

The Special EDge

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New Roles for All Educators

Special Education Within the Context of General Education

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Robert A. Stodden, PhD, Director of the Center on Disability Studies and Professor of Special Education, University of Hawaii at Manoa

he laws that guide the delivery of special education services in the United States have changed significantly over the years in how they envision one central tenet: the requirement that states provide a “free appropriate public education” (FAPE) for all qualified students with disabilities between the ages of 3 and 21.

Education for All Handicapped Children Act

Within the 1975 Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA), Congress originally conceived of FAPE as a procedural process for ensuring that parents and school personnel worked together to develop and implement the individualized education programs (IEP) of students in special education. While the initial legislation focused on ensuring that educational services were provided (the procedures), it did not define FAPE in a way that considered educational progress or meaningful benefit (the substance).

In the ensuing years, numerous court cases explored and clarified the substantive aspects of FAPE necessary for a child with a disability to “benefit educationally” from the provision of special educational services. Subsequent legal interpretations of FAPE, however, did not provide guidance for

educators or parents regarding the “provision of a specific level of education,” nor did these cases seek to address issues of “equality” of educational opportunity for children with disabilities. In addition, the provision of FAPE under the “some educational benefit” standard often resulted in IEP teams making educational placements that were separate from regular educational settings or designing educational programs that were independent of the general education curriculum.

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, follow-up studies were conducted on the performance and outcomes of children with disabilities as they progressed through school and transitioned into postsecondary education and employment. The results of these studies were disappointing and raised questions concerning the need for children with disabilities to experience a more “meaningful benefit” or an equal educational opportunity from the special education services they received. A number of court cases during this period further validated the questions raised by these studies; these cases began expanding the interpretation of FAPE to include the provision of “meaningful educational benefit” or meaningful educational progress or growth. Other cases explored FAPE language as linked to meaning-

ful benefit of instruction, inclusion in the general education curriculum, and access to opportunities provided to students without special needs.

FAPE and the Reauthorizations

EAHCA was reauthorized as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1997 and as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEIA). Those 1997 and 2004 reauthorizations changed the focus of the law—away from just providing for basic access to an education and toward creating

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Informing and supporting parents, educators, and other service providers on special education topics, focusing on research-based practices, legislation, technical support, and current resources



Fred Balcom, Director
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As we enter the new school year, we have many things to do. One of the most important tasks this year for all educators is to help students with disabilities participate in general education as much as possible. The general education environment—the core environment—provides the best access to the content that all students are expected to learn.

We have a unique opportunity to be a part of the work of implementing the newly adopted common core standards in California. We will need to contribute our best ideas regarding appropriate accommodation that can be used in classroom instruction and assessment to ensure that all students are benefiting from these standards.

We also need to ensure the meaning-

ful participation of students with disabilities in the large-scale assessment that all students must take.

This issue of *The Special EDge* provides several perspectives on how to accomplish this important task of full participation. Dr. Robert Stodden gives us an overview of the history and potential of coordinated efforts between special education and general education. We get the federal perspective from Alexa Posny, Assistant Secretary for the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS), and a description of the state-level coordinated efforts between special education and general education within the California Department of Education. Dixon High School is highlighted as an example of successful efforts to implement response to intervention (RtI), one method to assist students to be successful in the general education environment.

This issue also includes the Advisory Commission on Special Education's annual report. I encourage you to read about the activities of the commission during this past year. I have found their input and insight invaluable as we have wrestled with many issues. Their continuing effort to understand the statewide needs of students with disabilities requires your input, as well.

Finally, the legislature and the governor have eliminated portions of Chapter 26.5 of the Government Code that mandated coordinated services with county mental health agencies. We will continue to work with stakeholder groups to collectively develop appropriate policies and practices to ensure that the educationally related needs of these students are met and that they have continual access to appropriate services.

The year ahead promises to be full of challenges, but together we will be able meet them and to continue to improve special education services to all California's students with disabilities. ♦

General and Special Education Work Together

When schools fail to make adequate yearly progress (AYP),¹ some educators and parents are tempted to see special education as the culprit. “After all,” one line of argument runs, “special education has mostly kids with learning disabilities. They must be the ones driving down our scores!”

This kind of scrutiny is generally misguided, since students with disabilities are almost never the single or direct cause of a school’s lack of academic progress. However, a closer look at this group of students may actually be warranted when a school’s scores are low—although for reasons other than the obvious.

Students with disabilities often serve as “the canary in the coal mine.” Along with the other categories of students who are academically at risk—such as students who live in poverty or those whose first language is not English—these students are more susceptible to the fallout of academic and instructional inadequacies. They typically need more focused and intense instruction, sometimes at a slower pace. When these kinds of interventions are not provided as part of the general curriculum, more students end up deficient in basic skills and then, ultimately, labeled with a disability. In addition, the percentages of some categories of students receiving special education services may point to systemic assessment and placement problems. Disproportionate representation of certain groups in special education may point to a pattern of school staff too quickly assuming that a student has a learning disability, for example, when the source if the problem actually may be cultural or socioeconomic.

The benefit of investigating the cause of low student achievement lies in knowing where to make improvements: refining instructional skills among teachers and paraprofessionals; introducing new schoolwide systems, such as positive behavioral supports (PBS); engaging in other graduated interventions for underperforming students, such as response to intervention (RtI); or taking more dramatic approaches, including school restructuring and alternative governance. Addressing many of the problems with “first instruction in the general curriculum” will help to remedy some of the problems that occur in special education: the over-identification of certain ethnic groups, the large numbers



of children who are given questionable “learning disabilities” labels, and the subsequent funding problems that schools face when their special education enrollments are high while their funding for specialized supports and services is limited. California educators, researchers, and policy makers at all levels understand the primary role that “first instruction in the general curriculum” plays in the academic success of all children. Throughout the state, a great deal is being done to reposition special education within the context of general education and to diminish the instructional and economic

inefficiencies of two separately operating systems.

Disproportionate Representation

The State Performance Plan Technical Assistance (SPP-TA) Project has developed a system of support to help districts address the disproportionate representation of certain ethnic minorities in special education. While this project is funded by special education and the issue of disproportionate representation reflects special education data, extensive research shows disproportionality to be an outcome of practices in general education. Any solution must include the improvement of basic general education and a system-wide effort for general education and special education to work together.

The process of developing this system has been as collaborative as the solution it promotes. Representatives from California’s State Board of Education, parent training and information centers, and numerous other stakeholder groups have taken a central role in advising and directing an effort that has resulted in a plan for “systems change that is designed to provide LEA [local education agency, or school district] and school improvement teams with the knowledge and technical expertise they need to develop a thorough understanding of problems, issues, and concerns in their schools, and what needs to be done to address them.”²

The reason for this particular focus is simple. In 2004, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act charged states with finding remedies for disproportionality. The SPP-TA plan constitutes California’s remedy. But school improvement is like the proverbial

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1. AYP is required by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act’s (ESEA) reauthorization, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).

