

# Five Websites That Support Standards-Based Teaching and Learning

Leah Wasburn-Moses

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## Abstract

Today's special education teachers are expected to be able to give all students access to the general education curriculum (McLaughlin & Thurlow, 2003). This responsibility can be particularly challenging given the wide range of ages, ability levels, and needs of the students they teach (Huefner, 2000). This paper describes results of a thorough web search to assist special education teachers in supporting standards-based teaching and learning. Five websites are presented covering curriculum, instruction, universal design, assessment, and IEP development.

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## Keywords

standards-based teaching, technology

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## Introduction

Special educators have always relied on IEPs and a variety of materials to guide them in setting up plans for students. However, recent laws have mandated that every child be held to one standard (Thurlow & Thompson, 2003). Now, special educators are responsible for complex knowledge of grade-level curricula and instructional techniques. These policies mean significant changes to the entire system of special education, which can be overwhelming for teachers. However, the Internet can provide assistance for teachers who may be struggling to meet these mandates. Online tools now include research-based instructional methods, classroom interventions, lesson plans, applications, and simulations (Smith & Meyers, 2003).

Standards-based reform poses many challenges for teachers (Huefner, 2000). In special education, new laws have centered around assessment, standards, and access to the general education curriculum for students with disabilities (Thurlow & Thompson, 2003). Many teachers perceive a struggle between the need for individualized curriculum and instruction and for holding every student to one set of standards (Huefner, 2000; Ward, Montague, & Linton, 2003). This issue further complicates the role of a special education teacher, which is notoriously diverse (Mastropieri, 2001). In sum, these mandates mean significant changes to the entire system of special education (Thurlow & Thompson, 2003).

In order to locate materials to support teachers in their quest to provide quality standards-based teaching and learning, a thorough Internet search was conducted. The Internet has the possibility to revolutionize teaching, and online tools now include research-based instructional methods, class-

room interventions, lesson plans, applications, and simulations (Smith & Meyers, 2003). However, the challenge in education is to bring these tools to teachers to further reform efforts (Baines, Deluzain, & Hegngi, 1998; Essex, 2002). This article attempts to bridge the barriers in translating policy to practice through presentation of Internet tools that have direct application to classroom practice.

In order to identify tools that could be used by special education teachers to support standards-based teaching and learning, several Internet searches were conducted. These searches used combinations of keywords of "standards-based," "curriculum," "special education," "best practices," "IEPs," "teaching," and "assessment." Only websites containing multiple strategies with practical classroom implications were selected. The sites were chosen to cover all phases of the teaching cycle (e.g. planning, instruction, assessment) as well as special education teachers' unique roles and responsibilities (e.g. writing IEPs, differentiating instruction) (Lerner, 2006; Wasburn-Moses, 2005). Selected sites were all created and/or endorsed by national organizations supporting standards-based teaching and learning. The sites cover the following areas: curriculum, instruction, universal design, assessment, and IEP development. Each site is presented in the following format: (a) site, (b) description, and (c) highlights.

## Selected Websites

### 1. Curriculum: MarcoPolo

<http://www.marcopolo-education.org>

#### Description:

This site bills itself as a “nonprofit consortium of premier national and international organizations and the Verizon Foundation dedicated to providing the highest quality Internet content and professional development to teachers and students throughout the United States.” The content follows national standards in each subject area, and includes links to seven separate Websites in the following areas: arts, economics, humanities, mathematics, reading/language arts, science, and geography. Each site includes lesson plans with downloadable worksheets, interactive content for students, and links to additional resources. A calendar provides links to lessons appropriate for each day across the seven areas, and an all-inclusive database can be searched by topic/standard and by grade band.

#### Highlights:

- The geography site Xpeditions offers a virtual museum for students to explore.
- The mathematics site Illuminations features 68 online activities and 726 weblinks that can be searched by standard.
- The economics site, EconEd includes links to free teaching materials and ideas for community-based projects.

