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NASET Special Educator e-Journal

Exceptional Teachers Teaching Exceptional Children

Table of Contents

Special Education Legal Alert	3
Buzz from the Hub	7
Update from the U.S. Department of Education	9
Learning Disabilities	10
Partnering for Student Success: How Special Educators Can Collaborate Effectively with Administrators	22
Acknowledgements	30

Special Education Legal Alert

Perry A. Zirkel

October 2025

This month's update identifies two recent court decisions that respectively illustrate specialized ADA and IDEA issues. For related publications and special supplements, see perryzirkel.com

On October 2, 2025, a federal district court in New Hampshire issued an unofficially published decision in <i>National Education Association-New Hampshire v. N.H. Attorney General</i>, addressing the enforceability of the state's recently enacted laws that ban public schools and other public entities from engaging in activities related to "diversity, equity, and inclusion" (DEI). Violations, whether knowing or unknowing, require termination of all public funding. In two previous lawsuits, this court struck down as unconstitutional similar laws or executive actions targeting "divisive concepts" or "DEI." Here, the plaintiffs, which included the state teachers' association and four school districts, sought a preliminary injunction based not only on the federal and state constitutions, but also the IDEA, Section 504, and the ADA. The criteria for such immediate court relief are likelihood of success, irreparable harm, and the balance of equities, including the public interest.	
The constitutional challenges included the void for vagueness doctrine under the Fourteenth Amendment's due process clause.	Citing its previous decisions and similar rulings in the federal district courts in D.C. and Maryland, the court concluded that the plaintiffs were likely to succeed on their vagueness claim based on these laws' unfairly elastic prohibitions and their potentially arbitrary application, as exemplified by students with disabilities in relation to other student groups.
The IDEA challenge was based on the preemption doctrine, which provides that federal law supersedes conflicting state law.	Finding that these anti-DEI laws prohibit schools from doing what the IDEA requires, including classifying students based on disability to improve their educational outcomes, the court concluded that plaintiffs were likely to succeed on the IDEA preemption claim.
The plaintiffs' Section 504 and ADA claim was also based on preemption.	The court reached the same preemption conclusion based on the inescapable conflict between these federal disability anti-discrimination laws and the

	state's anti-DEI laws.
The plaintiffs contended that they also met the irreparable harm requirement.	The court agreed based on not only the crippling financial consequences but also the hindrance to the schools' core mission, "especially ... for students with disabilities."
The plaintiffs additionally argued that they met the final requirement for the injunction.	The court agreed, finding that the balance of equities, which merged with public interest in this case, was clearly in the plaintiffs' favor.
The plaintiffs sought a universal injunction, whereas defendants asserted that such relief be limited specifically to the plaintiffs.	Finding a middle ground between these two positions, the court enjoined the defendants from enforcing the laws against public entities that employ or contract with plaintiffs or their members or serve students with disabilities.
Although the issue of anti-DEI laws is part of a much larger and ongoing political and judicial controversy, the reason for including it in our monthly update is the rather crucial role of students with disabilities, which was not only clear in the IDEA and Section 504/ADA bases of the decision but also notable in the court's analysis of its void-for-vagueness constitutional claim.	

