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Book Review: Transformational Leadership in Special Education: Leading the IEP Team (Lentz, Kirby).

By Amanda Nieves

Bibliography Information

Lentz, Kirby. Transformational Leadership in Special Education: Leading the IEP. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Education, 2012. 188 pp. \$51.00.

Introduction

“You will need to treat the IEP meeting like it is the most important meeting you have ever attended”. The author of this book has a doctorate in Education and was an educator for 40 years. In his experiences, he served as an administrator, an elected school board member, and as a parent of a child with an IEP. Lentz reflected that as a special education teacher, he at first, did not know how to chair or lead the IEP team meeting and thought that the meetings could be led by anyone. He claimed his greatest experience was being a parent, sitting on the other side of the table and says that it gave him “a dimension of really understanding what the IEP was meant to be and how the IEP team influenced every aspect of the special education student’s education”. The purpose of writing this book was to help those who chair and lead the special education IEP team meetings to know how to lead. The thesis of this book is using the principles of transformational leadership, IEP teams become effective tools to ensure student success and achievements.

Summary

This book is broken into three parts; Building the IEP Team, Leading the IEP Team, and Transformation of the IEP Team. Part one discusses the people who should be included in the meeting, the learning environments which need to be taken into account, building relationships between parents, students, and school, and how teams miss opportunities. Part two discusses having the right mindset as a leader, how to prepare for the IEP team meeting, ground rules staff should follow, making a team-oriented agenda for the meeting, collaboration with school and parents for outcomes, IEP goals, team member training, and follow-up. Part three of this book includes the idea of thinking of the IEP meeting as a series of meetings, how to integrate more than just the classroom, eliminating the negatives, and how to transform the process as a transformational leader.

Main Themes and Strong/Weak Arguments

Part One

Part one of this book starts by explaining “The concept of defining the leadership of the IEP team” (p. 6). The author stressed that it is not the title of the person who is leading the IEP team meeting that matters, but it is the “style and type of leadership made available to the persons on the IEP team” (p. 7). This directly supports the thesis of the book. The author affirmed how important it is for IEP team members to be conscious of “the limits, expectations, and knowledge of professional and parental areas of responsibility” (p. 7). The author explained a variety of negative types of “leaders” and relates them to different animals (a lion, a fox, opossum, and rat). Lentz defined the transformational leadership style and why this is the preferred style of leadership. He cited Peter Senge, the author of *The Fifth Discipline* (1990), in saying that transformational leaders are “designers, teachers, and servants” (p. 14).

The transformational leader also educates the team and sees everyone as a valuable and necessary part of the team. I found the symbolization of negative leaders very helpful in understanding these characteristics and comparing these leaders to a transformational leader. Lentz referred back to these “animals” throughout the book. This argument is strong; as a teacher being in Special Education for only ten years, I was easily able to identify these negative types of “leaders” that I have seen throughout my practice. The argument of the transformational leader being the preferred option is strong, in stating that being a transformational leader “is a quality that positively motivates and moves good ideas forward” (p. 14).

Lentz explained that student goals should not just be focused on what is needed for the classroom. He states that “skills taught to students with disabilities at school often go beyond the concept of “pure” academics” (p. 19). This argument connects back to the thesis as the student success should be viewed as being successful at home, at school, and in the larger community as an adult. Lentz claimed that “when home and school work together...utilization becomes purposeful and learning is reinforced” (p.22). Lentz made an argument for the IEP team to consider all environments that need to be focused on for student success (like toileting, stealing, inappropriate touching). He also maintained this argument by stating that “The goal of the IEP is to ensure that students with disabilities learn lifelong independent skills” (p.20). While I completely agree with this, and Lentz does give some examples, there could have been a stronger argument made. It would have been a stronger argument if Lentz had gone a little deeper into the many instances where adaptive and functional skills need to be taught in school and may not necessarily be deemed as “academic”.

Lentz made a strong argument for building relationships. He states that “through a relationship-building training protocol it is possible to develop collaborative and meaningful relationships between parents, students, and school” (p.27). The team leader needs to find the right balance in these relationships. He explained that parents who are new to the IEP process and team will have needs that are different than the needs of veteran parents. Lentz gave strong examples and ideas that an IEP team leader can directly apply to their practice. This argument is solid, as it makes logical sense that a positive and supportive relationship between school and parents would attribute to student success.

Part Two

Part two of this book was written to outline how to facilitate great IEP team meetings and a great IEP. Although Lentz reasoned that it is the IEP team leader’s job to eliminate all preconceived and negative thoughts about past IEP team meetings in order to set the right mindset, I found this one of his weaker arguments. Often times, the IEP team leader is a Special Education teacher. While these teachers do play a large role in shaping the mindset of others going into the IEP team meeting, it is the principal holds the biggest power in this area. For many IEP team leaders, mindset shift is attempted, but they are not viewed by their peers as an authority figure, and therefore need the leadership team next to them on the front lines of this battle to change mindsets.

The author then continued on to make some simple but strong arguments about the preparation for the IEP meeting. Lentz pointed out that the invitation for the IEP team meeting is cold and unwelcoming, and he is right. The IEP team meeting paper is pre-generated, small print, and very business-like. He gave strong ideas and examples that IEP team leaders can directly implement to make parents feel welcome and like they want to attend. Lentz also gave a list of ideas to properly prepare parents when attending the IEP team meeting. Concrete examples like this make for a strong argument. This list included ideas such as creating a list of strengths, emerging skills, needs, and interests of their child to discuss at the meeting and program around.

One of the strongest arguments made in this part of the book was that the goals cannot be determined prior to the IEP team meeting. He stated that “Parents need to understand they are equal members of the team and their perspective is essential to the adequacy of the resulting IEP” (p.103). If IEP goals are predetermined, it is impossible to reach this goal. When this happens, parents no longer feel like they are a part of the team or like their input even matters or will be accounted for. It is such a strong argument because many teachers and many schools do not follow this rule of thumb. This advice is valuable, because the IEP is to be created by a team, and collaborative creation is not one person making all the decisions and bulldozing others into signing off. Going along with this, Lentz made an equally strong argument for the need of parent training. He supports this need by bringing up the educational jargon and acronyms often used by teachers and specialists. While teachers and specialists need training to speak in a way that people not in the field of education can understand, parents should also educate themselves to feel empowered and confident about participating in these meetings as an equal member.

Part Three

Lentz started part three by arguing that “teams that treat the IEP as a single event miss opportunities to meet student needs” (p. 123). He strongly supported this argument by discussing the idea that each IEP is written for one year’s worth of growth; so the meetings should be a series, not a single event. Lentz also supports this argument by referring back to his belief on building relationships and understanding that relationships are built over time- not in one meeting. Lentz added further support for this idea by explaining “IEPs are progressive over time. The team needs to always be thinking about the next steps, the future, and the transition plan concept” (p.126).

Lentz also made a solid argument for the “integration of teachers”. He explained that all teachers should have enough special education background and training in order to effectively provide inclusion services in the general education classroom (p. 131). Lentz strengthened his assertion by stating that along with integration of teachers, the curriculum and related services should also be integrated to truly be inclusive and educate students in the least restrictive environment.

Connections to Another Text

Lentz made the point that a great IEP is the start of the transformation process. He argued that although it is a long-term process, change can originate from one IEP team and affect an entire school (p. 141). He stated that “Change, however, cannot be accomplished alone; the transformational leader must be able to motivate others to participate and believe in the change process” (p.142). This argument connects to the leadership described by Fullan (2014), in that to be an effective leader, you must be a leader who has followers. Fullan explained that in order to be a leader who is followed, you must operate on moral purpose, have emotional intelligence, and build strong relationships with others.

Fullan (2014) states that “moral purpose means acting with the intention of making a positive difference in the lives of employees, customers, and society as a whole” (p.3). I connected this with Lentz’s belief that the goal of an IEP is “to ensure that students with disabilities learn lifelong independent skills” (p. 20). In order to ensure that students with disabilities learn lifelong skills, the IEP team must truly be working on moral purpose. Schools are measured by state testing and academic standards. Many skills that students with exceptionalities need to master may not be reflected in these tests- but schools still need to focus on these.

On page 52, Lentz stated “A learning organization is in simple terms a system that is totally aware of its integrations within its own environment, where the environment is safe for risk taking and sharing of ideas to promote organizational performance and to foster organizational creativity and creative tension to provide organizational energy.”. This strongly connects with Fullan’s belief that “Good relationships purge a knowledge-creation process of distrust, fear, and dissatisfaction, and allow organizational members to feel safe enough to explore the unknown territories” (p. 82). Without being trusted and feeling comfortable in taking risks, teachers will be afraid to be creative and this will stifle the possibility of greatness.

Lentz asserted that a successful educational experience can only happen “if the leader creates and defines what the attitudes and mindsets are before the IEP team meeting even begins” (pg.71), which to me directly relates to Fullan’s belief that “The leader becomes a context setter, the designer of a learning experience-not an authority figure with solutions.” (p. 112). Throughout both of these books this is a common theme. Lentz frequently discussed that the IEP team leader or chair is not the one in charge; they set the agenda, finalize the paperwork, and facilitate the conversation. Both of these authors strongly believe in “the team” doing the work in collaboration with each other and with the trust of their leaders.

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About the Author

Amanda (Biagi) Nieves was born and raised in southern New Jersey. In 2008, she graduated from Neumann University with a Bachelor's degree in Elementary Education and a Certification in Special Education. She is currently pursuing her Master's degree in Special Education with an Endorsement in Autism from Florida International University. Driven by her passion to close the achievement gap, the success of her students, and truly making a difference, she proceeded to work for nonprofit Title I school networks. Amanda previously served as a Special Education Teacher and Case Manager for KIPP Philadelphia Schools and now holds the same position at Mastery Charter Schools in Philadelphia. Amanda resides in New Jersey, with her husband Rafael and two dogs, Diesel and Noah.

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Book Review: What Great Principals Do Differently: Fifteen Things That Matter Most

By Deborah Martinez

An administrator or even a teacher, who wishes to improve their school and their classroom will benefit from reading *What Great Principals Do Differently: Fifteen Things That Matter Most*. It was written by a gentleman by the name of Todd Whitaker who was a formal principal himself, and now works with more than 50 schools a year as a consultant. In this book Whitaker works to provide guidance to school leaders. Although he feels that principals may be intelligent and knowledgeable, but in order to be effective principals, they must do things differently. “It is what they do” (p. 1). He describes fifteen effective strategies which he concluded from research studies as well as his own personal experiences that have been proven effective. It was a very easy read, full of powerful insights and clear strategies, making it a very informative read. I will go through these fifteen strategies and point out the essential message Whitaker is trying to convey to us.

