Kansas EAG SEC Special Education Project: 2010 – 2012
“Closing the Opportunity Gap for Students with Disabilities”

What was learned?

In the U.S., public school systems are expected to provide all students with standards-based instruction and inclusive assessments that are well aligned with such instruction. Federal legislation has underscored the right of students with disabilities (SWD) to have access to the general curriculum, instructional content, and tests aligned with standards (IDEA, 1997, 2004; NCLB, 2001). However, relatively little is known about the extent to which standards-based instruction at grade level is delivered by general education or special education teachers (Roach, Namisi-Chilungu, et al., 2009).

Now, results from a two-year study supported by the U.S. Department of Education provide new information regarding classroom teaching practices and subject content taught in ELA and Math, and differences in instruction according to class composition. The study also produced and tested a new online tool for teachers and leaders to evaluate the degree to which current classroom instruction is consistent with the Common Core Standards, and to identify where change will be needed in many classrooms and schools.

Study Design

Working with educators in three states (KS, NC, OH), a new application of the Surveys of Enacted Curriculum (SEC) online system was developed and used to analyze and report on key questions regarding opportunity to learn for students with disabilities and students in general education. CCSSO led a consortium of state leaders, researchers and curriculum specialists to develop and incorporate key survey items that could provide valid data for analysis of differences in instructional content and practices in special education and general education classrooms. The consortium also conducted and reported content analyses of prior academic state standards, alternate/extended standards, grade-level student assessments, and the Common Core Standards using the SEC content frameworks.

The study involved 600 teachers across the three states from 19 school districts and 50 schools. A key measure of opportunity to learn used in the study was the degree of statistical alignment between the curriculum content reported by teachers and the subject content expected in standards and assessments. Student achievement scores on state assessments were analyzed to measure the effects of curriculum alignment.

What was learned?

- Alignment analysis using SEC data identified gaps in opportunity to learn. The instructional content data from teachers reporting on what they taught in ELA and Math grades 4-8 show consistency (general alignment) in the broad content topics taught by teachers in general education with the broad topics taught by teachers in special education, however instructional content at the fine grain (specific topic) level differs significantly between the two groups.

- Understanding importance of cognitive expectations in instruction. The SEC data show significant gaps between current instruction and the Common Core Standards for both general education and special education teachers. In the cognitive demand dimension of instruction
reported by SEC, teacher expectations for student learning focus heavily on Recall/memorize and Use of Procedures with little emphasis on the expectations of Demonstrate Understanding, Analyze/investigate, or Evaluate/integrate.

- **School LRE indicator related to instructional alignment with standards.** Schools with more inclusive classrooms (higher LRE scores) had greater alignment of instruction to standards than schools with less inclusion – for both students with IEPs and general education students.

- **Instruction aligned to standards positively related to gains in student achievement** – The study analyzed state assessment data for two years and results showed effects of instructional alignment: a) Better alignment of ELA instruction to Common Core Standards is positively related to achievement gains, and b) Better alignment of Math instruction to prior state standards is positively related to gains. The multivariate analysis at the student level controlled for related variables such as prior achievement and student demographics.

- **School-based guidance provided for use of data to improve instruction.** Based on demonstration of the use of SEC data with schools, the project developed online PD modules designed to guide local teams in using SEC data to improve instruction in relation to Common Core Standards. The website is now in the public domain and available to educators.

- **Instructional practices vary widely in special education and general education.** Analysis of data across states, districts and schools showed that teachers used quite different methods and strategies for providing instruction within the same subject and grade level of students. Teachers used the SEC data charts to evaluate and discuss shifts in practices particularly to meet the Common Core Standards.

- **Study tested a new instrument for analyzing instruction for students with significant cognitive disabilities.** A key question for state and local education leaders is how to improve opportunity to learn for all special education students and particularly those with the most severe disabilities (1% students). The project developed a survey instrument that asked teachers to report on instructional content and practices used with a small sample of their students. The data were analyzed and reported in relation to state alternate or extended content standards.

The study results and use of the SEC data tools and analyses are being reported in several conference sessions in summer 2013, including the National Conference on Student Assessment and the U.S. Department of Education OSEP Leadership Conference.

