Getting to Effectiveness in Special Education

Profiles in Women’s Leadership

October 1, 2021
Session Description

This session will introduce the domains of effectiveness in special education and showcase local exemplars of effective practices, driven by local female leaders. The session will highlight how investments in leadership, a culture of high expectations, family/community engagement, etc. are critical to creating effective learning environments for students with disabilities. The session will provide opportunities to learn from and ask questions of a diverse panel of experienced women leaders in New Jersey special education. The intended audience is all school and district leaders, including those who directly support special education.
VIP Panelists

• Lystrea Crooks: Director of Special Education, Irvington Public Schools
• Peggy McDonald: Coordinator of Special Projects, Foundation for Educational Administration (FEA)
• Debby Sarmir: Assistant Superintendent, Northern Valley Regional High School District
• Candice Wells: Supervisor of Special Education, Newark Public Schools; NJ Leadership Academy Facilitator, NJPSA/FEA

Facilitator

• Kendra Carter: Associate Manager, Public Consulting Group
Call to Action!

• There is an urgent need to raise expectations and improve educational outcomes in special education, which has been a pressing issue since before the COVID-19 pandemic began in 2020

• Despite the federal Office of Special Education’s shift to a Results Driven Accountability (RDA) model in 2014, there remains a need for vast improvement in academic and functional outcomes for students with disabilities
  
  • Only eight states have achieved a “Meets Requirements” rating for all six years under RDA
  
  • Largest states (California, New York, and Texas), accounting for approx. 25% of the nation’s students with disabilities, have NOT received a “Meets Requirements” determination in any year of RDA

• Number of students found eligible to receive special education services continues to grow
  
  • Increase of 11% between the 2000–2001 and 2017–2018 school years, totaling 7M+ students nationwide

• Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District, the Supreme Court affirmed that schools must be “appropriately ambitious,” in meeting the needs of every child with a disability through their Individualized Education Program (IEP).

• The only way to effectively ensure that a growing number of students with disabilities meet appropriately ambitious learning standards is for school districts to develop clear roadmaps for what it means to operate effective, high-quality special education programs and then to enact these roadmaps with intentionality and commitment
PCG’s Special Education Effectiveness Framework
What is the Special Education Effectiveness Framework?

• The Special Education Effectiveness Framework was designed to assist school districts in catalyzing roadmap conversations, assessing and ultimately improving the quality of special education programs.

• Designed to provide school district leaders with a set of practices to strengthen special education services and supports in six key domains, and to highlight the multidisciplinary, integrated nature of systemic improvement.

• An intentional focus on improving outcomes for students with disabilities leads to improved outcomes for ALL students.
Investing in people from recruitment to retirement to ensure highly qualified and effective staff have the skills/training needed to provide services and support to promote the success of diverse learners.

Increasing expectations of students with disabilities by presuming competence and incorporating culturally relevant, growth-oriented practices.

Defining expectations for service delivery, resource allocation, and data management infrastructure to guide data-driven decisions.

Supporting students with disabilities (including increased collaboration and ownership of school administrators and staff) and coordinating efforts with community organizations to improve results.

Delivering instruction and interventions within an inclusionary framework and with Individualized Education Program (IEP) fidelity, leading to increased access and progress in grade-level learning standards and reducing disproportionality.

Embracing partnerships to make informed decisions and provide equitable opportunities for all students.
Deeper Dive: Potential Points of Discussion
Special Education Domains of Effectiveness: Leadership

Supporting students with disabilities (including increased collaboration and ownership of school administrators and staff) and coordinating efforts with community organizations to improve results

• How did your leadership team foster a sense of shared accountability amongst staff, students, families and community?

• Tell us about the team building process your team followed to ensure effective communication and collaboration

• How did your leadership team maintain a student-centered focus and encourage that amongst the entire team?
Special Education Domains of Effectiveness: Learning Environment and Specialized Services

Delivering instruction and interventions within an inclusionary framework adopting a coherent Multi Tiered System of Support, leading to increased access and progress in grade-level learning standards

• How did Office of Special Education, Office of the Assistant Superintendent, and Office of the Superintendent come together to problem-solve the needs around supporting struggling learners and students being referred?

• How has the District’s Multi-Tiered System of Supports impacted struggling learners?

• What are some of the best practices the District has incorporated in the IEP development process?

• Tell us about the District’s approach for incorporating student-centered planning and family input
Special Education Domains of Effectiveness: Systems and Structure

Defining expectations for service delivery, resource allocation, and data management infrastructure to guide data-driven decisions

• How has the District embedded special education initiatives into its vision and strategic plan?
• Tell us about the District’s process for revamping policies and procedures, and how you train and communicate changes
• What process does Newark follow to ensure continuous review of practices to ensure improvement?
• Tell us about your process for benchmarking, setting goals and progress monitoring
Special Education Domains of Effectiveness: Family and Community Engagement

Embracing partnerships to make informed decisions and provide equitable opportunities for all students

- What practices has the District incorporated to ensure staff communicate and work effectively with families?
- How is family input solicited and incorporated?
- What practices has the District implemented to account for the cultural diversity of families?
- Tell us about the supports and resources Irvington offers its families
- Tell us about the partnerships the District has forged in the community and the impact these partnerships have on your programing
Questions for our panelists?