2. *CDE Guidance Document on Disproportionality*, p. 18. For an extensive list of resources on disproportionality, go to www.cde.ca.gov/splselqaldisproportionality.asp.

thread on a sweater—you start pulling on one small section only to find the entire garment affected. Knowing this, the national experts who helped to design the plan called for a comprehensive approach that supports the improvement of the entire system. When fully applied, this approach is capable of addressing any systemic deficiency; and, conversely, any deficiency that is addressed using this approach will have a positive effect on the entire system.

Special Education with Other Categorical Programs

Special education and the numerous programs funded under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) target the learning needs of students. Although special education funding focuses at the student level while many ESEA programs focus at the school and district levels, local collaborations can help bridge sometimes isolated categorical program activities. And diminishing dollars are encouraging districts and schools to find creative ways to work around roadblocks to leverage funds.

The California Department of Education (CDE) District and School Improvement Division works with districts and county offices of education receiving Title I funds. When the schools and districts receiving these funds fail to make AYP for three years, they become subject to Program Improvement (PI).³ Laura Wagner, ESEA liaison in the division, reported that CDE works with county offices and other technical assistance providers to help schools and districts take a systemic look at their programs. The effort begins with an analysis of student achievement data and then moves on to analyses of other district structures: governance, curriculum and instruction, use of data, allocation of human and fiscal resources, parent involvement, and professional development.

3. Program Improvement: a status given to Title I schools that do not make AYP. These schools are subject to corrective action measures.

These analyses also focus on the district culture for supporting groups of students who are struggling, and they involve a series of probing questions related to how these students are being taught: What is their access to high-quality first instruction in the general curriculum? To what extent are they receiving scaffolded intervention support? To what extent are those students who are in need of support for learning

Regional System of District and School Support (RSDSS)

The RSDSS helps schools and districts that receive Title I funds meet the state's academic content standards. California uses a regional approach for this work because of the vast number of schools and districts in the state. More information about the Statewide System of School Support is at www.cde.ca.gov/sp/sw/ss/. Contact information for all of the RSDSS centers in the state is at www.cde.ca.gov/sp/sw/ss/s4directory.asp.

English actually receiving that support? These questions are all predicated on the conviction that special education assessment and placement are to be reserved only for those students for whom high-quality instruction in the general education setting seems insufficient, or insufficient without targeted, special education support.

Rebecca Wetzel, a consultant in the Regional System of District and School Support (RSDSS) in Los Angeles sees “a great deal of overlap between Title I and special education.” However, in her more than ten years of work in RSDSS, Wetzel says, “many people see these two categorical programs as existing in strict silos. But while the silos still exist, we are working to break those down.” For her, any effort that allows children with disabilities to take advantage of Title I money is partly an

issue of justice: “In Title I schools, all children who go to that school, including children with disabilities, earn those Title I dollars.” It is also an issue of efficiency. “We need to take advantage of all services and supports before we start thinking that a child has a disability and might need special education,” says Wetzel. “It is a process of changing habits and patterns. However, when funding gets tight, the whole silo mentality gets to work, and people then tend to parcel out their resources rather than leverage them. And leverage is what we need to be doing to best serve kids. It's not fiscally smart to do otherwise.

“In our work in RSDSS, we look at systems that are causing groups of kids not to achieve. We look at which student groups are not being given access to the core curriculum. We look at what practices need to be addressed and at how students are being assessed, and we look at what needs are not being met within general education. We then provide extra supports based on need. This is actually what RtI is about, and this is what we do.

“There is much misunderstanding about RtI. Too many educators see it as a rigid system of assessment and paperwork that still requires a kid to fail first. They see it as just another kind of special education. This misunderstanding is unfortunate. RtI is ‘just in time’ intervention in general education that responds to the needs of kids before they fail.”

Sanger USD

A number of school districts in the state have seen unquestionable success in their efforts to incorporate an RtI process while bringing every resource—general education and special education—to bear on serving all students. The Sanger Unified School District offers one example.

In 2004, seven of Sanger's schools were in Program Improvement—among the first of 98 schools throughout the state to experience this status. According to Matthew Navo, Director of Pupil Services, “we knew we needed

to change the way we did things. And we knew we couldn't afford to wait." So Sanger went on to restructure the way it provided services, especially how general education and special education worked together. One of the first things the district did in this restructuring effort was to apply "for all of our Title I schools to have a 'schoolwide' Title I designation," says Navo. "This allowed us to use all of our Title I money for all

Professional Learning Communities

Sanger learned about Professional Learning Communities from Rick and Becky DuFour, who say that, "to build a professional learning community, focus on learning rather than teaching, work collaboratively, and hold yourself accountable for results."

Read more at www.allthingsplc.info/pdfs/articles/DuFourWhatIsAProfessionalLearningCommunity.pdf.

Guidance on Response to Intervention

Sanger used CDE's guidance to implement RtI. For more information, go to www.cde.ca.gov/cil/cr/ri/rtiresources.asp.

Sanger Webinar

An archived Webinar featuring Matt Navo's discussion of Sanger's approach to whole-school reform is available through WestEd's Schools Moving Up: www.schoolsmovingup.net/cs/smul/view/e/4860.

of our students, regardless of whether they were English language learners (ELLs), had disabilities, or were simply general ed kids struggling to read."

The district then spent a good deal of its money on sustained professional development, which was provided to

all of Sanger's teachers. When six of Sanger's eight Title I schools received Academic Achievement Awards for 2010–2011 Navo ascribed that success to the professional development that was paid for by the combined dollars and that focused on three areas: professional learning communities (PLCs); explicit, direct instruction (EDI); and RtI.

Navo says that the PLCs created teams of teachers committed to continually improving their efforts, and the EDI "strengthened and enhanced the 'tier 1'⁴ delivery of classroom instruction. RtI, in Navo's opinion, is the "easiest and most effective way to reach the needs of all students. It replaces the 'wait to fail' model and makes the system more proactive and less reactive." RtI in particular, says Navo, "cannot be effective without special education and general education working together."

While not every Title I school has the option of applying for the "schoolwide" designation, Navo sees a focus on professional development as one way for any Title I school to skirt categorical funding restrictions and thus blend resources in the service of all children. "You combine your money to train all teachers. Then all kids benefit, especially when you're putting in place research-based practices. You get beyond bureaucratic roadblocks and end up creating relationships across categories. This has worked well for us."