The first strategy he gives to us is that it is important that administrators realize that “It is the people, not the programs that determine the quality of a school.” (p. 8) There is a lot of pressure in schools today because of the state and federal levels of demand for accountability, and therefore leaders try to implement new programs in the hopes that it will improve their school. Most of these programs are introduced to the staff via workshops and lack actual hands on learning. Also, when we look at a school, immediately we look for the quality of its teachers. As an administrator you have two choices, either you hire new teachers or you can work to improve the teachers that you have. An effective administrator will build relationships with their teachers and use their most effective teachers in motivating others and help make decisions that will improve the school.

In his next key strategy, he points out that what truly makes a school a great school, the teacher. She is the true variable in the classroom. He points out that in every school there are those few teachers that have the most discipline problems and he compares it to “an elephant in the room”, (p. 13), but in this case, the “elephant” in the school. They should be addressed and therefore can acknowledge this deficit and help improve behavior strategies in their classroom. Teachers should also examine their attitude toward their students. There are two types of teachers, those who blame themselves when their students are not doing well and always looking for ways to improve their performance. Then there are those teachers that in the same scenario, will blame the student or the parent or administration, everyone other than themselves. When administrators apply this strategy to themselves, they take responsibility for the success of their school climate instead of placing blame on the faculty. “Who is responsible for the climate in your school?” “The more effective principals responded, “I am” (p. 16).

We now look at great characteristic of an effective administrator, treating everyone with respect. They will do this every day and at all times. Just as an effective teacher treats their student with respect, so must an administrator treat their staff with that same respect. An effective administrator can improve their school’s climate by showing their teachers how much they appreciate them and what a great job they are doing.

Effective administrators realize that they are the filters in the day-to-day reality of their school. They set the tone for the school’s emotional energy through different means. In the simple answers to questions like, “How is your day?”, a principal can affect the frame of mind of the person who is asking the question. They way that they respond to teachers can affect their effort in the classroom. He is not saying that you should be untruthful, but it is important to choose what information you share and how you share it. This can be especially true when you are either angry or frustrated. “By sparing others the unnecessary bad news, I can create a much more productive environment” (p. 29).

An effective administrator knows that his most important role is to teach the teachers. This means that they are there to help teachers improve their practices in the classroom and their ability to communicate with their students. If the administrator assumes that their teachers do the best they can, they would focus on improving what they know. They can be role models for their teachers by visiting their classrooms and understanding how they interact with their students, then show them what they expect.

This is much like Fullan's practice of supervisory walkthrough on-site visits by supervisors to address individual needs of schools and to provide guidance (Fullan, 2001). They also have less effective teachers observe a more effective teacher, where they can learn what works and what doesn't and improve their approach, similar to Fullan's practice of principal peer coaching where a full-time mentor coach's on a regular basis (Fullan, 2001). "This collaboration among classroom teachers is one of the most basic and effective ways to improve instruction" (p. 41).

As an effective administrator, one of the basic ways to improve your school is to hire better teachers. An important element in doing this is "to have the school become more like the new teacher" (p. 43). They can do this by not just looking for teachers to lead their students, but teachers who can lead their peers as well. Another obstacle an administrator has is the fact experience does not mean that they are the best teacher. "Remember you don't want your new employees just to fit into your school; you want to hire the best, and have your school become like them" (p. 48).

Unfortunately, standardized testing is a reality that will be with us for a very long time, maybe even forever. An effective administrative is aware of the pressures of these exams but should care more about "staff motivation, teacher morale, school culture and climate, and student behavior" (p. 51). According to Whitaker, we should focus on the behaviors that lead to success and not the beliefs that stand in the way of it. An administrator can shift the beliefs of the teachers about the tests and encourage the staff to work as a team on behalf of the students no matter how we feel about the tests.

Whitaker explains how administrators recognized how difficult it is to change a person's belief, so an effective administrator will need to focus on behaviors rather than beliefs. When a change is required, it is important to focus on the desired behavior not necessarily the belief. Although a person's beliefs should be respected, what really matters at time is behavior. "Effective administrators should focus on behaviors not on beliefs" (p. 61).

Whitaker states that both bad and good administrators expect loyalty from their employees, but an effective administrator expects their teachers to place their loyalty in their students. The administrator must act in the best interest of all the students and staff for the good of the school. "Great principals are loyal to their students, to their teachers, and to the school" (p. 65).

Administrators make decisions every day, some are controversial. Sometimes it is important to ask for someone's input before making these decisions. The question is who do we ask? Whitaker states that effective administrators ask themselves one important questions, "What will by best teacher think?" (p. 68). They ask these teachers because they are valued by the staff members and their opinion would be well received. An administrator will take into consideration the reactions of their best teachers before implementing any new idea. "They have already earned the respect of their peers," Whitaker writes, "When we can draw on the role models in our own school, the chances of expanding acceptance and implementation grow exponentially." (p. 69). These teachers can bring a lot of important and innovative ideas on any school improvement plan.

There are many times administrators have issues being discussed and both sides have strong feelings. Whitaker states that administrators need to ask themselves, "Who is the most comfortable and who is the least comfortable in this situation?" (p. 73). Administrators want to make people who are uncomfortable to change in a positive manner but by doing this, we need to make sure that those who are our best teachers, not make them uncomfortable. An important point that is brought up is that everyone should be treated as if they always do the right thing.

An effective administrator needs to be aware of their high achievers, "they need to understand these people, be sensitive to their needs and maximize their ability." (p. 81). High achieving teachers want to help and give their support and they take responsibility by responding to any request for help. These teachers need autonomy and recognition to make them content and motivated. To avoid burnout, we should not give them work that others can do knowing that they have a specific skill which they can perform.

An effective administrator also wants every student, every teacher, each staff member, all the parents, to think that it is cool to care. It is difficult when teachers and others seem to not care, are negative to students and just don't want to change. "If we create an environment where each person does what is best for the students and for the school, we will seldom make a wrong decision." (p. 90). Whitaker describes some tactics that could help with this issue of apathy.

Effective teachers seldom do anything to harm students, so an effective administrator who works hard to keep good relationships with their teachers. Both work to repair relationships in order to avoid hurt feelings, often apologizing quickly just in case they did cause harm. This repairing is very important and it is a skill that we can give to our students, “developing these repairing skills in our students can help alleviate problems in all our classes.” (p. 104).

The final strategy Whitaker give us is setting expectations at the starts of the years. “For effective principals, the start of the year is a chance to set the tone for the school year and, more importantly, for the school.” (p. 105). He gives basic suggestions, which include talking about classroom management without having teachers and staff feel guilty or angry. A strategy that he mentions deals with weekly staff memo at monthly staff meetings. Much like Fullan’s practice of monthly principal support groups where monthly conferences staff members would occur to discuss expectations (Fullan, 2001).

In conclusion, Whitaker states that “Being a principal is an amazing profession. It is challenging, dynamic, energizing and draining – but most of all, it is rewarding. Our impact extends far beyond anything we can imagine.” (p. 114). Whitaker gives us his important strategies that can be helpful to administrators. The book focuses on the idea that respecting, involving and developing staff is the best way to improve schools. It gives administrators an approach that can enhance their learning environment while developing their school improvement goals. Whitaker leaves us with this final statement, “Think of it as a blueprint. The principals are the architects. The teachers establish the foundation. The students move into the building and fill it with life and meaning.” “Every principal has an impact. Great principals make a difference.” (p. 115).

I found that the strategies that Whitaker gave in this book were extremely helpful and I can see how they can help an administrator become an effective administrator. I didn’t see many weaknesses with his thesis and thought that he explained himself well. I especially found the first six strategies he explained, which was ‘It’s People, Not Programs’, “Who is the Variable”, Treat Everyone with Respect, every day”, The Principal is the Filter”, and “Teach the Teachers”, to be the strongest of all fifteen. It’s as if he wrote them in the order of importance. This book is written in an easy and understandable style and is a valuable contribution to leadership for administrators who are interested in becoming truly effective instructional leaders.

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About the Author

Deborah Martinez is a Special Education Teacher working for Miami-Dade Public Schools and has been teaching for more than 13 years. She is the head of the Special Education Department at her school and has built a wonderful relationship with her administration, fellow teachers, students and parents. She enjoys working with children with special needs and helping them reach for their dreams through their education. She believes every child should be valued and treated with respect. An education should empower a child and help him or her make a positive contribution to our world.

African American Students Disproportionate Representation in Special Education

By Briana Merchant

Abstract

The education of African American students differs from that of their Caucasian American counterparts. Due to the cultural differences that exist between the African American community and the standard American education system, there is a disproportionate representation of students referred for, and placed in special education programs in the United States. The increased frequency of students being referred for these specialized services correlates with the misunderstanding of cultural norms, distinct behavior disparity, and the lack of cultural relevant teaching practices. This literature review examines some of the common areas that serve as indicators to education professionals for the need of special education services. Additionally, it discusses the disconnect that African American students face during the provision of curriculum and instruction. For this reason, recommendations are centered on reaching more educators and professionals who identify with students and understand the nuances that exist within the African American culture.

African American Students Disproportionate Representation in Special Education

The education of African American students differs from that of their Caucasian American counterparts. On an average, African American students are viewed through a different lens in the world of public education and exposed to harsh judgement in both the school and classroom setting. This judgement faced by students is often a direct correlation with the variation of cultural norms from those of the majority. Due to the cultural differences that exist between the African American community and the standard American education system, there is a disproportionate representation of students referred for and placed in special education programs in the United States. This review of literature will examine the variation between the African American culture and the public-school norms. The importance of addressing this topic is to shed light on the disproportionate over-representation epidemic that continues to occur between the minority group of African Americans and the United States public school system. Thus, an examination of the discrepancy that exists between the African American culture that often serve as contributing factors, in the identification of the education need which lead to a segregated placement and additional services. Perspectives of prior research will also be analyzed to recognized some of the common indicators that are used to determine the need for intensive specialized services.