On September 28, 2025, the federal district court in Nevada issued an unofficially published decision in <i>C.W. v. Nevada Department of Education</i>. The plaintiffs were parents of 12 students with disabilities and a national parental advocacy organization. The defendants were the Clark County School District, which is the fifth largest district in the country, and Nevada's state education agency (SEA). The plaintiffs claimed various systemic deficiencies in the defendant-district's policies and practices and in the defendant-state's supervisory oversight allegedly in violation of the IDEA and Section 504/ADA. The identified district deficiencies included, for example, systemwide inadequacies in child find activities, special education staffing, professional development, dyslexia and autism services, and inclusion support. The defendants filed preliminary motions, such as dismissal, to dispose of this lawsuit or parts of it (e.g., its class action aspect) on various alternative grounds.	
The defendant district moved for dismissal or a more definite statement as to the plaintiff's IDEA and Section 504/ADA claims.	Rejecting this motion, the court concluded that the plaintiffs' allegations were sufficiently specific to give the defendants fair notice of a requisite basis for their claims under the IDEA and Section 504/ADA.
The defendant district also filed a motion to strike the allegations beyond the 12 named plaintiffs as failing to qualify as a class action.	The court delayed a ruling for this claim, concluding that it should await the plaintiff's motion for class certification after the parties have had the opportunity to further develop the record for this purpose.
The defendant SEA filed a motion to dismiss the IDEA claims on the grounds that (a) the IDEA does not provide plaintiffs with a right to sue a SEA and (b) the plaintiffs failed to exhaust the available administrative	Denying this motion, the court concluded that in the Ninth Circuit (a) plaintiffs have an implied, although not express, right of private action to bring systemic claims against an SEA, and (b) various specific allegations in this case qualify for the systemic exception to the exhaustion requirement.

adjudication procedure of a due process hearing under the IDEA.	
The defendant SEA sought to eliminate the advocacy organization on the basis that it lacked “standing” to serve as a plaintiff in this case.	Disagreeing, the court concluded that some of the parents whose children were allegedly denied FAPE in this case provided the basis for organizational standing because they were members of the organization.
The defendant SEA also filed a motion to dismiss the Section 504/ADA claims for failure to show “bad faith or gross misjudgment.”	Also rejecting this argument, the court concluded that both the Ninth Circuit and, more recently, the Supreme Court have applied instead the “deliberate indifference” standard in the Section 504/ADA context.
This decision is only the first phase in what may be prolonged proceedings, which includes various subsequent hurdles for plaintiffs and which is more likely to end in an adverse decision or some sort of settlement than a conclusively precedential victory. Nevertheless, this case illustrates the increasing trend for plaintiff parents and their organizations to seek systemic reform and wider liability via lawsuits under the IDEA and Section 504/ADA against large school districts and, especially, SEAs. Thus far, as exemplified in my 2022 article , the reported outcomes of these lawsuits have varied widely depending on the specific factual contours and the particular jurisdictions in which they arise.	

Buzz from the Hub

<https://www.parentcenterhub.org/buzz-october2025/>

New Infographic from the National Consortium for Physical Education for Individuals with Disabilities (NCPEID)

The NCPEID's infographic, *How Do I Get Adapted Physical Education Services for My Child in Special Education?*, explains how students with disabilities ages 3-21 have a right to physical education, including Adapted Physical Education (APE) if needed, in their least restrictive environment. It also explains why it is important for students with disabilities to participate in physical education and how to request/receive APE services.

[View the infographic here.](#)

How to Engage Your Child in the Early Years

Experiences that occur during the earliest years of life strongly impact the abilities of infants and toddlers to learn, move, and interact with others. In recognition of this, especially for children who are deafblind, the National Center on Deafblindness (NCDB) has compiled some resources to help families understand the critical role they play in fostering the early development of their child.

[Find the links to the resources here.](#)

Education Choice: School Choice Guidance and Resources for Parents, Families, States, and Local Education Agencies (LEAs)

The Department of Education (ED) has created a page with education choice related guidance and resources for parents, families, states, and local education agencies (LEAs). This page includes information on private schools, charter schools, homeschooling, magnet schools, and other personalized learning options.

[Access the page here.](#)

How to Sharpen Executive Functions: Activities to Hone Brain Skills

This article published by ADDitude explains that executive functioning skills (EFs) range from working memory to cognitive flexibility to inhibitory control, and beyond. EFs power our daily functioning, future planning, and mental/physical health. It provides suggestions and ideas on how to improve core executive functioning skills through different activities, exercises, and games.

[Read the article here.](#)

RAISE Adult Ally Podcast

The *Adult Ally Podcast Series* amplifies the voices of dedicated advocates who are driving meaningful change. Created specifically for the adult ally toolkit, funded by the RAISE Center, the series highlights the lived experiences of adult allies who actively support and uplift young people, centering their needs, aspirations, and agency through in-depth conversations.