### 2. Instruction: What Works

#### Clearinghouse

<http://www.whatworks.ed.gov>

#### Description:

Although this site is currently incomplete, it is important in that it is part of the United States Department of Education’s effort to identify and present scientifically validated practices that improve student learning. They claim that “as a decision-making tool, the What Works Clearinghouse helps the education community locate and recognize credible and reliable evidence to make informed decisions.” It sets and implements standards for recognizing and testing the quality of research, and presents findings in easy-to-understand formats. Currently, the only completed study is in the area of curriculum-based interventions for improving middle school mathematics. This report reviews middle school math curricula and explains which ones were found to be effective, which ones were not, and why. Other reports for the future include interventions for violent behavior, adult literacy, peer-assisted learning, interventions for beginning reading, and dropout prevention. These reports should offer teachers a way to sift through opinion and hearsay to uncover the heart of effective teaching practices.

#### Highlights:

- The HelpDesk offers phone and email consultation to answer questions about reports or the implementation of best practices related to their findings.
- This site also offers an opportunity to get involved through the informal What Works Network (WWN).

**3. Universal Design: K-8 Access Center**  
<http://www.k8accesscenter.org>

Description:

Also sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, the stated mission of the Access Center is “to provide technical assistance that strengthens state and local capacity to help students with disabilities effectively learn in the general education curriculum.” Universal Design is a method used to support all students in accessing the general education curriculum and is often compared to constructing a ramp to allow all students to enter a building. The “Resources” link is organized into the following seven topics: background information on access, instructional programs and practices, professional development modules, math, language arts, science, and universal design. Each of the topical areas includes links, presentations, video clips, and easy to access information. The site also includes online discussion topics, such as “assessment and students with disabilities” and “effective classroom strategies.” In this way, teachers can interact with experts in the field as well as with their peers.

Highlights:

- Provides a way to get involved through “information sharing communities.”
- It includes facilitated chats with experts around pertinent educational issues.

**4. Assessment: Integrating Standards**  
<http://www.integratingstandards.org>

Description:

This site describes how standards can be integrated into “non-standard” educational settings, such as alternative schools and separate settings for individuals with more intense needs. Although the site is geared toward integrating the Minnesota standards, the framework and activities can be adapted to fit within other states’ frameworks as well. Lessons are divided into Career and Technical Education, Developmental Cognitive Disabilities, and Emotional and Behavioral Disabilities, and focus on four instructional areas: social studies, science, math, and arts and literature. The site demonstrates how ingenuity can be used to bring both best practices and standards-based teaching to groups who traditionally have been excluded from standard school settings.

Highlights:

- Resource materials are created by a Best Practices in Special Education grant.
- “Developmental Cognitive Disabilities” contains aligned lesson plans, assessments, and other ideas in areas determined by teachers to be of greatest need for students with intensive disabilities.

**5. IEP Development: E-Learning  
Design Lab**  
<http://elearndesign.org>

Description:

The E-learning Design Lab is intended to “explore new uses of technology to enhance learning environments that meet the educational and training needs of society.” Included in the lab is an online professional development workshop entitled “IEP Development.” The workshop is easy to follow and is organized around five lessons. The lessons include: IEP fundamentals, Initiating IEP development, Developing the heart of the IEP, Completing the IEP, and Does the IEP provide FAPE? It is intended to prepare teachers to align IEPs with academic standards. Each lesson includes resources, readings, activities, and assessments. The site also provides other modules in the broad areas of reading, positive behavior supports, and technology in education.

Highlights:

- video clips accompany each lesson
- other online modules that may be of particular interest include “(Behavioral) Intervention Strategies,” “Writing and Technology,” and “Data-Driven Instructional Decision Making.”

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, teachers have access to many quality online supports to assist in implementing standards-based teaching and learning, of which these five are only a few. Internet resources can assist teachers in all stages of the teaching process and cross tradi-

tional boundaries separating general and special education. The sites help demonstrate that standards-based teaching does not necessarily exclude individualization or creativity. As the Internet is continuously growing and changing, teachers are encouraged to use these sites as starting points in their search for strategies to aid in their professional growth. The five sites presented provide a glimpse into the types of resources that are available to support classroom implementation of standards-based teaching and learning.

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***About the author:***

Leah Wasburn-Moses is Assistant Professor in the Department of Educational Psychology at Miami University.