

Building Leaders Working Conditions Action Team Recommendations to Address Barriers to Attracting, Training and Retaining Special Educators

Collective Leadership

- **Personal Development**

- Develop self-awareness and identify biases by reflecting on personal beliefs and examining marginalized and privileged identities.
- Build authentic relationships with racially and ethnically diverse members of the school and local community.
- Refine leadership practice for social justice through learning and reflection.

- **Collaborative Culture**

- Foster a culture in which all stakeholders see themselves as a team of learners and problem-solvers with agency and accountability for student learning.
- Create structures that sustain collaboration for decision-making, planning, learning and feedback.
- Collaborate with members of the school and broader community, especially those furthest from justice, to routinely analyze and revise structures, policies and practices that uphold institutional racism.

1. Collaboratively establish, monitor, and evaluate the effectiveness of structures and decision-making processes by providing PD for all stakeholders starting with leadership so that there is a clear understanding of the purpose of the policies and legalities around IEP and 504 requirements.
2. Principal learns side by side with the special education teacher and proactively seeks additional resources and networks with external partners to support staff.
3. Leadership needs to provide training around internal biases to avoid over identification of specific student populations.
4. Establish and nurture strong systems in place to share and collaborate vertically and horizontally; between the SE and GE staff.
5. Establish Interdisciplinary Teams for PLCs as well as grade level or bldg PLC's with common planning or meeting times on a regular basis.
6. Schedules should be done by workloads and not caseloads.
7. LISTEN/HEAR THEM / seek first to understand and then to be understood.
8. Attend a special education conference with staff so leaders are learning side by side with staff.
9. Strong induction, mentoring and coaching of new personnel
10. More opportunities for administrators, school board members, and other school stakeholders to learn and understand where flexibility lies within curriculum development and requirements.
11. Create networks of special educators in like positions (e.g., ISD, MAASE, CEC, etc) and ensure that special education educators have better opportunities to attend relevant conferences to help with in person networking that are outside of the school day. Regular meetings with staff from other buildings would help special education teachers learn from others in different buildings/districts.
12. Make sure administrators and teachers are involved in the same training/ informational meetings so that the messages from ISDs and the state level are heard the same way.

Equitable School Community

- **Vision and Mission**

- Empower students, staff, families and community to own a vision and mission that reflects a commitment to equity and the aspirations of each student.
- Align goals, decisions and actions to the vision and mission of the school. Ensure every member of the community is clear on their role and responsibility in realizing the vision.
- Communicate clearly and consistently about specific aspects of the mission and vision, including progress toward goals.

- **Culture and Climate**

- Create a safe, inclusive and culturally sustaining environment that attends to the well-being of all community members.
- Privilege student voice and experience.
- Sustain a learning culture characterized by a focus on community-prioritized results, high expectations and a growth mindset for students and adults.

1. Advocate for fair and equitable practices for all teachers and challenges adult attitudes and practices that may be harmful or demeaning to teachers.
2. Build and sustain a culture of shared accountability amongst staff, students and community as a whole for the academic success of each student in the school with a high level of support for all stakeholders.
3. PD to help the educator become comfortable and knowledgeable about issues of compliance; diversity, equity and inclusion; and RTI.
4. Add checks and balances within the department. Give teachers clear directions on how to fill out paperwork, store all the directions in one commonly-known spot.
5. Create and provide strong mentoring and coaching (building level, ISD level, PLC time)
6. An outline and reminder of expectations and/or deadlines. (special educator monthly checklist)
7. Provide the flexible time, space and resources for ongoing, genuine and meaningful teacher collaboration around student and teacher learning needs. (release time to help give time for compliance paperwork)
8. Professional development
 - a. What is and is not co-teaching, and continuum of services.
 - b. How to facilitate crucial conversations with parents and colleagues
 - c. Trauma Informed Practices
 - d. Relationships and Norms for learning
9. Establish good communication and PR systems with students, staff, parents and advocacy groups, including the legislature
10. Grow your own teacher prep. program in our high schools
11. Ask employees what makes a great ____ (insert position). What they say reflects their identify, values and beliefs. If it aligns with job, great. If it doesn't, engage in conversation about the discrepancies and people will opt in or out.
12. Acknowledge and celebrate educators each day not just one week of the year

Learning and Teaching Environment

● Vision for Learning

- Ensure the beliefs that students should have agency in their learning, take ownership of their ideas and work together in rigorous inquiry and problem-solving.
- Develop a shared vision for high-quality, culturally and linguistically responsive teaching and learning that underscores high expectations for every student.
- Build capacity to understand and respond to how individual and institutional racism impact expectations for diverse learners.

● Curriculum, Pedagogy and Assessment

- Support the use of high-quality, inquiry-driven curriculum, culturally and linguistically responsive materials and assessments aligned to grade-level standards.
- Ensure student learning opportunities support their social, emotional and academic development.
- Integrate a race and social justice focus across all learning opportunities.

● Improvement of Instructional Practice

- Establish and sustain teacher learning that is grounded in the shared understanding of specific student learning needs and the school's instructional vision
- Support each teacher's self-reflection, goal setting and growth through ongoing conversation, focused observation, feedback and professional development.
- "Provide teacher learning opportunities that intentionally examine and confront biases in the context of instructional practice, academic content and creating inclusive classrooms."

