Students with Disabilities Can Make AYP

What _Every_ School Leader Should Know

Acknowledgements

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Introduction

In 1975, Congress passed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act; requiring public schools to educate all children with disabilities. The law produced significant changes across the country. For example, public school systems became responsible for educating students with visual impairments, physical disabilities, and intellectual disabilities. Over the next several years, special schools were created for students with the most significant disabilities. This represented unprecedented progress since many students, prior to 1975, did not have a chance to participate in the great opportunity of an American public education. In the ensuing years, many students have also been evaluated and determined to have invisible impairments, such as learning disabilities, that are not readily apparent but nonetheless have an impact on a child's educational progress.

In that initial federal special education law and its reauthorizations (1983, 1986, 1990, 1997), which later became known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), a strong accountability system was fully described. Accountability, however, was not based on academic outcomes as we currently define accountability. It focused on procedural due process as a way to ensure that students with disabilities had a free and appropriate public education. The law clearly outlined procedural safeguards describing how children should be evaluated, how parents should be involved in the decision-making process, and how an annual plan, called an Individualized Education Program (IEP), should be developed for each child with a disability who is eligible for special education. In the decades since 1975, the due process procedures became more and more complex and the resulting paperwork increasingly more burdensome. But, every "t" was crossed and every "i" was dotted to make sure that students were provided every special education service for which they were legally entitled.

The inherent problem with procedural based accountability is obvious. The IEP can include all required components; every timeline can be met; and parents can be dutifully afforded every due process right; without having an impact on student progress in the least. A school can follow every regulation (and there are hundreds) but that is no guarantee that the students are actually learning. Nonetheless, state departments of

education across the country are responsible for monitoring special education programs in local school systems. Mounds of folders full of paperwork and documentation have been reviewed for decades to ensure compliance with procedural safeguards.

The concept of accountability changed drastically for students with disabilities when the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation was signed into law in 2002 with overwhelming bipartisan support. This legislation, an update of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, requires each public school to improve the achievement of all students. Schools must systematically show progress over several years until, by 2014, all students meet state-defined standards of academic performance.

Accountability, based on educational outcomes, is now mandated for students with disabilities. Previously, schools could opt out of including students with disabilities on the school-wide tests; or they could assess the students, but remove their scores from the official school scores. The NCLB legislation states that all students must be included in the accountability system and that each subgroup of students must make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in order for the school to make AYP. Subgroups include the various ethnic groups, students who are economically disadvantaged, those who have limited English skills, and students with disabilities.

The achievement scores of students with disabilities directly contribute towards a school's rating, and those scores can not get lost in the average. All of the scores of students with disabilities are combined to make one of the counted subgroups. The school can not make AYP unless that subgroup makes sufficient progress. This expectation is the same for each subgroup. If the disability subgroup does not make sufficient progress over time, then the school will be labeled as a Needs Improvement school.

Due to this emphasis on accountability for educational outcomes for all students, many school leaders and teachers find themselves in a challenging position. Some school administrators have limited training or experience in special education and yet they are being held accountable for ensuring that students with disabilities make academic progress. In addition, special education administrators and teachers are being asked to be full participants in the accountability system that focuses on how much children learn rather than focusing almost exclusively on the due process procedures. The purpose of

this book is to provide a step-by-step, systematic process that will increase the academic achievement of students with disabilities and will enable them to make AYP.

This book is written for two groups of people. First, it is designed to provide information for school leaders and teachers without a background in special education who are being asked to provide effective educational programs for special education students. For you, it will provide high-leverage activities that will enable you to evaluate the current performance of students in your school and to implement instructional and organizational improvements to increase their performance.

Second, this book is also designed for special education teachers and administrators who have a wealth of expertise regarding students with disabilities. A framework will be provided for analyzing the massive and often overwhelming information being thrown at you everyday in order to select and implement best practices. This framework will guide you as you shift your role from one of paperwork compliance to one of ensuring that students with and without disabilities show impressive educational growth.

There are some cautions to consider. There are no silver bullets for quick and easy improvement. If they existed, their use would be widespread and all students would be meeting standards. This book provides a systematic process that will assist you in working with a team to analyze needs and determine which activities, if implemented, would have the greatest impact on students with disabilities in your school. It will:

- Describe specific analytical activities to assess both student and organizational needs.
- Review instructional and organizational barriers seen in many schools across the country that negatively impact the performance of students with disabilities.
- Determine how to broker or develop resources and initiatives to address the specific instructional and organizational barriers that are evident in your school.
- Provide a guide for developing a plan of action that will focus and align all of the initiatives in your school so that students with disabilities as well as students without disabilities make progress.

- Review the steps needed to effectively monitor and lead your improvement efforts so that the changes actually result in long-term improvement in professional practices and tangible growth in student performance.

A visual organizer of this process is presented on the next page which will be referred to throughout the book. To read the visual organizer, begin at the bottom of the page.