[Listen to the podcast here.](#)

How to Do a Document Review – Video Series

Parents can learn how to navigate and review special education documents through PACER's 5-part video series. Each video is less than 5 minutes long and the series teaches parents how to do a solid special education document review. It also explains what to look for in the evaluation report, the IEP, and progress reports, and how they work together. Parts 3, 4, and 5 can also be viewed individually if a parent just wants a better understanding of each type of document.

[View the videos here.](#)

Webinar Series: Powering Digital Accessibility Through Systemic Action

This free interactive webinar series will prepare state and local education teams to implement

NCADEMI's (National Center on Accessible Digital Educational Materials & Instruction) *Quality Indicators for the Provision and Use of Accessible Materials in PreK-12 Systems* and will serve as a foundation for those considering their optional year-long targeted technical assistance (TTA). Enrollment in the TTA begins in January 2026. The sessions will consist of six focused 50-minute sessions, tailored office hours, and practical tools. Office hours will be offered between sessions to answer questions and provide additional support. Office hours are optional, not recorded, and will have a separate registration link.

Participate individually or with others from your state or district to learn how the Quality Indicators can lead to systemic change.

Dates: Oct 9, 2025, Oct 23, 2025, Nov 6, 2025, Nov 20, 2025, Dec 4, 2025, Dec 18, 2025

Time: All sessions will begin at 2:00 PM ET.

[Register here.](#)

Update from the U.S. Department of Education

<https://www.ed.gov/>

Birth to Grade 12 Education-Resources

<https://www.ed.gov/birth-to-grade-12-education>

Available Grants

<https://www.ed.gov/grants-and-programs/apply-grant/available-grants>

U.S. Department of Education Announces Final Rule on Public Service Loan Forgiveness to Protect American Taxpayers

October 30, 2025

The U.S. Department of Education released its final rule to restore the taxpayer-funded Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) program to its intended purpose of benefitting Americans working in public service.

U.S. Secretary of Education Linda McMahon Announces New Members and Names Next Chair of the National Assessment Governing Board

September 30, 2025

U.S. Secretary of Education Linda McMahon named Tennessee Representative Mark White as Chair of the National Assessment Governing Board. Secretary McMahon also announced the appointment of two education leaders.

Learning Disabilities

By Dr. Faye J. Jones

Learning disabilities (LD) are neurodevelopmental conditions that can significantly affect how individuals process and retain new information

(<https://www.verywellmind.com/learning-disabilities-types-causes-symptoms-and-treatment>).

Despite these challenges, many people with LD possess average to above-average intelligence and frequently demonstrate exceptional strengths in areas such as mathematics, science, the arts, and other creative fields.

The key issue often lies in a gap between a person's innate potential and the academic or functional expectations typically associated with their age or role. Recognizing and supporting these individuals' unique strengths—while providing appropriate accommodations—can foster greater inclusion, innovation, and productivity in any work environment.

Types of Learning Disabilities: ([Learning Disabilities: Types, Causes, Symptoms, and Treatment](#)).

Dyslexia is the most prevalent form of learning disability, representing approximately 80% of all cases (mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/dyslexia/symptoms). It is a language-based processing disorder that affects an individual's ability to speak, read, write, and comprehend verbal or written language.

These challenges may result in a slower rate of vocabulary development and difficulties with grammar, reading fluency, and overall comprehension. Understanding dyslexia is crucial for

fostering inclusive environments where employees or team members with learning differences can thrive and contribute their strengths effectively.

Dysgraphia is a learning disability that affects written expression (wellwisp.com/what-does-dysgraphia-mean). Individuals with dysgraphia may experience challenges with spelling, grammar, vocabulary usage, memory retention, and organizing thoughts on paper. One of the key characteristics is impaired handwriting, which can appear messy or inconsistent.