**Website posting of reports and products:** All the project results, products and dissemination materials from the project are posted online at the CCSSO public webpage (go to www.SECsurvey.org/ SEC Online PD Guide: Improving Teaching and Learning Using SEC Data).
Closing the Opportunity Gap for Students with Disabilities: Analyzing Alignment of Instruction and Standards in English Language Arts and Mathematics

Summary Report

Kansas EAG State Consortium SEC Special Education Project

December 2012

The contents of this report were developed under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. However, those contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the U.S. Department of Education and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal government.

The US ED grant (#S368A100013) was awarded to the Kansas State Department of Education in 2010. The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) is the project contractor and manager for the grant project involving districts and schools in three states: Kansas, North Carolina, Ohio. The project grant proposal was titled: “Develop Instrumentation to Analyze Fidelity of Instruction for Students with Disabilities in relation to Standards and Assessments and Report on Opportunity to Learn and Student Achievement.”

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Project webpage: www.SECsurvey.org
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Closing the Opportunity Gap for Students with Disabilities: Analyzing Alignment of Instruction and Standards in English Language Arts and Mathematics

Kansas EAG State Consortium SEC Special Education Project

The Kansas EAG State Consortium project has collected, reported and demonstrated use of data from the Surveys of Enacted Curriculum (SEC) online system for analyzing opportunity to learn for Students with Disabilities (SwD). The project has tested the use of SEC online tools and reports for analyzing special education instruction and alignment of instruction to state standards and assessments. The project was designed and implemented with leadership from a consortium comprised of leaders from three state departments of education, CCSSO, the Wisconsin Center for Education Research, and WestEd. The project rationale and design is detailed in two documents—grant proposal (Kansas State Department of Education, 2010) and project design prospectus (CCSSOa, 2010). A key goal of the project is to assist and support states in working to close the opportunity gap of students with disabilities. Through this summary report, the Consortium is providing description and evidence of how the project data and outcomes are used to address the project questions.

Executive Summary

Project Outcomes and Products

Instrument development and demonstration. Through the state consortium leadership and technical assistance from experts, the Surveys of Enacted Curriculum (SEC) data collection and reporting instruments were revised and adapted to increase their applicability for analysis of instruction provided to students with disabilities. The revised versions of the SEC Math and ELAR instruments were used for data collection and reporting with 600 general and special education teachers in grades 4-8. Also, a new instrument was designed and tested to analyze opportunity to learn for students with significant cognitive disabilities.

Data workshops for educator teams. Professional development workshops were convened in each state for participating district leaders and each school was invited to send a team of administrators and teachers. The teams analyzed SEC data focused on analysis of special education and learned how to apply data results to curriculum and instruction in their schools.

Professional Development Guide. With results from the project data reports and feedback through the in-state workshops with school teams, the consortium designed and implemented an Online SEC PD Guide which provides step-by-step plans and guidance for school staff and teachers to access and use the SEC data to support their efforts to improve instruction and close the opportunity gap. The Guide is structured around five PD modules addressing key questions for implementation of the Common Core.

Research by state and cross-state. Four data sources were used to address the leading questions for the project: surveys of teachers assigned in general and special education, content analysis of standards and assessments, school-level program data, and student achievement scores on state assessments. All of the data were collected and analyzed over the two years of the project with cooperation of the three states, 19 districts, 50 schools, and 600 teachers that participated. The results of the data analyses and reports through the KS State Consortium project are briefly summarized.
Website posting of products: All the project results, products and dissemination materials are posted online by CCSSO (see www.SECsurvey.org).

The SEC Special Education project was designed to address four key questions for analysis of opportunity to learn concerning opportunity to learn for students with disabilities and all students.

1. **What is the fidelity of instruction in relation to Standards and Assessments?** The project data collected through teacher surveys using the SEConline system were used to report to state leaders and local educators on the alignment between content of instruction provided in grades 4-8 classrooms and the standards for student learning required by each of the three project states (Kansas, North Carolina, Ohio). The analysis of alignment included statewide assessments used for all students—both general end-of grade academic assessments and modified or alternate assessments used with students with disabilities. Third, the project analyzed and reported on the degree of alignment between current instruction and the Common Core Standards, including fine-grain analysis within topics by grade.

