/behavioral disorders?

6) Are there any indicators in this element about which you have a particular concern?

APPENDIX H

Participant Demographic Questionnaire

PARTICIPANT CONTACT INFORMATION AND DEMOGRAPHICS

Project Title: Practitioner Perceptions about Documenting Special Education Best Practices
                   within a Standard Teacher Performance Rubric
Researcher: Moira A. Coogan, Doctoral Candidate, School of Special Education
Phone: 720-746-8855   E-mail: coog6234@bears.unco.edu
Advisor: Francie Murry, Ph.D.   E-mail: Francie.Murry@unco.edu

Participant Numerical Identifier: _____

Name: _____

Email: _____

Phone: _____

Gender:

_____ Male   _____Female

Current Professional Role: Please Check One:

_____   Special Education Teacher

_____   Principal/Assistant Principal

_____   District/BOCES Level Exceptional Student Services Personnel

_____   State Level Exceptional Student Services Personnel

_____   College/University Faculty

Education (Please check highest degree earned):

_____ Bachelor's   _____ Master's   _____ Ed. Specialist   _____

Doctorate

Professional Education Experience (Please provide number of years for ALL that apply)

Role	Number of Years	Role	Number of Years
Classroom Teacher:		**State Level Personnel**	
General Education:	_____	Instructional Services:	_____
Special Education:	_____	Exceptional Student	
Principal/Assistant Principal:	_____	Services:	_____
Instructional Coach:	_____	Other:	_____
District Central Office Personnel:			
Instructional Services:	_____	**College/University Faculty:**	_____
Exceptional Student	_____	**Other** (Please Specify):	
Services:		_____	_____
Other:	_____		

Current Public School Environment:

School District Enrollments

_____ ≥ 300 students
_____ 301-600 students
_____ 601-1200 students
_____ 1201-6000 students
_____ 6001-25,000 students
_____ 25,001 or more students
_____ N/A: I am currently employed by a BOCES
_____ N/A: I am not currently employed by a district or BOCES

School Building Enrollment:

_____ > 100 students
_____ 100-199 students
_____ 200-299 students
_____ 300-399 students
_____ 400-499 students
_____ 500-599 students
_____ 600-699 students
_____ 700-799 students
_____ 800-899 students
_____ 900-999 students
_____ 1,000 or more students
_____ N/A: I am not currently serving in a public school building

APPENDIX I

Member Check Survey
on *Survey Monkey*™

Moira Coogan Focus Group Follow-Up

Welcome

Thank you for your earlier participation in my dissertation research project: Practitioner Perceptions about Documenting Special Education Best Practices Within a Standard Teacher Performance Rubric

Please provide your feedback---using this brief survey---regarding the major topics that emerged after my analysis of the transcripts of your discussions.

Focus Group Attended

*1. Name

[   ]

*2. Please indicate which focus group you attended:

( ) September 15, 2012 (Special Education Teachers)

( ) September 29, 2012 (Special Education Directors and Faculty)

( ) October 20, 2012 (Special Education Directors and Faculty)

( ) October 27, 2012 (Special Education Teachers)

( ) November 3, 2012 (Principals)

( ) November 17, 2012 (Principals)

Major Topics and Best Practices from Focus Group

Moira Coogan Focus Group Follow-Up

*3. Here is a list of major topics from your focus group discussion.
Please review it and answer the question below.

Accomplished and Exemplary Columns
Building or District Supports
Competent Evaluators
Conferencing
Expectations for All Classrooms
Fidelity of instructional delivery
Impact of Evaluator and Teacher Relationship
Interaction with Parents
Other Evaluation Tools
Principal Training
Rigor
Special Education Communication with General Education
Special Education Curricula
Students on the ASD Spectrum or with Significant Support Needs (SSN)
Students with EBD
Subjective Interpretations
Suggestions for change
Teacher Ability to Articulate Instructional Rationales
Teacher Preparedness
Time Constraints on Special Education Teachers

Please select

I agree that this list of major topics accurately reflects our focus group discussion.

Moira Coogan Focus Group Follow-Up

4. Here is a list of best practices from your focus group discussion.
Please review it and answer the question below.

Aligning Instruction to Individual Student Academic and Behavioral Needs
Aligning Special Education Instruction with General Education
Aligning Special Education Instruction with State Standards
Providing Appropriate Behavioral Interventions
Providing Explicit Instruction
Understanding Diverse Student Backgrounds
Using Formative Assessments and Progress Monitoring

Please select

I agree that this list of best practices accurately reflects our focus group discussion.

5. I would suggest adding the following major topics or best practices that I remember were discussed:

6. I would suggest removing the following major topics or best practices because I do not remember them being discussed:

7. Any additional comments:

Copy of page: Major Topics and Best Practices from Focus Group

Moira Coogan Focus Group Follow-Up

*8. Here is a list of major topics from your focus group discussion.
Please review it and answer the question below.