The prevalence of African American students placed in special education is often a result of the variation in culture and environmental factors from the norms of the school. There is an increased rate of students who are from culturally diverse and ethnic backgrounds referred for more specialized services and programs. Per Irvine (2012), the African American population accounts for 14% of school population, yet make up 20% of the special education population. This data speaks volumes to the idea of disproportionate over-representation, as the percentage of African American students enrolled in special education exceeds the percentage of students in the overall school population. The increased frequency of students being referred for these specialized services is often due to the misunderstanding of cultural norms, distinct behavior disparity, and lack of culturally relevant teaching practices.

In a review of literature, there is a consistent concern in regards to the disproportionate over-representation of minorities, specifically African American students being referred for special education services. The identification and referral process of students, who are culturally diverse is often a result of the lack of knowledge and understanding of the cultural nuances that exist between students and schools. Students are entering classrooms all around the country, with their own personal experiences based on their cultural and environmental teachings. In most instances, one of the most prominent characteristics of African American students is their independence, strong will and survival skills.

Their upbringing plays a significant part in their development, as they are assumed greater responsibilities than their Caucasian American peers. These responsibilities generally focus on being a caretaker for older and younger generations. With the greater responsibility that is demanded in the home environment, African Americans are not provided with the same foundational skill set. This leads to students entering school without the basic functional skills and may already be behind other students. Thus, the typical milestones that schools are used to students mastering upon entrance must be taught by educators.

Another cultural factor in the disproportionate identification of African American students in special education is the socioeconomic status of the minority group. The high incidence of African American families who are poverty stricken may limit the availability of the resources needed to meet the necessities of life. Consequently, the lack of resources often attributes to the frequent occurrence of health-related risks and malnourishment during important developmental stages of pregnancy and child development. Vallas (2009) state that “African-American children are more likely to be poor and are thus more likely to be subject to the biological and environmental risk factors that threaten early childhood cognitive and emotional development, such as low birthweight, poor nutrition, poor or no healthcare, less stimulating and less stable home environments, and prenatal exposure to alcohol and tobacco, among others.” For education professionals and school psychologists, upon the initial parent interview there is a request for the disclosure of problems occurred during pregnancy and during the child’s development. Reviewing the literature from an African American perspective, Irvine shared a personal experience where she was advised that “African American parents should be wary of divulging their children’s low birth weight to school personnel because they might use that information to justify placement in special education” (Irvine, 2012). Further, she also adds that some parents would believe that the teachers are probing to find clear indicators to justify the onset of an attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, mental, as well as behavioral problems (Irvine, 2012).

Moreover, the skewed identification of African American students for special education is a result of the students desire to maintain their cultural identity. Neal, McCray, Webb-Johnson, and Bridgest (2003), noted that “diverse students become more tenacious in their efforts to maintain their cultural identity, teachers who are unfamiliar and inexperienced with student diversity often overreact and impose unenforceable rules, expectations, and prohibitors.” One of the main characteristics of African Americans is the inherited cultural identity that they possess. This is one of the key identifiers that sets this minority group apart from others as the cultural identity is one that is developed without any type of formal teaching. Educators must be aware that the identity of students includes their cultural experiences and should refrain from placing specific expectations and rules on students that may strip them of their cultural identity.

When African-American students exhibit more pronounced disruptive behaviors that vary from those of their Caucasian American peers, teachers view these behaviors as problematic. Thus, teachers believe that there must be a deeper reasoning for the occurrence of these specific behaviors and want to begin the special education referral process. The outcome of the psychological testing, teacher questionnaires and a review of student records often leads to the identification and eligibility for special education services under the more “judgmental or “soft” disabilities categories of mental retardation, emotional disturbance, and learning disabilities” (Irvine, 2012).

Teacher perspectives and opinions of how they believe students should behave in the school setting, can also lead to the increased identification of minority students in special education. The reality is that African American children are more than twice as likely to be referred for behavior rather than academics (Irvine, 2012). Take the classroom rule, raise your hand to speak or share your answer, for example. All students in the general education class know and are aware of how they should conduct themselves in the classroom, but given a discussion or a review question posed by the teacher, an African American student may shout out the answers, while most students will follow this rule, raise their hand, and wait to be called on. To the student, this is just a way of communicating to the teacher that they know the answer and want to demonstrate their knowledge by participating, however, teachers view this as a disruptive behavior and an indicator for the need of a more self-contained academic environment (Williams, 2007). The referral for special education communicates to students that there is a problem because you want to participate, but failed to adhere to the classroom rules. This is an absurd reasoning for any child, let alone one who is already identified as a minority, to be viewed as having an inherit problem. This display of behavior should instead be used as a tool in the general education classroom and used as a teachable moment.

Instead, behavioral consequences are imposed on students who are African American, and the cultural identities that are embedded in students are the exact reasons why teachers tend to refer students for additional services.

Yet, the reality is that the behaviors may be a sign that the curriculum and instructional strategies that are used in the classroom to teach are not appealing to the students. Minority students, who exhibit disruptive behaviors are subconsciously communicating to teachers that there is a disconnect between curriculum and the instructional strategy, being used to teach these culturally diverse learners. The instructional practices that are commonly used are best suited for most students who have had the similar experiences and have been previously exposed to the concepts. This unfortunately will not always be the case for African American students as they need a more kinesthetic approach to learning that offers a direct connection to their reality.

Consequently, the lack of understanding and inability to understand the concepts explored through curriculum is another deciding factor for a self-contained learning environment. In a personal experience, when providing special education services for four students in a general education language arts class, I witnessed how certain curriculum can provide a disconnect for students. With the instruction focused on euphemisms, the teacher provided the definition to the class, then proceeded to share example sentences of euphemisms. Of the examples, one stated “the televisions looked as if they fell off the back of the truck.” She posed the question to the class, opening the discussion for the students to share what they think the euphemism meant. The class demographics was made up of 85% of African American students, who raised their hands and called out to offer possible definitions of the phrase. None of the students could decipher the true meaning of the euphemism, so I interjected and provided an example to allow the class majority an opportunity to understand. I, then questioned students by asking them if they have ever observed, or purchased goods that were being sold from someone’s house or car. Almost instantly the class lit up in concurrence with the example, where I added that these items fell off the back of the truck because they are stolen goods that are being sold. Only then, were the students able to make the connection and understand what a euphemism was. This is a sheer example of the need for curriculum and instruction to be directly correlated with the real-world experiences that these students have. Likewise, teachers need to provide similar culturally relevant teaching practices in classrooms daily to allow African American students the opportunity to learn and understand curriculum.

Annie Campbell said it best with her quote, “we can teach our children to flap their wings, but the conditions have to be just right for them to fly,” sheds light on the need of educators to provide a free, appropriate public education for all students, including those from diverse cultural backgrounds and students with disabilities. It examines the importance of establishing equal circumstances for these students to be successful. The need is for all teachers to provide education that is relatable to student’s personal real world experiences. By providing instructional curriculum that appeals to students and recognizing the cultural influences on student’s learning, educators will apply culturally relevant teaching (Gimbert et al., 2010). However, this would require teachers to do their homework and learn about the different cultures represented in their classroom. As teachers take the time to learn about the students’ cultures, they will be able to better understand the behaviors exhibited by the students to be a cultural norm, then an indication of a disability. Gimbert, Desai, and Kerka (2010) provided an interesting take on the knowledge of their students stating that “knowing what and how to teach becomes relevant only after teachers come to know their students, where they understand how life is organized in the communities, where the values, beliefs and cultures of students and the way that students use knowledge and how these characteristics that affect learning.” This is the foundational basis for the idea of culturally relevant teaching, which is centered on using the student’s cultures to shape and develop instructional practices that appeals to all types of students of various cultures with specific needs.

Conclusion

African American students are provided with a different education than their Caucasian American peers, as they are more likely to be referred from or receive their education in a special education setting. The common indicators that teachers often may use for deciding factors for special education services often derive from the misunderstanding of cultural norms, behavioral issues, and the disconnect of curriculum due to the lack of culturally relevant teaching practices.

Recommendations to improve the education experience for African American students is to consider the variation that exists between the cultures of racially, culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse students and the educational institutions serving them. The fundamental cause of the achievement gap and disproportionate representation is the miscommunication of the cultures, where these students in the programs will be more likely to be treated as students with special needs (Griner and Stewart, 2012). About the cultural norms and behavioral concerns, there is a call for more culturally diverse education professionals, who both are from and understand the culture of students. The United States education system is compelled to seek out and include the voices of parents, community members, activists, and cultural experts to understand how to best meet the needs of students represented within their schools and communities (Griner and Stewart, 2012). Leading to the increase of recruitment, preparation, and retaining of culturally diverse teachers or teachers for urban schools, there will be an increase in the retention of educators, who will exceed the five-year minimum (Gimbert et al., 2010). With the focus in the hands of the teacher education programs, the pre-service teachers should be provided with more experiences in the urban setting to exposed future educators to the reality of the public-school system. By placing student teachers directly in the trenches of the urban education setting and hiring those who represent the cultures of students in their classes, they will be able to make better connections with students and their families (Gimbert et al., 2010). Consequently, the rate of African American students referred for special education will significantly decrease, as they will be educated by professionals who can personalize the education experience and tailor the lessons to their specific cultural needs.

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The Inadequate Inclusion of Parents in Special Education: A Review of Literature

By Amanda Nieves

Literature Review

Researchers have suggested that going back almost 50 years, there is evidence that parents lacked (and skill lack) knowledge and understanding of their rights as a parent of a child with disabilities (Mandic, Rudd, Heir, & Acevedo-Garcia, 2010). These parents also lack the awareness of their role as an equal and valuable member of the IEP team (Mandic, Rudd, Heir, & Acevedo-Garcia, 2010). Many parents have a difficult time understanding relevant special education regulations and navigating the system (Burke, 2013). It is important that parents are involved in the process of planning and creating their child's IEP (Individualized Education Program), as IDEA specifies that parents are an integral part of this process. Research shows that parental involvement directly and indirectly impacts students' academic achievement. Parent involvement decreases drop-out rates and decreases at-risk behaviors among other things (Burke, 2013). Due to the obvious benefits and legal rights of parent involvement, it is important to examine this topic further.