This condition often makes it difficult to think and write at the same time, which can impact productivity, especially in environments that rely heavily on written communication. Awareness of dysgraphia and the provision of supportive tools—such as speech-to-text software or alternative formats for documenting ideas—can empower individuals to perform effectively and contribute fully in the workplace.

Dyscalculia, sometimes referred to as "math dyslexia," is a learning disability that affects an individual's ability to understand and work with numbers and mathematical concepts (my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/23949-dyscalculia). This condition can impact core skills such as counting money, reading clocks, performing mental calculations, recognizing number patterns, and applying formulas.

In professional settings, individuals with dyscalculia may face challenges with tasks involving numerical reasoning or time management. By implementing supportive practices—like using visual aids, calculators, or timekeeping tools—organizations can empower team members with dyscalculia to thrive and contribute meaningfully.

Auditory Processing Disorder (APD) is a neurological condition in which the brain struggles to accurately interpret sounds, even though hearing ability is typically normal (Auditory processing disorder: kids & teens). Individuals with APD may experience difficulty distinguishing similar sounds, recognizing the order of spoken words, or filtering out background noise.

In work environments, this can affect verbal communication, especially in group discussions or noisy settings. Support strategies—such as providing written instructions, allowing extra processing time, or using assistive listening technologies—can significantly improve engagement and productivity for team members with APD.

Language Processing Disorder (LPD) is a subtype of Auditory Processing Disorder that specifically affects how spoken language is understood and interpreted (What Is Language Processing Disorder? The Complete Guide). Individuals with LPD may struggle to assign meaning to verbal information, such as distinguishing between similar-sounding words or understanding sentences and stories in real time.

In professional environments, this can lead to difficulties following verbal instructions, participating in fast-paced conversations, or comprehending meetings without visual or written support. Employing strategies like providing written follow-ups, visual aids, or breaking down complex information can enhance communication and ensure meaningful inclusion for individuals with LPD.

Nonverbal Learning Disabilities (NVLD) are neurological conditions that impact a person's ability to interpret nonverbal forms of communication ([Nonverbal Learning Disorder | Psychology Today](#)). Individuals with NVLD may have difficulty understanding facial

expressions, body language, tone of voice, spatial awareness, and other contextual cues that are essential for effective social interaction.

In the workplace, these challenges can influence team communication, interpersonal dynamics, or performance in unstructured situations. Providing clear, direct verbal communication and fostering a supportive, inclusive environment can greatly enhance the participation and success of team members with NVLD.

Visual Perceptual and Visual Motor Deficits are neurological conditions that can affect how individuals process visual information and coordinate physical responses (Visual Perceptual Motor Deficit). These challenges often impact hand-eye coordination, spatial awareness, and fine motor skills.

In a workplace setting, individuals with these deficits may experience difficulty tracking lines of text while reading, confuse visually similar letters or symbols, or struggle with tasks that involve manual dexterity—such as handling office tools, organizing materials, or navigating unfamiliar environments. Providing visual aids, clear signage, ergonomic tools, and alternative methods for completing tasks can help create a more accessible and productive work environment.

Common Symptoms of Learning Disabilities

Learning disabilities can present a wide range of cognitive, behavioral, and communication-related challenges (Learning Disabilities: Types, Causes, Symptoms, and Treatment). While the severity and combination of symptoms vary by individual, common signs may include:

Difficulty with reading, writing, or understanding written materials

Short attention span or frequent lapses in focus

Problems with memory retention and information recall

Trouble distinguishing between similar sounds, letters, or numbers

Challenges in sounding out unfamiliar words or sequencing letters and numbers correctly

Difficulty expressing thoughts, emotions, or organizing ideas verbally or in writing

Confusion between left and right or difficulty telling time

Reversal of letters or numbers when writing or reading

Limited understanding of abstract words or complex concepts

Poor hand-eye coordination and trouble with fine motor tasks

Delays in speech development or verbal processing

Disorganization or frequent loss of personal items and materials

Difficulty listening, following verbal instructions, or adapting to change

Inappropriate or impulsive responses in conversations or tasks

Behavioral signs such as restlessness, acting out, or resistance to discipline

Inconsistent performance despite demonstrated potential or effort

Awareness of these signs can help organizations identify when accommodations or support strategies might be needed. With inclusive practices in place, individuals with learning disabilities can contribute meaningfully and thrive in diverse professional environments.