The Importance of Data

"Creating relationships across categories" can be as important with data as it is with people. Schools need data to know how to plan, what is working, and where they need to improve. Important funding sources also may require monitoring data if a school, district, or the state is to receive those funds. However, data gathering, planning requirements, and monitoring efforts can be cumbersome and overwhelming.

CAIS—the California Accountability and Improvement System—is being

4. RtI is most often implemented in three tiers of gradually more intensive interventions to support student success.

jointly developed by CDE and the California Comprehensive Assistance Center (CA CC) at WestEd to remedy some of the challenges associated with data. CAIS is an integrated, Web-enabled, whole-school planning and monitoring tool. According to Fred Tempes, director of the CA CC, "the goal of the planning function in CAIS is to eliminate multiple plans and to create a system that supports one

California Comprehensive Center

CCC Web site: www.wested.org/cs/wel/view/pj/446.

Comprehensive School Assistance Program

CSAP Web site: www.wested.org/cs/wel/view/pg/23.

district improvement plan. We say plans are integrated now, but only because they're stapled together."

As Sylvie Hale, who leads the CA CC support of CAIS, explains it, "currently if a child qualifies for Title I, ELL, migrant, and special education services, that child will require four different plans that are not coordinated or integrated. In some cases, the staff members serving that child don't even talk to each other. That is the nature of the funding streams. CAIS is being developed as one place where schools and districts describe what they are going to do and identify where it applies—resulting in a single rather than multiple plans.

"The underlying premise of CAIS does not involve trying to duplicate the paper-based processes. Some of these processes are broken; most of them are inefficient and contribute to the silo mentality; and all of them are hard to monitor and duplicate effort. And they limit participation."

Monitoring

The planning function in CAIS is currently being piloted. Its monitoring side, however, is already being used by

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general education. “CAIS allows external reviewers to go online and do many compliance checks without having to travel to the district,” explains Tempes, who also hopes through CAIS to provide a way for “schools and districts not to get distracted by compliance monitoring.” His hope is that CAIS will ultimately give schools more time to implement—and make them more accountable for implementing—effective practices.

Given the system’s potential, special education personnel would like to take advantage of CAIS. According to Chris Drouin, manager at the California Department of Education’s Special Education Division, “the core functionality of CAIS lies in the inherent relationship between districts and the state. CAIS is well-suited to interacting around correction and to streamlining these efforts, and it is amendable to our local plan process.”

Special education participation in CAIS, however, is far from easy, according to both Drouin and Tempes. “Special ed has very specific requirements,” explains Tempes. “It’s a complicated process that involves student-level data, assurances, school visits, complaint and adjudication processes, and sometimes even cross-district efforts. We are helping the [special education] division examine its responsibilities for compliance monitoring in general and to look at the various parts to determine what part of special education can be best addressed using CAIS.” The task is complicated. In Tempes’ words, “Hard to describe; harder to do.”

The complexity of the process does not appear to be dissuading either CDE or WestED, since CAIS is reflective of a larger effort at CDE to develop ways for schools to focus on educational results rather than compliance in their planning efforts—and to include special education in the total picture.

Planning Across Systems

“Currently, the requirements and the critical program elements of special

education services are not included in the LEA plan,” says Sharon Tucker, Senior Program Associate at WestEd. “We would like to help change that and to develop conversations about integrating all services.” Tucker and others have been meeting with representatives from Title I, Title II, Title III and special education for more than five years, “trying to come up with an integrated LEA plan,” she says. The intent is to make the LEA plan “one that does not get caught up in compliance but that supports real teachers who are operating in real schools and who do not see kids in categories; they see kids as kids. Individuals.”

One of the questions that Tucker and her colleagues are asking is “How can we strengthen LEA plans so that they have as much to do with outcomes as input?” In her view, too many plans—in both general and special education—are “still all about input, about adult behavior: what programs are in place, what services are provided, how many teachers attend an in-service. We want an LEA plan that focuses more on what students are achieving and learning. And if kids are not doing well, let’s have action plans for solving that.”

Referring to the effort to coordinate previously separate programs, Tucker says that this initial stage of “planning will require people to drop individual agendas and bring their best thinking to the table. It forces people to sit down and talk.” She acknowledges that “it might be a painful process at first. Down the road it will be easier. And we certainly don’t want to get caught up in developing great plans if there is no way to ensure their implementation. What technology [and CAIS] can do is help us monitor how a program was implemented and if it was done with fidelity. Then we can measure success in terms of student outcomes.”

We value what we count. And the way we keep score ultimately influences the way we do business. Any plan or initiative that insists that all kids count—and that all kids are counted—is worth every effort. ♦

opportunities for improved educational achievement for students with disabilities. The law contained language that provided specific guidance to school officials and parents regarding that “meaningful benefit,” while seeking to maintain the individualized character of education for children with disabilities. The following components were introduced in the 1997 reauthorization and were further defined and expanded in 2004:

1. An assessment process that was aligned with measurable annual goals and that supported documentation of the student’s ongoing progress toward desired outcomes. Such goals would inform the IEP teams that anticipated outcomes were being met and that students were advancing appropriately toward desired standards.
2. Improvement in the quality of educational outcomes by ensuring that students with disabilities participate and progress within the general education curriculum and thus be more likely to meet the educational standards set for children without special needs.
3. An increase in expectations as a means to improve educational results for children with disabilities in a manner that promotes equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency.

The need to realize the “meaningful educational benefit” intent of FAPE for children with disabilities was further clarified in the “Findings” section of the 2004 IDEIA reauthorization: to ensure high expectations “by creating access to the general education curriculum in the regular classroom, to the maximum extent possible;” by “meeting developmental goals” and “the challenging expectations that have been established for all children;” and by “preparing children with disabilities to lead productive and independent adult lives, to the maximum extent possible” [IDEIA: 1400 (c)(4)].

This legislative guidance required administrators and teachers to re-focus on how IEP teams would ensure meaningful outcomes from educational programming. Given this legislative guidance, significant new demands were placed on all administrators and educators working with students with disabilities. In addition to the need for all teachers and administrators to understand the meaning of FAPE and the shift from access to educational benefit, these demands also included the following:

- Looking to the general education curriculum as the standard for all.
- Focusing on improved outcomes for students with disabilities and not just on process.
- Supporting students with disabilities to obtain results in elementary and secondary school and to have access to postsecondary education and employment.

These changes in IDEA also required all teachers and administrators to know how to gather and use formative evaluation data to monitor student progress and improve instructional practice. Finally, they required all administrators and teachers to participate in meaningful and sustained professional development activities that clearly communicated the roles and responsibilities of everyone supporting the needs of all students in core general education subjects.

