

MCKINLEYVILLE MIDDLE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP SITE PROFILE

Introduction

McKinleyville Middle School serves over 400 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. Thirty-eight percent of the school's students receive free or reduced price meals, and 12% are in special education. Fewer 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 pullout 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, Mindy Fattig, 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, Ms. Fattig identified a general education teacher who was willing to pilot some of the new ideas she had identified through her research. They began in 2000 by team teaching one 8th 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.

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 7 to 10 in two years (from 2003-2005), and resource students' English and math scores have risen steadily since program inception.

Teachers credit staff stability for the climate of trust that has been developed through classroom teaming and joint planning and problem solving.

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.