Framework for Improving the Achievement of Students with Disabilities

Step 6: Implement Actions and Maintain Momentum
- A. Clearly describe what success looks like
- B. Keep it simple
- C. Keep it on the front burner
- D. Continuously monitor student performance
- E. Continuously monitor progress in adult practices
- F. Build effective professional development systems
- G. Share and celebrate success

Step 5: Develop an Action Plan
- A. Build ownership throughout the school
- B. Determine priority actions
- C. Build ongoing professional development systems
- D. Reserve time for conducting classroom observations

Step 4: Overcome Organizational Barriers
- A. Provide a second tier of support
- B. Teach reading at all grade levels when necessary
- C. Include special education teachers in all professional development initiatives
- D. Provide time for co-teachers to plan collaboratively
- E. Provide professional development activities on co-teaching
- F. Align instructional materials to the curriculum

Step 3: Overcome Instructional Barriers
- A. Provide effective instruction in pull out classes
- B. Provide effective accommodations
- C. Ensure uninterrupted instructional time
- D. Implement effective co-teaching
- E. Administer school-wide assessments appropriately
- F. Ensure in-depth instruction
- G. Utilize ongoing formative assessments to guide instruction

Step 2: Develop Support Systems for Specific Students
- A. Identify bubble and high impact students
- B. Review IEPs
- C. Develop a support system for specific students

Step 1: Identify School Needs
- A. Develop a team
- B. Redefine the role of special education administrators
- C. Analyze school-wide data

Start Here

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Step 1

Identify School Needs

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Develop a Team

The first step in making any change is taking a long, hard look at the current situation. A school in which all students are meeting high standards has no reason to change. A school that can not make this claim has to look at its current status in order to decide what it needs to change and how to make the changes. This analysis should be completed by a school-wide team. An analysis conducted by the principal alone, an individual teacher, or even a grade level team of teachers may be useful, but is not as likely to result in any comprehensive change that will ultimately be reflected in students meeting or exceeding performance standards.

Ideally, the school team that analyzes the school-wide data (and completes the other five steps of the Six Step Framework) will include the principal, grade level or content area general education teachers, special education teachers, and the system's special education director. The principal and the special education director are mandatory team members, as are teachers representing both special and general education. A school may choose to involve other stakeholders including parents, community or business partners, related services providers, or paraprofessionals.

However, if the core team utilizing the Six Step Framework does not include the principal and special education director, time and energy are being wasted and little change will result. In Step 4 of the framework, Overcoming Organizational Barriers, it will be clear that changes at the organizational level are beyond the authority of individual teachers. Organizational changes at the school level require the principal's involvement. At the system level, organizational changes may require the participation of the special education director or the director's collaboration with the system's leadership team to provide resources and support for the change process.

At the system level, the superintendent's support is also critical. The superintendent will not necessarily be involved in the detailed analysis of school-wide data, but support from that office will often be needed for successful implementation of change initiatives. If the superintendent leads a system-wide team through the Six Step Framework with each principal in turn leading school-wide core teams, there is a greater likelihood that the framework will be used to lead to change resulting in improved

student performance. However, it is possible for a single school to successfully use the framework, even when the entire school system does not, as long as the team includes the key core team members: the principal, special and general education teachers, and the special education director.

Redefine the Role of Special Education Administrators

During this process of selecting your leadership team, you must redefine the role of special education administrators. They should be a part of the school leadership team that analyzes student performance and sets a course for improvement. Special education administrators should become instructional leaders, working side-by-side with the school's leadership team in implementing the Six Step Framework. In many school systems, the special education division, often housed in the central office, employs administrators who are assigned to multiple schools. The special education administrators may have different titles such as lead teacher, coordinator, or liaison, for example. Traditionally, these special education administrators have been responsible for spending time in each of their assigned schools to lead and support the special education teachers. In addition, there may be school-based personnel, perhaps an assistant principal, assigned to supervise special education throughout the school. On a typical school visit, the special education administrator checks in with the school's front office and then visits each special education teacher. Much time and energy is focused on supervising the due process procedures that were described earlier. In addition, they may intervene in sensitive situations between parents of students with disabilities and school personnel, attend IEP meetings, or order supplies.

Instead of spending most of their time helping individual teachers, they should be at the table to collaborate when system or school improvement initiatives are designed and undertaken. Their role is to advocate for the needs of students with disabilities within the context of the overall plans. For example, special education administrators should ask, "How can this reading initiative expand to ensure that students with disabilities benefit from these activities as much as their peers without disabilities?" Once the plans are developed, special education administrators should assist the school administrators in providing coaching and support to special education and general education teachers as those initiatives are implemented. A special education administrator may observe general

education classes and provide suggestions and opportunities for brainstorming to determine how the teacher can enable all students to be successful; students with and without disabilities. Likewise, other school administrators will provide coaching and support to general education and special education teachers during implementation. In this manner, collaborative relationships should be developed between the special education administrators from the central office and the school-based administrators as initiatives are planned and implemented, as mid-course adjustments are made, and throughout the improvement process.

In order to make this change, some of the responsibilities that currently burden the special education administrators' schedules must be reassigned. It is impossible to continue to add responsibilities to the plate of supervisors and assume that all of those tasks can be completed effectively. These leaders must prioritize activities, such as implementation of the Six Step Framework. Other managerial duties may have to be shared or delegated. Tasks must be prioritized daily. Which tasks are critical to creating a school culture that focuses on student learning? Which can be delegated or shared? Which can be eliminated? Administrative teams may collaborate to determine how to accomplish this role-restructuring.