Benefits of Parental Involvement

In addition to the benefits outlined in the introduction of this paper, there are benefits with direct connections to children with disabilities and their education. Studies have suggested that many parents are not satisfied with their children's education (in relation to children with ASD). Based on a 91% return rate of 168 mailed surveys; only 30% of these parents of children with ASD report that they are satisfied with the level of teacher understanding about ASD (Star & Foy, 2010). Including these parents more heavily in their child's education will better prepare teachers, which will directly affect the students. Parents of children with ASD have valuable insight and concerns that are important for the school to listen to.

When a school takes notice to a student experiencing difficulties and in need of additional supports, parents can play a vital role as a member of their child's pre-referral intervention team (PIT) (Bing & Gregory, 2010). Bing and Gregory (2010) explained that a PIT is intended to be proactive and collaborative in nature in order to attend to the needs of the struggling child before consideration for more restrictive environments (Bing & Gregory, 2010). When parents are not included in this process, it is a detriment to the collaborative nature, and more importantly to the child. It is my opinion that parents know their children the best, and can provide valuable insight for teachers and schools.

Parental Knowledge

It is evident that schools are not doing an adequate job of informing and educating parents on their child's education plan. Valle (2011) stated "Observations of parent-professional conferences confirmed unclear explanations of psychological testing, a lack of opportunity for parents to ask questions, and the presentation of pre-prepared Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) for parents to sign". This is not what IDEA outlines and is not a representation of equal partnership in developing the IEP. Valle (2011) also explained that surveys indicate that school professionals perceived the parent role as a passive receiver of information as opposed to an active participant and the IEP was mostly completed without parent input, despite what the law indicates. Lentz (2012) stated that parents often feel confused in IEP meetings, as teachers and school psychologists use educational jargon that they do not understand.

In a national sample of 200 randomly selected elementary schools, Truscott et al. (2005) found that 85% used some type of pre-referral process for struggling students, but that only 25% reported that parents were members of these teams (Bing & Gregory, 2010). Parents who are low-income and non-White parents of students with disabilities report that they are not as involved in the IEP as they would like to be (Mandic, Rudd, Heir, & Acevedo-Garcia, 2010).

Schools are legally required to give parents a copy of their procedural safeguards at IEP meetings. These documents outline parent's rights and students' rights in the special education system (Mandic, Rudd, Heir, & Acevedo-Garcia, 2010). The law states that parents are to receive the procedural safeguards in their native language, or it is to be translated in a way that the parent can understand. The law also states that the notice must be written in language understandable to the general public. Mandic, Rudd, Heir, & Acevedo-Garcia (2010) report that the procedural safeguards for each of 50 states and the District of Columbia were collected during the spring of 2006. The SMOG is a readability formula was used to determine the readability level of these safeguards. In order to estimate the level of literacy among parents, this research used data from the 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy. In terms of revised scores, only 6% scored in the high school reading level range, 55% scored in the college reading level range, and 39% scored in the graduate or professional range (Mandic, Rudd, Heir, & Acevedo-Garcia, 2010). Often times, schools hand over these documents and ask parents to sign off without explaining, reviewing, or allowing questions. What is additionally concerning is that SEELS and NLTS-2 data suggests that parents of students with disabilities are also more likely to have limited literacy skills than the general population (Mandic, Rudd, Heir, & Acevedo-Garcia, 2010). These facts do not support the law that these documents are intended to be written in a language that is understandable. This issue can greatly harm the ability of a parent to participate in their child's education.

Advocacy

Burke described in her article that parents often feel intimidated by a large school district and as though they are inadequate or lack expertise (Burke, 2013). In addition to these feelings, parents sometimes have a hard time obtaining transportation to the school, child care for the meeting, and also may not be able to take off from work (meetings are often scheduled during the school day) (Burke, 2013). Taking these facts into consideration, it is no surprise why parents are not holding an equal role in the creation and implementation of their child's IEP. This is where an advocate comes into play.

Advocates could truly play an integral role to ensure that parents are informed on their rights as well as their child's rights as well as ensuring that the student is being appropriately serviced. Special Education advocates are "individuals with knowledge of both special education law and advocacy skills to assist parents in working with the school system" (Burke, 2013). Burke (2013) explained that special education advocates are supposed to "aid parents in securing appropriate educational services for their children". However, the advocacy field is left unsupervised without any institution in place to hold advocates accountable in their appropriate support of parents (Burke, 2013).

Conclusion

According to the "Strong Families, Strong Schools" report, "Theory years of research shows the greater family involvement in children's learning is a critical link to achieving high quality education and a safe disciplined learning environment for every student" (U.S. Department of Education, 1994, p.1).

First and foremost, my opinion is that parents should be treated as not only a part of the IEP team, but as an integral member. Prereferral plans and IEP plans should be created with the parent present, instead of being created by the school and presented to the parent to sign off on. Parents are the experts on their child, and schools should treat them as such. In addition to this, schools should hold information sessions for parents of students with an IEP. These meetings should educate the parents on the procedural safeguards, what to expect at the IEP meeting, what their role is in the IEP process, and how to read an evaluation. In addition to this, parent support groups should be organized.

Another suggestion to achieving a strong understanding for parents is the state holding advocates accountable to truly supporting parents and keeping the student at the forefront. Burke explained in her article that it is unclear the best way to train advocates and in my opinion advocates should be treated as attorneys, with intense college training and high expectations. These attorney advocates should be provided by parents in need.

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About the Author

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The Institutional Shortcomings of Special Education and How We Can Bridge the Gap: A Literature Review

By Ibis Paneca

Abstract

While the focus of these articles diverges into specific topics - they all shared a common thread - not enough is being done to incorporate parents into the fabric of Special Education. Based on personal experiences as an educator and research, one can begin to identify the institutional shortcomings of special education and how we can bridge the gap. This review will discuss the current attempts being made to remedy the situation, as well as address the instances where there is still much work to be done. How can it be expected to engage parents when they are intimidated at their inability to understand? How can one neglect a population whose average reading level is several grades lower than what is being printed in our IDEA materials? It is surprising how educators trivialize caregivers by not addressing them by their names in IEP meetings. They are not called by their names without realizing this takes away their power. The results of applying the suggested methods should be an increased participation from parents.

Introduction

How is a raven like a writing desk?" This unanswerable riddle has been shared countless times by Disney and Lewis Carroll's fans alike. While no one can provide a satisfying response, it can be said that this enigmatic quote sums up how many parents feel when navigating through the special education system of the United States. This quote is poignant because Valle writes compellingly about the similarities parents, particularly mothers, experience in their journey into special education services for their children and the fanciful journey that Alice travels into through the looking glass. Through the analysis "Complex Relationships between Multicultural Education and Special Education: An African American Perspective", "Readability of Special Education Procedural Safeguards", "Down the Rabbit Hole: A Commentary About Research on Parents and Special Education", "Improving Parental Involvement: Training Special Education Advocates", and "The Big Picture, Focusing Urban Teacher Education on the Community", one can begin to identify the institutional shortcoming in the special educational system and posit suggestions on how to bridge the gap in order to serve our students better. Literature Review

In the story of Alice Through the Looking Glass, Alice is unsure of herself and disoriented as she finds herself in an upside-down world where nothing makes sense to her personal sensibilities. Mothers, too, can feel unsure and disoriented when they are exposed to situations where they need to advocate for their children but are ill equipped to do so. In a study, mothers were asked to talk about themselves where Campbell identifies them as the "reluctant hero" archetype. These mothers face adversity with determination and resolve because they have to, not because they feel they can, or because they want to. Just as Alice is thrown into a trial where nothing seems fair but she feels compelled to speak up, so too, do mothers stand by and watch their children be referred, accommodated, and serviced by an out of touch system until they stand up and say, "No More", thereby becoming the catalysts of change in their children's lives. Examples were given where mothers report that something is not right in early childhood, but health care providers minimize their concerns. Vale identifies the realization of a deficiency in school age children as a fall down the "rabbit hole" and mothers are left to navigate through the system with little understanding of how any of it works.

Upon entering this world on the opposite side of the "rabbit hole" the mother confronts difficult special education jargon, assessments that she is unfamiliar with as to their purpose or how they work, as well as hard to understand eligibility guidelines. They feel unwelcomed in their child's IEP meetings and feel like the individuals set up to help their child, take an antagonistic or oppositional approach if the mother asks questions or is "resistant" to the IEP teams recommendations.

One could opine that the recounting and point of view Valle takes may be over simplistic, as there are many instances in which specialists and SPED teachers do create a meaningful rapport with parents. However, the simplicity of the issue brings to light the need for restructuring of the roles mothers and fathers have to fill when it comes to a SPED student. For starters, parents of SPED students are placed in the unique position of having a personal responsibility under the law to help guide their child's education. This "legally mandated parent-professional collaboration" should foster a spirit of team work between the SPED team and the parents yet historically it has not. There has been proof since the 1970's that parents were ignorant to their rights under the IDEA Act or have a working understanding of the services being provided to their child. Furthermore, observations of the meetings that went along with the Independent Educational Plan process indicated that the explanations given to parents regarding the psychological testing were unsatisfactory. Observations further demonstrated that parents were dissuaded from asking questions due to the IEP forms being filled out before-hand with minimal parent input and short scheduled time of the meetings.

The issues delineated above may have gotten traction and attention as early as the 1970's but very little has been done to remedy the matter. Even in the 1990's, twenty years after a problem was identified, "more than 100 of the parents of children with learning disabilities revealed that over half of their parents indicated that they were initially confused about their child's diagnosis and described the test results and recommendations as not helpful" (Malekoff, Johnson, & Klappersack, 1991, p.420). Parents of disabled students, who are vulnerable to poor educational, social, and employment outcomes, are those who are most negatively impacted, according to the National Longitudinal Transition Study. This is due to many factors, some of which are inflexibility in their workplace for them to take time off, language barriers, or parental literacy limitations.

In 2004, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act legally mandated that parents would have a part in their child's "diagnosis, evaluation, placement, services, individualized educational planning, and transition to adulthood". The law demands that these procedural safeguards be understandable to the public and be provided in the native language of the parent. If in any case that the native language cannot be published on paper, it has been required for parents to have the procedural safeguards translated to them orally in their native language. In Miami-Dade County, in the Forms site, the Procedural Safeguards are found in English, Spanish, and Creole. Furthermore, educational institutions need to be able to prove in writing that these guidelines have been met, such as with a signature from the parents. At first blush, it seems that the special education community and the educational department at large is doing its due diligence at providing parents with the tools they need in order to be active participants of their child's education. However, are they really? Studies completed as to the readability of these documents denote otherwise. A readability analysis provided by Dale and Chall predicted the reading level necessary in order to understand the procedural safeguards in written ESE documentation. Some of the aspects of the study included, average sentence length and word difficulty, a measurement of how many polysyllabic words there were in a document. Using this Dale-Chall formula, the "median reading grade level was of 11-12". Another formula, called the Flesch grade level formula labeled the documents as grade level 13. Pruitt applied this information to the actual reading level of the sample of parents in the study which was grade level 9 and found documentation to be at least three grade levels higher than their reading acuity.

