

Moving Toward Equity through Inclusive Schooling

Considerations for School Administrators



A PARABLE ON EDUCATIONAL CHANGE

Once upon a time there were regular kids and special kids. Regular kids went to their neighborhood schools, attended regular classes with regular teachers, and participated in regular school activities. Special kids went to special schools, attended special classes in special rooms, and participated in special school activities. Because everything they did was special, they had special teachers.

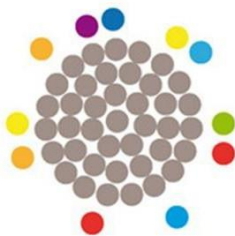
But then came **mainstreaming**, where special kids were “allowed” into regular classrooms if their work and behavior was, well, almost regular.

This was followed by **integration**, where special kids were still special, but they were allowed into regular classes (usually ones not considered too academic), often with their teacher or a special assistant. This made the adults who worked with the kids talk to each other about teaching methods and sometimes plan their lesson together.

Then came **inclusion**. The special students went to their neighborhood schools; were assigned to regular classes, just like regular kids; were taught by regular and special teachers; and participated in regular school activities. As a result, all schools were regular, all activities were regular, and all kids were regular. They also lost their labels; instead of being “special” or “regular,” they were just kids. And some of them had their instruction and materials adapted so that they could learn what everyone else was learning.

But what happened to the teachers? Well, the regular teachers became more special, and the special teachers became more regular. They learned from each other and now they are all just teachers of kids – who go to their neighborhood schools.

- Author unknown



EXCLUSION



INTEGRATION



INCLUSION

<http://www.paderborn.de/microsite/inklusion/index.php>

The Role of Building Principals In Facilitating Inclusive Schools

In the beginning of the 21st century, inclusive education emerged as a schoolwide approach for educating students with disabilities in general education classes. Over the last 20 years, as research continues to demonstrate the benefits of inclusive education, and professional literature describes strategies for success, it has become clear that the successful inclusion of learners with disabilities means attending to the needs of ALL learners, especially those at who are academically or behaviorally at risk for removal – for disciplinary or instructional reasons. It has also become clear that successful inclusion requires a systemic change in the organizational structure of the school as well as a transformation in the roles and relationships of all school staff. Toward this end, the school principal is key.

A study as early as 1992 explored administrative strategies that support the successful inclusion of students with disabilities; and a 2002 study of elementary schools working to build inclusive education capacity identified key elements to meet the needs of all learners. These factors are consistent with the recent findings of the Principal Competencies Advisory Group, convened by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the CEEDAR Center in 2016 to develop the Professional Standards for Educational Leadership (*PSEL 2015 and Promoting Principal Leadership for the Success of Students with Disabilities*).

In 1998, the Maryland Coalition for Inclusive Education, with the Maryland State Department of Education and local administrators, reflected on 8 years of transforming school practices to include students with disabilities in 10 local school districts.

They identified 3 key findings and identified a variety of attributes that characterize a successful inclusive principal as leader of an inclusive school.

- *The most significant factor in building an inclusive educational setting is the **vision and leadership** of the building administrator.*
- *A key element for successful inclusive services is **planning**, which varies in degree and scope throughout the State.*
- ***Collaborative decision-making**, planning, and teaching skills are critical for implementing best instructional practices, and most educators have not had the training or experience in using these skills.*

Personal Attributes

Leaders promote change through practices that are collaborative, intentional, and supportive; they:

- 🌸 share decision-making power with their staff,
- 🌸 lead by example,
- 🌸 extend the core values around inclusiveness and quality to other initiatives and students, and
- 🌸 actively promote learning communities.

Student Assignments

Leaders provide clear direction for student grouping that fosters quality instructional practices and does not overload staff through:

- 🌸 purposeful assignment of students with disabilities to classrooms in natural proportions,
- 🌸 heterogeneous class composition,
- 🌸 students assigned to age-appropriate grades,
- 🌸 active involvement and support of students in non-academic activities, and
- 🌸 deployment of staff according to student need AFTER scheduling students with IEPs.