The truth remains, however, that due process protections are still a critical component of federal special education legislation. They must be implemented and documented. School leaders and special education administrators must be extremely creative with their division of duties to ensure that the mandatory paperwork is done efficiently so that special education administrators (and other administrators) have the time for their most meaningful work, leading instruction and impacting student performance.

Analyze School-Wide Data

After you have developed your team and reconsidered the role of special education administrators, it is necessary to analyze school-wide data to determine the performance of students with disabilities. This analysis has multiple purposes. First, it provides a broad understanding of how students with disabilities are performing. It is also the foundation for the next five steps in the framework.

As required by the NCLB legislation, all students must participate in assessments to evaluate their proficiency in specific subject areas (e.g. reading). School-wide assessments are administered near the end of the school year. They are designed to evaluate whether a student has met the state performance standards and they also reflect how well a school is performing. A few weeks after the administration of the assessments, the school receives results for every child, for the school as a whole, and for each subgroup of students. Based on these results and other information, it is determined whether the school is making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) or whether the school should be labeled as a Needs Improvement School.

The student population is divided into subgroups that include ethnic groups (e.g., African American, White, and Asian), students from economically disadvantaged families, students who are English language learners, and students with disabilities. In order for a school to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), each subgroup must show sufficient progress. If every subgroup meets expectations except the disability subgroup, then the school does not make AYP. If the school does not make AYP for two consecutive years, then the school is labeled as a Needs Improvement school.

The basic purpose of the Six Step Framework is to provide a process which can assist the disability subgroup to make AYP. But, it would be a mistake to limit the goal to only making AYP, meaning the students with disabilities barely meet minimum standards. Focusing exclusively on the minimum standard increases the risk that there will be a reduction in the percentage of students exceeding standards. Therefore, for the remainder of this book, the goal will be to assist students with disabilities to meet or *exceed* standards.

During Step 1 of the framework, your school team analyzes the performance of the disability subgroup on the annual assessments (and on any other school-wide data that is available.) As we progress through the six steps, this process could also work as a framework for impacting the performance of any student subgroup. For the purpose of this book, however, the focus is on students with disabilities.

The following charts document how students with disabilities performed on the school-wide assessment in a hypothetical middle school in Georgia, Miller Johnson Middle School. In order to meet standards on the Georgia assessment, the Criterion

Referenced Competency Test (CRCT), a student must score at least 300 points on the content areas (reading, English/Language Arts, and math). Adequate Yearly Progress is determined in part by the percentage of students in each subgroup who meet that numerical standard. But, students can also show that they have exceeded expectations by scoring 350 points or more on the respective content areas. The average score for students with disabilities in each grade is provided. In addition, the percentage of students with disabilities that met, exceeded, or did not meet standards is provided. This percentage is not only provided for each content area, but it is also provided for each domain within the content area. Looking at these assessment results, how would you analyze the performance of students with disabilities?

Miller Johnson Middle School
Results for Students with Disabilities on the Georgia CRCT

English/Language Arts								
Number of students tested in English/ Language Arts	English/ Language Arts mean scaled score	% of students who did not meet the standards	% of students who met the standards	% of students who exceeded the standards	% of students who met or exceeded standards on Sentence Construction & Revision	% of students who met or exceeded standards on Paragraph Content & Organization	% of students who met or exceeded standards on Grammar & Mechanics	% of students who met or exceeded standards on Research Process/Source Materials
6th Grade								
35	284	71	29	0	31	37	34	23
7th Grade								
39	286	69	31	0	39	42	39	26
8th Grade								
36	290	64	36	0	42	44	47	28

Reading								
Number of students tested in Reading	Reading mean scaled score	% of students who did not meet the standards	% of students who met the standards	% of students who exceeded the standards	% of students who met or exceeded standards on Reading for Vocabulary Improvement	% of students who met or exceeded standards on Reading for Locating & Recalling Information	% of students who met or exceeded standards on Reading for Meaning	% of students who met or exceeded standards on Reading for Critical Analysis
6th Grade								
35	281	74	26	0	31	34	31	23
7th Grade								
39	289	69	31	0	36	38	36	21
8th Grade								
36	288	66	34	0	39	42	39	25

Miller Johnson Middle School
Results for Students with Disabilities on the Georgia CRCT

Math										
Number of students tested in Math	Math mean scaled score	% of students who did not meet the standards	% of students who met the standards	% of students who exceeded the standards	% of students who met or exceeded standards on Number Sense & Numeration	% of students who met or exceeded standards on Geometry & Measurement	% of students who met or exceeded standards on Patterns & Relationships	% of students who met or exceeded standards on Statistics & Probability	% of students who met or exceeded standards on Computation & Estimation	% of students who met or exceeded standards on Problem Solving
6th Grade										
35	273	82	18	0	25	20	23	14	25	14
7th Grade										
39	275	83	17	0	23	21	21	13	23	13
8th Grade										
36	274	82	18	.0	25	19	22	14	25	14

The analysis reveals several things. The students in the disability subgroup did not, on average, make the minimum proficiency score in reading, English/Language Arts, or math. In addition, none of the students with disabilities scored 350 points, exceeding standards, on any content tests. While it is beyond the scope of this book to analyze other subgroups, the school team analyzing this data might want to see if any students exceeded standards. On the whole, students were stronger in the areas of reading and English/Language Arts than they were in mathematics. Surprisingly perhaps, in English/Language Arts, the older student outperformed the younger students. In that content area, the 8th grade students outperformed the 7th grade student who outperformed the 6th graders. Analyses of the assessment domains reveal similar weaknesses for the 6th, 7th, and 8th graders. Students were relatively weak in: reading for critical analysis (reading); the research process and source materials (English/Language Arts); and statistics, probability and problem solving (math).

