



Preparing Preservice Teachers for Inclusive Education Through Standards-based Curriculum

Preparando professores de formação inicial para educação inclusiva por meio de um currículo baseado em padrões

Preparación de futuros docentes para la educación inclusiva a través de un currículo basado en estándares

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Abstract: This paper explores factors that impact inclusive teacher preparation programs in the United States, such as federal legislation, inclusive teacher shortage, state policies, and the standards developed by the accreditation organizations and specialty professional associations. It also discusses the process of developing and implementing a curriculum based on multiple sets of standards from different professional organizations to prepare preservice teachers for inclusive education in dual-certification teacher education programs in a mid-sized university located in the Northeastern US. Crosswalk examples between the Council for Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) standards, Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) standards, the New York State Teacher Certification Examination (NYSTCE) – Students with Disabilities Content Specialty Test (SWD CST) Framework, and an excerpt of a standards-based assessment rubric

are shared to help provide insights into the preservice inclusive teacher preparation in New York State, the United States.

Keywords: teacher preparation; inclusive education; standards-based curriculum.

Preparing Preservice Teachers for Inclusive Education Through Standards-based Curriculum

Special education in the United States has developed tremendously since the early 1800s, and its advancement has been driven by not only social and economic factors but also legislation and major court cases (Friend, 2018). Historically, parents and caregivers of individuals with disabilities have played an important role. In addition, the civil rights movement and the inclusive education movement have promoted the development of special education in the US, from the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965* (ESEA 1965), the first federal legislation which provided federal funding to educate students with disabilities, to the more recent *Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act* (IDEiA 2004), which mandates children with disabilities to receive free appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE), mandates nondiscriminatory evaluation with the use of multiple assessments, regulates disciplinary procedures, and safeguards parents' involvement and rights to confidentiality in the process (Friend, 2018; Kim et al., 2019).

The number of students diagnosed with disabilities has been increasing. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2021), in 2019-2020, 7.3 million students from 3-21 years of age received special education services in public schools in the United States, which increased by 16 percent from 2000-2001 and contributed to 14 percent of the entire K-12 public school enrollment. The number of students with disabilities learning in inclusive

classrooms with peers without disabilities has also been increasing. NCES (2022) reported that in Fall 2020, 95 percent of students with disabilities who received special education services under IDEA were enrolled in regular public schools and 2 percent in regular private schools. In regular schools, 66 percent of students with disabilities spent 80% or more time per school day in inclusive classrooms, 17 percent spent 40-79% of the time, and 13 percent spent less than 40% of the school day in inclusive classrooms with peers without disabilities (NCES, 2022). Inclusion is a set of core beliefs and practices that support everyone as a full member of the community with equal access to resources and opportunities (Shapon-Shevin, 2007). It is critical for teachers to learn about the unique background and experiences their students bring in and to understand individual students' strengths, needs, and perceptions, so they could provide inclusive learning environments that benefit all students (Fallon & Zhang, 2013).

While data indicate that the number of students with disabilities increases and a significant percentage of students with disabilities study in inclusive education settings, the growth of the number of special education teachers is at a much slower pace. The most recent NCES data reported in 2015-2016, 454,000 special education teachers taught in K-12 public schools in the United States (11.9%), which increased by 0.6 percent from 1999-2000 ($n = 340,000$) (NECS, 2017). The gap between the increase in the number of students who receive special education services and that of the number of special education teachers leads to a shortage of special educators, which results in increasing demand for special education and inclusive education teacher preparation in higher education. Teachers reported a lack of knowledge and skills in working effectively with students with disabilities, a lack of resources to meet the needs of students with disabilities, and a lack of knowledge of special education legislation and special education service procedures (Florian & Linklater, 2010). Forlin and Chambers (2011) found

that lack of knowledge, skills, and resources was correlated to preservice teachers' negative attitude toward inclusion and a low level of confidence in serving students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. It is urgent for teacher preparation programs in higher education institutions to offer high-quality education and equip preservice teachers with knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions to work with all students, including students with and without disabilities.

