# Preface

**A**s we put the final touches on the revision of this book and it heads to print, the 2004 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) had just been signed. Although no major changes were made to the assessment or instruction requirements in IDEA 2004, many states, districts, and schools were still adjusting to significant requirements that were added to IDEA in 1997. Among the 1997 amendments were those that required students with disabilities to have access to the general education curriculum (including the standards that are driving the curriculum); that required districts and states to include students with disabilities in state and districtwide assessments, with accommodations where appropriate; and that an alternate assessment be used with those students unable to participate in the regular state and district assessments. Furthermore, states were required to report the number of students taking state and district assessments and the number taking the alternate assessment. They also were required to report on the performance of students with disabilities in both types of assessments.

Little did we know that when the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act was signed into law by President George W. Bush in January 2002, such tremendous changes would occur in so little time for the accountability for student learning, including for the learning of students with disabilities. And as a result, the nation was forced to address the issue of how to make sure that students with disabilities actually benefit from their instruction—with the benefit shown on the assessment and ultimately reflected in the districts' and states' accountability systems.

IDEA 2004 made clear that students with disabilities are to be in the NCLB accountability system. Thus we need to know how students with disabilities are performing, and we need to expect that their performance will improve over time. Our discussions with many teachers, parents, and administrators, however, suggest to us that it is not obvious how to make sure that the performance of students with disabilities does increase.

We revised this book in our continued effort to address the need to work systematically to close the achievement gap and hence improve the test performance of students with disabilities. Of course, we do this with the belief that improving test performance translates into improved learning. In fact, we direct

our suggestions toward ways to improve students' learning and performance on a variety of tasks, not just test taking.

## AUDIENCE

This book was written to be a resource to all district and school professionals, particularly those overseeing programs for students with disabilities and other special needs students, including students who are English language learners, and the individuals responsible for instructing these students. As with our previous book, we hope that state-level personnel, as well as higher education teacher preparation personnel, will read this book, even though it is directed primarily toward educators in schools. Because the education of our children— all children—is a shared responsibility, we also address parents as we suggest how to improve the performance of students with disabilities.

## OVERVIEW

We organized this book to take you step by step through some approaches to improving the performance of students with disabilities. As we do this, we provide you with lots of materials that you can use to help you make decisions, document what you have done, and keep track of student progress. In each chapter we provide you with a list of additional resources that might be helpful to you, as well as a list of Internet sites with information on the topic of the chapter.

To further your use of and thinking on the contents of the chapters, we have provided you an opportunity via *Reflections on Change* to assess where your own knowledge and comfort are with each topic covered in the book. You will find this in Appendix A in the book.

We have created a list of technical assistance and dissemination networks that can provide information relevant to the topics covered in this book. Some of them are national resources; others are regional.

We have made every attempt to develop a book that is very usable, with both information and strategies and materials to support both. We hope that as you use this book, you will provide us with feedback on its usefulness in meeting your needs and in improving student performance.