As data are reviewed and trends recognized, theories begin to emerge about instruction. Perhaps instruction for students with disabilities has lacked rigor. There may have been a focus on surface level information rather than delving deeply into the content and asking students to perform higher level cognitive skills. Students may have been asked to repeat the correct answer rather than applying information in a complex and challenging way. If this were corrected, perhaps some students with disabilities would exceed expectations in the three content areas.

Low level instruction may occur for different reasons. School personnel may have depressed expectations for students with disabilities. They may assume that students with disabilities, regardless of the type of their disability, are fundamentally limited in their potential. This reasoning is flawed. According to Gloeckler (2006), the overwhelming majority of students with disabilities have at least average intelligence. In this school, there may be few special education students participating in challenging courses, possibly because teachers and parents with good, but misguided intentions want to protect them from the possibility of failure.

Another reason for the lack of in-depth instruction may be teacher preparedness. Teachers may not feel comfortable delving deeply into the content areas. There may be a

high number of teachers who are not fully credentialed in the subject matter they are assigned to teach. A look at teachers' credentials may reveal that less experienced and less qualified teachers are more often assigned to teach students with disabilities. Of course, there could easily be other reasons for low student performance. Examination of additional data may lead to further theories. For example, the team might review the school schedule to determine if special education students are spending an inordinate amount of time in lower level classes.

The leadership team using this book's Six Step Framework should complete the analysis of data. In addition, other staff members should participate in the analysis. Various personnel will be able to contribute background information explaining the data. According to the Fiscal Policy Studies Institute, there is a "story behind the baseline" that can help explain the data (Friedman, 2006). What has happened over the past few years at our school? What has been tried before? What worked and what did not? By analyzing the school-wide data, the entire school staff can develop a sense of ownership for the students' performance. They will offer effective ideas for improving instruction and overcoming barriers. They are also likely to beef up their instruction in particular content areas and specific domains. Merely being involved in the data analysis and theory development often has an impact on teachers' instructional practices.

In addition to analyzing assessment data, your school team should analyze other school-wide data. This may include information on absentee rates for teachers and students; data on office discipline referrals; or class grades, for example. The data examined can be summative in nature, such as annual assessments, or it can be formative data, information that is gathered much more frequently during the school year to determine how well students are learning. Unlike summative data, formative data are used to reflect a student's progress in class, thereby providing the teachers with information to guide continued instruction. Many schools administer informal assessments, as often as every few days to every few weeks, in order to analyze students' learning curves. The team can analyze the trend line of this data for students with disabilities to determine students' academic progress.

Schools in different states and school systems collect different school-wide data. The team should analyze each data element for the disability subgroup and the data for all

students when appropriate to generate a general understanding of the performance of students with disabilities. This information will provide you with a general impression of how the students with disabilities performed during the preceding school year and the needs to be addressed in improvement planning for the upcoming year.

For the purposes of this book, one more set of data, office discipline referrals, will be analyzed from Miller Johnson Middle School. Many schools collect data on students who are referred to the office for a discipline infraction. This data generally includes which students were referred to the office, the infraction that resulted in the referral, the location in the building where the infraction occurred, and the referring teacher. The following chart summarizes a portion of that data. In this case, it is best to analyze the data for all students, not just for students with disabilities. This will enable your team to determine if a persistent discipline problem exists in the school, and whether the discipline problem is limited to students with disabilities or is pervasive across the student body. In the following example, there are 1205 students in the school, 130 who are students with disabilities.

Miller Johnson Middle School
Discipline Data

Number of Office Referrals for Disciplinary Infractions per Month (previous school year)											
	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Total
Location of Infraction											
Classrooms	15	21	18	16	15	18	17	16	14	17	**167**
Gym	12	14	13	16	12	15	27	13	11	15	**148**
Cafeteria	32	28	29	25	24	29	13	24	27	28	**259**
Bus Port	9	10	11	7	4	5	10	7	12	15	**90**
Main Hall	16	15	14	12	4	17	9	12	17	14	**130**
Restrooms	17	20	19	11	12	11	8	17	19	13	**147**
Total	**101**	**108**	**104**	**87**	**71**	**95**	**84**	**89**	**100**	**102**	**941**

Frequency of Office Referrals for Disciplinary Infractions per Student per Year		
	All Students	**Number of students with disabilities**
Number of students referred 1 time	109	14
Number of students referred 2-3 times	54	9
Number of students referred 4-5 times	32	15
Number of students referred 6-7 times	24	10
Number of students referred 8-10 times	17	13
Number of students referred more than 10 times	14	13

The discipline data are very revealing. It is apparent that discipline problems at Miller Johnson Middle School are not limited to the students with disabilities. Discipline problems occur in many areas of the campus, with particular difficulty in the school cafeteria. An inordinate amount of time is being spent on discipline issues. Teachers and administrators could be using that time to improve instruction, if there were fewer discipline referrals. In addition, students are losing irreplaceable instructional time.