Attention to Staff




Leaders attend to both the process and the content of discussions to create a foundation for successful building-wide change by:

- 🌸 use a process of *reflective inquiry* within existing teams and management groups to promote changes in the culture of the school,
- 🌸 use information from the school (history, practices, strengths) to engage staff in *discussions* about the values and implications of diversity, inclusion, collaboration, and differentiated instructional practices,
- 🌸 actively lead and develop systems for effective collaboration and shared ownership and accountability for teaching all learners, and
- 🌸 *create time and opportunity* for discussion within the school to address issues that affect the development and implementation of inclusive practices.

Other key leadership practices

- 🌸 Communicating high academic expectations and presuming the competence of students with limited communication skills.
- 🌸 Ensuring that evidence-based instruction and intervention are implemented with

integrity.

-  Promoting team-based collaboration and data-based decisions for planning and evaluating instructional impact.
-  Promoting inclusive social environments that foster acceptance, care, value, and belonging in adult-student and student-student relationships.
-  Creating partnerships with families to gain insight into their child's specific strengths and disabilities to make educationally sound instructional decisions.

State, district, and school leaders and advocates had consensus around the following:

1. ***The attitude of the administrator was cited as the most influential factor for the success of an inclusion program.***
2. Administrators at inclusive schools cultivated a school climate that signified that all students belonged at the school site, and that all teachers would teach all students.
3. Administrators must continually redefine the role of both the classroom teacher and special educator based on previous inclusion successes and emerging student needs.
4. In some cases, modifications of the existing school's organizational structure were necessary to provide built-in teacher collaboration and planning time.
5. Administrators who sought out and hired new teachers who had a mindset that embraced a philosophy of inclusion were more likely to build quality school practices.
6. Effective leaders encouraged staff members to have patience with the change process; implementation problems were to be expected and solved.
7. Providing professional learning opportunities for staff members enabled the development of new skills and provided a common language for collaboration, instruction, and assessment.
8. Inclusive education leadership teams were helpful for identifying goals, guidelines, and procedures for inclusive practices. Team members then became instrumental in public relations and sharing information about the transformation process.
9. Administrators who were nonjudgemental and created safe spaces for staff to share their fears and concerns created an open-door policy that promoted a culture of belonging and acceptance for all.
10. When administrators modeled inclusive language and eliminated labels for adults and students, collaboration became easier and promoted shared responsibility for the learning of all.

Barriers and Solutions

For Building Inclusive Schools

In 2004, the Maryland State Department of Education Task Force on Inclusive Education reviewed summaries from focus group discussions in fourteen local school districts. **Barriers and solutions** were identified to help school leadership teams as they worked strategically to improve inclusive practices.

BARRIERS

- ✓ **Leadership:** *lack of vision and support for a shared understanding through dialogue, resources, or skill development.*
- ✓ **Attitude/Beliefs:** *lack of comfort or unwillingness to embrace a philosophy of inclusion or change existing practices.*
- ✓ **Instructional Practices:** *lack of sound general education practices and a lack of understanding about how students with disabilities can participate in general education instruction while providing specialized instruction in unique educational goals.*
- ✓ **Professional Development:** *lack of adequately skills personnel and limited investment in training for professionals to assist them in learning and implementing inclusive practices.*
- ✓ **Resources:** *funding shortages for materials, equipment, and technology as well as barriers resulting from overcrowded facilities and inadequate time for planning/collaboration.*
- ✓ **Personnel Preparation:** *disconnect between university course content and program focus with the skills and knowledge required to successfully teach students with disabilities in general education classes.*

- 1. Articulate a clear AVISION.** If an administrator supports their staff and SENDS THE MESSAGE that all students who live in their jurisdiction belong in their school, then staff will know that they have a shared responsibility and will be accountable as a TEAM for ALL students. If administrators support their staff in collaboration (time and methods), then problem-solving will occur. If administrators see how differentiated instruction, based on Universal Design for Learning frameworks, is good for all students, then they can lead their staff toward high performance expectations for all students.
- 2. Address CONCERNS AND FEARS.** Special educators worry that “their” students will experience failure and/or will get lost in fast-paced classes with typically developing learners. They worry that classroom teachers will not use specialized instructional strategies or will not implement the support and services to meet individually designed goals. Classroom teachers worry that they won’t know how to teach and meet the instructional needs of a student with a particular disability, and that they may have to

spend more time on one student than the rest of the class. They worry that they are being asked to do something that they are not prepared to do. While listening to and acknowledging educator concerns, these can be translated into action by supporting them in planning time, professional learning, and in-school coaching.

