

Primary Authors

Peg Dawson
Marcy McIver

Contributing Authors

Chapter 1: Peg Dawson
Chapter 2: Marcy McIver
Chapter 3: Marcy McIver, Kelli Clari, Jackie Gilson
Chapter 4: Kelli Clari, Delaney Zimmerman, Alexis Provetto
Chapter 5: Marcy McIver, Kelli Clari, Peg Dawson, Shyrl Cone, Olena Mandeville
Chapter 6: Felicia Sperry
Chapter 7: Peg Dawson
Chapter 8: Beth Peterson
Chapter 9: Peg Dawson, Jacki Gilson, John Burrell, Marcy McIver

Other Contributors

Jennifer Blaisdell, Jennifer Dutton, Carol Bush, Jennifer Dutton, Steven Endres, Gary Gerst, Wendy Gray, Keith Giacoma, Kathleen Holowka, James Lill, Dina Kotecha, Stella Mask, Lynn Roberts, Carina Waldman, Jenni Waltman, Jamie Warner

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Introduction

Background

Executive skills are the infrastructure that underlie school success. In fact, a quote from an *Edutopia* article published in 2019 makes clear how critical executive skills are in supporting academic performance: “*The skills that make up executive function are better predictors of success than test scores, IQ, or socioeconomic status.*”

Schools take a variety of approaches to bringing executive skills to the attention of teachers and helping them integrate these skills into daily lessons and classroom routines. At one end of the continuum, some schools purchase curricula and contract with the curriculum developers to train teachers to use their materials. At the other end, you may find a lone practitioner, such as a school psychologist, counselor, or teacher, weaving executive skills into informal conversations or into the problem-solving process that is the backbone of Student Assistant Teams. In that case, the recognition that understanding executive skills and how to develop them benefits *all* students, not just those with learning challenges, grows by word of mouth, one conversation at a time.

There are advantages and disadvantages to both approaches. While those of us involved in writing this manual are committed to bringing executive skills to all classrooms, we understand that teachers, now more than ever, feel overwhelmed by the demands placed on them. The phrase *initiative fatigue* has become widespread (just Google it!)—and for good reason.

We believe strongly in the impact that supporting executive skills in students of all ages can have on success (academic, behavioral, social—and yes, life success). So we’re taking the long view. There are no quick fixes. Sometimes light bulbs go off, and teachers are immediately on board. More often, it’s a slow process of helping teachers see how important these skills are—

and helping them recognize how they are *already* supporting this kind of skill development without even realizing that's what they're doing. If they see they are already using strategies to support executive skill development, then it's not as heavy a lift to help them see how, with a little more intention and with a tweak here and there, they could have an even greater impact on the students they work with.

Purpose

This manual is intended as a guide for facilitators who want to support classroom practices that help students develop and strengthen executive skills in a developmentally appropriate fashion. For those familiar with an MTSS model (Multi-Tiered System of Supports), we are choosing to focus on Tier 1. Tier 1 is generally defined as core instruction that is universal for all students. It's delivered in general education classrooms by general education teachers. It often incorporates a collaborative process in which teachers and specialists (such as school psychologists, school counselors and other support staff) exchange ideas and problem solve when issues with individual students or groups of students arise. When those issues involve executive skills (and in our experience they do more often than not), the facilitator can be involved in the discussion and the problem solving. This manual presents a blueprint for how to do this.

As stated, we understand that there are a variety of ways to introduce and support executive skills in the general education classroom. This manual will outline three approaches that vary in formality and intensity, with a goal of matching the approach to the style of the facilitator and the needs/culture of the schools they work in.

- Level 1: Informal/organic—introducing executive skills into informal conversations with teachers or during student support team meetings.

- Level 2: specific steps the facilitator can follow to help a school embed executive skills into daily lessons and classroom routines.
- Level 3: System’s level. At this level, we will identify the key elements involved in a system’s level approach to embedding executive skills into classroom instruction. We will explain how the most common system-wide models—MTSS, PBIS, and UDL—can be adapted to incorporate strategies for supporting executive skills in general education classrooms.

Other chapters will address working with parents and strategies for working with teens.

Throughout the manual there will be links to additional resources.

A Note about Facilitators

When you ask ChatGPT for the definition of a facilitator, here’s what you get: *A facilitator is a person who helps guide and manage a group or process to ensure effective communication, collaboration, and achievement of objectives. They often assist in organizing discussions, encouraging participation, and maintaining focus without dominating the conversation.*

You can read more about the role of the facilitator in Chapter 3. But please understand: Just because you’re reading this manual doesn’t mean that you’ve agreed to be a facilitator. Maybe that’s not something you’re comfortable doing. But maybe you know someone in your school who would be a great facilitator. Please invite them to access this manual and see if they’re interested in playing this role. Or get a group of people at your school to look through the manual and decide as a group to facilitate the process of embedding executive skills into daily practice in your school. In this case, your job is to facilitate finding a facilitator! Be aware that it should never feel like it all falls on your shoulders.

A Final Piece of Advice

This guide will likely feel intimidating. It was compiled by people who have been thinking about executive skills for a long time and have a range of experience bringing executive skills to schools and classrooms. ***We would suggest you see this book as a reference and not as a step-by-step guide for embedding executive skills into classroom routines and instruction.***

If you Google “reference book,” the first definition that pops up is this: a reference books is “a book intended to be consulted for information on specific matters rather than read from beginning to end.” Although we did not create an Index, since it’s a pdf document you should be able to search it for topics you’re interested in. We’ve also embedded hyperlinks through the document to resources stored in a Dropbox folder. Click on the hyperlink, view the resource, download it if you like, and then click out and return to where you were in the guide. To obtain the full manual, complete this [form](#):

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