

## **MCKINLEYVILLE MIDDLE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP SITE PROFILE**

### ***Introduction***

McKinleyville Middle School serves over 370 students in grades 6-8 in the town of McKinleyville in northwest Humboldt County. The middle school is part of the three-school McKinleyville Union District and received a Leadership Award in 2005 for collaboration. Forty-three percent of the school's students receive free or reduced price meals, and 15% are in special education. Less than 1% of the students are English Language Learners.

### ***The Impetus for Change***

Prior to adoption of a collaborative model, McKinleyville's special education was delivered in a traditional model, with resource support provided through pull-out classes, and Special Day classes taught in separate classrooms for almost all of the school day.

In 1999, the latest special education teacher in a position that had seen high turnover gave her notice to the principal, concerned about the behavioral and academic issues she was facing with the children she taught. Rather than accept her resignation, the principal initiated a discussion with the teacher about what the school should do to address the persistent issues related to special education at the school. The teacher sought information about alternative models for educating their middle school students, particularly those in special education. After collecting information through attending a conference and doing online research, the resource teacher was able to suggest some new approaches.

### ***McKinleyville's Model***

McKinleyville's "integrated model," as it is known, was initially implemented on a small scale. In its first year, a general education teacher was identified who was willing to pilot some of the new ideas she had identified through her research. They began in 2000 by team teaching one 8<sup>th</sup> grade classroom with a blended population of students in both special and general education, covering core subjects (language arts, reading, and social studies).

After the first year, the two teachers sought other general education teachers who were willing to try the new approach. Their colleagues, some initially skeptical, were persuaded by the academic and behavioral successes that they witnessed in the classroom. Students, polled for their opinion, expressed strong support for the approach as well. Teachers who participated were provided training opportunities on topics related to inclusion, provided through conferences, including CalSTAT conferences, and consultation with other CalSTAT Leadership Sites.

In the second year, the school expanded the new approach to sixth and seventh grade core classes; and in the third year, to math and science. In 2002 academic support components were added. Now blending and teaming are used universally at the school so that students receiving resource support, and those receiving services in the Special Day Classes, are included in general education classrooms. The integrated model enjoys across-the-board buy-in from the teaching staff.

The school administration has supported the integrated model by providing release time for attendance at conferences, purchasing materials needed for instruction and academic support, and supporting the continued development and change of the model since its inception.

At McKinleyville:

- Students receiving special education services, including those attending Special Day Classes, are taught (with some exceptions) in the general education classroom.
- The resource teacher provides in-class support to the general education teacher's coverage of the curriculum.
- All teachers have received training in differentiated instruction in order to maximize classroom time with all students.
- Academic support is provided to all students regardless of participation in special education: study skills classes are taught as an in-school elective by the resource teacher and a specialist; after-school tutorial programs are offered four days a week for an hour each day; and Saturday school is available for 4 hours on the weekend.
- Special and general education teachers meet weekly in grade level teams to discuss curriculum and individual student placements. They also meet in subject-area groups across grades, though less frequently.
- Planning and initial placements for the fall academic year are done in spring, when the resource teacher and the administration consider students' needs and plan the fall schedule around anticipated student need.

## ***How They Did It***

### **Planning**

Nearly all of the initial planning for the school's collaboration model was carried out by the special education teacher, on her own time, using internet and hardcopy resources. Through her online work she learned of an upcoming CalSTAT Leadership Institute and made arrangements with the principal to attend. The costs of attending the Leadership Institute were the only significant expenses incurred by the school throughout the planning process.

### **Ongoing**

Adopting the inclusion approach has required little additional investment by the school. CalSTAT Leadership Site award money is used to pay for staff development related to collaboration and intervention programs. Otherwise, the program was implemented by reallocating the school's existing resources, particularly with how staff and time were used.

### ***Staff***

Special education staffing at the school was transformed from a traditional service delivery model consisting of pull-out programs for students in the Resource Specialist Program (RSP) and three nearly full-day self-contained classes for students receiving services in special day classes (SDC), to the new integrated model. Under the new integrated model, the two RSP teachers spend most of their day supporting teachers in general education classrooms or teaching intervention classes for all students who need the extra support, not only those with IEPs. The SDC teacher also collaborates with an 8<sup>th</sup> grade general education teacher for one period, three days a week and attends 8<sup>th</sup> grade team meetings. Below is the typical daily schedule for the RSP teachers:

- Two to three periods of team-teaching in general education classrooms in the core subjects of reading, language arts, social studies, math, and science.
- Two to three periods of teaching Academic Success or Reading Intervention classes using a Response to Intervention model. This varies by day and by teacher.
- One planning period that alternates from day to day so the RSP teachers can share common planning time with the general education teachers with whom they collaborate.