For each state, and participating districts within states, the project reports were able to identify specific topics and cognitive demands in current instruction that indicate lack of alignment with Common Core Standards. The data analysis and professional development support provided assistance to leaders and educators in identifying where shifts in instructional practices and curriculum organization will need to be made. Specific examples of SEC data charts used in reporting and technical assistance are highlighted in this Summary Report.

2. **How can we analyze opportunity to learn for students with disabilities and differences from general education?** The project was designed for each participating district and school to request that teachers report on the content of instruction in ELA and math in grades 4-8, and both general education and special education teachers at each grade were asked to participate. The Consortium project collected and reported data on four topics regarding students with disabilities:
   - Differences in content of instruction in classes taught by general education teachers vs. special education teachers
   - Gaps between current classroom instruction and content defined in Standards
   - Alignment between state extended standards for students with significant cognitive disabilities and regular, academic standards
   - Degree of content alignment between instruction for students with significant cognitive disabilities and extended standards.

Several patterns in differences in opportunity to learn were noted across states. In language arts, time and emphasis on specific topics differed by class composition, including more emphasis on Phonics and Comprehension in classes with more special education students, and less emphasis on Vocabulary, Writing applications, and Elements of Presentation. Mathematics instruction in classes with more special education students had more time and emphasis on topics of Number sense and Operations, and less emphasis on topics of Measurement, Geometry, and Algebraic concepts, and Data and Statistics.

Cognitive demands of instruction also showed differences. The classes with more special education students emphasize instruction asking students for Recall and Performing Procedures than the classes with more general education students. In comparison to Common Core Standards, expectations for student learning will need to shift instruction toward more emphasis on the Communicate, Analyze and Evaluate areas of cognitive expectations.
The project developed and pilot tested a teacher survey for teachers of students with significant cognitive disabilities. The pilot results showed that teachers can report data on instruction by student rather than a whole group, and the design asked for reports on three students. The data were reported in comparison to state extended standards, and the results showed instructional content heavily focused on a small number of content topics in language arts and in math, with expectations focused on the Attend and Recall levels.

3. What are differences in instructional practices between special education and general education classrooms? In the study, survey data from teachers provided for analysis of classroom instructional practices and reporting differences by class composition. The data analysis included teacher attitudes, teacher preparation, professional development, classroom assessments, homework, and use of technology. The reporting of SEC special education data focused on three types of data charts:
   - Classroom instructional practices—variation in practices by class composition/percentage of students with IEPs
   - Small-group activities in ELA and Math—types of activities by class composition
   - Teacher perceptions toward teaching ELA and Math—differences by class composition

In language arts, classes with primarily special education students (more than 70% IEP) were found to use practices that involved less time in reading, collecting information, presenting information, and writing in class, but slightly more use of manipulatives and work in small groups. The classes with more special education students had greater use of small groups or pairs during instruction. In mathematics instruction, classes with more special education students used more time on practices involving learning math outside the classroom, use of portfolio in assessment, and practicing test taking strategies. Small group activities in math classes with more special education students used less time on solving non-routine problems and discussing math problems or reasoning with mathematics.

4. What is the relationship of instruction students receive to student achievement? The cross-state analysis to address the question of achievement effects comprises data collected at three levels; program (school or district), teacher (instructional content and practice), and student (characteristics and achievement) from each of the three states that participated in the study. The analyses in the Cross-State Report consider multivariate regression models designed to explain student achievement scores controlling for prior achievement and economic disadvantage in order to examine the relative impact of program inclusiveness, OTL, pedagogy, and disability status on achievement.

The multivariate analysis had two key findings regarding opportunity to learn for students with disabilities. First, using the school-level indicator of Least Restrictive Environment (KRE), schools with more inclusive classrooms for students with disabilities were found to have greater alignment of instruction to Common Core Standards and professional standards for math and language arts. Second, students receiving instruction that was more closely aligned to Common Core Standards in languages arts and reading had higher achievement gains than other students, while mathematics instruction alignment to older state standards predicted higher achievement gains. The analysis of achievement gains controlled for prior student achievement, student demographics, and disability status of students.