Accomplished and Exemplary Columns
Additional Administrator Workloads
Building or District Supports
Competent Evaluators
Conferencing
District Discretion
Expectations for All Classrooms
Fidelity of instructional delivery
General Education Teachers and Classrooms
Impact of Evaluator and Teacher Relationship
Instructional Environments
Interaction with Parents
Interactions between Principals and Special Education Directors
Participant Background
Potential for Over- or Under-Ratings
Principal Training
Rigor
Rubric as inspiration
Rules for Implementing the Rubric
Special Education Communication with General Education
Special Education Curricula
Special Education Teacher as Interventionist or Content Area Expert
Student Achievement (Standard Six)
Students on the ASD Spectrum or with Significant Support Needs (SSN)
Students with EBD
Subjective Interpretations
Teacher Ability to Articulate Instructional Rationales
Teacher Preparedness
Technology

Please select

I agree that this list of major topics accurately reflects our focus group discussion.

Moira Coogan Focus Group Follow-Up

9. Here is a list of best practices from your focus group discussion. Please review it and answer the question below.

Aligning Instruction to Individual Student Academic and Behavioral Needs
Aligning Special Education Instruction with General Education
Aligning Special Education Instruction with State Standards
Articulating Learning Objectives Clearly
Assisting Students to Understand Their Learning Needs
Collaborating with General Education Teachers and Other Service Providers
Maximizing Inclusion
Promoting Advocacy for or by Students
Providing Appropriate Behavioral Interventions
Providing Explicit Instruction
Understanding Diverse Student Backgrounds
Utilizing Research Based Interventions

Please select

I agree that this list of best practices accurately reflects our focus group discussion.

10. I would suggest adding the following major topics or best practices that I remember were discussed:

11. I would suggest removing the following major topics or best practices because I do not remember them being discussed:

12. Any additional comments:

Major Topics and Best Practices from Focus Group

Moira Coogan Focus Group Follow-Up

✱13. Here is a list of major topics from your focus group discussion.
Please review it and answer the question below.

Accomplished and Exemplary Columns
Assessments of Students
Building or District Supports
Competent Evaluators
Conferencing
Expectations for All Classrooms
Fidelity of instructional delivery
General Education Teachers and Classrooms
Impact of Evaluator and Teacher Relationship
Interaction with Parents
Interactions between Principals and Special Education Directors
Principal Training
Rigor
Rubric as inspiration
Special Education Communication with General Education
Special Education Curricula
Special Education Teacher as Interventionist or Content Area Expert
Student Achievement (Standard Six)
Students on the ASD Spectrum or with Significant Support Needs (SSN)
Students with EBD
Suggestions for change
Teacher Ability to Articulate Instructional Rationales
Teacher Preparedness
Technology
Use of Rubric in Pilot Districts

Please select

I agree that this list of major topics accurately reflects our focus group discussion.

Moira Coogan Focus Group Follow-Up

14. Here is a list of best practices from your focus group discussion. Please review it and answer the question below.

Best Practices
Aligning Instruction to Individual Student Academic and Behavioral Needs
Aligning Special Education Instruction with General Education
Articulating Learning Objectives Clearly
Assisting Students to Understand Their Learning Needs
Collaborating with General Education Teachers and Other Service Providers
Communicating Effectively with Parents
Engaging Students in the Learning Process
Providing Appropriate Behavioral Interventions
Providing Explicit Instruction
Using Formative Assessments and Progress Monitoring

Please select

I agree that this list of best practices accurately reflects our focus group discussion.

15. I would suggest adding the following major topics or best practices that I remember were discussed:

16. I would suggest removing the following major topics or best practices because I do not remember them being discussed:

17. Any additional comments:

Major Topics and Best Practices from Focus Group

Moira Coogan Focus Group Follow-Up

*18. Here is a list of major topics from your focus group discussion. Please review it and answer the question below.

Accomplished and Exemplary Columns

Additional Administrator Workloads

Assessments of Students

Building or District Supports

CEC Position Statement

Conferencing

District Discretion

Expectations for All Classrooms

Fidelity of instructional delivery

General Education Teachers and Classrooms

Impact of Evaluator and Teacher Relationship

Instructional Environments

Interaction with Parents

Participant Background

Peer Observers

Potential for Over- or Under-Ratings

Potential Negative Teacher and Evaluator Behaviors

Principal Training

Rigor

Rubric as inspiration

Rules for Implementing the Rubric

Special Education Communication with General Education

Special Education Curricula

Special Education Directors as Evaluators

Special Education Teacher as Interventionist or Content Area Expert

Student Achievement (Standard Six)

Students on the ASD Spectrum or with Significant Support Needs (SSN)

Students with EBD

Subjective Interpretations

Suggestions for change

Teacher Ability to Articulate Instructional Rationales

Technology

Time Constraints on Special Education Teachers

Use of Rubric in Pilot Districts

Moira Coogan Focus Group Follow-Up

Please select

I agree that this list of major topics accurately reflects our focus group discussion.