The purpose of this paper is to explore factors that impact inclusive teacher preparation programs in the United States, such as federal legislation, inclusive teacher shortage, state policies, and the standards developed by the accreditation organizations and specialty professional associations. It discusses the process of developing and implementing a curriculum based on multiple sets of standards from different professional organizations to prepare preservice teachers for inclusive education in dual-certification teacher education programs in a mid-sized university located in the Northeastern US. Crosswalk examples between the Council for Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) standards, Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) standards, a New York State Teacher Certification Examination (NYSTCE) Framework, and an excerpt of a standards-based assessment rubric are shared to help provide insights into the preservice inclusive teacher preparation in New York State, the United States.

Context

State University of New York (SUNY), composed of 64 campuses, over 7,000 academic programs, more than 1.3 million students, and nearly 3 million alumni, is the largest and most comprehensive system of public institutions of higher education in the United States (SUNY, n.d.). SUNY Brockport, established in 1835 as a normal school, is one of the 13 comprehensive “university colleges” in the SUNY system (SUNY, n.d.; SUNY Brockport, n.d.).

The Department of Education and Human Development at SUNY Brockport offers Childhood Inclusive (grades 1–6) and Adolescence Inclusive (grades 7–12) with Middle School Extension (grades 5–6) Education programs to prepare preservice teachers to work with all students with and without disabilities. Once completed the program, the teacher candidates will be recommended to New York State Education Department (NYSED) for dual certifications in both special education, that is, NYS Certification - students with disabilities, and a general education specialty area, that is, NYS Certification of one of the areas in Bilingual, Childhood Education, English Language Arts, Language Other Than English (French or Spanish), Mathematics, Science (Biology, Chemistry, Earth Science, or Physics), or Social Studies (SUNY Brockport Professional Education Unit, n.d.).

For teacher candidates who are enrolled in the Childhood or Adolescence Inclusive Education programs at SUNY Brockport, in addition to educational foundation courses and the content and pedagogical courses in English, Mathematics, Sciences, and Social Studies appropriate for their chosen area, they also take special education courses on foundations, methods, and assessments. The courses are developed in a sequence of three phases prior to student teaching. Each phase is associated with one clinical practicum (i.e., field experience), which contains a minimum of 50 hours of teacher candidates' interaction with students with varied abilities for a total number of 150 hours in school settings at their certificate-appropriate levels (i.e., childhood at 1-6 grades, adolescence at 7-12 grades with the option of a middle school extension at 5-6 grades). Phase four offers one full-time student teaching practicum for a full semester of 15 weeks. Each of the field experiences and student teaching is supervised collaboratively by qualified professionals, including a college supervisor and a cooperating teacher certified in the area the teacher candidate is pursuing. Systematic and continuous

assessments are designed for all courses and clinical practicums, to evaluate teacher candidates' performance, appropriate for the development of both depth and breadth of their content and professional knowledge and skills. Successful completion of each course and clinical practicum in a previous phase is required to advance to the next one. All key assessments of the courses and clinical practicums in the four phases are collected and monitored in Tk20, an online educational assessment management platform, for program accreditation and continuous improvement purposes.

During the four phases of the inclusive education program, teacher candidates progress through a series of developmentally sequenced coursework and clinical practicums to learn content and pedagogical knowledge. They also develop skills to work with students of a full range of ages, types, and levels of abilities required by the teacher certificate(s) they seek. A preservice teacher enrolled in the Childhood Inclusive Education program works with students with and without disabilities at both lower and upper elementary levels. An Adolescence Inclusive preservice teacher works with students with and without disabilities in their content area in high school settings. If seeking a Middle School extension, an Adolescence Inclusive preservice teacher must meet an additional requirement and work in a middle school setting. At least one of the clinical practicum placements takes place in a school setting with high needs and one includes English Language Learners. Thus, the teacher candidates gain opportunities to work with students and educators in the field and be prepared for the role of an inclusive teacher appropriate to their selected New York State teaching certificate (i.e., teaching license).

New York State Policies on Teaching and Learning

In addition to federal legislation and the increasing demand for inclusive educators who are prepared to teach all students, inclusive teacher education programs are also heavily

influenced by standards established by the national professional organizations and policies developed by the State Department of Education. The structure of the inclusive education programs at SUNY Brockport and their curricula are aligned with the policies regulated by New York State for teacher preparation programs as well as professional organizations' standards, aiming to prepare dual-certified preservice teachers with high-quality content and pedagogical knowledge and skills to work with all students, including students with and without special needs.