Implications

When proposing the changes in 1997 and 2004, the intent of Congress was not to add additional burden or cost to schools as they sought to “more appropriately” serve children with disabilities. Instead, the intent was to guide the development of efficient and effective models of collaboration between general education and special education to reduce the cost of such services, with the net impact of improving educational outcomes for children with disabilities. Under the current economic conditions that

require budget cuts and reductions in personnel and other resources, there is a clear need to ensure that school districts not view implementing the legislative intent of these reauthorizations as a mandate for another new program to be added to the list of current programs on the books. Thus, the role of the State Education Agency (SEA) and Special Education Local Plan Areas (SELPA) is to help districts and schools view the changes as a guidepost for initiating a process to improve the way schools approach teaching and learning, rather than as extra layers of required services, personnel, and programs.

Significant work has been done to develop various approaches to improve how general educators and special educators approach teaching and learning. Such models require changes in the ways administrators, general educators, and special educators think about the children in their schools and the ways they work together to provide high-quality learning experiences for all children, including students with disabilities. As administrators and educators seek to address the needs of an increasingly diverse student population, they are further challenged by the need to establish higher expectations for student learning and greater accountability on the part of everyone involved in the process.

Response to Intervention

One approach proposed for achieving these changes is response to intervention (RtI), a multi-tiered, problem-solving process that schools and teachers can use to address the academic and behavioral challenges of all students. Underlying RtI is the presumption that general and special education teachers share responsibility in the learning outcomes for all students. Thus, general and special education also will share in RtI’s success.

RtI typically involves four components: universal screening; progress monitoring; data-driven instructional decision making; and fidelity of implementation. These four components are

used within a framework of levels/tiers of support for students and for teachers to organize and deliver increasing levels of instructional intensity and duration. All four components also serve as a way to build a shared knowledge base from which general and special educators can work together to address each student’s individual learning needs.

There are numerous ways for all teachers to provide high-quality, standards-based instruction within a tier 1 or “core” curriculum that is matched to students’ academic needs (Utley, 2011). These might include (1) a framework to unpack, or deconstruct, content standards that permit all students to access the general education curriculum; (2) ongoing, quality assessments that guide decisions about the effectiveness of instruction; and (3) an array of instructional strategies that match clearly articulated learning outcomes and that are implemented with complete fidelity. These strategies might include scaffolding or differentiated instruction—essentially any approach that is grounded in general education and provided to all K–12 learners. Additional strategies that arise from special education include modeling and systematic prompts.

Tier 2 consists of more targeted and precise strategies for K–12 learners who need additional support to be successful in school. Finally, examples of the most intensive, individualized strategies (tier 3) are often provided with the assistance of specialized personnel.

Working Together—New Roles

Any “whole school” initiative, such as RtI, that is focused on doing things differently may result in different roles for many educators. Thus, significant collaboration and commitment is required by nearly everyone, and school personnel focused on teacher quality and effectiveness will need to seek different ways to connect K–12 student learning to what teachers know and do. Although the research in this area is complex, some of the factors currently linked to teacher quality include the following:

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- Dispositions (e.g., teachers' unshakeable belief in the ability of all children to learn)
- Persistence
- Knowledge of content
- Knowledge of pedagogy (both general as well as subject-specific)

When these factors make up the shared knowledge base for both general and special educators and administrators, and when they all share the responsibility for educating all of our students, the roles and duties traditionally held by each should change and blend, consistent with the lists below.

Summary

The legislation associated with educating students with disabilities has changed over time, as has its intent. This change has altered the provision of FAPE from basic access to education to meaningful educational benefit. It is a shift that requires extensive change in the traditional roles of all educational personnel but most specifically around the need for general and special educators to collaborate in meeting the learning and behavioral needs of all students. This effort requires continually reevaluating how education is being delivered—under what conditions and toward what outcomes.

RtI is being promoted as one model that can effectively address a large

range of educational needs for diverse populations within a framework of making education meaningful for all students. However, in order for RtI—or any model—to be successful, educational personnel must have a shared vision and common understanding of the process for achieving that vision so that all students can thrive. ♦

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New Roles for Educators at All Levels

For State, District, and School Administrators

- Establishing and maintaining a schoolwide vision of "all teachers teach all students"
- Creating a structure or mechanism within the school for all teachers to interact and support each other in addressing the needs of all students (professional learning communities)
- Providing support for teachers to work together in professional learning communities, academies, and other co-teaching and instructional arrangements
- Guiding the focus on data-driven improvements at all levels of the school and areas of instruction
- Reallocating personnel funding and limited school resources in support of general education and special education teachers working together in an efficient and effective manner
- Developing and implementing a system of tiered professional development supports for all teachers in the district or school

For General Education Teachers

- As content experts, leading the discussion within their schools around the components of RtI that are content specific
- Initiating, planning, and conducting universal screening of all students
- Utilizing universal screening data to guide teaching and learning activities for all students
- Initiating and conducting student progress monitoring for implementation with all students
- Making meaningful instructional adjustments based upon ongoing progress monitoring data
- Sharing data and student progress with all other teachers and making adjustments across the curriculum

For Special Education Teachers

- Participating as co-teachers with general education teachers in core subject areas
- Providing individualized supports for all struggling learners in core subject areas
- Providing expertise, specific to special education, that supports students (e.g., task analysis, applied behavioral analysis, and classroom-based reading fluency assessment)
- Sharing data and student progress with all other teachers
- Assisting in making instructional decisions that are informed by data
- Assisting in differentiating instruction and supporting the learning needs of struggling learners



Response to Intervention at Dixon High School

Response to intervention (RtI) may be “a work in progress” at Dixon High School, as school officials say, but the emphasis definitely is on “progress.”

In the years since 2006 when Dixon began to implement RtI, a three-tiered pyramid of increasingly intensive academic and behavioral interventions, the following has occurred:

- Special day classes (SDC) for all but those students with the most severe disabilities have been eliminated and replaced by curriculum supports and other interventions.
- Special education students now spend 74 percent of their time in regular education classes, a five-percent increase over the past five years.
- The number of district students in special education has fallen from a high of 464 in 2007 to 379 in 2010 (out of a total population of 4,000), a decline of nearly 20 percent.

“There are kids out there who five or six years ago would have been in special education but aren’t because of the interventions,” says Betty Jo Wessinger, Director of Pupil Services and Special Education for the Dixon Unified School District.

The RtI Challenge in High School

RtI—often seen as a way to identify and support students at the beginning of their school years before they have a chance to fail—looks different and is more challenging at the secondary level. “In elementary school, students are learning to read,” says school psychologist Sean McGreevey. “In high school, they are reading to learn. What do you do with a tenth grader who is reading at a fourth-grade level?”

The difficulties inherent in answering that question are “legion but not insurmountable,” says Kevin Feldman, consultant in reading and intervention for the Sonoma County Office of

Education and an early proponent of RtI. “It’s never too late to change what we are doing.”