1. Adopt, implement and support an instructional framework that reflects the identity, values and beliefs of the organization. Link all goals and initiatives to the instructional framework and use to guide the PD, including that about FAPE and LRE.
2. Promote, monitor and reinforce patterns of interaction between principal and teacher and among teachers that indicate that all are valued for their contributions.
3. Provide training on IDEA and FAPE, including continuum of programs and services to provide LRE
 - a. Communicate how accommodations are advancing student learning, rather than excusing students from learning.
 - b. Simulations and scenarios for general educators to experience what life is like for their students, including sensory deprivation and overload, reading with goggles, listening with headphones, etc. as well as the use of assistive technology while using the augmented tools to experience how the accommodation provides access and support rather than undermines learning.
 - c. Establish structures for educators and students to identify problems of practice and suggest solutions
4. Principal creates opportunities for each educator's status to be elevated, not at the expense of others, but in ways that advance learning and build culture. 5) Ask the special educator to 'lead the learning' in areas specific to gen ed lack of knowledge or interaction with the IEP
 - a. Assess staff members strengths and match opportunities for growth with their abilities and aptitudes.
5. Before launching new initiatives, introduce a visual change model so people know what to expect. Create a chart or matrix to capture as many factors as possible and use them to guide conversations amongst staff and other stakeholders.
 - a. Develop/Foster change management skills in staff members by developing their capacity to launch and manage innovative practices with the learning community. For example use approaches like backward planning to introduce new ideas among staff and other stakeholders. Show the story vs tell the story.
 - b. Focus on transparent communication, building trust, providing professional training and support, and creating fair and consistent systems of accountability, fundamentalism and its impact decrease.
6. Professional development on competency based learning, grading and grading practice, personal

curricula, RTI, MTSS, 504, Spec Ed law, serving diverse populations, including specialized training for ASD and EI.

7. Educate gen. ed. staff on their roles and responsibilities to develop all students, including working with special ed. teachers in co-taught settings so that aren't marginalized. This needs to take place before the start of school in Pd.
8. Make sure accommodations and modifications are not further disabling students and/or presented as a menu of options to select. Rather each specifically picked to ensure student success long-term so that more doors are opened than closed.
9. Create and engage general educators in simulations and scenarios to experience what life is like for their students, including sensory deprivation and overload, reading with goggles, listening with headphones, etc. as well as the use of assistive technology while using the augmented tools to experience how the accommodation provides access and support rather than undermines learning.
10. Learn how to manage complex change with a clear vision, development of skills, providing of incentives and resources, and guided by a clear action plan that is iterated as it is implemented to avoid confusion, anxiety, resistance, frustration and false starts.
11. Strategically identify needs, create practices, and allocate resources to encourage staff members and students to help identify ways to reach desired outcomes.
12. Engage general and special educators in unpacking standards, identifying essential knowledge and skills, developing performance tasks aligned to these essentials, and clear success criteria for students (and staff)

Resource Management

- **Identifying Priorities**

- Use data on student learning and well-being, plus teaching practice, to determine strengths, needs and priorities aligned with the school's vision and mission.
- Establish measurable growth goals for school climate and student academic development, and appropriate goals for student social and emotional development.
- Analyze information to improve the effectiveness of programs, processes and the equitable use of resources.

- **Aligning Resources**

- Leverage school-based resources (e.g., people, expertise, time, space) to create equitable experiences and outcomes.
- Continuously improve by incorporating the full range of assets (perspectives, languages, cultures, skills, networks) present in the school community.
- Strengthen partnerships with the community to inform and generate support for strategic priorities.

- **Developing Talent**

- Cultivate a diverse staff that possesses understanding of the developmental needs of every student.
- Provide multiple types of professional learning opportunities that support the goals and development of each staff member.
- Institute processes for reflection and feedback that are strengths-based and focused on growth.

1. Clarify

- a. expectations for application of special education law (What is mutually agreeable time?).
- b. job descriptions with primary and secondary responsibilities
- c. General and Special Educator jobs...Who to go to for what (and what not to go to someone for)
- d. Paraprofessional expectations (Including providing the necessary training and job descriptions).

2. Be intentional about assignment of staff

- a. based on geography and location
- b. experience
- c. knowledge of the students
- d. Impact on building/district culture
- e. Design a system that is team oriented that supports procedural compliance thus allowing for more time and emphasis on instructional delivery.

3. Involve key stakeholders in

- a. determining resource needs based upon disaggregated student learning and teacher practice data aligned with vision and mission to address diversity of needs.
- b. identifying and leveraging existing resources, including time, money, technology, space, materials, expertise and partnerships to benefit all students equitably.
- c. make adjustments to budget, schedules, staffing patterns and collaborative planning time to benefit all students.

4. Provide release time as needed when paperload grows beyond normal demand (may include time for Medicaid billing).

5. Invest in identifying quality resources to train educators in, both gen ed and sped, and then make sure resources shared during training are accessible by staff and students

during the school year. Include teachers in the identification of resources, not only higher administration

6. Create intentional meetings of all teaching staff to develop understanding and voice needs to each other between gen ed and special educators (to address “strengthen partnerships” within the building)
7. Provide access to current conference for special educators to attend yearly (connection to other special educators, current developments in the field, best instructional practices, changing rules)
8. Host a conference with community services present with special educators to voice needs and gain support and knowledge of what is available.
9. Work with stakeholders to establish and implement a variety of decision-making processes for the equitable allocation of resources to address problems of student learning and educator best practices.
10. Proactively seek additional resources and networks with external partners and providers to support strategic priorities and needs.
11. Conduct a Time / Task analysis of what general and special educators are asked to do. Address inequities and/or provide additional pay (e.g., schedule B)
12. Explore para compensation to acquire more educated and qualified staff, knowing many don't attend staff PD, often aren't aware of some of the foundational practices and expectations. Consequently the staff experience burnout not just because of lack of paras, but also extra duty of supervising and leading paras who are not equipped for jobs they are hired.