

Indicator: Teams of special educators, general education teachers, and related service providers meet regularly to enhance/unify instructional planning and program implementation for students with disabilities. (5118)

The literature on the importance of special education and general education staff meeting and working collaboratively to plan and implement specialized instruction for students with disabilities makes the following important recommendations:

As states increase their efforts to implement standards-based curriculum for all students, educators of all types must develop a wider range of collaboration skills that facilitate cooperative planning and effective instructional implementation. For example, in their efforts to promote policies and practices to improve educational performance for students with disabilities, the President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education (2002) recommended that "teachers in general education learn about special education." This recommendation is consistent with the legislative priority, *Unified System of Education*, established by the National Association of State Directors of Special Education, which focuses on the infusion of quality teaching on the part of both general and special education teachers. This priority explicitly acknowledges that "the success of all children is dependent on the quality of both special education and general education...and that special education is not a place apart, but an integral part of education" (NASDSE, 2002).

To create a positive student learning experience with growth in student achievement, educators have invested time and effort in establishing the processes to identify students at risk for failure and to provide differentiation in their instructional delivery to improve understanding. While both are important steps, neither will be successful in raising student achievement if an effective, well documented monitoring process for student growth is not in place. Progress monitoring identifies which skills may be in need of being reviewed and retaught. It helps identify what the instructional focus should be for individuals or small groups who need help.

It is crucial that the group of professionals working in the monitoring phase represent a multidisciplinary viewpoint, can identify the data to be reviewed and timeframe for a monitoring cycle, and can clearly delineate the steps in documenting student progress. Walberg states that we must consider both summative and formative assessment in the monitoring phase. Walberg also states, "district and school staff can form work groups organized by grade-level and possibly by subject to develop practical classroom assessments to measure weekly or monthly progress of students." Team members must work together to modify both classroom instruction and interventions for more successful student outcomes. The team should be comprised of all the service providers for students with special needs as "it is assumed that no one person or profession has an adequate knowledge base or sufficient expertise to execute all functions (assessment, planning, and intervention) associated with providing education services for students (ASHA, 1991). Thus all team members contribute to the coordinated approach (educational program, IEP, IFSP) designed for each child (and family), although each team member's responsibility for implementation may vary" (Catlett & Halper, 1992). Often teams focus on summative data, but formative assessment data should not be overlooked. Fisher and Frey point to its value in stating, "Teachers use formative assessments to improve instructional methods and provide student feedback throughout the teaching and learning process. The results of formative assessments are used to modify and validate instruction."

In addition to formative assessments, interim division assessments, teacher-made tests, unit tests, computer-generated assessments and student coursework are all examples of possible data points for use in assessing effective interventions or determining the need for new targeted interventions.

Redding (2006) has pointed to another value of an effective monitoring strategy. His research has found that “monitoring the application of targeted learning strategies by teachers can help a school refine its professional development processes and improve its teachers’ effectiveness.” A collaborative team using multiple data points could find concepts poorly understood are not just a student understanding issue, but a methods or materials problem. By developing a new instructional approach and re-teaching the concept, student understanding may increase. Data comparisons of the outcomes from various interventions can identify which strategies are most effective; these can be extended to other students in multiple classrooms.

Each member of the team brings their strengths and expertise. Each member has a different perspective of the student that they can share. Each member becomes a valuable resource to “strengthen teaching and learning opportunities, methods, and effectiveness” (Ripley, 1997). As for any team, the biggest challenge and commitment is to find the time to plan and evaluate effectiveness of interventions.

References and other resources

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