Blending Classrooms: Avoiding Duplication

For Dixon, a leadership training on RtI in 2004–2005 propelled the change. “Originally we had parallel [general ed and special ed] classes that were almost entirely different,” says McGreevey. “One spring the parallel [special education] civics class had a very low enrollment. The teacher started talking with the general ed teacher and ultimately moved them to her class with co-teaching. It was really successful. Lifelong SDC kids managed the curriculum.”



The high school also had parallel classes for English language learners, who make up nearly 11 percent of the school population. “That was three different classes,” says Wessinger. “We asked ourselves, ‘Why can’t we put them all together and create an additional period of language arts for students not at grade level?’” So, while co-teaching “was a great idea,” says Principal Ivan Chaidez, “we found that a curriculum support system works better.”

Curricular Supports

Curriculum support is Dixon’s middle or second tier of the RtI pyramid. Tier 1 is the core curriculum in language arts, math, social studies, and science; and tier 3 involves intensive interventions “that allow us to be very

individual with the students,” says McGreevey. Curriculum support, taught by the school’s four special education teachers, is designed to bolster academic performance as soon as there is indication that a student is struggling. In addition to working on general education class assignments, students in tier 2 receive instruction in functional skills, such as organization, time management, self-advocacy, study skills, and test taking. Curriculum support teachers and general education teachers regularly check students’ academic progress, behavior, and attendance records. Collaboration is essential, says Wessinger. “We need a syllabus and assignments so we know what to support.”

Dixon began using Read 180 as its tier-3 intervention two years ago—and not just for special education students. Virginia Lantry’s class, for example, includes English language learners, students with IEPs, a student with behavioral issues, and one who is simply a slow reader.

That mix is part of Dixon’s philosophy of “getting special ed students with their non-disabled peers,” says Wessinger. In her curriculum support class, Laurie Holm says she is “not perceived as a special education teacher.” The class includes general ed students “who maybe need help with structure, organization, or advocacy,” she says. The blended classes also lead to improved behavior, according to McGreevey. “There are more behavioral problems when students with learning disabilities are put together than when they are dispersed” throughout the school.

Conversely, students with IEPs who have learning disabilities are not easily identifiable in general education classes where instructional aides assist all students. Core teachers may provide informal interventions in class as well. Some students, whatever their status,

Dixon, continued page 10

may redo assignments or re-take tests as part of differentiated instruction.

Ongoing assessments are a critical part of the RtI effort, providing teachers with regular feedback about how interventions are working. Teachers use formative assessments, often as frequently as every two to three weeks, to gauge whether they need to re-teach or provide instructional support and to assess what is needed for a student to move to the next level.

On Track for Graduation

One of the difficulties to be surmounted in implementing RtI at the high school level involves the issue of credits. “By the time students get to high school they are counting credits and units” needed for graduation, says Feldman. Certain special education or support classes—interventions some students need in order to succeed in the core curriculum—do not count toward graduation. “This is a huge issue,” he says.

At Dixon, each special education student has a four-year plan that must include the requisite number of credits for graduation. The plan is straightforward: only two pages long. The first page includes all classes that can fulfill the requirements for graduation. The second is blank and is filled in by the student and updated at the beginning of every semester. This plan provides a very concrete way for students to stay on top of their progress.

Dixon also is trying to include more core material within its interventions, McCreevey says. For example, “students have to pass a computer class [to graduate], so we’ve put computers in curriculum support classes to allow students to become more familiar with them.”

The four-year plan is presented when students enter high school and is one part of the transition from middle school. Each year “we get together with the junior high and look at data points to determine appropriate placement and course recommendations”

for incoming freshman, says Wessinger. Additionally, since each of the high school’s four special education teachers serves as case manager for a grade-level cohort of students with IEPs and follows that cohort for four years, the current case manager for grade 12 will visit the middle school before the end of the school year to meet with staff and the special education students who will enter high school as ninth graders in the fall.

With various pieces of RtI in place throughout the Dixon Unified School District, the district’s management team—superintendent and district officials, school principals, and assistant



principals—met in May to develop a common language for RtI. In their definition, “RtI is the framework for providing systematic behavioral and academic interventions for all students. If a student fails to respond to an intervention, we ask ourselves, ‘What will we do for the student?’ And we provide the appropriate interventions.” Each school site will then develop its own pyramid of interventions based on such factors as the demographics of the school population.

Behavior

At Dixon High, “We continue to expand and develop the academic side of the pyramid,” says McGreevey, “but the behavior side is not quite as systematic as to what interventions to provide under what circumstances to what students. “There are a lot of problems at this age with drugs, alcohol, teen sexuality, mental health issues.” As a work in progress, the RtI

behavior pyramid also follows a three-tiered pattern: the core tier 1 is taught in every class and includes a schoolwide set of behavioral expectations, with such components as attendance policy, dress code, and office etiquette. In tier 2, a student, usually referred by his or her teacher, may receive small-group instruction or after-school tutoring on issues of behavior; or the student might be assigned to Saturday school. Tier 3 focuses on the individual student and may include such interventions as psychiatric counseling and referral to a county family services agency.

Overall, the shift away from SDC classes has meant a shift for many special education teachers as well because “even kids with IEPs have at most two classes of special ed,” says Wessinger. For these teachers, that means more emphasis on collaboration and consultation rather than direct instruction. And at Dixon High, recognized as a California Distinguished School in 2011, the teachers have made the shift willingly, she says. “Everyone is working together to treat all students in ways that meet their needs. Their needs are not all the same, but if they all are learning, that’s what’s important.”

As Principal Chaidez says, “We have a responsibility to all students to meet their needs socially, emotionally, academically, behaviorally. We’re family here. We’re one team.” ♦

—Janet Mandelstam

Comparison

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a “demonstrated record of effectiveness in increasing the academic proficiency of students.” Finally, these services are to be selected by the parents and approved by the state [Sec. 1116 (e) *Supplemental Educational Services*]. Schools not making AYP for four years must undergo corrective action; a failure to achieve AYP for five years requires school restructuring. *The Intersection of IDEA and NCLB* offers a thorough discussion of how these two laws interact. (available at www.nea.org/assets/docs/HE/IDEA_NCLBIntersectionsfinal2004.pdf). ♦

Setting up these systems, even the multi-tiered system of support, is more expensive because we need the intervention specialists, the additional arms that are in there. So I think that sometimes the system and the finances get in the way [of establishing effective approaches] more than a lack of will.

West: How can Title I and special education work more collaboratively to support all children?