NYSED (n.d.) mandates the implementation of the New York State Learning Standards, and currently, the New York State Next Generation Learning Standards for English Language Arts and Mathematics across Pre-Kindergarten through 12th Grade and NYS Next Generation Learning Standards for Science and Social Studies across Kindergarten to 12th Grade are used. The school districts in NYS use these learning standards to develop and modify curricula and materials and to provide their students with high-quality learning experiences. Faculty in the inclusive teacher preparation programs at SUNY Brockport have adapted their curricula in special education and content areas courses (i.e., English, Mathematics, Sciences, and Social Studies) to create opportunities for preservice teachers to develop their knowledge and skills and practice the use of the NYS Learning Standards through course assignments.

A New York State teaching certificate is required for a teacher to be eligible to teach in the State's public schools. Teacher candidates must complete the State's testing requirements before a provisional teaching certificate can be issued. For example, a preservice teacher enrolled in the Childhood Inclusive Education Program at SUNY Brockport must pass four required New York State Teacher Certificate Exams (NYSTCE), including Educating All Students exam, Content Specialty Test- Multi-Subject Test (1-6) exam, Content Specialty Test Students with

Disabilities exam, and the Teacher Performance Assessment (edTPA). From spring 2020 to spring 2022, NYS provided Safety Nets for preservice teachers who were impacted by the COVID-19 crisis, which allowed teacher candidates to take either edTPA, a performance-based assessment, or Assessment of Teaching Skills-Written (ATS-W), a computer-based exam. From April 2022, edTPA was eliminated and now NYS requires the teacher preparation programs to integrate a teacher performance assessment into their clinical experiences such as student teaching, practicum, or residency (NYSED, 2022). Accordingly, faculty in inclusive teacher preparation programs need to constantly update curricula to better prepare candidates for dual certifications.

Accreditation and Standardization

In addition to the NYSED requirements, NYS requires all the State registered teacher education programs to meet multiple sets of standards by accreditation bodies such as the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) with Specialty Professional Association (SPA) standards at the national level. The purpose of accreditation is to assure accountability and quality of the programs offered by institutions. If a teacher education program receives CAEP accreditation, it meets national and professional standards for the content, its operation, and its teacher candidates' performance level, and thus it is recognized by the profession (CAEP, n.d.).

The accreditation system makes it essential for inclusive education programs to re-think the curricula, assessments, and instruction developed for individual courses within the programs. For example, faculty in the Childhood and Adolescence Inclusive Education Programs at SUNY Brockport need to collaborate to find interdisciplinary connections when developing curricula, instructional materials, and assessments that are aligned with the CAEP Childhood standards and

the standards of various Specialty Professional Associations (SPA), such as Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) standards for special education, International Literacy Association (ILA) standards for Literacy or English Language Arts, National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) standards for social studies, National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) standards for mathematics, and National Science Teachers' Association (NSTA) standards for science.

Accreditation of an inclusive teacher preparation program depends on independent reviews by different SPAs. For example, due to its dual-certificate nature, the Childhood Inclusive Education Program at SUNY Brockport prepares reports for CAEP and CEC reviews individually. The CAEP K-6 Elementary Teacher Preparation Standards are established for the preparation of general education childhood educators, while the CEC standards are to prepare special education teachers for working with students with disabilities. To maintain national accreditation, the Childhood Inclusive Education Program needs to be recognized by both CAEP and CEC independently. Hence, to fulfill the requirement of accreditation, special education faculty and those specializing in the content areas need to see themselves as an integral part of the dual-certification program and work closely to ensure preservice teachers are prepared to be dual certified and provide high-quality education to all learners (Zhang et al., 2019). In the meanwhile, the NYSTCE frameworks in the content areas as well as the NYS Next Generation Learning Standards for English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies are taken into consideration in the curricula development, revision, implementation, and ongoing continuous program improvement.

