

Performance Standards

for Special Education Certification



Special Education Certification

What it means

Special Education Certification is designed to meet the unique needs of all learners, supporting their cognitive, social, and emotional growth. Special Education is built upon inclusive practices that are embedded within an institution. Cognia® helps institutions implement an intentional approach to recognizing and responding to learners' unique strengths, needs, identities, and goals.

Effective special education programs use individualized planning and research-based instructional practices to track student progress. Special education is supported by a community of educators, specialists, school leaders, families, and community partners who share responsibility for creating equitable pathways for student success. Special education facilitates meaningful engagement in academic, social, and cocurricular experiences for all learners. Cognia Special Education Certification guides institutions to demonstrate their commitment to all learners and drive continuous improvement.

Effective special education programs:

- Demonstrate a commitment to belonging and inclusion
- Create safe and accessible learning environments
- Promote collaboration with families and community partners
- Provide staff who have appropriate expertise
- Dedicate time to effectively train teachers and support staff
- Design physically accommodating spaces for many learners
- Provide and monitor the use of appropriate resources
- Monitor learning and program effectiveness using data collection and analysis tools
- Embed individualized, developmentally appropriate, and evidence-based practices

Quality characteristics

Four key characteristics are evident when an institution effectively engages with Cognia Performance Standards for Special Education Certification and participates in Cognia's peer review process for certification and continuous improvement.

CULTURE OF LEARNING: A focus on creating a broad sense of belonging, engaging families and community, and fostering a nurturing environment in which all learners flourish.

LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING: The responsibility of an institution's leaders to influence and actively model inclusive beliefs, training, and practices, and to demonstrate the value of having a diverse student body.

ENGAGEMENT OF LEARNING: Proactive consideration of unique needs so that all learners can participate in the learning process with independence and confidence and have opportunities to grow and succeed.

GROWTH IN LEARNING: Adaptability to address unique student needs in a developmentally appropriate environment so that all learners can grow towards their next level of learning.

Cognia Performance Standards for Special Education Certification

STANDARD 1

All staff work collaboratively to create inclusive learning environments through respectful interactions, equitable participation structures, and daily practices that uphold the institution's core beliefs and values.

STANDARD 2

Comprehensive research-based interventions and emotional support are provided to support and promote student well-being and to create safe, ethical, environments where learners can thrive.

STANDARD 3

Professional staff cultivate meaningful partnerships with families and community stakeholders to support all learners.

STANDARD 4

The governing body oversees the intentional alignment of the institution's mission, philosophy, and beliefs with its commitment to a diverse and neurodiverse student population, and institution leadership ensures this commitment is implemented.

STANDARD 5

The institution demonstrates commitment to inclusive practices through policy, resource allocation, communication, and consistent monitoring and accountability for effective implementation and continuous improvement.

STANDARD 6

The institution provides adequate personnel with Special Education expertise in partnership with classroom teachers and other adults who are trained to provide inclusive teaching and learning.

STANDARD 7

The physical learning environment is purposefully designed to ensure accessibility and inclusivity for all learners.

STANDARD 8

Students with identified special educational needs are supported through individualized plans and research-based assessment practices.

STANDARD 9

The institution delivers individualized, inclusive, and evidence-based instruction within a developmentally appropriate, culturally responsive learning environment that supports the academic, social, and emotional growth of neurodiverse learners.



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