Posny: Thelma [Melendez, Assistant Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education] and I talk about this all the time because we're talking about kids who struggle. One group of kids is disadvantaged, and the other group has a disability. The cause and effect in my mind doesn't make a difference. I don't care what the issue is. We need to provide the supports for any child at any point in time. Funding again gets in the way. I don't think we'll ever have enough. Right now even in special ed, at the federal level we probably pay about 18 percent of the cost; that puts the burden, 82 percent, back on the states and the districts. And that's a heavy load to lift. We know there aren't sufficient dollars. The same thing [is true] in terms of Title I. There are a lot more kids who could be served. One of the most popular models is to get a "schoolwide" designation for Title I. If you're a "targeted assistance" school—the other designation—you have to target that assistance. With a schoolwide designation, you can serve all kids, and that allows more flexibility and more freedom to serve kids in a more robust way. The "schoolwide" is probably a great example of a way to work collaboratively, and to use state dollars and district dollars, as well.

West: How do the original intents of IDEA support collaboration?

Posny: When it was put into effect in 1975, collaboration wasn't necessarily there. The law was intended to provide

access. There wasn't a guarantee of an educational level. We weren't there yet. We sometimes go on a pendulum, and sometimes it just takes time. But that law is only 35 years old. My son is now 27 years old. He does not know what it's like to go to school without kids with disabilities. So, in one generation, we have made a sea change in providing not only access but a great education for kids with disabilities. With No Child Left Behind for the first time we became accountable for every single child, and it really pointed a clear lens onto kids with disabilities and the fact



that they were not doing as well. The [positive] results that I'm seeing now are something that even six, seven, eight years ago we were unable to see. So did the original intents of IDEA support collaboration? No. It was to provide access. But over the course of time, collaboration had to happen. I think the change started in 1988. That's when we began to talk not just about mainstreaming but about inclusion. And then with the 1997 reauthorization that was the first time we were required to assess kids with disabilities. Everyone thinks it came about with No Child Left Behind, but it came about prior to that. It was only with NCLB in 2001 and 2002 that we then looked at [students with disabilities] as a separate subgroup.

I think we've done a great job in a little over three decades. For me it is amazing.

West: What are your ideas on best practices or models of collaboration?

Posny: That's a tough one. I'm seeing so many different examples, and there isn't [just] one model or one method that really works. Some people ask, "Is it top down or is it bottom up?" And I say it's all of it. I've seen it all work, depending. The question in psychology we always asked was, "Do we change behavior first, or do we change attitude?" And the answer is "Yes."

If you change behavior, people start acting differently and their attitude changes. If you change their attitude, they start acting differently. It's the same thing with models of collaboration. I have seen great models that came from the teachers themselves. They happen to form a relationship or they happen to be stuck in the same classroom. Some of the best models of collaboration come from, "Well, we're both here; why don't we work together." Or, "We're both teaching this particular part. Gee, why don't we work together?"

I've also seen other models that start from the administration, especially with RtI [response to intervention]. A lot of people have taken RtI far beyond what it is, which is great, although sometimes people then get confused about what RtI really stands for. But I have seen where it started at the superintendent's level and then became infused within all of the schools with great student success.

So, best practices or models? It's however you can get everyone to work together. It's kind of like "playing well in the sand" and knowing that you don't walk into your classroom and shut the door and you're all by yourself. That's not the model that works as well.

West: Not isolation, but relationships.

Posny: That's correct. ♦

(The second part of this interview with will appear in the Autumn 2011 issue.)

Overlapping Laws for General Education and Special Education

Because special education was originally conceived as part of general education, the legislation that governs general education, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA, reauthorized as No Child Left Behind, or NCLB), also directly affects special educators and students with disabilities in a number of areas: assessment, accountability (including Adequate Yearly Progress, AYP), sanctions (including School Choice and Supplemental Services), teacher quality, and paraeducator quality. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) addresses three of these five areas—assessment, teacher quality, and paraeducator quality. The chart below compares the legal mandates of these laws across issues, followed by brief explanations of the two provisions of NCLB that are addressed in ways that are not directly comparable to the mandates of IDEA: accountability and school sanctions.

	ESEA	IDEA
Assessment	Annual assessments in all grades must be administered with appropriate accommodations, guidelines, and alternate assessments for all students covered by IDEA [Sec. 1111 (b)(3)(C)].	Students with disabilities must be included in all state and local assessments with appropriate accommodations or through alternate assessments [Sec. 612 (a)(17)].
Highly Qualified Teachers	All teachers must be “highly qualified,” which constitutes any public school teacher who has a bachelor’s degree and holds full state certification [Sec. 9101(23) <i>Highly Qualified</i>]. “Pupil services personnel”—school counselors, school social workers, school psychologists, and other qualified professional personnel involved in providing assessment, diagnosis, counseling, educational, therapeutic, and other necessary services—also must be highly qualified [Sec. 9101(36) <i>Pupil Services Personnel</i>].	IDEA uses the term “qualified personnel” to mean personnel who have met state-approved or state-recognized certification, licensing, registration, or other comparable requirements in the area in which the individuals are providing special education or related services [Sec. 612(a)(15) <i>Personnel Standards</i> and Sec. 602(22) <i>Related Services</i>].
Paraprofessionals	Each school or school district receiving Title I funds must ensure that all paraprofessionals have (1) completed at least two years of study at an institution of higher education; (2) obtained an associate’s (or higher) degree; or (3) met a rigorous standard of quality and can demonstrate by a formal state or local academic assessment knowledge of and the ability to assist in instructing reading, writing, and mathematics; or knowledge of and the ability to assist in instructing reading readiness, writing readiness, and mathematics readiness, as appropriate [Sec. 1119 (c) <i>New Paraprofessionals</i>].	A state may allow paraprofessionals and assistants who are appropriately trained and supervised, in accordance with state law, regulations, or written policy, to assist in the provision of special education and related services to children with disabilities [Sec. 612 (a)(15) <i>Personnel Standards</i>].

Accountability

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), NCLB’s approach to accountability, deserves credit for helping to highlight the importance of focusing on academic progress for all students. The AYP provision requires states “to submit a plan that demonstrates that the state has adopted challenging academic content standards and challenging student academic achievement standards that apply to all schools and all children attending public schools in the state” [Sec. 1111 (a)(2) (B)]. NCLB also requires school districts (LEAs) to “use any academic

assessments . . . to review annually the progress of each school to determine whether the school is making AYP” [Sec. 1116 (a)(1)(B)].

School Sanctions

NCLB’s school sanctions involve identifying those schools that are not making AYP. Students enrolled in those schools failing to make AYP for two years must be offered the option of transferring to another public school (including a charter school), that has not been identified for school improvement (unless such an option is prohibited by state law) [Sec. 1116 (b) (E) *Public School Choice*].

Title I schools not achieving AYP for three or more consecutive years must make available “supplemental educational services” to students from low-income families, including those with disabilities. Supplemental educational services consist of any additional academic instruction designed to increase the academic achievement of students; they include such interventions as tutoring and remediation. These kinds of services must be provided outside of the regular school day, aligned with the state’s academic content standards, and provided by individuals who have

Comparison, continued page 10

Why buy...