Persistent Challenges and Emotional Impact of Learning Disabilities

While many children experience occasional difficulties with focus, reading, organization, or communication during their school years, individuals with learning disabilities typically exhibit a consistent cluster of these challenges that continue into adolescence and adulthood ([How Learning Disabilities Affect Emotional Health - Searchbing.com](#)). These patterns are not simply developmental delays but enduring traits that require strategic support and understanding.

According to the National Institute for Learning Development (NILD), frustration is a common emotional response among individuals with learning disabilities (nild.org/learning-disabilities). This often stems from a keen awareness of the contrast between their areas of strength and the tasks they find exceptionally difficult. Despite strong abilities in certain subjects or creative pursuits, they may struggle with foundational skills, which can lead to discouragement, reduced confidence, or anxiety in both academic and professional settings.

Recognizing this internal tension is key to creating a supportive work environment—one that values individual potential, embraces diverse learning styles, and provides resources that empower all team members to succeed.

Causes of Learning Disabilities

Learning disabilities arise from differences in the brain's neurological functioning, which affect how individuals process information, learn new skills, and retain knowledge ([verywellmind.com/learning-disabilities](https://www.verywellmind.com/learning-disabilities)). These differences may originate before birth, during delivery, or in early childhood. Common contributing factors include:

Maternal illness or complications during pregnancy

Oxygen deprivation during birth

Genetic predispositions linked to learning disabilities

Early childhood injuries or illnesses, such as meningitis

Certain developmental conditions like cerebral palsy and Down syndrome, which may be associated with learning impairments

It's important to distinguish learning disabilities from learning challenges caused by other factors. These may include:

Sensory impairments (e.g., vision, hearing, or motor difficulties)

Intellectual disabilities

Emotional or behavioral disturbances

Socioeconomic, cultural, or environmental disadvantages

Accurate identification and differentiation are critical to ensuring individuals receive the appropriate support, accommodations, and interventions that align with their specific needs.

Diagnosing Learning Disabilities

The diagnosis of learning disabilities is typically carried out by qualified healthcare or educational professionals through a comprehensive evaluation process ([healthline.com/health/testing-for-learning-disability](https://www.healthline.com/health/testing-for-learning-disability)). This process often includes:

Academic Assessment: Standardized tests measure key skills in reading, writing, and mathematics, along with intelligence quotient (IQ) testing to identify potential learning gaps relative to cognitive ability.

Performance Review: A detailed analysis of the individual's academic, professional, social, and developmental history helps build a full understanding of functional strengths and challenges.

Medical and Family History: Evaluators may gather information about health history to identify possible genetic, developmental, or environmental influences.

Physical and Neurological Examination: These exams help rule out or identify other conditions—such as neurological disorders or developmental delays—that may impact learning.

Every learning disability presents differently and each individual's experience is unique. Some may have a single, clearly defined difficulty, while others experience overlapping challenges that can affect multiple areas of functioning.

Most learning disabilities emerge during early childhood and are often diagnosed during the school years. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, during the 2022–2023

academic year, specific learning disabilities accounted for 32% of all disability classifications under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (nces.ed.gov).

However, some individuals are not formally diagnosed until adulthood—often during college or upon entering the workforce. Others may go undiagnosed entirely, navigating life with persistent academic, occupational, or social difficulties without understanding the root cause.

Recognizing these conditions early and accurately is critical to creating effective support systems, both in academic and professional environments.