Connections Between the CAEP and CEC Standards

First, a crosswalk of the standards between the Council for Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) 2018 K–6 and the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) 2012 was developed to help align course assessments and rubrics with both content-specific and special education standards. Two faculty, one Social Studies professor and one Special Education professor in the Childhood Inclusive Education program, initiated the work. To ensure the validity of the crosswalk procedure, each of the professors evaluated the CEC and CAEP standards and did the crosswalk independently to determine potential connections between these two sets of standards. Then, they worked together, compared their individual work, discussed the disagreements, reached a consensus, and finalized a table wherein the CAEP standards were represented in their entirety in the left column of the table, and the CEC standards were populated into the right column of the table when a potential connection in the standards was recognized (Zhang et al, 2019). Since some CEC standards could not be aligned with CAEP standards to be included in the initial crosswalk table, the two professors created another table where the CEC standards were represented in their entirety in the left column while the CAEP K–6 standards were in the right column. Content area education faculty and special education faculty are recommended to tailor to their needs and choose the crosswalk table they would use when connecting standards with their course assessments. Table 1 provides an excerpt of a crosswalk between CEC and CAEP standards.

Table 1
CEC/CAEP Crosswalk Example

CEC Standards	CAEP Standards
Initial Preparation Standard 1: Learner Development and Individual Learning Differences	
1.1 Beginning special education professionals understand how language, culture, and family background influence the learning of individuals with exceptionalities.	1.b – Candidates use their understanding of individual differences and diverse families, cultures, and communities to plan and implement inclusive learning experiences and environments that build on children’s strengths and address their individual needs.
1.2 Beginning special education professionals use understanding of development and individual differences to respond to the needs of individuals with exceptionalities.	1.a – Candidates use their understanding of how children grow, develop and learn to plan and implement developmentally appropriate and challenging learning experiences within environments that take into account the individual strengths and needs of children. 1.b – Candidates use their understanding of individual differences and diverse families, cultures, and communities to plan and implement inclusive learning experiences and environments that build on children’s strengths and address their individual needs.
Initial Preparation Standard 2: Learning Environments	
2.1 Beginning special education professionals, through collaboration with general educators and other colleagues, create safe, inclusive, culturally responsive learning environments to engage individuals with exceptionalities in meaningful learning activities and social interactions.	3.e – Candidates manage the classroom by establishing and maintaining social norms and behavioral expectations.
2.2 Beginning special education professionals use motivational and instructional interventions to teach individuals with exceptionalities how to adapt to different environments.	--
2.3 Beginning special education professionals know how to intervene safely and appropriately with individuals with exceptionalities in crisis.	--

Note: CEC Standards were retrieved from <https://www.cec.sped.org/~media/Files/Standards/Professional%20Preparation%20Standards/Initial%20Preparation%20Standards%20with%20Explanation.pdf>

CAEP Standards were retrieved from <http://caepnet.org/~media/Files/caep/standards/2018-caep-k-6-elementary-teacher-prepara.pdf?la=en>;

Alignments Between NYSTCE Students with Disabilities, CEC, and CAEP Standards

CEC requires the teacher education programs to report their teacher candidates' aggregated data in the State's licensure exam(s) as one of the key assessments when seeking program review and recognition for the accreditation purpose. The New York State Teacher Certification Examination (NYSTCE) Students with Disabilities Content Specialty Test (SWD CST) is a New York State Certification Licensure Examination required for New York State educators of students with disabilities. The NYSTCE-SWD CST is composed of 90 selected responses (i.e., multiple-choice test items) and one constructed response (i.e., an essay item), to measure a teacher candidate's knowledge and skills necessary to teach students with disabilities effectively in the New York State public schools (NYSED, 2018). The Special Education Professor did a crosswalk, aligning the NYSTCE - SWD CST competency by performance indicators stated in the test's framework (NYSED, 2018) with the CEC and CAEP standards. Table 2 provides an excerpt of a crosswalk among the NYSTCE - SWD CST Licensure Test competencies, the CEC Standards as informed by the appropriate specialty sets of Initial Special Education Individualized General Curriculum (IGC) and Individualized Independence Curriculum (IIC), and the CAEP standards.