The RiSE (Resources in Special Education) Library freely lends materials to California residents; the borrower pays only for return postage. The items on this page represent a small sample of the library's holdings; go to www.php.com/services/libraries to search the complete list. To order materials, phone or e-mail RiSE librarian Judy Bower: 408-727-5775; judy@php.com.

Behavior

Best Behavior: Building Positive Behavior Support in Schools

Jeffrey Sprague and Annemieke Golly. An evidence-based discipline program that integrates family collaboration with proven, easy-to-implement interventions that can be used throughout an entire school, within an individual classroom, or with just one student. 2005. 241 pages. Call #23704 or 23705.

Building Positive Support Systems in Schools: Functional Behavioral Assessment

Deanne Crone and Robert Horner. An up-to-date conceptual model and set of practical tools for meeting the challenges of severe problem behavior in elementary and middle schools. 2003. 171 pages. Call #24017.

Discipline with Dignity: New Challenges, New Solutions

Richard Curwin, Allen Mendler, and Brian Mendler. An affirming approach to managing the classroom that promotes respect for self and others. 2008. 252 pages. Call #24015.

Positive Behavioral Support in the Classroom: Principles and Practices

Lewis Jackson and Marion Panyan. A comprehensive approach to helping education professionals evaluate children with challenging behaviors, tailor support, and link concepts of behavioral support to the broader practices of schools and society—all through a blending of research and practical strategies. 2002. 365 pages. Call #23427.

Collaboration

Collaborative Planning/ Collaborative Teaching: Transforming Theory into Practice

Richard Villa. A comprehensive explanation of the five components necessary for an effective collaborative teaming process. Includes virtual visits to co-teaching environments, as well as a staff development session, where obstacles to co-teaching are addressed. 2002. Two videos. Length: 35 minutes each. Call #23388.

School, Family and Community Partnerships Handbook: Your Handbook for Action

Joyce Epstein et al. A research-based framework for six types of involvement that guide state and district leaders, school principals, teachers, parents, and community partners to form Action Teams for Partnerships—dynamic groups that plan, implement, evaluate, and continually improve family and community involvement for student success. 2002. 379 pages. Call #23361.

Innovative Instruction

Co-Teaching in the Differentiated Classroom: Successful Collaboration, Lesson Design, and Classroom Management

Melinda Fattig and Maureen Tormey Taylor. Detailed explanations for how to implement co-teaching programs in mixed-ability classrooms. 2008. 126 pages. Call #23969 or 23970.

RTI in Title I: Tools and Guidance to Get It Right

Laurie Matzke and Tanya Lunde Neumiller. A resource for seamlessly integrating Title I mandates into every step of the RtI process—and moving school districts closer to achieving AYP for all students. 2008. 67 pages. Call #24067.

Getting Ready for RTI: Staff Training on Key Principles

John McCook and Joseph Witt. Practical applications of the tiered RtI process, designed specifically to help school staff understand the service delivery system and how interventions, student progress monitoring, and instructional decision-making fit into the RtI framework. 2006. DVD. Length: 28 minutes. Call #24063 or 24075.

RTI and DI: The Dynamic Duo

Lynn Heintzman and Helene Hanson. Explains how response to intervention and differentiated instruction address the needs of all learners and share common elements: a student-centered focus and the use of ongoing assessments to inform decision-making and facilitate effective instruction. 2009. DVD. Length: 37 minutes. Call #24012.

RTI: Create Your Own Response to Intervention—Two Approaches to Prevent Chronic Failure

Alan Coulter. Features an approach for helping teachers, principals, and central office leaders develop customized response to intervention processes and early intervening services. In this video, principals, master teachers, and consultants demonstrate two approaches: the protocol approach and the problem-solving approach that meet the intent and spirit of IDEA 2004. 2007. DVD. Length: 185 minutes. Call #24089 or 24090.

RTI Tackles the LD Explosion: A Good IDEA Becomes Law

Karen Norlander and Karen Kemp. Explains the implications of changes in federal law addressing the identification of children with learning disabilities and how schools can move special education and general education toward a unified and effective collaborative model. 2006. DVD. Length: 57 minutes. Call #23936.

Collaboration

www.naesp.org/resources/1/Principall/2008/N-Dp12.pdf

From the National Association of Elementary School Principals, *Collaborating with Special Education Administrators* (2008) addresses how school principals and special educators can work together to educate all children within the context of legislated requirements.

www.ncset.org/publications/issue/NCSETIssueBrief_2.1.pdf

This *Issues Brief* written by the National Center on Secondary Education and Transition (NCSET), *Collaboration Between General and Special Education: Making It Work*, offers a compelling argument, as well as research and financial justification, for collaboration between general education and special education.

www.wested.org/online_pubs/RD-04-01.pdf

This issue of WestEd's *R&D Alert—When Special Education and General Education Unite, Everyone Benefits*—addresses the accountability requirements mandated by the No Child Left Behind Act, how those requirements are making the education of students with disabilities the concern of all educators, and how the alignment of general and special education will ultimately better serve all students.

www.calstat.org/collaborative_messages.html

The research-based core messages featured on this page support efforts between general education and special education to work together to educate all students. The core messages were designed to serve as a guide for collaborative efforts at all levels, from individual classroom, to school site, to school district. Each message includes references and links to additional, relevant resources and materials that are available free and online.

The Individualized Education Program (IEP)

www.nichcy.org/schoolageliep

The National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities (NAEYC) provides resources about IEPs: what the law requires, what information a typical IEP contains, how IEPs are developed, and more.

www.tsbvi.edu/seebear/winter05/seven.htm

Seven Habits of Highly Effective IEP Teams outlines qualities and behaviors that, when used by parents and teachers who serve on the same IEP team, guarantee the best possible outcome: school success for students with disabilities.

Positive Behavior Supports

www.apbs.org/

The Association for Positive Behavior Support is dedicated to promoting research-based strategies that combine applied behavior analysis and biomedical science with person-centered values in the development of a systems-change approach to increasing quality of life and decreasing problem behaviors in individuals. The organization's Web site features information about positive behavior support as it is applied to autism spectrum disorder, developmental disabilities, emotional and behavioral disorders, and traumatic brain injury. This site provides a range of helpful information targeted for families, schools, districts, and states.

www.modelprogram.com/

MODEL: Managing On-site Discipline for Effective Learning was created by two San Bernardino County school psychologists as a vehicle for distributing materials and resources to schools and districts that are engaged in building systems of positive behavior support (PBS). The site is packed with practical, proven materials to support every aspect of PBS efforts at all levels.

www.pbis.org/

The Office of Special Education Programs' **Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports** provides schools the capacity-building information and technical assistance needed for identifying, adapting, and sustaining effective schoolwide disciplinary practices. The center's Web site offer dozens of resources for school and district staff interested in supporting positive behavior, decreasing instances of bullying, and creating optimal environments for learning.

