

STANDARD INDICATOR 1.1

UNDERSTANDING OF STUDENTS

The teacher recognizes individual differences and knows the backgrounds, abilities, and interests of his or her students and uses this information to differentiate his or her approaches to students and to instruction.

To respond effectively to individual differences, teachers must know many things about the particular students they teach: their individual physical, social, and emotional needs and makeups, as well as relevant characteristics of their lives that affect their learning, such as whom their students go home to at night, how they have previously performed on standardized tests, and what sparks their interest. This kind of specific understanding is not trivial because teachers use it to decide how best to tailor instruction.

As diagnosticians of students' interests, abilities, and prior knowledge, skillful teachers learn to read their students, anticipating what concepts and activities certain students may find problematic. By keeping a finger on the pulse of the class, teachers decide how to alter their approaches to differentiate instruction by working with individual or groups of students in particular areas of need, enriching instruction with alternative examples, explanations, or activities.

Proficient teachers learn from their experiences. They learn from listening to their students, from watching them interact with peers, and from reading what they write. The information they acquire about students in the course of instruction subsequently informs their understanding of teaching and learning, which transforms their practice. In their efforts to work with children different from themselves, teachers monitor both what they see and hear and what is not so close to the surface. They must strive to acquire a deep understanding of their students and the communities from which they come and that shape students' outlooks, values, and orientation toward schooling.

Adapted from NBPTS, *What Teachers Should Know and Be Able to Do*, 2nd ed. (2016, pp. 12–14).

Key Elements of Teacher Practice Related to Standard Indicator 1.1

Knowing a wide range of characteristics about the students they instruct so they can respond effectively to individual differences, including:

- Knowledge of students' backgrounds, interests, abilities, and personality traits;
- Understanding of different cultures and applying [culturally responsive teaching](#) practices;
- Understanding of the complex role that language plays in learning and knowledge of language acquisition strategies;
- Influence of students' unique living situations and family dynamics;
- Ability to gather, organize, and use information from a variety of sources on students' prior knowledge, backgrounds, interests, and readiness for the learning for both planning and teaching;
- Use of individualized education programs (IEPs), language proficiency levels, 504 plans, and other processes/documentation to gain knowledge about learner needs;
- Knowledge gained through observations of interactions with peers;
- Knowledge gained from examining student work; and
- [Differentiation](#) of tasks, assessments, and modes of response on the basis of the key elements listed previously.

Questions for Reflection and Planning

- How am I gathering and organizing relevant information about my students to make it easily accessible for planning and teaching?
- How am I using what I know about my students as individuals that will inform my teaching and transform my practice?
- How am I adjusting my practice to accommodate students' needs by providing them with appropriate access points to the learning?
- What do I know about their interests and background that can help me to better connect with each student and differentiate instruction to make it [relevant](#) and appropriate for each learner?

Core Proposition 1: Teachers are committed to students and their learning.

1.1 LEVEL 1

Standard Indicator 1.1. Understanding of Students. The teacher recognizes individual differences and knows the backgrounds, abilities, and interests of his or her students and uses this information to differentiate his or her approaches to students and to instruction.

Level 1, Ineffective

The teacher does not implement differentiated learning opportunities for students on the basis of backgrounds, readiness, interests, or personality traits. This results in accessible and challenging instruction for few to no students.

Performance-Level Descriptors

The teacher does not gather knowledge about students by observing them carefully and seeking additional information from a variety of school-based and out-of-school sources.

The teacher demonstrates little or no awareness or understanding of how individual students' learning needs, backgrounds, abilities, language proficiencies, interests, and personality traits affect and influence learning. This results in the planning of instruction that does not accommodate student differences or learning needs.

Critical Attributes

- The teacher does not attempt to ascertain variations in ability levels among students in the class.
- The teacher is not aware of students' interests, backgrounds, or cultural heritages.
- The teacher takes no responsibility for learning about students' medical or learning disabilities detailed in 504, IEP, language proficiency levels, or other documented learning plans.
- The teacher primarily teaches to the whole group with no differentiation or modifications.

Possible Examples

- The teacher uses the same examples and approaches to teach a mathematical concept to all students despite the fact that assessment data show a number of students do not have the prerequisite skills to address the content.
- The teacher plans to teach a week of lessons about the Christmas holiday to a class in which there are a number of students who practice religions that do not celebrate Christmas.
- The teacher plans to give her Level 1 and 2 English learners (ELs) the same assignment she gives the non-EL students in the class with no modifications designed to provide access to the learning.
- The high school English teacher plans and implements lessons that regularly ask students to read the same text independently, with no attention to student interest or varied reading levels.

Implications for Professional Learning
(adapted from InTASC Learning Progressions 1.0)

Develop the ability to: Deepen knowledge of and apply approaches to adapting instruction to meet the specific needs of individuals and groups of learners.

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Teaching practice is advanced through professional learning that will, for example:

Expand knowledge of learner diversity and its implications for adjusting instruction.

- Seek out resources to gain knowledge about the various cultures and family structures represented within the classroom and community and ways to consider aspects of these differences when planning instruction.
- Consult with colleagues and specialists, and identify and use data sources to deepen understanding of exceptional learner needs and options for adapting instruction.