19. Here is a list of best practices from your focus group discussion. Please review it and answer the question below.

Aligning Instruction to Individual Student Academic and Behavioral Needs

Aligning Special Education Instruction with General Education

Aligning Special Education Instruction with State Standards

Collaborating with General Education Teachers and Other Service Providers

Communicating Effectively with Parents

Creating a Supportive Classroom Environment

Promoting Advocacy for or by Students

Providing Appropriate Behavioral Interventions

Using Formative Assessments and Progress Monitoring

Utilizing Research Based Interventions

Please select

I agree that this list of best practices accurately reflects our focus group discussion.

20. I would suggest adding the following major topics or best practices that I remember were discussed:

21. I would suggest removing the following major topics or best practices because I do not remember them being discussed:

22. Any additional comments:

Major Topics and Best Practices from Focus Group

Moira Coogan Focus Group Follow-Up

✱23. Here is a list of major topics from your focus group discussion. Please review it and answer the question below.

Accomplished and Exemplary Columns
Additional Administrator Workloads
Building or District Supports
Competent Evaluators
Conferencing
District Discretion
Expectations for All Classrooms
Fidelity of instructional delivery
General Education Teachers and Classrooms
Impact of Evaluator and Teacher Relationship
Instructional Environments
Interaction with Parents
Interactions between Principals and Special Education Directors
Other Evaluation Tools
Peer Observers
Potential for Over- or Under-Ratings
Potential Negative Teacher and Evaluator Behaviors
Rigor
Rules for Implementing the Rubric
Special Education Communication with General Education
Special Education Curricula
Special Education Directors as Evaluators
Special Education Teacher as Interventionist or Content Area Expert
Students on the ASD Spectrum or with Significant Support Needs (SSN)
Students with EBD
Subjective Interpretations
Suggestions for change
Teacher Ability to Articulate Instructional Rationales
Technology
Time Constraints on Special Education Teachers
Use of Rubric in Pilot Districts

Please select

I agree that this list of major topics accurately reflects our focus group discussion.

Moira Coogan Focus Group Follow-Up

24. Here is a list of best practices from your focus group discussion. Please review it and answer the question below

Aligning Instruction to Individual Student Academic and Behavioral Needs

Aligning Special Education Instruction with General Education

Assisting Students to Understand Their Learning Needs

Collaborating with General Education Teachers and Other Service Providers

Communicating Effectively with Parents

Creating a Supportive Classroom Environment

Developing Effective IEPs

Engaging Students in the Learning Process

Identifying Students for Special Education Services

Promoting Advocacy for or by Students

Providing Appropriate Behavioral Interventions

Using Formative Assessments and Progress Monitoring

Using Paraprofessional Support Appropriately

Please select

I agree that this list of best practices accurately reflects our focus group discussion.

25. I would suggest adding the following major topics or best practices that I remember were discussed:

26. I would suggest removing the following major topics or best practices because I do not remember them being discussed:

27. Any additional comments:

Major Topics and Best Practices from Focus Group

Moira Coogan Focus Group Follow-Up

✱28. Here is a list of major topics from your focus group discussion. Please review it and answer the question below

Accomplished and Exemplary Columns
Additional Administrator Workloads
Assessments of Students
Building or District Supports
Competent Evaluators
Conferencing
Expectations for All Classrooms
Fidelity of instructional delivery
General Education Teachers and Classrooms
Impact of Evaluator and Teacher Relationship
Interaction with Parents
Other Evaluation Tools
Participant Background
Peer Observers
Potential for Over- or Under-Ratings
Potential Negative Teacher and Evaluator Behaviors
Principal Training
Rigor
Rubric as inspiration
Special Education Communication with General Education
Special Education Curricula
Special Education Teacher as Interventionist or Content Area Expert
Student Achievement (Standard Six)
Students with EBD
Subjective Interpretations
Suggestions for change
Teacher Ability to Articulate Instructional Rationales
Teacher Preparedness
Time Constraints on Special Education Teachers
Use of Rubric in Pilot Districts

Please select

I agree that this list of major topics accurately reflects our focus group discussion.

Moira Coogan Focus Group Follow-Up

29. Here is a list of best practices from your focus group discussion. Please review it and answer the question below

Aligning Instruction to Individual Student Academic and Behavioral Needs

Aligning Special Education Instruction with State Standards

Articulating Learning Objectives Clearly

Collaborating with General Education Teachers and Other Service Providers

Communicating Effectively with Parents

Creating a Supportive Classroom Environment

Engaging Students in the Learning Process

Maximizing Inclusion

Providing Appropriate Behavioral Interventions

Providing Explicit Instruction

Providing IEP-Required Accommodations and Modifications

Understanding Diverse Student Backgrounds

Using Formative Assessments and Progress Monitoring

Please select

I agree that this list of best practices accurately reflects our focus group discussion.

30. I would suggest adding the following major topics or best practices that I remember were discussed:

31. I would suggest removing the following major topics or best practices because I do not remember them being discussed:

32. Any additional comments:

Thank You

Moira Coogan Focus Group Follow-Up

Thank you for your response. Your feedback is greatly appreciated.