

COSA New Special Education Directors Training 2019

LEADING CULTURE CHANGE IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

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Revisiting the Purpose and Role of Special Education

- ▶ **Special education** is designed to ensure that students with disabilities are provided with a culture and environment that allows them to be educated effectively.
- ▶ The special education administrator is called to provide district level leadership that inspires conditions that are most conducive to the social-emotional and academic growth of children with special needs.
- ▶ A major role of the special education administrator is to create a vision and culture within the district that genuinely embraces the gifts and talents of students who experience disability and genuinely believes that they are vital to the optimal success of ALL staff and students in the district.

Dilemma:

- ▶ You inherit a situation where the culture and learning environments in your district are not highly conducive to the effective education of students with disabilities.
- ▶ You do not clearly see where special education fits in your district strategic plan.
- ▶ You attempt to place yourself in the position of students with disabilities attending in your district, and their families, and clearly see that you would not be satisfied if you were in their place.
- ▶ Your data reflect underperformance and over-segregation of students with disabilities.
- ▶ Your department appears to be 'siloes' from the overall education enterprise in your district.
- ▶ People in your district refer to students with disabilities more often by their identification code, their disability, or their classroom placement.

There's Only One Choice.....

- ▶ A culture change is needed in your District
- ▶ You must wisely inspire it
- ▶ Kids with and without disabilities deserve it
- ▶ Families deserve it
- ▶ Taxpayers deserve it
- ▶ Communities are counting on it
- ▶ The law requires it

Table Activities:

- ▶ Please personally reflect on the current situation in your district as it relates to students receiving special education services.
- ▶ Do you feel that culture change is needed in your district related to special education?
- ▶ If so, what are the signs that lead you to believe this?
- ▶ Do you feel equipped to lead the needed culture change? Why or why not?
- ▶ Take 15 minutes to discuss your reflections with another administrator at your table.
- ▶ Please be prepared to share out the results of your conversation with the whole group.

One New Director's Journey of Culture Change

- ▶ Started July 1, 2016. Identification rate of 16.5%
- ▶ RTI not in place in district. PBIS just getting started.
- ▶ 98 self-contained classrooms. 19.2% of students in special education spend more than 40% of their day in segregated settings.
- ▶ Graduation rate for students with disabilities lower than like-sized districts.
- ▶ Most self-contained teachers developing their own curriculum.
- ▶ Nearly 2,000 incidents of restraint and seclusion reported.
- ▶ Behavior seen as special education issue.
- ▶ Resource distribution far favors segregated placements.

Phase One (July 2016-March 2017)

- ▶ New Director comes from within the same district with these data. Has a plan but needs to develop trust that it can be carried out.
- ▶ Strategy #1: Build additional credibility for change by engaging a highly credible outside external consultant to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of special education in the district.
- ▶ Report will provide a set of written recommendations for the district to consider.
- ▶ Right person will need to be chosen to be external evaluator.
- ▶ Need buy-in from district leadership to initiate a culture shift.

Components of Evaluation

- ▶ Interviews with District Leadership, Principals, Licensed and Classified staff, Parents and Community Advocates.
- ▶ Meetings with District Cabinet.
- ▶ Visits to schools throughout districts. Classroom observations.
- ▶ Meetings with Administrators in Office of Student Services.
- ▶ Review of fiscal, personnel, state report card, special education report card and performance data.
- ▶ Development of written report with recommendations.
- ▶ Review of external evaluation with Cabinet and District Leadership, Unions and Community Representatives.

Phase Two (Sharing Outcome of Evaluation and Developing Buy-In)

- ▶ April 2017-August 2017
- ▶ Student Services Develops “Guiding Principles for Special Education.”
- ▶ Evaluator presents findings to all stakeholders at multiple meetings. Participants have opportunity in large and small groups to give feedback on Guiding Principles and evaluation report.
- ▶ Work groups identified to begin work in 2017-18. Purpose of each group is to review recommendations in the evaluation, develop short and long-term plans for implementing recommendations.

Phase Two(continued)

- ▶ Work groups identified: 1) Family Engagement, 2) Teaching and Learning, 3) District Resources and Program Alignment, and 4) Behavior.
- ▶ Deliberate strategy to have representative membership on work groups (parents, advocates, district and building administration, licensed and classified staff). Try to ensure that different races and cultures are represented, and that representation comes from all areas of the district.
- ▶ Meetings with licensed and classified bargaining groups to choose their members who would participate. Work with advocacy groups to determine parent involvement.
- ▶ Identify a Core Team of 15 people to serve as a steering committee reviewing the work progress of all work groups.
- ▶ Schedule Work Group and Core Team meetings for 2017-18 and create PDU incentive for participating, as well as plan for subs.

Phase Three: 2017-18

- ▶ Each work group meets six times for three hours to develop short and long-range plans for implementing recommendations.
- ▶ Core Team meets four times to review their work.
- ▶ Special Education Redesign appears on the district strategic plan as one of eight key initiatives. Report to school board provided.
- ▶ Meetings with all stakeholder groups to unveil 2018-18 one year plans from each work group, to listen to concerns, and to answer questions.
- ▶ Also moved forward on some recommendations during 2017-18. i.e website, adult assistance phase-in, bond work relocating classrooms, curriculum adoption, revising job descriptions, parent trainings.

Phase Four: 2018-19

- ▶ Implement recommendations from one-year strategic plans.
- ▶ Work groups and Core Team continue to meet to monitor implementation of 2018-19 strategic plan and to review plan for 2019-20.
- ▶ Continue updating stakeholders and school board.
- ▶ Bond and boundary work is a high priority.
- ▶ Beginning to monitor progress and clarify data. Aligning more closely with K-12 general education initiatives.
- ▶ UDL, curriculum identification and implementation, progress monitoring, data teams.

How are we doing so far?

- ▶ Data showing more students are accessing general education curriculum.
- ▶ Most impacted students now on track for diploma rather than certificate of attainment.
- ▶ Plan in place to have more students attend neighborhood school or feeder area.
- ▶ Plan for all students to graduate from neighborhood high school.
- ▶ Three phases near implementation for adult assistance, comprehensive training plan in progress.
- ▶ Adoption of SEL Curriculum.
- ▶ Post-secondary outcomes very good.
- ▶ Growth in number of IEPs each year has remained steady for two years.
- ▶ Community identifies as second highest priority for bond implementation more students graduating from neighborhood high schools.
- ▶ Greater use of person-centered language.
- ▶ Fourteen parent training events, and website revamped with input from families.

Challenges

- ▶ Varying degrees of effectiveness in building leadership embracing inclusive practices.
- ▶ ‘General Education’ is slower to come along than I wish
- ▶ RTI and PBIS still in early stages.
- ▶ Some push-back from special education staff.
- ▶ Budget for implementation items that require funds.
- ▶ Initiative fatigue.
- ▶ Improved instructional practices needed by special education staff.
- ▶ Over-reliance on classified staff in classrooms.
- ▶ Much professional development needed.

Keys to Success

- ▶ Support from the highest level of the district (Superintendent and Cabinet).
- ▶ Understand your data and your stakeholders.
- ▶ Establish clear set of Guiding Principles. Understanding the 'why' before you get to the 'how.'
- ▶ Input from stakeholders at all phases of the work.
- ▶ Reports on progress to all stakeholders periodically.
- ▶ Support from families and advocates.
- ▶ Work closely with your union representatives. No surprises.
- ▶ Communication, communication, communication.
- ▶ Develop thick skin. Believe in what your doing with all of your heart. Understand that criticism is a part of the journey and likely indicates that you are doing something right.