Strengthen analysis and reflection on practice.

- Work with a coach or other colleague to better understand how to adjust practice to meet particular learner needs.

Build skill in problem solving to ensure the achievement of learner outcomes.

- Work collaboratively to identify and effectively use resources that can support particular learning needs.

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1.1 LEVEL 2	
Standard Indicator 1.1. Understanding of Students. The teacher recognizes individual differences and knows the backgrounds, abilities, and interests of his or her students and uses this information to differentiate his or her approaches to students and to instruction.	
Level 2, Developing	
Performance-Level Descriptors	<p><i>The teacher attempts to implement some differentiated learning opportunities for students on the basis of backgrounds, readiness, interests, and personality traits. This results in accessible and challenging instruction for only some students.</i></p> <p>The teacher gathers some knowledge about students by observing them and seeking some additional information from a variety of school-based or out-of-school sources. The teacher is aware of the influence and effect that students’ backgrounds, abilities, language proficiencies, interests, and personality traits have on student learning, and uses a limited range of strategies to plan instruction and adjust practice.</p>
Critical Attributes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The teacher is aware of the different ability levels in the class but possesses a limited knowledge of how to proactively plan for differences using the data, regularly offering the same activity and assignment to all students with minimal adjustments to accommodate these differences. ■ The teacher is aware that students have different interests and backgrounds but rarely draws upon their contributions or incorporates materials to tailor instruction in light of student diversity. ■ The teacher is aware of students’ medical or learning needs detailed in 504, IEP, language proficiencies, or other learning plans but struggles to accommodate the implications of these needs. ■ The teacher primarily teaches to the whole group, making occasional adjustments or modifications in reaction to student responses to the instruction during the lesson.
Possible Examples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The teacher provides a graphic organizer and adjusts the quantity of problems to be completed by struggling and advanced students on the same worksheet rather than adjusting the complexity of the task. ■ When selecting books for the classroom library, the teacher selects books based on reading level but pays little attention to the interests of the students. ■ For a student at lower levels of English proficiency, the teacher provides an English-speaking classmate to assist but does not scaffold the assignment to provide support for the learning. ■ The physical education teacher knows there are students with IEPs in his class but is unsure how to use the information to adjust instruction. ■ During a whole-group lesson, the teacher notices that several students are struggling with the concept of placing decimals in multiplication problems and forms a small group for additional support before sending them back to do the independent assignment.
Implications for Professional Learning (adapted from InTASC Learning Progressions 1.0)	<p><i>Develop the ability to:</i> Deepen knowledge of and apply approaches to adapting instruction to meet the specific needs of individuals and groups of learners.</p>

Teaching practice is advanced through professional learning that will, for example:

Expand knowledge of learner diversity and its implications for adjusting instruction.

- Participate in a structured course of study on second language development or **cultural competence**.

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- Seek out resources to gain knowledge about the various cultures and family structures represented within the classroom and community and ways to consider aspects of these differences when planning instruction.
- Consult with colleagues and specialists to deepen understanding of exceptional learner needs and options for adapting instruction.

Strengthen analysis and reflection on practice.

- Work with a coach or other colleague to better understand how to adjust practice to meet particular learner needs.
- Examine multiple sources of data to assess the impact of current practice on meeting diverse learners' needs and make adjustments in practice.

Build skill in problem solving to ensure the achievement of learner outcomes.

- Work collaboratively to identify and effectively use resources that can support particular learning needs.

Build skill in personalizing and customizing learning.

- Identify particular learner challenges and use data to systematically address those challenges.

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1.1 LEVEL 3**Standard Indicator 1.1. Understanding of Students. The teacher recognizes individual differences and knows the backgrounds, abilities, and interests of his or her students and uses this information to differentiate his or her approaches to students and to instruction.****Level 3, Effective****Performance-Level Descriptors**

The teacher plans and implements differentiated learning opportunities within whole class, small groups, or, for some individuals, on the basis of backgrounds, readiness, interests, and personality traits. This results in accessible and challenging instruction for most students.

The teacher gains a range of knowledge about students by observing them carefully and seeking additional information from a variety of school-based and out-of-school resources.

The teacher recognizes the influence and effect that students' backgrounds, abilities, language proficiencies, interests, and personality traits have on students' learning and uses this knowledge to plan instruction and adjust practice proactively to meet the needs of most learners.

Critical Attributes

- The teacher maintains or accesses a system of updated student records and gathers additional information on students through observation, school-based information, and contact with caregivers and other means to identify specific needs and proactively plan and respond with individualized support and variety in learning experiences.
- The teacher uses a variety of approaches to support learners in accessing academic content by connecting it to their backgrounds, abilities, interests, and learning preferences.
- The teacher adapts instruction and uses modified materials, resources, tools, and technology to address the specific needs of individual learners, including those associated with disabilities, giftedness, and English language proficiency.
- The teacher proactively plans for, and responds to, student learning needs throughout a lesson by adjusting instructional approaches or learning tasks and providing differentiated support as necessary.