- 3. Foster and Guide COLLABORATION skills for data-based instructional planning and co-teaching.** Teachers are expected to work together but are often not given the time or the knowledge of how to collaborate effectively and efficiently. Data systems may be obtuse, and teachers may need support to translate student performance into strategies for success. Educational teams can benefit from learning collaborative problem-solving strategies and methods for running efficient team meetings.
- 4. PLANNING TIME is crucial to success.** Traditional school schedules do not always afford educators the collaboration time needed to co-plan instruction and co-assess the effectiveness of strategies and interventions. Collaborative planning time for grade level teams with specialized educators prior to the beginning of the school year and regular planning meetings throughout the school year will lead them to success.

Changing School Structures

To Teach All Learners

An Integrated Tiered System of Instruction, Intervention, & Supports

In the last several years, education reform efforts recommend that the resources and efforts toward Response to Intervention (RtI) systems and Schoolwide Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (PBIS) systems be braided and modified to address the complex social, emotional, behavioral, and academic learning needs of a wide variety of learners (Shogren, Wehmeyer, Lane, & Quirk, 2017). Such an integrated system emphasizes the value of research-based core general education instruction, with specific interventions provided for learners that match their specific performance development needs with sufficient intensity to learn the grade level curriculum and participate successfully with their peers in the general education class and school settings.

An integrated tiered system of instruction, intervention, and supports is a comprehensive school-wide approach to use research-based and customized strategies to improve outcomes for all learners. The selection and implementation of interventions and supports is

designed through cross-disciplinary collaboration using multiple data sources to both determine the need for intervention and evaluation of intervention impact.

- Note 1: I-MTSS is not Response to Intervention (RtI). **Both** are intended to be proactive general education frameworks to identify learners who need additional interventions to learn grade level standards. Traditionally both systems have used a 3-tier framework that has been visualized as a triangle in which Tier 1 is effective instruction with differentiation and supports for all learners, Tier 2 is supplemental instruction on targeted skills for those who need them to make progress, and Tier 3 is individualized instruction and supports that are customized for a single learner who has not made sufficient progress. RtI models focus on academics and place an emphasis on a learner's responsiveness to the selected intervention. In contrast, MTSS is much broader in scope; it seeks to integrate academic, social-emotional, and behavioral data and design the additional interventions and supports through a system-wide approach to provide comprehensive solutions to participation and learning.
- Note 2: While a "tiered" system traditionally refers to three distinct tiers of interventions; the I-MTSS model that we advocate adopts a more fluid approach such that supplemental and intensive interventions represent a systematic method to increase the intensity of interventions or supports for learners who persistently show an academic, social-emotional, or behavioral need for them and decreasing those supports based on performance data. Rather than having "entry" and "exit" requirements for receiving an intervention available at "Tier 2" or "Tier 3" it is expected that the intervention team will identify how instruction will be intensified to support learning. The process is a **solution-finding approach** that uses data to determine the type of intervention or support and when those strategies are no longer needed.

Components of a school-wide I-MTSS framework include:

- **Comprehensive data system** that integrates academic data (universal screening, progress monitoring, diagnostic assessment), behavioral data, social-emotional data, attendance, etc. Valid and reliable tool for school-wide performance are supplemented by customized data related to individual learner skills.
- **Collaborative teaming** (school administrator; regular educators in the targeted grades/subjects; specialized educators such as special educators, related service providers English learner specialists; and other specialists such as psychologists, mental health providers). In some schools the team will focus on individual learners who have been identified through the school data system to benefit from additional or

customized intensive support to participate and learn alongside peers in the regular classroom.