Treating Learning Disabilities

Learning disabilities are lifelong neurological conditions, not curable disorders (Learning Disabilities: Types, Causes, Symptoms, and Treatment). However, with timely identification, targeted intervention, and the right support systems, individuals with learning disabilities can succeed and thrive in academic, professional, and community environments.

Effective management strategies may include specialized instruction, assistive technologies, workplace accommodations, and coaching focused on individual strengths. When organizations foster inclusive practices and provide ongoing resources, employees with learning disabilities are better equipped to reach their full potential and contribute meaningfully.

Treatment Approaches for Learning Disabilities

Although learning disabilities are lifelong conditions, a range of support strategies and interventions can help individuals manage challenges and succeed across academic, professional, and social environments. Common treatment approaches include:

Specialized Instruction: Trained educators and specialists work with individuals—especially during school years—to evaluate learning profiles, build on strengths, and develop personalized strategies that address specific challenges.

Medication: In some cases, medication may be prescribed to support concentration, reduce hyperactivity, or manage co-occurring conditions such as ADHD, which can impact learning.

Therapy and Counseling: Psychotherapy or cognitive-behavioral therapy can assist individuals in managing emotional stress, building self-esteem, and developing effective coping skills.

Targeted Interventions: Speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, or academic coaching may be introduced to address specific skill deficits or developmental needs.

Support Networks: Peer groups and community-based support, whether for individuals or families, can provide encouragement, share strategies, and reduce the sense of isolation often associated with learning challenges.

When paired with workplace accommodations and inclusive practices, these treatments can significantly enhance confidence, engagement, and long-term success.

Every individual brings a unique set of strengths and challenges to the table. While certain tasks may come easily to some, others may require different approaches or support. Individuals with

learning disabilities may face specific difficulties related to processing or acquiring information, but these challenges do not reflect a lack of intelligence or potential.

With access to appropriate support, such as specialized instruction, tailored treatment plans, and a compassionate, understanding environment, individuals with learning disabilities can thrive both personally and professionally. A workplace culture grounded in empathy, patience, and inclusion ensures that every team member has the opportunity to succeed and contribute their full potential.

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Partnering for Student Success: How Special Educators Can Collaborate Effectively with Administrators

Maria B. Peterson-Ahmad, PhD

Randa G. Keeley, PhD

In today's schools, collaboration between special educators and administrators isn't just helpful, it's essential. Whether you're a new teacher navigating your first IEP meetings or a veteran advocating for program improvements, strong partnerships with school leaders can make the difference between feeling isolated and feeling supported. When teachers and administrators work together, students with disabilities benefit from more consistent, inclusive, and high-quality instruction. This article offers practical strategies for special educators to build productive, trust-based relationships with administrators. Grounded in research on inclusive leadership, effective communication, and evidence-based practice, these ideas can help you strengthen your professional voice, advocate for your students, and collaborate more confidently with your leadership team.

1. Building a Partnership Mindset

The foundation of effective collaboration with administrators starts with perspective. While it can be easy to view administrators as decision-makers "above" the classroom, the most successful partnerships recognize that both roles share the same goal: student success.

Adopt a shared-leadership approach. Administrators rely on special educators to provide expertise about students with disabilities, IEP implementation, and inclusive practices. Rather than waiting for direction, bring that expertise to the table. Initiate conversations about what's working in your classroom, share student progress data, and identify where support or resources could make a difference.

Communicate with clarity and context. Administrators often balance competing demands such as compliance, scheduling, staffing, and instructional quality. When bringing up an issue, frame it with context, as this approach shows initiative and partnership rather than problem dumping:

“Our students are making progress in reading with the new intervention, but small-group time has been challenging to schedule. Could we explore ways to adjust the master schedule to make that work?”

Build mutual trust through transparency. Share your instructional goals, the strategies you’re using, and what you need to make them effective. Administrators are more likely to advocate for you when they understand the “why” behind your requests.

2. Collaborating for Classroom and Program Support

Special education teachers often juggle instructional responsibilities, compliance paperwork, and cross-department collaboration. Working with your administrator proactively can reduce that load and create systemic improvements that benefit everyone.