When analyzing the frequency of office discipline referrals, it is apparent that many students are referred to the office repetitively. Of those students who receive multiple office referrals, a disproportionate number of students have disabilities. Approximately 10% of the students in the school have disabilities. As students are referred more often, a greater percentage of the students have disabilities. In the end, it is probably accurate to theorize that students' misbehavior is a significant barrier to improving student achievement. This barrier exists for the entire student body, but is amplified for the disability subgroup. The leadership team's first reaction may be to develop tough discipline guidelines so that students are punished harshly for misbehavior. This approach does not necessarily result in either increasing students' responsible behavior or reducing inappropriate behavior.

A school's challenge is to develop a school-wide *positive* discipline system in which a common set of positive expectations are communicated, and responsible student behavior is explicitly taught and reinforced.   Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is one such school-wide behavioral system. To read a complete description of PBIS, access www.pbis.org/schoolwide.htm.

The analysis of school-wide data sets the foundation for the Six Step Framework. Analyzing the data provides a general impression of the performance of students with disabilities in your school. It also allows for the opportunity to develop theories about the school-wide educational program. Does the school's primary problem revolve around math instruction, for example? Or, are discipline problems so pervasive that both students with *and* without disabilities are having difficulty learning? After reviewing the school-wide data, improvement priorities should start to emerge.

There are a few cautions to consider. The student population in any school changes from one year to the next. In fact, many schools have populations that change

quite a bit over the course of a year. It is entirely possible that the current assessment results will reflect a group of students that are no longer in your school. This is pertinent especially in high schools in which students may only participate in a school-wide assessment once, during their junior year, for example. In this case, the students taking the assessment will always be different from one year to the next.

In this situation, high schools should implement assessments that will assist in forecasting how students will perform on the school-wide assessments. These assessments may take the form of end-of-course assessments or common assessments that can be used each year. Regardless of the approach, these assessments should be aligned to the school-wide assessment used to determine a school's AYP status.

In addition, one year's data are not as powerful as multiple years of data. During the analysis process, compare students' performance over the last few years. During that analysis, you may determine that the 3rd grade students generally performed well in math, but their achievement leveled off in 4th grade. This revelation may suggest that improvements should focus on the instruction that is being provided in the 4th grade. A multi-year analysis will also show you where students are making progress. If, over the last few years, math scores have systematically increased, then it may be best to stay the course with the instructional improvements currently underway. The scores may not meet the target yet, but the positive trend line suggests that scores are headed in the right direction. On the other hand, the data, if unchanged over the last few years, may suggest that the instructional innovations that you have attempted have not been successful. Therefore, it may be time to rethink and make some changes.

Uncovering data inevitably leads to the need to uncover more data. One data indicator in isolation cannot tell the whole story. It takes piecing the data together to arrive at a complete picture. This, however, can become problematic. It is easy for data analysis to become data paralysis. You can get so bogged down in the data that it generates confusion rather than sound theories. The tendency during the data analysis phase is to ask more questions. What if we could slice the data in this way? Were the office discipline referrals more prevalent on certain days of the week? Did the boys with disabilities under perform or over perform in comparison to the girls with disabilities? The questions can really become more suffocating than helpful. As school leaders, you

must follow the hunches about your school by looking at the data. Sometimes those hunches have merit and sometimes they do not. Never allow the data to develop a life of its own so that it produces anxiety instead of meaningful information which leads to improvement.

At the conclusion of each step, questions will be provided to guide the members of your leadership team through the Six Step Framework. Complete the following questions in order to analyze the performance of students with disabilities based on school-wide data.

Step 1: Identify School Needs

List the personnel who will be leading the Six Step Framework for your school. Does your leadership team include meaningful involvement from the school principal, special education director, general education teachers, and special education teachers?

How are all members of the faculty involved in analyzing school-wide data?

What does the analysis of school-wide assessment results reveal about the students with disabilities in your school? What are your theories behind the data? Are these findings similar for other subgroups of students?

What other school-wide data did you analyze and what did that analysis reveal? What are the theories behind the data?

Step 2

Develop Support Systems for Specific Students

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Step 2 of the Six Step Framework involves developing a support system for specific students with disabilities. In this step, students who could benefit from additional support and who are most likely to have a huge impact on your school's AYP status will be identified. In Step 1, we discussed the analysis of school-wide data in order to develop a general view of the performance of students with disabilities in your school. In Step 2, we will identify and build a support system for those students who need something above and beyond typical instruction.

Identify Bubble and High Impact Students

To begin, we will dig a little deeper into the data to determine those students who are bubble students and those who are high impact students. Every year, near the end of the college basketball season, sportscasters predict which college teams will be invited to participate in the NCAA basketball tournament. The sportscasters discuss which teams are "on the bubble" for either receiving an invitation or being shut out of the 65 team roster. A team who wins 17 games in a season is probably "on the bubble." If they won games against impressive opponents, or play in a tough conference, they may make it under the wire and receive an invitation. They are on the good side of the bubble. If, on the other hand, their season was less impressive, they may be left out.