The school's paraprofessionals are also used to support inclusion. They are assigned based on need to assist in general education classrooms, or to work one-on-one or in small groups in intervention classes.

*Time*

*Instructional Time.* The school has creatively reworked its schedule to provide time for multiple levels of intervention time, called academic support classes, and for common planning time for collaborating teachers. The academic support classes are offered in lieu of a general education elective period. The school also offers an after-school tutorial program 5 days per week, an after-school math intervention class 3 days per week and a four-hour Saturday tutorial program (see below for more detail).

*Collaboration Time.* During the first several years of implementation the school provided collaboration time before and after school or during lunch periods, paying for the teachers' extra time with money from its CalSTAT grant. They soon discovered that the teachers could not sustain the extended day long-term as the teachers began to feel "burned out" as the school year progressed. For the 2005-06 school year, common planning time was instituted for the first time, providing time for collaboration within the teachers' normal work schedule. Scheduling the common planning time was difficult but well worth the effort. All of the teachers in a department get one common planning period per day. The schedules of the RSP teachers rotate daily so that their planning periods align with the departments with which they collaborate at least one day per week. Grade level teams also meet weekly during lunch.

*Other Resources*

The school receives some additional discretionary resources through the federal Title I program, site council funds and the CalSTAT Leadership Site grant. The district provides professional development and supports the school's after-school program as part of a district-wide initiative. Perhaps the most important contribution by both the district and the local SELPA is their assurance that special education staffing at the school will not be reduced even if caseloads decline.

*Intervention Programs.* The approach allows for multiple intervention strategies aimed at providing additional instructional time for all struggling students. These include:

- **Academic Support Classes.** These are open to all students. They replace an elective and are taught by RSP teachers. They feature small class sizes of about 17 students and provide additional instruction in any core subject area.
- **Intervention Classes.** These classes provide intensive reading intervention for students in grades 6-8. The students are ability grouped for these classes. The school uses site council funds to pay for a half-time teacher who provides release time for a RSP teacher to teach these classes.

- **After-School Program.** The after-school program meets for an hour per day, 5 days per week (M-F). Three teachers work with students using the general education curriculum by re-teaching, pre-teaching upcoming topics, or providing homework help. A Math Lab was added to the program to serve students who are below basic in math. Teachers working in the program are paid a per diem for their time. The program is funded by the district.

The school added a part-time Intervention Coordinator position this year by upgrading a part-time teacher's position to full-time. The additional position was paid for by slightly increasing class sizes.

*Professional Development.* Both the school and the district have been refocusing existing resources for professional development in priority areas. For example, the school trained all of its teachers in differentiated instruction, one of the key elements of the approach. The only additional funds the school has received for professional development are through its CalSTAT grant. The school first used its CalSTAT grant money to pay for collaboration time outside of the regular school day. Today, the money is used almost exclusively for professional development and instructional materials such as AlphaSmart keyboards.

### ***Results***

McKinleyville has noted that its model has affected student behavior, standardized testing scores, and staff turnover.

Detention referrals for children in special education have dropped by 60% since the program began in 2000, attributed mainly to their participation in a general education environment with higher expectations of positive behavior. More students in special education are participating in extra-curricular activities, including sports, than did before the program was instituted.

McKinleyville's API similar-schools ranking rose from seven to ten in two years (from 2003-2005), and resource students' English and math scores have risen steadily since program's inception.

The school has seen special education caseloads decline by more than half since 2002. Under the inclusion model, McKinleyville's teachers are making more effective use of their time, spending less time writing IEPs and more time working directly with students. The staff feels that under this model substantially more students are getting the help they need.

### ***Reasons for Success***

Much of McKinleyville's success in adopting its inclusion model may be attributed to its implementation strategy of starting small and allowing the process to be largely teacher-driven. The success experienced by the first teachers to use the model helped to gain buy-in from the rest of the staff. Teachers also felt supported due to the training they received and a commitment from administration to support them in the classroom.

Finally, teachers credit staff stability for the climate of trust that has been developed through classroom teaming and joint planning and problem solving, which all contribute to the success of their model.

### ***Challenges***

While there was initial resistance by some instructional staff, the evidence of positive impacts on students and on the teaching environment have led to what is now described by teachers as universal buy-in.

### ***Next Steps and Scaling Up***

Two areas on which the school is focusing is providing more intervention options for low-performing students and helping the high school adopt inclusion so that students will experience continuity in programming as they move from middle school to high school.