Possible Examples

- At the beginning of the year or course, the teacher examines previous years' student data and preassessment information to identify and plan for the various learning needs of students.
- When planning a unit of instruction, the teacher reviews the IEPs of students to include strategies and resources in support of the IEP goals and shares this information with the resource teacher.
- A teacher administers a student interest survey to students and caregivers at the beginning of the school year and uses this information to make decisions about resources and activities to include in her upcoming unit.
- A teacher knows that five of her students are in the band and plans to have them discuss how their instruments work as part of a unit on sound.
- The teacher observes and takes notes on how students' social skills and personality traits impact their contributions to small-group work and uses this information to improve the cohesiveness of groups for an upcoming project.

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- The teacher begins instruction on adding fractions with different denominators with whole-class instruction but, using his knowledge of the differing levels of understanding of his students, has prepared practice in small groups at differing levels of complexity and teacher support.

Implications for Professional Learning
(adapted from InTASC Learning Progressions 1.0)

Develop the ability to: Anticipate and minimize challenges to learning and increase supports to achieve [higher order learning](#).

Teaching practice is advanced through professional learning that will, for example:**Strengthen analysis and reflection on practice.**

- Examine multiple sources of data to assess the impact of current practice on meeting diverse learners' needs and make adjustments in practice.
- Share practices related to particular groups of learners with colleagues and use feedback to better meet specific learner needs.

Build skill in problem solving to ensure the achievement of learner outcomes.

- Work with colleagues to support the intentional scaffolding of [higher order learning](#) across groups of students with particular needs.

Build skill in personalizing and customizing learning.

- Draw on learner input to structure learning opportunities that allow for student choice and autonomy in their learning and in how they demonstrate proficiency.
- Identify particular learner challenges and use data to systematically address those challenges.

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1.1 LEVEL 4	
Standard Indicator 1.1. Understanding of Students. The teacher recognizes individual differences and knows the backgrounds, abilities, and interests of his or her students and uses this information to differentiate his or her approaches to students and to instruction.	
Level 4, Distinguished	
Performance-Level Descriptors	<p><i>The teacher implements differentiated learning opportunities within whole class, small groups, or, for some individuals, on the basis of backgrounds, readiness, interests, and personality traits. This results in accessible and challenging instruction for nearly all students.</i></p> <p><i>The teacher provides opportunities for meaningful student choice where appropriate and encourages students' use of their own understanding of their individual preferences and learning needs in selecting challenging assignments and how they will accomplish them.</i></p> <p>The teacher gains a broad range of knowledge about students by observing them carefully and seeking additional information from a variety of school-based and out-of-school sources.</p> <p>The teacher recognizes the influence and effect that students' backgrounds, abilities, interests, and personality traits have on students' learning and seeks student input to use with this knowledge to plan instruction and adjust practice dynamically to meet the needs of nearly all learners.</p>
Critical Attributes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The teacher proactively plans for and implements interventions, modifications, and accommodations on the basis of IEPs, 504 plans, language proficiencies, and other legally required accommodations, seeking advice and support from specialized staff and families. ■ The teacher facilitates learners in developing an understanding of how their backgrounds, abilities, interests, and learning preferences influence their learning and assists them in taking responsibility for choosing approaches to a learning task that will be effective for them as individuals and produce quality work. ■ The teacher regularly incorporates a variety of differentiated instructional and grouping strategies to provide meaningful and dynamic access points for student learning. ■ The teacher integrates diverse languages, dialects, and cultures into instructional practice to build on learners' backgrounds and experiences and promote the value of multilingual and multicultural perspectives.
Possible Examples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The science teacher creates customized materials for lab assignments that are designed to meet the individual needs of students with learning differences. ■ A language arts teacher analyzes the text for an upcoming unit to look for connections between the text and student skills, knowledge, interests, and cultural backgrounds and uses this analysis to develop lesson plans that build on student strengths and accommodate differences. ■ The teacher supports students in using awareness of their own individual reading levels to select texts at an appropriate level of readability and complexity for independent reading. ■ The art teacher adapts several units to include a studio approach for her eighth-grade art class when she realizes that the group of students is artistically inclined and motivated to work with various media independently.

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- During a unit on three-dimensional figures, a mathematics teacher provides multiple learning tasks and assessment options from which students may select to demonstrate proficiency.
- To provide access for students with beginning levels of English proficiency, the high school biology teacher uses related content articles at lower levels of readability, teacher-prepared notes that include pictures and diagrams, access to related technology, and groupings with students trained in how to support one another in the learning.

Implications for Professional Learning
(adapted from InTASC Learning Progressions 1.0)

Develop the ability to: Anticipate and minimize challenges to learning and increase supports to achieve [higher order learning](#).

Teaching practice is advanced through professional learning that will, for example:**Strengthen analysis and reflection on practice.**

- Share practices related to particular groups of learners with colleagues and use feedback to better meet specific learner needs.

Build skill in problem solving to ensure the achievement of learner outcomes.

- Draw on learner input to structure learning opportunities that allow for student choice and autonomy in their learning and in how they demonstrate proficiency.

Build skill in personalizing and customizing learning.

- Work with colleagues to design and test various supports for high-level achievement for learners with particular needs.