Every school has students who just barely meet or miss the minimum score on school-wide assessments. School leadership teams must review their school-wide assessment data for each student to determine which students barely met or barely missed meeting standards. For the following year, those students are considered bubble students, in that they could easily move into, or out of, the group of students meeting expectations. In the previous step, we discussed a hypothetical middle school in Georgia where students must score a minimum of 300 points to meet expectations. In this scenario, school personnel identify which students were just under the cut score. These will be the students who need support during the upcoming school year to ensure they meet expectations, since they came close last year. In addition, students who were just over the cut score need support to be sure they continue to meet expectations since they barely made it the year before. There are no hard-set rules on the actual point spread that should be used to identify the bubble students. In Georgia, a school may choose to look at the scores between 290 – 310 points, or between 285 – 315 points. (It should be noted

that many other students will need additional support during the school year, including students who fell well below the cut score and those students who easily exceeded the cut score.)

We will now turn our attention to another hypothetical school in Georgia, Robert Middleton Elementary School. Like middle schools, elementary school students must score a minimum of 300 points to meet expectations and 350 points to exceed expectations. A sample of the students' scores has been placed in order from the highest scoring students to the lowest scoring students. The bubble students are identified.

Robert Middleton Elementary School
Student Scores on the Georgia CRCT

Reading		English/Language Arts		Math	
M.C.	336	N.O.	337	Z.S.	322
J.C.	335	L.C.	336	A.S.	322
A.P.	335	K.A.	334	M.C.	319
J.O.	334	J.O.	334	J.C.	319
B.T.	334	B.T.	332	A.P.	318
Z.S.	332	Z.S.	328	J.O.	318
A.S.	331	D.K.	327	B.T.	317
J.L.	331	L.R.	326	J.L.	317
L.M.	330	J.C.	326	L.M.	317
M.B.	329	A.P.	325	K.A.	316
N.O.	327	S.M.	324	D.K.	315
L.C.	326	L.W.	323	L.R.	315
K.A.	326	B.D.	323	M.B.	314
D.K.	324	M.C.	321	N.O.	313
L.R.	323	A.S.	320	L.C.	313
K.W.	323	J.L.	320	S.R.	312
S.M.	321	L.M.	319	H.R.	312
L.W.	319	M.B.	319	F.N.	311
B.D.	319	S.R.	317	P.A.	310
S.R.	317	H.R.	317	M.P.	310
H.R.	315	M.P.	316	C.B.	310
F.N.	314	F.A.	315	K.W.	309
P.A.	313	M.T.	315	S.M.	308
M.P.	311	K.W.	314	L.W.	305
C.B.	309	F.N.	314	B.D.	302
J.S.	307	P.A.	313	N.A.	300
K.C.	305	S.B.	310	M.M.	297
S.B.	302	S.K.	310	R.K.	294
S.K.	300	K.P.	305	G.D.	292
K.P.	297	N.A.	302	L.J.	290
N.A.	295	M.M.	300	C.F.	287
M.M.	293	L.J.	297	J.S.	286
L.J.	293	C.B.	296	K.C.	286
M.L.	292	J.S.	294	S.B.	285
R.K.	291	K.C.	292	S.K.	282
N.I.	288	M.L.	297	K.P.	282
F.A.	287	R.K.	289	L.J.	282
M.T.	285	N.I.	285	M.L.	281
A.C.	284	T.F.	284	M.T.	281
I.P.	284	N.U.	284	A.C.	280
T.F.	284	G.D.	283	I.P.	280
U.A.	282	L.J.	282	W.S.	277
T.R.	279	C.F.	279	N.U.	276
W.S.	277	A.C.	277	G.D.	276
N.U.	276	I.P.	274	L.J.	276
G.D.	278	H.B.	272	C.F.	275
L.J.	277	U.A.	271	T.F.	274
C.F.	276	T.R.	270	U.A.	271

In the chart above, 18 students could be considered bubble students in reading if the point spread was placed between 285-315 points. In English/Language Arts and math, 17 and 24 students respectively would meet the criteria. If school personnel are successful in maintaining those students who met expectations and helping those who barely missed the mark, they will have made great strides toward meeting AYP for students with disabilities. The teachers for each of these students need to be aware of students' assessment scores.

It should be noted that assessments in some states are not vertically aligned. A score of 300 in 3rd grade will not statistically equate to a 300 in 4th grade if the student makes exactly one year in academic progress. Even in those states, this process can still be helpful. Identifying the bubble students will give you an idea of which students should be observed closely and taught strategically to ensure that they make it over the proficiency hump in next year's assessment.

There is a caution for using this process for determining bubble students. This focus on students just meeting expectations may inadvertently lower expectations for students who can achieve more. If school personnel are single-minded in pursing 300 points in Georgia, then many students who perform at higher levels may not be sufficiently challenged. In order to compensate for this, schools should develop a list of students who are on the bubble for exceeding expectations, those students who scored within 10 points either way, let's say, of 350 points. The goal would be for those students to exceed expectations on next year's school-wide assessments.

In addition to identifying the bubble students, school personnel should identify those students who have a high impact on a school's ability to make AYP. To illustrate this point, we will continue the conversation about Middleton Elementary. The demographics of the student population are listed below.

Middleton Elementary School – Demographics	
Student Subgroup	**Number of Students**
All Students	787
African American	280
White	275
Native American/Alaskan	80
Hispanic	75
Asian/Pacific Islander	77
Free/Reduced Lunch	77
Student with Disabilities	76
Limited English Proficiency	76

We will discuss three different students who attend Middleton Elementary School. Michael is an African American student. He is not: a student with a disability, economically disadvantaged, or a student with limited English proficiency. Lee is an Asian student with a disability who speaks English fluently and receives free/reduced cost lunches. Sarai is an economically disadvantaged, white student with a disability, who has limited English proficiency.