A study in 1969 utilized another readability formula called SMOG. This formula was given a higher credence of validity. It is conducted by "taking three samples of 10 sentences from different parts of the text, counting the number of polysyllabic words contained within each 10 sample sentences, and adding the total number of polysyllabic words across the three sections." The formula yields a score for closer to 100% understanding and the margin of error is only 1.5 grades versus the 3 grade margin of the previous formulas. Additionally, all documents were also manually evaluated using more SMOG formula by a research assistant that independently assessed a random subsample of documents using the revised method. The revised score resulted in a downward movement of the top scores. Compared to previous formulas, only six percent of the sample scored in the high school reading level range. Fifty-five percent scored in the college level range which was (13th-16th grade) and the remaining thirty-nine percent, which sounds remarkably high, was in the graduate or professional level, (approximately 17th grade). By stark contrast, the National Assessment of Adult Literacy rates the majority of adults, less than fifty percent, to be an intermediate level reader. If one limits the sample to those adults who earned less than a high school diploma, their reading level rated below basic for fifty four percent! Unsurprisingly, Rudd published in 2007 that almost half of the United States population lacked the skills necessary to function effectively in complex health related contexts.

If so much information regarding the literary aptitude of US adults is available and yet readability assessments for SPED documentation continue to be at a college level, who are these documents really being writing for? Surely the Department of Education, State Department of Education, and district departments are not writing these safeguards for the parents of our SPED students. These procedural safeguards continue to be written in excessively high reading levels. This practice continues to have negative implications for our ESE students and their families. Parents may be unable to understand the assessment process or the IEP process, which in turn brings feelings of exclusion or shame to them. Harry and colleagues (1995) offer that parental advocacy is off put by the lack of emphasis on participation and the glut of documents the parents have to navigate through. The power dynamics and confusing jargon limit parental involvement.

The African American community has been directly impacted by institutional disenfranchisement. There has been a lack of understanding between the parents of the African American community and the educational community. In a case study by Williams (2008), African American parents believed their children were placed in special education because teachers were pressured to assign low performing students to these programs to maintain accountability. Additionally, they did not know that students could be exited from the program. Parents believed once you were placed they would be “trapped”. These misguided beliefs have created tension between African American parents and special education. So much so that it was also believed not to be forthright with educators for fear that they would use the child’s information, such as low birth weight, to justify placement in special education programs. While it seems that African American parents may have been overly cautious, data suggests that there is an underlying prejudice and bias towards African American students. There is a disproportionate amount of African American students in disability categories such as emotionally disturbed or learning disabled. Moreover, these students spend over sixty percent of their time in self-contained or segregated placements compared to white disabled peers.

Gottlieb, Gottlieb, and Trobone found that students that were African American were more likely to get referred to ESE services mainly due to behavior and not academic achievement – if they shouted out answers or did not raise their hand they were seen as disruptive. When teachers are not in touch with cultural mores or customs, they may make unwarranted referrals and inaccurate placements. Cultural values are very important to the development of any person and yet they are greatly overlooked. These racial stereotypes about the role of poverty have “associated poverty with emotional and behavioral problems resulting in disproportionate referrals of African American students to special education”. Adding to this already tense situation is the bureaucratic special education system that focuses on documentation and legal compliance. It is easy to be a confused parent and as such be unable to advocate for their child. While there are organizations that help bridge this gap, historically families of color do not participate in such organizations. This could be attributed to cultural norms, work schedules, or both. Regardless the reasons, there needs to be a movement to empower parents.

It is evident that students of color have a two tiered issue, lack of cultural awareness in Education and disenfranchisement due to educational levels in some African American communities and the high reading level of special education documentation. Despite the fact that these issues seem to be divergent from each other, indeed they are very much related. Special education needs to create a discourse where the individual is taught within the context of their experiences - both in the classroom and with the parents. Culturally responsive pedagogy is in many respects, social justice pedagogy. It is imperative that all education, particularly Special Education, even out the playing field and make all participants, equal participants.

Involving parents in the special education process has been mandatory since the inception of the program, however, the way the program is presently set up does not facilitate involvement of these parents. It has been discussed in this review how the publications created to inform the public are too high a grade level for parents to understand them. So now that this gap has been identified, what can be done to remedy the situation? Kimble stresses that clarity and precision should be the goal. Plain language improves comprehension when compared to “legal writing”. Presently, the law states that the language should be “understandable to the general public”, however there is currently no guideline specifying what “understandable” levels are. Mandic, Rudd, Hehir, and Acevedo-Garcia posit that “the U.S. Department of Education as well as the state departments of education should lead by example by providing clear, simple template language for local educational agencies to follow”(2012). It can be agreed that readability of documents is an essential first step to bridging the gap between parents and SPED education.

Providing clear publications would allow parents to ask questions about the content and the details rather than swim helplessly in the needless verbiage of the documents. It was also recommended in the study that special education teachers be trained to provide translated written documented rights to parents and self-advocates. While it can be concurred that there is a need for someone to translate and to explain rights to parents, this would not be a long term solution to saddle SPED teachers with this responsibility. The amount of accountability SPED teachers already experience is significantly burdensome. To thrust them into the position, formally, of translating and explaining the students' rights and responsibilities would make them personally liable for misrepresentations or misunderstandings. The districts need to make the effort to educate the parents. Burke examined two special education advocacy training models: the Volunteer Advocacy Project (VAP) and the Special Education Advocacy Training (SEAT). The programs were designed to help "train individuals in special education policy and advocacy skills". The purpose of these trainings was so that those individuals would serve as advocates for parents. Some of the participants were early education students; others were parents of special education students. While the parents learned the information for themselves, the programs were set up in such a way that they have to provide advocate services for other parents. By doing so the two training models were creating a system that automatically grows the number of individuals who understand SPED policy, rights, and responsibilities. Advocacy provides collaboration between the schools and the parents. It takes the burden of educating and training off of the SPED teachers and empowers the parents. The fact that parents attend these trainings makes them take ownership of their child's education. They become active participants in the SPED process and improve the relationship between the school and the parent.

Equally as important to providing advocates, is promoting families and community engagement. Teachers learn from the families and the community and use this knowledge to reach the student. The educators build caring relationships with the students and motivate them. They use an effective learning resource that is gleaned from the community. This is the beginning of connecting special education and the cultural gaps that were mentioned in this piece. We should consider, as mentioned by Irvine (2012) to include co-teaching between the SPED and general education faculty, the inclusion of k-12 teachers in planning new models for teacher training, and the implementation of professional development programs for teacher educators. Additionally, centers such as the MUSE (Multicultural Urban Secondary Education) program, stress the importance of equity in its program. "Candidates interview parents and community members, research the history and culture of a neighborhood, document community strengths, and develop an action plan to connect their findings to the curriculum. This program seems to embody the socially just pedagogy that we referenced earlier. Coupling the training of parents in self advocacy with training teachers about the cultures in the community they serve, there would be a holistic support system for the student that is likely to produce well rounded, secure individuals. Everyone needs to do their part in order to help mold a child. There is a well known quote that says "it takes a village to raise a child", and with steps such as the ones mentioned above, there can be a working urban community and a working SPED community village - together. The steps are not a supreme undertaking. It is reasonable to set up a five year plan in which to implement the program. Year one would encompass changing the entire procedural safeguard and supporting documentation into readable templates. The reading level should be clear and concise. The reading level should mirror the average reading level of the district. No document should be written in anything above a 12th grade level and the average should be closer to 6th grade. During year two and three, districts should provide the parents adequate training of the SPED process, through workshops, online seminars, and lectures. These trainings can be held at the schools once a week. At the completion of the trainings, parents should be encouraged to advocate for another family at the school or provide additional trainings to new student families as they come into the school. During year four and five informative panels of discussion where parents and community leaders educate the school faculty as to the culture of the community they are serving should be provided. Teachers need to work with parents and learn the social contexts on how to engage and reach their students. They should be active participants in the community and make themselves recognizable to its citizens. Year four and five should also introduce master teachers to mentor and cohorts to train the teachers in SPED as well as fine tune their culturally responsive teaching. Learning gains and data should be observed and assessed for those five years and adjustments should be made as necessary. This plan can serve as an active attempt to bridge the gap within the SPED education system and are addressing those shortcomings in a methodical and scientific sense. The parts of the program that work will continue and those who were not successful can be revisited. It is only by actively promoting change that one can truly conform to the spirit of the IDEA law. The Federal Department of Education, the State Department of Education, and the individual districts are who need to provide a framework for parents and help them exit the rabbit hole unscathed.

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Empowering Families of Students with Disabilities to Collaborate in the Early Years with Educators for Positive Student Outcome: A Review of the Literature

By Darcy Sanchez

Abstract

School based collaboration is important when working with families and students with disabilities. Collaboration, which is the interaction between two or more individuals, incorporating a diversity of behaviors such as communication, coordination, sharing of information and resources, decision-making and problem solving. Creating relationships between parents and teachers can often be difficult. Therefore teachers need to be taught various ways of working with families of students with disabilities, which have been proven to be effective. This article provides information about how to meet families different needs for positive student learning outcomes.

Introduction

This purpose of this article is to review literature that investigates various ways for professional educators to effectively communicate and work with families of students with disabilities in their early years. By reviewing literature on family involvement within the school setting we can gain knowledge about family focused programs that could potentially increase parental learning opportunities involving students with disabilities and in turn increase overall student achievement. Research has shown that children whose parents are involved within the school show increased social functioning and decreased behavior problems (El Nokali, Bachman, & Votruba-Drzal, 2010). It is important early on to examine ways to achieve a constructive working relationship with parents and teachers in order to and fully understand the dynamics of how to improve positive student learning outcomes. Research is showing that children with disabilities, especially autism are being diagnosed earlier and therefore the importance of early intervention is proving to be extremely beneficial (Tissot, 2011). It is important to access each family as their own unit and explore the interactions between the child's functioning level and the impact of the child's disability on the family in order to empower the families and provide adequate resources (Brown et al., 2010). From working with young students with disabilities for over 14 years, I know that each family has different needs and when your child is diagnosed with autism at a young age, parents often have many unmet needs and that it is essentials for professional teachers to collaborate with them. As Valle (2011) pointed out, it is important to for all families including culturally diverse families to understand their role in the educational system and for professionals to ask families to tell their stories so they can more intimately respond to the families' needs.