Table 2

Example of a Crosswalk Across the NYSTCE - SWD CST, CEC Standards, and CAEP Standards

New York State Teacher Certification Examination (NYSTCE) - Students with Disabilities Content Specialty Test (SWD CST) Competency by Performance Indicators Competency 1. Foundations of Special Education	CEC Standard	CAEP Standard
a. applies knowledge of the historical and philosophical foundations of the field of special education and of contemporary issues, trends, and research	CEC 1.1, CEC 1.2 (IGC-IIC.1.K1, IGC-IIC.1.K4, IGC-IIC.1.K7)	CAEP 1.b, 1.a
b. applies knowledge of relevant laws, regulations, state policies, and ethical guidelines (e.g., related to referral, assessment, eligibility, placement within a continuum of services, behavior management planning and implementation, mandated reporting, maintaining confidentiality)	CEC 4.1, CEC 4.2 (ICSI.4.K2, IGC-IIC.4.K2, IGC-IIC.4.K3)	CAEP 3.a, 3.b
c. applies knowledge of the rights and responsibilities of students with disabilities, parents/guardians, teachers, other professionals, and schools	CEC 1.1, CEC 1.2 (IGC-IIC.1.K1, IGC-IIC.1.K4, IGC-IIC.1.K7)	CAEP 1.b, 1.a
d. applies knowledge of culturally responsive strategies that promote effective communication and partnerships with students with disabilities and their parents/guardians to help students with disabilities achieve desired learning outcomes	CEC 7.2 (IGC-IIC.7.K1, IGC-IIC.7.S3)	CAEP 5.a
e. applies knowledge of effective strategies for communicating and collaborating with general education teachers, school staff members, paraprofessionals, related services providers, medical personnel, volunteers, and representatives of community agencies to help students with disabilities achieve desired learning outcomes	CEC 7.3 (IGC-IIC.7.K2, IGC-IIC.7.K3, IGC-IIC.7.K4, IGC-IIC.7.S4)	CAEP 1.c, 5.a
f. applies knowledge of strategies for engaging in self-reflection and ongoing professional development activities to enhance effectiveness as an educator of students with disabilities	CEC 6.1, CEC 6.2, CEC 6.4 (IGC-IIC.6.K1, IGC-IIC.6.K3, IGC-IIC.6.K4, IGC-IIC.6.K10)	CAEP 5.b, 5.a, 5.c
g. demonstrates knowledge of strategies and information sources for remaining current regarding research-validated practice in the field of special education	CEC 3.1, CEC 5.7 (ICSI.3.S2, IGC-IIC.5.K2, IGC-IIC.5.S11, IGC-IIC.5.S27)	CAEP 2.a, 2.b, 2.c, 2.d
h. demonstrates knowledge of local, state, and national services, resources, and organizations serving students with disabilities and providing program support	CEC 5.4, CEC 5.5 (IGC-IIC.5.S20, IGC-IIC.5.S25)	--
i. applies knowledge of the teacher's responsibility to advocate for the interests of students with disabilities	CEC 5.7 (IGC-IIC.5.K5, IGC-IIC.5.K9, IGC-IIC.5.K12)	--

Note: NYSTCE-SWD CST competency performance indicators were retrieved from https://www.nystce.nesinc.com/TestView.aspx?f=HTML_FRAG/NY060_PrepMaterials.html

Development of Standards-Based Assessments for Inclusive Education Programs

The Special Education Professor worked with colleagues to align the special education curriculum, student learning outcomes, instruction, assessments, and their rubrics with the CEC and CAEP standards. The performance-based student teaching evaluation is one of the most comprehensive assessments implemented in the last phase of the inclusive education program, student teaching. The student teaching assessment set has three components. One is a professional education unit-wide global assessment instrument, Global Assessment of Candidate Performance (GACP), which is used to collect data across disciplines for CAEP accreditation, including Childhood Inclusive Education, Adolescence Inclusive Education in various content areas such as Biology, Chemistry, Earth Science, English, French, Mathematics, Physics, School Health Education, and Physical Education programs. The other two are the content area assessment instrument and the special education assessment instrument. The student teaching special education assessment instrument is completed independently by both professionals who supervise student teaching candidates, that is, the special education certified, experienced cooperating teacher and the college supervisor at the end of the inclusive education student teaching placement. Table 3 provides an excerpt of the special education student teaching assessment rubric, aligned with the CEC Standards as informed by the appropriate specialty sets of Initial Special Education Individualized General Curriculum (IGC) and Individualized Independence Curriculum (IIC), and the CAEP standards.