Which of these students carries the most weight when it comes to determining whether Middleton Elementary School makes AYP? Michael's score on the school-wide assessment will be counted in the group of "all students" and one other time, in the African American subgroup, which consists of 280 students. In that subgroup, Michael's score will be 1 out of 280, carrying a weight of approximately .3% when determining if that subgroup will make AYP. Lee, however, is in three subgroups. Because he is in the Asian subgroup, his score will represent 1 out of 77 scores in that subgroup. Because that subgroup is smaller than the African American subgroup, Lee's score will account for approximately 1.2% of the scores in that subgroup. Therefore, his score is weightier than Michael's score. But, his impact does not end there. Lee is also in the economically disadvantaged subgroup (qualifies for free/reduced lunch) which is comprised of 77 students in addition to being in the disability subgroup, comprised of 76 students. As stated earlier, Lee's score represents approximately 1.2% of the scores in the Asian group. He also represents approximately 1.2% of the students in the economically disadvantaged group and approximately 1.3% of the students in the disability subgroup.

Because he is in three subgroups as opposed to one group for Michael, and those groups are smaller in size, Lee's score carries more mathematical weight than Michael's score when determining if Middleton Elementary School makes AYP.

The student with the highest impact, however, is Sarai. Her score is placed in four subgroups: White, disability, economically disadvantaged and Limited English Proficiency (LEP). Each of these subgroups is relatively small. In the White subgroup, Sarai's score represents approximately .4% of the scores; in the disability subgroup - 1.3%, economically disadvantaged – 1.2%, and LEP – 1.3%. Sarai's score has a huge impact on whether Middleton Elementary makes AYP, especially when you compare her to Michael. She is counted multiple times and each of those times she is counted, her score carries more weight because the sizes of her subgroups are smaller than Michael's group. (It should be noted that different states have minimum numbers of students that are necessary to be counted as a subgroup.)

It is obvious that high impact students in a school can have a tremendous impact on the school's AYP status. In Middleton Elementary School, it could be argued that a few dozen high impact students could mean the difference between making or not making AYP. These students cannot be allowed to fall through the cracks. That does not mean that schools should focus exclusively on these students. Improvement among high impact students cannot guarantee that a school will make AYP. Even if each of these students meets expectations, the school still may not make AYP. But these students can prevent a school from making AYP. If all of the high impact students fail to meet expectations, it will be extremely difficult for Middleton Elementary School to make AYP.

What does this mean for schools? With your leadership team you should determine which students are high impact students and which students are bubble students, and then develop a support structure for those students. At times, you will get a large return for your efforts because some students will be in both groups. (Again, we are not suggesting that other students will not need support.)

One more caution: Do not let the terms high impact or bubble student become just another way to label students. The only use of these terms is to help identify students whose scores indicate a need for more support.

Review Individual Education Programs

The first step in developing a tier of support for these students is to review their educational programs and determine if their current programs are likely to result in the students meeting or exceeding expectations. If weaknesses are detected in their educational programs, then changes can be made at the beginning of the year, rather than waiting for the student to fail at the end of the school year when it is too late to do anything about it.

Each student with a disability has an Individualized Education Program, or an IEP, which describes in detail the services and supports for the next year. Listed are the special and general education services, individual accommodations, or in some cases modifications, to be provided over the next year. Each IEP is developed individually by a team of people who know the student best, his or her own teachers and parents. According to the IDEA legislation, students aged 16 year and older must also be invited to be members of their IEP teams.

In this section, the components of the IEP will be described including a description of how each element can be reviewed for instructional utility. If implemented as written, will the program enable the student to make sufficient academic progress? Essentially, the review of a child's IEP, particularly for a bubble student and/or high impact student, will enable you to project whether the student will meet or exceed expectations. If you are a special education professional, you are already familiar with each component of the IEP. However, the focus in IEP development has been on compliance with state and federal rules and regulations until recently. Here, we are reviewing IEPs for instructional effectiveness.

If you are a school leader without a background in special education, or a general education teacher, you have had experience attending meetings in which IEPs were developed. While some leaders and general education teachers are extremely sophisticated IEP team members, many do not have a full understanding of the components of the IEP. Regardless of which category you are in, the process of reviewing the instructional effectiveness of IEPs is likely to reveal patterns of concerns or strengths that pave the way for improving the academic achievement of students with

disabilities. We will explain the instructional components and guide you through an analysis of an IEP for one student.

According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004, the federal special education legislation, the IEP is an overall program for the student which includes a complete description of strengths and weaknesses, measurable goals, a description of the supports and services, the location in which those services will occur, and a rationale that explains the service decisions. A Transition Plan must be written also for students who are 16 years old or older that supports successful transition to activities after high school graduation. Some states have required a Transition Plan to be developed for students even younger than 16. (We will not discuss the Transition Plan in depth in this exercise.)