Perspectives/Findings

When parents first find out that their child has a disability they often feel as if a black fog has just covered their world. As a professional teacher of students with disabilities I feel it is vital that educators communicate and work closely with families to help them through the early years of accepting and working through the new diagnosis. In order to be the best partner I can be with parents of a child with a disability, Ray, Pewitt-Kinder, and George (2009) and I believe that listening to them is the key to supporting them and helping facilitate the family through the development of their child in the school setting. The child's academic strengths at school are important, but we must also focus on the needs and strengths of the family. Each family needs different support depending on the severity of the disability, the families' resources, along with the cultural views of the family in regards to disabilities (Ray et al., 2009).

I agree with what Burke (2013) said, in that most parents and families that have children with disabilities often have trouble navigating through the special education system and need help becoming advocates for their child.

Teacher and school professionals play a vital role in helping parents advocate for their child. Parental involvement is vital in special education, because as Burke (2013) pointed out we must collaborate to ensure that children with disabilities receive the special services which are best suited to their needs. Congressional leaders mandated by law through the Individuals With Disabilities Improvement Education Act (IDEA) that parents be involved in their child's special education (Burke, 2013). But all too often as Valle (2011) stated, parents, especially mothers are being coerced by well-intended professionals into agreeing with the educational team, instead of an actual collaboration occurring during the IEP meetings. I see this happening in almost every IEP meeting that I have attended as the ESE teacher over the past ten years. I make an effort to meet with parents of students in my class to go over the IEP goals prior to the meeting and give them copies of my plan to review at home prior to the meeting. With new students, the IEP meeting is often the first time I am meeting the student and family, so once they are placed in my class I offer more knowledge into the IEP and their personal goals along with resources to increase the parents knowledge.

As Starr, & Foy (2010) stated, parents do know their own child best and therefore school professionals need the parents support to work collaboratively as much as the parents needs the schools support in order to create supportive environments. I share the belief that all parents of students with disabilities view their child's disability different then each other and as Stoner et al. (2005) stated it is important for teachers to be competent communicators and knowledgeable of each families dynamics when working with them. Good collaboration is vital and involves the desire to work with the family, willingness to provide resources, respect for the individual families values.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the majority of research in the literature indicated that many researchers have explored various ways to increase parental involvement and empower parents to help their child achieve the best education possible. As a special education teacher I know that having a "tool kit" for parents to access that contains, community agencies, steps to the assessment process and what to do once your child is diagnosed, along with an IEP service checklist for their disability can be an immense help in guiding and empowering parents to become better advocates for their child with a disability. The Internet is full of great information, but it can become overwhelming very quickly, so having a knowledgeable professional help families become advocates is one of the best tools available. Teachers need to know the available local and state resources available for students with disabilities. School districts could provide a tutorial website that could guide teachers, especially teachers new to special education, about best practices on how to communicate and work with all families and students with disabilities, including culturally and linguistically diverse families. From working with young students with disabilities for over 14 years, I have come to know that each family has different needs and when your child is diagnosed with autism at a young age, parents often have many unmet needs. That in it self makes it is essentials that professional teachers collaborate with parents. I believe that it is very difficult to collaborate with families, until they possess working knowledge of their rights and the basic disability laws. It is vitally important that parents know the rights they have regarding their child with a disability. As a teacher of students with disabilities, I cannot educate my students without the support and effective communication of my student's parents. With all that being said, it is imperative that teachers receive professional development in order to be able to guide and collaborate parents and their children with disabilities.

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About the Author

Darcy Sanchez is excited to be teaching Exceptional Student Education for the 14th year. She earned her first degree in Nursing at Florida Keys Community College and my B.S.N. at University of Miami. After working as an RN for over 10 years, she wanted to spend more time with her young daughter and her two toddlers, so she switched careers in her late 30's and began her teaching career in her hometown of Key West, Florida. Following in her father's footsteps' as he was a school teacher, and suggested she switch careers. She is currently teaching Pre-K ESE at the same middle school she attended as a teenager, which has recently become a pre-kindergarten-8th grade school. Her husband and she have been married over 20 years and have three wonderful adopted teenagers.

SPECIAL EDUCATION LEGAL ALERT

Perry A. Zirkel

© April 2017

This monthly legal alert provides, in the usual format of a two-column table, highlights (on the left) and practical implications (on the right) of major new legal developments. To sign up to automatically receive these monthly alerts, go to perryzirkel.com

1. A recent federal court decision specific to the effect of bullying on the district's FAPE obligation illustrates the limits of both the U.S. Department of Education Dear Colleague Letter and the Second Circuit *T.K.* decision that partially relied on it.

<p>In an official published decision in <i>J.M. v. Department of Education</i> (2016), the federal district court in Hawaii ruled that the IEP team's minimal discussion of the previous "horrible" bullying of a child with autism was not a denial of FAPE under the IDEA where the IEP, including its crisis plan, was reasonably calculated to confer the requisite educational benefit. Thus, the court reached a different outcome from the Second Circuit's decision in <i>T.K. v. New York City Department of Education</i> (2016).</p>	<p>The Second Circuit in <i>T.K.</i> had ruled that the failure to discuss severe bullying amounted to a denial of FAPE in terms of parental participation, thus affirming the lower court's decision against the district; however, the appellate court did not adopt the lower court's specific requirements that included, in certain circumstances, an individually anti-bullying plan in the IEP. The Hawaii decision illustrates the limited precedential effect of the Second Circuit's ruling and, all the more, that of the lower court's even more extensive anti-bullying rulings in <i>T.K.</i></p>
<p>At least as important, the federal district court in <i>J.M.</i> did not accord significant weight to the OCR Dear Colleague Letter (2014) on bullying, concluding that it was "merely aspirational." More specifically, this court reasoned that in the absence of precedent otherwise, such agency policy statements merely provide guidance to schools, not binding or even persuasive effect on courts. In the past, courts have often found such federal agency interpretations to be persuasive, but the proverbial pendulum may be shifting.</p>	<p>Both the lower court's and the Second Circuit's bullying-related ruling relied in part of this Dear Colleague Letter. More generally, the Supreme Court's recent remand of the transgender student case in response to the U.S. Department of Education's reversal of its policy position on this issue not only illustrates the potential transience of these agency positions, especially under the current Administration, but also represents the loss of potential precedent from the Supreme Court on their legal weight.</p>

2. As described in the February 2017 Monthly Alert, the Second Circuit in *A.M. v. New York City Department of Education* (2017) ruled that the child was entitled to a particular methodology where the “a clear consensus” of the evaluative info at the IEP meeting supported it. This decision was a potential sea change in terms of the traditional tide for methodology cases. Other recent decisions before and after *A.M.* illustrate is special status but unclear reach thus far.

Here is a sample of recent methodology cases prior to *A.M.*:

- In *Forest Grove v. Student* (2016), the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that the IEP’s failure to incorporate parent’s preferred methodology, which was based on English teacher’s instructional approach, did not amount to denial of FAPE.
- In *Genn v. New Haven Board of Education* (2016), the federal district court in Connecticut decided that the IEP was substantively appropriate, including the disputed reading methodology for a student with multiple diagnoses, including dyslexia.
- In *M.T. v. New York City Department of Education* (2016), a federal district court in New York ruled that the lack of ABA methodology was not a denial of FAPE because the IEP only mentioned it as one of previous successful methods for the student.

Here is the more limited number of methodology decisions issued in the two months since *A.M.*:

- In *Ms. M. v. Falmouth School District* (2017), the First Circuit rejected the parent’s contention that the prior written notice, which proposed use of a particular multisensory reading program, was part of the IEP, while noting that the absence of ambiguity in the IEP rendered *A.M.* “irrelevant” to the analysis.
- In *P.C. v. Rye City School District* (2017), a federal district court in New York upheld the substantive appropriateness of an IEP, finding that—unlike *A.M.*—the evaluative materials did not identify any services so necessary that their omission was a denial of FAPE.

These decisions continued the long line of cases in which the courts deferred to the school districts’ choice of methodology in applying the relatively relaxed substantive standard for FAPE under the IDEA. Most of these cases have been specific to students with autism or SLD, as canvassed in these two articles:

- Zirkel, P. A. (2015). An update of legal issues related to students with autism: Eligibility and methodology. *West’s Education Law Reporter*, 322(1), 10–44
- Rose, T., & Zirkel, P. A. (2007). Orton-Gillingham methodology for students with reading disabilities. *Journal of Special Education*, 41, 171–185.

As expected, *A.M.* has set a methodology standard that will broadly apply within the three states of the Second Circuit—Connecticut, New York, and Vermont. Yet, the *P.C.* case illustrates that this standard, although a change from the previous trend, is not a particularly low hurdle for parents. However, as the *Falmouth* ruling shows, the impact of this standard in other circuits remains an open question at this point, without automatic adoption or rejection.

N2Y



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Latest Employment Opportunities Posted on NASET

Classroom Teacher - Special Education

Ridgely, MD

Job Category: Teacher

DESCRIPTION:

Come for a job, find a family. Where else but Benedictine? Be inspired to come to work every day knowing that you are making a difference in someone else's life. Our teams of professionals work together to improve the quality of life of adults and children with developmental disabilities by helping them achieve their greatest potential in all aspects of life; school, residential, and vocational.

The Teacher provides instruction to students with developmental disabilities in education, vocational, functional and self-help, social-emotional, and behavioral areas.

Implement each student's current Individual Education Plan (IEP), with updates as necessary. Supervise students in areas assigned and according to behavioral management plans designated. Evaluate each assigned student's attainment of goals as stated in the IEP. Submit progress and other reports as required by the school program or requested by School administrators. Implement strategies and provide materials and equipment as appropriate for the population served. Complete, in advance, and maintain lesson plans, protocol and schedules for daily planning. Attend and participates in faculty meetings, interviews, inservice sessions, Parent conferences and other activities as required. Supervise and document performance of classroom staff with follow-up on goals and outcomes of performance/coaching lessons. Administer state testing to students as directed by School administration and submit documentation in a timely manner.

