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## **Using General Observation Tools in the Evaluation of Special Education Teachers**

### Proposal

To date, no research studies have examined the validity of general observation systems for use with special educators. Further, researchers have raised concerns about whether such systems appropriately account for the kinds of instructional practices most commonly used by special educators. To help identify effective special education teachers and to help those who are struggling to improve, it will be critical to districts that they have accurate, reliable observation data.

In the present study, we investigate the extent to which the Framework for Teaching (FFT), a widely-adopted observation scheme, reliably and validly captures special educators' practice. To do so, we adopt Kane's validity argument approach, appraising the plausibility of the argument that judgments of special educator teaching quality can be made on the basis of FFT scores.

In conducting our validation, we collected classroom observation data from 80 special education teachers in two U.S. states. Each teacher was videotaped four times in 2016-2017. All 320 lessons were scored on both FFT and on an observation instrument more closely aligned with special education teaching, the Quality of Classroom Instruction (QCI).

Overall, special educators' lessons scored as expected in the classroom environment domain (Domain 2). In contrast, scores in the Instructional domain (Domain 3) were far lower than previously-published studies using FFT. When comparing FFT scores to scores drawn from the special education instrument, the two measures rank ordered teachers in similar ways. However, the results indicate a ceiling on FFT scores between basic and proficient.

There are complex conceptual and logistic challenges in adopting a common evaluation tool across all teachers. For the purposes of teacher sorting, it is helpful to see that FFT and QCI rank order teachers' similarly. However, for improvement purposes, decreased scores could lead to wasted time and resources as well as teacher discouragement and frustration.