Response to Intervention

www.interventioncentral.org/index.php/academic-resources

Intervention Central is devoted to making high-quality resources for response to intervention (RtI) available at no cost, providing teachers, schools, and districts with publications on effective academic and behavioral intervention practices, articles to guide the successful implementation of RtI, and interactive tools to assist in the creation of assessments and other materials to help struggling students in the classroom and throughout the school.

www.rti4success.org/

The **National Center on Response to Intervention** features a library, training modules, and a newsletter devoted to information about RtI. The center also offers training and technical assistance to states and school districts interested in implementing RtI.

www.centeroninstruction.org/response-to-intervention-training-for-california-educators

Response to Intervention: Training for California Educators (2006) is a five-video sequence that provides a comprehensive overview and exploration of response to intervention from a variety of perspectives. The videos are titled *RtI—Why Now?*, *What Is RtI?*, *RtI—Getting Started*, *Instruction in RtI Systems*, and *Administrative Issues in RtI*.

2011–2012 Calendar

September 22–24, 2011

Facing the Future— Building on the Past

The 2011 conference of the Council for Children with Behavioral Disorders will highlight effective practices to improve outcomes for challenging students. The conference is designed for professionals, students, and parents who have an interest in education, mental health, juvenile justice, or related fields. New Orleans, LA. For more information, phone 504-525-5566; or go to www.ccbd.net/event/2011-ccbdc-conference.

October 13–14, 2011

Youth Change—Breakthrough Strategies to Teach and Counsel Troubled Youth

This workshop offers updated, innovative solutions to turn around troubled children and youths ages 5 through 18. The event is designed for teachers, counselors, special educators, social workers, juvenile court workers, foster parents, or anyone who works with hard-to-reach, hard-to-manage children and youths. Portland, OR. For more information, contact Ruth Wells at dwells@youthchg.com or 503-982-4220; or go to www.youthchg.com.

October 19–22, 2011

Building Ethical Communities: 18th National Forum on Character Education

Sponsored by the Character Education Partnership, this forum is designed for educators working within established character education programs and those exploring ways to develop an ethical culture in their school communities. The event includes breakout sessions, in-depth workshops, interactive discussions, and more. San Francisco, CA. For more information, contact Rebecca Sipos at rsipos@character.org or 202-296-7743, ext. 20; or go to www.character.org/2011conference.

November 17–19, 2011

The 27th Annual International Conference on Young Children with Special Needs and Their Families

Sponsored by the Division for Early Childhood, the sessions and discussions in this conference will focus on transformative approaches in early intervention/early childhood special education and on redefining work with children by re-evaluating and reflecting on beliefs and experiences. The conference offers comprehensive coverage of the issues in early childhood special education for early intervention specialists, early childhood special educators, mental health specialists, administrators, Head Start staff, parents and family members, child care providers, researchers, policy makers, and anyone interested or involved in the issues of early childhood special education. National Harbor, MD. For more information, e-mail dec@dec-sped.org; or go to www.dec-sped.org/Conference.

February 9–11, 2012

PEAK's Annual 2012 Conference on Inclusive Education

This conference is designed for family members, general and special educators, and school administrators. Family members will learn ways to increase family and school collaboration; educators will learn about research-based educational strategies that enhance learning for *all* students; and administrators will learn how to lead teachers to support all students to achieve. Denver, CO. For more information, phone: 719-531-9400, 800-284-0251; e-mail conference@peakparent.org; or go to www.conference.peakparent.org.

The National Center on Response to Intervention

makes available recent Webinars about RtI. Go go www.rti4success.org/, click on “Events” and then on “Webinars” for a complete listing.

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Interview with Alexa Posny

This interview with Alexa Posny, Assistant Secretary for Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, was conducted in Dr. Posny's offices in Washington, DC, on April 19, 2011, by educational consultant Geri West. The interview is exclusive to The Special EDge.

West: Do you think the current budget challenges create their own incentives in support of collaboration between special education and general education?

Posny: Congress has just resolved the budget for 2011 and they held education relatively harmless. In fact, we even got an increase in money for Race to the Top¹ and new reforms and transformational ideas. There were no cuts whatsoever to IDEA [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act] and ESEA

[Elementary and Secondary Education Act]. We do have budget challenges. But when I think about funding for students with disabilities and people with disabilities, we're doing OK. The challenges really come at the state level. That's going to continue until the states can turn around their own econo-

mies. The best part of the question is that it means we're going to become far more efficient and really partner with all the other parts of education. Almost 60 percent of our kids with disabilities are in general ed for more than 80 percent of the day. Who are the primary instructors for our kids with disabilities these days? It's general

educators. Special education is a support within that system. It's no longer a silo. We are part of the [larger] system. And we provide the additional supports and interventions that kids need. So I do think that collaborative efforts are all to the good, that we will work smarter, and provide better supports. Special educators, including related services personnel, know how to teach the kids who struggle the most. Isn't that advantageous for every child in this country? And can't we use that



for everyone? When I think of general educators, their knowledge of the content and curriculum and standards is exactly what we need in special ed so that we hold kids to the highest level possible. So it's good for all of us as we begin to work on all of this together.

West: Doug Reeves and others insist that we know what to do to educate all children but sometimes lack the will. How can we support school leaders to develop the will and the resilience to do it?

Posny: I'm a total optimist and believe that everyone wants to do what is right for kids. Do they have the will? I would hope that anyone who is an educational leader absolutely wants to do the right thing for every child. But I wonder if it's not the will that's not here but if it's the system that gets in the way. And you're talking to someone from the U.S. Department of Education. Sometimes there are some barriers that are thrown up. I do think the funding streams get in the way.

We certainly have to be conscious of and be set up to monitor the dollars. Don't get me wrong; it's incredibly important that the money goes where it's intended. But unfortunately [a funding stream] sometimes forces people to continue to operate in silos and maybe not allow as much flexibility as needed. I think educators have some good

ideas on what they could do, and sometimes we get in the way—by “we” I'm talking about any of the bureaucracies. When Arne [Duncan, U.S. Secretary of Education] talks about what the reform is, he says it's about being tight on what we want but loose on the means and how to get there—tight on outcomes and loose on means—with the idea that, if we get the results we want for kids, then we can give the good actors the ability to go after what they think really needs to be done.

Posny, continued page 11

1. Details about Race to the Top are at http://earlyed.newamerica.net/blogposts/2011/merging_the_early_learning_challenge_fund_with_race_to_the_top-48354.