REQUIREMENTS:

Must have Bachelor's degree and valid teaching certificate in Special Education, meeting the Highly Qualified criteria. A Conditional Certificate, valid for two years, may be requested by the Educational Director for an individual with a BA/BS who does not yet meet the certification requirements for a Standard Professional certificate or Highly Qualified criteria. This individual would be required to meet the requirements for the renewal of the Conditional Certificate until a SPC or APC is obtained and to meet the criteria for Highly Qualified. Classroom experience teaching children with developmental disabilities highly preferred. Must have a passion to specialize in teaching children and adolescents with developmental disabilities. Must be highly organized, creative, and an effective collaborator.

BENEFITS:

Health, Dental, and Vision Insurance; Short-Term Disability, Long-Term Disability, Life Insurance, 403(b) Retirement Plan Dependent Care Benefits, Educational Assistance, Credit Union, Employee Assistance Program.

CONTACT:

Erin, HR Generalist at Benedictine

erin.negrete@benschool.org

(410) 364-9616

Special Education Teacher

Austin, TX

Job Category: Special Education Teacher

Description:

The Special Education Teacher is responsible for ensuring that all special education students receive comprehensive, compassionate and equitable services in order to achieve breakthrough academic achievement and character development. The Special Education Teacher will serve as an intervention specialist to assist teachers in helping every child meet grade level goals and will oversee the program and systems for all students who receive special education services. All KIPP Austin staff has a responsibility for ensuring that every KIPP Austin student achieves the academic skills, intellectual habits and character traits necessary to succeed in the nation's top colleges and universities.

We are currently seeking Special Education Teachers for our middle schools and high schools.

Requirements:

- Collaborate with teachers to develop effective whole group practices, small group interventions, and individualized learning activities
- Assist teachers with tracking data to determine the effectiveness of interventions
- Plan and teach small groups during guided reading
- Develop, coordinate and track individual student plans for all special services
- Provide direct student support through small group instruction and inclusion in the general education classroom
- Collaborate with teachers so they provide instructional support that leads to academic gains for students
- Maintain documentation and records for individual students; ensure confidentiality in reporting
- Advise teachers and principal on accommodation processes for state and school-wide assessments
- Accommodate and/or modify a curriculum that is aligned with the standards of KIPP Austin and Texas
- Assess individual student's progress and learning needs; demonstrate a relentless focus on helping students achieve
- Communicate students' progress toward realizing academic and character development goals with families on a weekly basis

Benefits:

- Teacher Career pathway with expert teacher development and opportunities for career advancement
- Competitive Medical, Dental and Vision coverage options with 79-95% of monthly medical premium costs (depending on the plan) paid by KIPP Austin
- 100% KIPP-paid short-term disability
- Paid parental leave (amount paid based on tenure)
- On-campus dry cleaning pick-up
- Retail discounts
- Gold's Gym individual and family plan discount

Contact:

Apply online at: <http://www.kippaustin.org/apply-online>

Arizona Special Education Teacher

Phoenix Metropolitan Area

Job Category: Special Education Teacher

Description:

\$48,000/school year (185 days). Summers off with year round pay. Special Education Teachers needed in Arizona (Phoenix and surrounding cities). Needs are in the self-contained and resource settings serving students with emotional disabilities (ED), Autism (A), Severe/Profound (S/P), and Intellectual Disabilities (ID). STARS is the largest school contract agency in AZ. STARS is owned and operated by Occupational Therapists. You will be an employee and receive full benefits (see below). With a proven track record, STARS is able to offer you an unbeatable support system and resources. STARS is hiring for the 2017-2018 school year. STARS places Special Education Teachers throughout the Phoenix, Tucson and the surrounding area public schools.

Requirements:

Certification through the AZDOE, in Special Education. Arizona Fingerprint Card through AZDPS. We will help you get the credentials needed and reimburse you for the cost.

Benefits:

Salary: \$48,000/school year, based on 185 days. STARS also offers a fantastic benefit package including: 16 weeks off, 100% Company paid Health, Dental, Vision, and Life Insurance, \$1,000/year Continuing Ed Money, Paid DOE Certification Fees, Paid NASET Dues, Spanish Immersion trip, Hawaii Trip for two, 401K, 125 Plan, Direct Deposit, Evaluation tools and treatment supplies, Two company sponsored parties with professional entertainment, Company newsletter, STARS sponsored dinner meetings with national/local speakers, Yearly raises, Referral bonuses, Moving \$, Birthday gifts and other appreciation throughout the year, Genuine Appreciation. **YOU WILL FEEL LIKE A STAR!!!**

Contact:

Brian Paulsen, COO #480.221.2573; Please email your resume to Jobs@StudentTherapy.com; Apply Online at StudentTherapy.com, we would love to hear from you!

Classroom Teacher

Atlanta, GA

Job Category: Faculty

Description:

The Atlanta Speech School

Full-Time Classroom Teacher in the Wardlaw Upper School
for Children with Language-Based Learning Disabilities

Start Date: August 2017

The Wardlaw School for children with dyslexia is currently seeking an outstanding professional to serve as classroom teacher in our multi-disciplinary, collaborative educational environment.

The Atlanta Speech School has evolved over its 78 years into the nation's most comprehensive center for language and literacy – earning a rising national reputation as the educational equivalent of a teaching hospital. Through four distinct academic programs, the School provides on campus an unmatched educational experience for more than 400 students each year. Another 1,000 individuals of all ages are served through our five clinical programs. Our Rollins Center for Language & Literacy provides professional development for early childhood and early elementary teachers across Georgia and beyond, now impacting more than 10,000 children annually and rapidly extending its reach. All of the Speech School's efforts are interrelated and intentional, creating a circle of impact that is continually refined and strengthened across all programs. Please visit our website for further information: www.atlantaspeechschool.org and be sure to watch our three-minute Promise video! - www.2020promise.org

POSITION SUMMARY:

The Wardlaw School is dedicated to serving children with average to very superior intelligence and mild to moderate dyslexia (reading disability). Children accepted into the Wardlaw School may exhibit underlying auditory and/or language processing problems that make it difficult for them to learn in their present educational setting. Our students are between the ages of 5 and 12 years old and are in kindergarten through 6th level. Wardlaw School students typically have a diagnosis of dyslexia or "red flags" for the disorder. They may also have difficulty understanding and/or using spoken language, expressing themselves through written language, or experience mathematical difficulties.

The Wardlaw School employs passionate professionals who strive to be leaders in their field and who are committed to excellence in the education of all children. Knowledge and understanding of research-based practices in the areas of language development, reading and math are the cornerstone for all that we do. We seek to hire innovators and thinkers who choose to work in an environment where they can truly make a difference in the life of a child. The Wardlaw School encourages all of its students, educators, specialists and clinicians to be engaged, perpetual learners.

REQUIREMENTS OF THE POSITION:

A Master's degree in learning disabilities, reading, speech/language pathology, or special education is required. All candidates should possess or be eligible for a current Georgia teaching certificate, eligibility for Georgia certification and/or certification from the American Speech-Language and Hearing Association as appropriate. An understanding of the interaction between language and learning is expected and training in at least one multi-sensory reading method is desirable. Experience is preferred.

BENEFITS:

Salary is commensurate with experience.

This 190-day, full-time school position offers a generous benefit package including health/dental/life/vision and long term disability insurance; the School subsidizes health insurance premiums of staff and families. Other benefits include Flexible Spending Account; 403(b) Plan; cost reduction of some Atlanta Speech School services; complimentary meals during work hours; and accrued sick leave.

TO APPLY:

Please submit all of the following documents to ensure that your information is considered: cover letter, resume, copies of certificates and/or license, college transcript, and written submission describing how your particular skills, talents, and/or expertise would be beneficial to the Wardlaw School (please limit to 500 words).

Email: hr@atlantaspeechschool.org

Subject line: Wardlaw 3rd-5th Grade Classroom Teacher

Please no phone inquiries.

Special Education Teachers - Will Relocate You!

Baltimore, MD

Job Category:

DESCRIPTION:

Explore your passion for education and being a part of a culture where students learn; personal empowerment, self-determination and resiliency through a mind-frame of personal accountability!

Relocation Assistance: Eager to give up your ice-scraper and snow shovel? Consider relocating to beautiful Phoenix, Arizona. We are hiring across the Valley! We'll help get you relocated to the Phoenix, Arizona area and provide relocation assistance, Sign-On bonus, AZ State Certification Licensure Fees, and AZ IVP Fingerprint Card fees for Special Education Teacher qualified candidates. 2017-2018 School Year positions in Buckeye, Surprise, outlining Phoenix, Gilbert, Queen Creek - across the Valley!

Ask about our relocation package! Move to sunny Phoenix where we bask in sunshine more often than any other major metropolitan area in the U.S. The sun shines on Phoenix during 85 percent of its daylight hours and for 300 days!

Desert Choice Schools utilizes a highly-structured, school-wide Positive Behavioral Supports program that teaches students Academic, Social/Emotional Problem-Solving and Strategies. All DCS teachers and support staff are trained in a unique methodology that assists students with maintaining Positive Choice-Making.

We are a tight-knit team that values colleagues who exhibit collaboration, integrity and the desire to make a difference in the lives of students who struggle to be successful, and who share a passion to help children and their families.

- Develop and implement student Individual Education Plans.
- Implement instructional activities that contribute to a climate where students are actively engaged in meaningful learning experiences.
- Identify, select, and modify instructional resources to meet the needs of the students with varying backgrounds, learning styles, and special needs.
- Assist in assessing changing curricular needs and offers plans for improvement.
- Provides a positive environment in which students are encouraged to be actively engaged in the learning process.

For more information, please apply at:

<https://desertchoice-learnitsystems.icims.com/jobs/1471/special-education-teachers---move-to-phoenix---we-will-relocate-you%21/job>

REQUIREMENTS:

- Valid Arizona Special Education Certification(Cross Categorical or Mild/Moderate)
- Valid Arizona DPS Fingerprint Card with IVP status-Bachelor's degree required
- At least 1 year of experience working with students with emotional disabilities preferred.
- Spanish speaking a plus. Not required.