- **Evidence-based and research-informed interventions and supports** that may be delivered to several learners who have a similar academic and/or behavioral profile, or more intensive and customized strategies for individual learners who need a specific integrated intensive intervention plan. The interventions or supports that are selected or designed have been demonstrated through research to have a positive impact on learners of similar age and profile. [Specially designed instruction](#) and English learner services are provided to any child who receives those services within tiered interventions and not as a separate, segregated service.
- **Ongoing professional learning and coaching for fidelity** that is provided both school wide and for content that is targeted to improve specific educator competencies. As practice profiles that define implementation fidelity are created with input from experts and implementers, a system for teaching and coaching implementation is developed, with implementation data collection on a schedule that can be reviewed by the leadership team to provide just-in-time coaching to support accuracy, consistency, and quality.

Inclusive Education

Inclusion is not placement. Some educators mistakenly define “inclusion” as a location: the general education class. It is increasingly accepted in states across the U.S. that inclusive education begins with an assumption that all children in the school community belong in the school and class that they would attend if they did not have a disability, and that all services are designed to be delivered as embedded and direct services within general education academic and social activities. The [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act](#), IDEA, reauthorized in 2004, reinforces this expectation. The only “removals” from general education allowed are for behavior that has a negative impact on the child or others in the class; children may not be removed due to disability label, severity of disability, or the need for dramatic or extensive modifications to the curriculum. Further, both ESSA and IDEA require children with the most significant cognitive disabilities to have goals that are directly aligned to grade level standards.

Inclusive schools focus not only on children with disabilities, but also English learners, and others who may experience inequitable access, opportunity, or outcomes. Some features of inclusive schools include are:

- scheduling learners who receive specialized services across grade level classes (elementary) or subject area classes (secondary) in “natural proportion” to their population in the school,
- a focus on creating a sense of belonging,
- collaborative planning and teaching between general and specialized educators,
- implementing a universal design for learning approach with differentiation based on class interests and skills,
- adapting general education lessons for each learner who needs it, and
- ensuring that all learners have a voice and are able and encouraged to socialize with peers and communicate their opinions as well as knowledge.

There is increasing recognition of the importance of building a MTSS school-wide approach as a foundation for inclusive education.

Changing Role of Teachers

Shared Responsibility and Accountability for All Learners

When schools move toward changing their culture and instructional practices to fully include each and every student in their community, collaborative teaming of professionals leads to improved instructional practice. With increased collaboration, overlapping and sharing of roles and responsibilities replaces role isolation. CHANGE is essential. *As such, inclusion is a change process rather than an event.* The process involves fundamental changes in the work-lives of teachers, with *significant* impact on their identity. Both principals and teachers will be challenged to monitor student progress and teacher satisfaction, as well as to continue to adjust as necessary.

Collaboration!

Teachers will work together to plan instruction and evaluate the effectiveness of their work and changes in student performance. General education classroom teachers work with special educators to create lessons that are based on Universal Design for Learning frameworks, further differentiate instruction based on the unique learning needs of students in the class, and identify where student accommodations, program modifications and specialized instruction will be embedded. When teachers share the delivery of instruction and supports for a student who requires intensive behavioral or academic support, they need to talk to each other about strategies and student performance on a regular and predictable basis. Teachers will:

- ✿ *Share common beliefs and work toward common goals*
- ✿ *Sit facing each other at meetings*
- ✿ *Share group tasks, responsibilities, and leadership*
- ✿ *Use collaborative practices and problem-solving strategies*
- ✿ *Meet regularly and consistently*
- ✿ *Encourage each other to interact and participate in decisions*
- ✿ *Make decisions by consensus, poll each other for understanding of issues and ideas, and criticize ideas but not each other*
- ✿ *Set rules for methods to deal with controversial issues or subjects*
- ✿ *Review how they are doing and give each other feedback on how they are doing as a team*
- ✿ *Continue to change and grow*

Co-Plan, Co-Teach, Co-Evaluate

When students with disabilities are included in general education, they may receive their special education services from the classroom teacher, a special educator, an interventionist, a related service provider, or even from a peer or paraprofessional under the guidance of a qualified teacher. Based on the scheduling of students and teacher assignments, special educators may regularly co-teach a subject, or may be assigned as a collaborative planner or in a consultative role to the classroom teacher.

**Inclusion asks us to change...
our attitudes, our behavior, and for some,
our belief system.**

How will you manage the change ahead

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