Table 3

Special Education – Student Teaching Assessment Rubric Example

CEC Standard	Exceeds Standard (3)	Meets Standard (2)	Approaching Standards (1)
I. Learning Environments: CEC 2.1 Through collaboration with	Candidate actively creates learning environments that value diversity and foster cultural understanding, safety	Candidate actively creates learning environments that value diversity and foster	Candidate establishes an incomplete set of classroom

<p>general educators and other colleagues, create safe, inclusive, culturally responsive learning environments to engage individuals with exceptionalities in meaningful learning activities and social interactions.</p>	<p>and emotional well-being, and positive social interactions for all students, including individuals with exceptional learning needs, by successfully removing barriers to accessibility and acceptance of all students; and implementing methods for ensuring individual academic success in one-to-one, small-group, and large-group settings.</p>	<p>safety and emotional well-being, and positive social interactions for all students, including individuals with exceptional learning needs, by successfully removing barriers to accessibility and acceptance of all students; and implementing methods for ensuring individual academic success in one-to-one, small-group, and large-group settings.</p>	<p>routines and/or inconsistently employs productive behavior management that does not fully work together to facilitate instruction and the efficient use of time, and/or rudimentarily organizes the classroom space for the intended instructional activity such that instruction is interrupted by the need to reorganize.</p>
<p>(IGC-IIC 2 K1, IGC-IIC 2 K3, ICSI 2 S1, ICSI 2 S5, ICSI 2 S10, IGC-IIC 2 S6, ICSI 2 S9; GACP 5; CAEP 3.e)</p>	<p>Candidate demonstrates the ability to actively engage all students, including individuals with exceptional learning needs, in meaningful learning activities and interactions by creating a safe, equitable, positive, and supportive learning environment in which diversities are valued; modifying the learning environment to manage behaviors; using effective and varied behavior management strategies; AND establishing consistent classroom routines to facilitate instruction and the efficient use of time.</p>	<p>Candidate demonstrates the ability to actively engage students, including individuals with exceptional learning needs, in meaningful learning activities and interactions by creating a safe, positive, and supportive learning environment in which diversities are valued; modifying the learning environment to manage behaviors; AND using effective and varied behavior management strategies to facilitate instruction.</p>	
	<p>Candidate creates an environment that encourages self-advocacy and increased independence of individuals with exceptional learning needs.</p>		

Discussion and Future Work

Standards-based assessments are used in inclusive education programs to communicate expectations clearly to teacher candidates. Preservice teachers' performance is evaluated in a more observable, measurable, and objective way, aligned with professional associations'

standards. The rubrics with the standards help teacher candidates to better understand the assessment criteria, demonstrate their knowledge and skills, and self-monitor their own professional growth using the standards. Faculty in the inclusive education programs (i.e., special education and content education) collect and analyze assessment data, track candidates' professional growth, and make data-driven decisions for continuous program improvement. These efforts ensure the high quality of the inclusive education programs and lead to meeting the standards of the specialty professional associations (such as CEC) and CAEP accreditation.

In the ongoing process of developing, implementing, and revising standards-based assessments in inclusive education programs, it is essential to establish a culture of assessment. This process can be complicated and time-consuming, and it often requires close collaboration among faculty members from different specialization areas across varied subjects and special education. It is critical for faculty across disciplines to establish common student learning outcomes and to share their own expertise while respecting others' perspectives.

Since the success of inclusive education programs heavily relies on the collaboration among faculty across disciplines, it is important for faculty members to recognize the dynamics within the team. Faculty need to be aware of the different expertise, strengths, and communication styles each team member brings in. They need to see themselves as equal and intertwined instead of separated when creating truly inclusive programs across disciplines (Zhang et al., 2019). The ultimate goal of the inclusive education programs is to provide high-quality education for preservice teachers so they are prepared to work with all students, including students with and without disabilities.

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