Start with shared priorities. Align your conversations with the school’s or district’s goals, for example, literacy growth, attendance improvement, or behavior support. When administrators see how special education initiatives contribute to broader school objectives, they are more likely to prioritize them.

Use data as a conversation tool. Administrators respond well to concrete evidence. Bring progress monitoring data, examples of student work, or summaries of IEP goal attainment to illustrate the impact of your work. Data shifts the conversation from personal advocacy (“*I need more support*”) to student-centered collaboration (“*Our students could make even greater progress if...*”).

Seek clarity and solutions collaboratively. When challenges arise, such as unclear service minutes, limited paraprofessional support, or scheduling barriers, invite administrators into the problem-solving process:

“Can we look at options together to make sure service minutes are delivered without disrupting core instruction?”

This approach emphasizes teamwork, not tension.

Stay visible and involved. Volunteer for leadership teams, serve on MTSS or campus improvement committees, or invite your administrator to observe a co-taught lesson. Visibility builds credibility and reinforces your role as an instructional leader.

3. Strengthening Practice Together: Using EBPs and HLPs

Administrators may not always have deep expertise in special education, but most want to learn how to support it better. You can be the bridge by sharing evidence-based practices (EBPs) and high-leverage practices (HLPs) that benefit all learners.

Use shared language. When discussing instruction, reference practices that administrators already know (such as differentiated instruction or formative assessment) and connect them to special education strategies, including explicit modeling, scaffolding, or frequent feedback.

Model and share success. Invite your administrator to observe EBPs and HLPs in action, such as a co-taught lesson that emphasizes student engagement or a small-group session demonstrating explicit instruction. When administrators observe these strategies firsthand, they’re more likely to invest in professional development or materials that sustain them.

Collaborate on professional learning. Suggest short, joint PD sessions or peer-learning communities focused on topics like progress monitoring, behavior supports, or inclusive lesson

design. When you and your administrator learn together, it reinforces a shared commitment to continuous improvement.

4. Putting It into Practice: Strengthening Your Administrator Partnership

Here are a few actions you can take right now to deepen your collaboration with administrators:

- Schedule a short check-in (even 15 minutes) each month to share highlights, concerns, or quick wins from your classroom.
- Use positive data storytelling by pairing progress data with student anecdotes to make outcomes more meaningful.
- Frame advocacy as a partnership. Instead of “I need more support,” try “Here’s what would help our students make the next leap.”
- Invite your administrator to observe a successful lesson or IEP implementation activity. Seeing impact firsthand builds understanding.
- Provide quick summaries or visuals, as administrators appreciate concise updates that clearly connect your work to school goals.
- Keep a shared problem-solving mindset. Approach discussions with solutions and flexibility, rather than just making requests.

Conclusion

When special educators and administrators work as partners, schools become more inclusive, responsive, and supportive for all students. Collaboration isn’t about hierarchy, it’s about shared expertise and mutual learning. By approaching your administrator as a teammate in problem-solving, advocating with data and professionalism, and celebrating joint successes, you not only strengthen your own practice but also help build a culture where every student with a disability can thrive.

Maria Peterson-Ahmad, Ph.D. is the Associate Dean of Research and Innovation and an Associate Professor of Special Education at Texas Woman's University in Denton, TX. Her research concentration focuses on teacher effectiveness, particularly for general and special education teachers of students with mild/moderate disabilities. She serves on the Executive Committee and the Board of Trustees for the Council for Learning Disabilities. She has also collaborated with the CEEDAR Center to create professional development materials on high leverage practices.

Randa G. Keeley, PhD is an Associate Professor of Special Education at Texas Woman's University in Denton, TX with a research concentration in classroom interventions that promote inclusive learning environments for students with special educational needs and disabilities. Her research interests include the application of quantitative and qualitative measures to analyze the effects of inclusive practices, culturally responsive teaching, technology, and co-teaching as they relate to the teacher and student.

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