BENEFITS:

Desert Choice Schools/Learn It Systems offers a competitive compensation plan, comprehensive benefits and 401(k)plan. We are most proud of Desert Choice Schools' collaborative team approach, professional development, and structured, strong mentorship program.

Desert Choice Schools/Learn It Systems is an Equal Opportunity Employer. Candidates must be presently eligible to work in the United States

CONTACT:

Alonza Stith 3600 Clipper Mill Road, Suite #330

(410)-369-0000 Ext. 124

Cathy Kubsik: cathy.kubsik@learnitsystems.com

Special Education Teacher

Kingston, PA

Job Category: Special Education

Description:

The Graham Academy has immediate openings for special education positions within both their autism support and emotional support K-12 classrooms.

The Graham Academy is a private academic K-12 school for students living with autism and students living with emotional challenges to excel in life through communication, exploration, opportunity, acceptance, and accountability.

Requirements:

Professional certification required.

Benefits:

Competitive salary and benefits.

Contact:

Please submit cover letter and resume to info@thegrahamacademy.com

Include name and position applying for in subject line.

Learn more by visiting www.thegrahamacademy.com

Special Education Teachers

Kingman, Az

Job Category: Elementary, Middle, and High School Special Education

DESCRIPTION:

Work a four day week in sunny Arizona! Kingman Unified School District is now hiring Elementary, Middle and High School Special Education Teachers for the 2017-2018 school year. We offer a great, low cost, quality of life in a small city just 90 minutes from Las Vegas. Enjoy our "45-10" school calendar that features a two week Fall Break, Winter Break, and Spring Break, not to mention seven weeks off each summer! We also have a comprehensive medical, dental, vision and life insurance package with ZERO out of pocket costs for premiums. The District actually contributes \$18 per month into a Health Savings Account for you! Whether you enjoy the bright lights of the big city in Las Vegas or Phoenix, or the twinkling lights of stars in a night sky over the Grand Canyon, Kingman is the spot for you! Apply today!

REQUIREMENTS:

Arizona Teacher Certification or Bachelor's Degree and ability to obtain Arizona Teacher Certification (traditional or alternative pathway). Please reach out to Human Resources Department 928-753-5678 Ext.2007 with questions.

BENEFITS:

Highly Qualified Special Education Teachers receive a \$2,000 signing bonus and \$2,500 compensation for case management. Our TIF5 (Teacher Incentive Fund) Grant will also pay returning teachers, who are rated as effective, upwards of \$5,000 in the Fall of 2019. Get in on the ground floor of this opportunity!

CONTACT:

Please email your resume to Human Resources Director: Heather Shaw-Burton hshawburton@kusd.org or apply online at www.kusd.org. We would love to welcome you to Kingman!

Teaching in New York City

New York City, NY

Job Category: Full Time Teaching

DESCRIPTION:

The New York City Department of Education is looking for bright, motivated, and dedicated teachers who are passionate about sparking opportunity for all students. With over 1,800 schools and 1.1 million students, New York City provides endless opportunities for you to hone your craft and build your career.

Whether in Coney Island or the South Bronx, our team of exceptional educators is passionate about urban education and is fiercely committed to success for all students. Our schools range in size (from 200-4,000 students) and are as diverse as our students and the neighborhoods we serve, allowing you to choose a school community that fits your needs as an educator. And with more than 200 innovative partnerships with leading arts, science and cultural organizations around the city, you will never run out of ways to expand your curriculum and pique students' interest.

New York City public schools are committed to fostering curiosity and confidence in all students, and jumpstarting the next generation of innovators, leaders and citizens. Now is your chance to help us make that happen.

COMPENSATION AND BENEFITS:

New York City public schools offer competitive starting salaries ranging from \$54,000 to \$81,694, based on prior teaching experience as well as your undergraduate and graduate education.

You may also become eligible for additional income through a wide array of incentives and school positions that will stretch and challenge you as an educator.

You might earn additional grants by teaching in a select, high-need school as part of our Teachers of Tomorrow program, or by helping your colleagues develop in one of our many teacher leadership roles .

REQUIREMENTS:

To apply to teach in New York City, candidates must first meet the following requirements:

- Possess or be on track to earn a New York State Department of Education (NYSED) teaching certification by the start of the 2017-18 school year. If you are not already NYSED-certified, there are several ways to obtain certification .
- Complete an online teacher application at TeachNYC.net

Learn more about our application requirements and deadlines and apply to teach in New York City today!

APPLY:

http://teachnyc.net/?utm_source=job-board&utm_medium=job-posting&utm_campaign=2017-applications&utm_term=Spark&utm_content=Naset

Coordinator, ADA and Student Disabilities Services

Elgin, Illinois, 60123

Job Category: Full Time

Elgin Community College (ECC) is a comprehensive, fully accredited community college located in Elgin, Illinois, one of its most rapidly growing cities. Our district encompasses 360 square miles, serving 400,000 people, 11,000 businesses with four public school districts and 15 high schools. ECC was selected as one of five Illinois community colleges to participate in the national Achieving the Dream (AtD) initiative. is a long-term national initiative that collaborates with community colleges to help more students earn degrees, complete certificates, or transfer to four-year institutions to continue their studies. The park-like setting of our 145 acre Main Campus offers instruction spanning nine major buildings with beautiful views. ECC also offers classes throughout the northwest suburbs of Chicago with more than 100 off-campus locations.

Function:

Serves as the college's ADA Coordinator for students and college liaison. Per the ADA laws, provide accommodation services to students with disabilities; i.e., sign language interpreters, accommodation letters, audio texts, other assistive technology/devices, test reader/writer services. Document and track students and services and provide information to various administrative offices as needed; i.e., Institutional Research.

Must be willing to work a flexible schedule to meet the needs of the department.

Some evenings will be required. Two to three times per month, this position will have the responsibility as an evening administrators and will work from 10 am - 7 pm on those assigned dates. May also be required to facilitate presentations on ADA compliance issues and the Disability Services program to faculty at the beginning of each term on a Saturday.

Essential Responsibilities:

1. Update/write Administrative Procedures for disabilities; oversee ADA compliance; liaison with college's legal department, ICCB, & Office of Civil Rights.
2. Collect, analyze, & authorize disability accommodation information. Compose individualized accommodation letters for students to present to faculty. Maintain confidential disability documentation.
3. Provide required accommodations including sign language interpreters, audio texts, test reader/writers, Learning Ally membership for students, software/hardware purchases or updates, furniture needs.
4. Act as liaison for students, parents, faculty, college departments, high schools, disability agencies and organizations.
5. Supervision of SAIL, 300+, contractual sign language interpreters.
6. Prepare/update MOUs and ensure compliance.
7. Serve as ADAPT club advisor.
8. Oversee department's budget.

Requirements:

1. Master's degree (MA) or equivalent in Special Education.
2. Three years working with students with disabilities in higher education.
3. Knowledge of high school special education programs.
4. Working knowledge of current ADA, 504 and other disability laws and regulations.
5. Excellent listening, speaking, reading, writing communication skills.
6. Excellent computer skills and software knowledge including Microsoft Office which includes Word, Excel, PowerPoint and Outlook.
7. Knowledge and comprehension of FERPA and confidentiality requirements.

Desired Qualifications:

1. Working knowledge of Ellucian Colleague or other ERP software.

For a detailed job posting and to apply, please visit our web site at: <https://jobs.elgin.edu/applicants/Central?quickFind=52346>

Elgin Community College is an Equal Employment, Equal Access Employer committed to increasing the diversity of our workforce.

PI97271837

Contact:

Apply Here: <https://jobs.elgin.edu/applicants/Central?quickFind=52346>

Special Education Specialist

Multiple Locations

Description:

The primary responsibility of the Special Education Specialist is to provide instruction and other related services to Special Education students. The Special Education Specialist will also facilitate diagnostic assessment including administration, scoring and interpretation. Will review and revise IEP's as needed. Will support instruction in reading, math, and written language for students, tutor individual and small groups of students, administer and score academic testing, write individualized education plans and support other academic programs as needed. The Special Education Specialist will work under the leadership of the Program Specialist and the Director of Special Education. This position will be available to provide direct instruction to students 6 hours a day.

Essential Functions include, but are not limited to the following:*

- Provide instruction to students with special needs and identified learning disabilities in a special education program.
- Tutor individual and small groups of students, reinforcing language and reading concepts.
- Administer and score individual and group tests.
- Schedule IEP meetings, coordinating schedules with parents, general education teacher(s), administrator, and all appropriate special education staff.
- Conduct IEP meetings.
- Communicate and coordinate special needs evaluation and testing with speech teacher, psychologist, and other service providers.
- Communicate with parents regarding individual student progress and conduct.
- Maintain progress records and record progress toward IEP goals.
- Record progress within the independent study program.
- Perform other duties in support of the Special Education Specialist program.
- Support other academic programs offered within the independent study program.
- Various openings in Burbank region, San Gabriel region, Victor Valley region, Inland Empire region, San Bernardino region, and San Juan region.

Knowledge, Skills and Abilities Required:

- Special Education Specialist Certificate or ability to obtain Mild/Moderate Certificate.
- Ability to teach students of grades K-12.
- Ability to work with children of all ages.
- Ability to understand, adopt, and support the independent study program, concepts and their philosophies.
- Ability to organize and present ideas effectively in oral and written form.
- Ability to make skillful decisions.
- Ability to work under pressure and meet deadlines.
- Ability to operate a PC computer, word processor, copier, FAX, and other office machines.

Education and Experience:

- BA/BS Degree
- Valid California Teaching Credential in Special Education (Mild/Moderate)

Contact:

Nehia Hearn
Human Resources Assistant
Direct: 626) 204-2552 Fax: 626) 685-9316
nhearn@ofy.org

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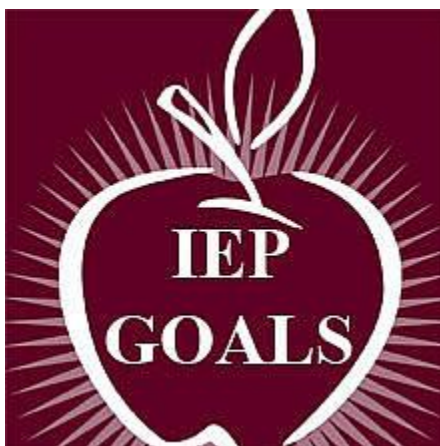
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NASET Application for iPad and iPhone



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