IEP Components - Present Levels of Performance. Each IEP must contain a description of a student's strengths and needs, particularly those weaknesses that are caused by the disability. You may read that a student exhibits strength in a certain subject matter, like math, but struggles in reading. Or, you may read that a student has strong academic skills but has weaknesses in behavioral and social domains. The IEP should describe how the student has performed on the most recent school-wide assessments. The student may have met standards on some portions of the assessment, while missing the criteria on other sections. Specific challenges related to the student's disability are discussed. For a student with a learning disability, the Present Levels of Performance should describe how those learning difficulties impact school performance. Perhaps the student has trouble processing print or faces challenges with numbers. The IEP of a student with an emotional or behavioral disability will describe the student's behaviors and how they negatively impact school performance, whether socially or academically. Does the student exhibit aggressive tendencies or consistent disrespect to those in authority? Is the student quiet and unable to interact with other students? The Present Levels of Performance lay the groundwork for the rest of the IEP.

This description of the student should be sufficiently comprehensive so that an effective educational program can be developed that takes advantage of the student's strengths and meets the student's needs. When you develop or read a student's Present

Levels of Performance, you should ask yourself, "Do I know enough about this student to plan an effective educational program?"

IEP Components - Accommodations and Modifications. When a student has a disability, accommodations and/or modifications may be needed to make progress in school. Accommodations and modifications are actually very different. Accommodations are instructional alterations that allow the student to sidestep the impact of the disability while still meeting the grade level expectations. For example, a student who is blind may need written materials presented in Braille. This accommodation allows access to information and provides an alternative avenue for demonstrating knowledge, enabling achievement on the same level as non-disabled peers. Another example may involve a student with a learning disability who has weaknesses in reading and written expression skills. In a middle school social studies class, Keshandra, for example, may need to listen to directions and orally respond to the questions guiding the design of a research project, rather than having to read the questions and respond in writing. In this instance, the weaknesses in reading and written expression would have been a barrier in determining if she actually could design a research project that would meet the teacher's criteria. With this accommodation, she is able to demonstrate the same research competency as non-disabled peers of the same age.

Modifications, on the other hand, alter the expectations for the student. The instructional program is significantly changed to the point that it is clear at the outset that the student will not be expected to demonstrate proficiency equal to that of other students. Growth is still anticipated, although the student is not expected to meet the same standards as his non-disabled peers. Thomas, a young man in 4th grade, may have a significant cognitive/intellectual disability with functional capabilities equivalent to a 3 year old, though he is in 4th grade. For him, the 4th grade math curriculum may need to be modified. Instead of expecting him to perform long division, his teachers may provide access to the instructional standard with a focus on dividing fifty pencils into groups of ten. He is completing a division task, but his proficiency will not be demonstrated at the same level as his non-disabled peers.

In this section of the IEP, a student's accommodations and modifications will be documented. There are a few basic challenges for the IEP team as they determine

accommodations and modifications. First of all, they should be careful not to confuse the two. If the student is expected to meet the same proficiency standards as non-disabled peers on the school-wide assessment, then accommodations, not modifications are needed. Instructionally, the student should be achieving the curriculum standards throughout the school year. Otherwise, meeting the expectations on the end of the year assessment will be difficult.

The IEP team must make sure that the accommodations do not inadvertently become modifications by lowering the expectations for the student. In the example in which Keshandra orally responds to questions when designing a research project, the teacher should make sure that her answers have sufficient depth and complexity to meet grade level expectations. It is very easy to unintentionally lower the expectations when this type of accommodation is implemented, essentially accepting lower level answers.

Teachers should use the least intrusive accommodation for the student to achieve success. For example, Kenneth, a 9th grade student, has difficulty reading 9th grade text in various content classes. He typically reads at the 4th grade level. Some teachers may be tempted to provide all written materials orally or through assistive technology (e.g., a device that will orally read the text). These accommodations may be needed at times, especially during classroom tests. But, the teachers would be over accommodating if they did not allow him the opportunity to access any printed materials. Perhaps the teacher could provide him with an outline of the class discussion rather than expecting him to generate notes. With notes that are more direct than the textbook, he can continue to use his reading skills to access information. The accommodation is not overly intrusive and yet he is not penalized for his weak reading skills and can still be successful. This will serve him well because high expectations are being maintained. When reviewing this section of the IEP, ask yourself, "Are accommodations cleverly chosen to be minimally intrusive and utilize the student's strengths while compensating for his disability?" In addition, ask yourself, "If we implement these accommodations, will the student meet or exceed expectations by the end of the school year?"

IEP Components - Measurable Goals. The IEP should contain measurable goals that will enable the student to make sufficient progress in school. These goals should allow the student to progress from the Present Levels of Performance to the desired outcomes.

The goals may focus on behavioral/social elements, organizational skills, academic domains, or the like. In addition, some IEPs may include short-term objectives or benchmarks that will enable the student to meet the annual goals. When analyzing this section of the IEP, ask yourself the question, "If the student achieves these goals, will the student meet or exceed expectations on the school-wide assessments?"

IEP Components - Behavioral Intervention Plan. Some students with disabilities exhibit social and behavioral difficulties that interfere with their educational performance. For these students, a Behavioral Intervention Plan (BIP) must be developed. The behavioral plan should outline the supports needed to increase the student's responsible behavior and to decrease inappropriate behavior. This plan should include positive interventions to motivate and reinforce responsible behavior, in addition to consequences for negative behavior, all designed to be effective for the individual student. As with accommodations, a BIP should take advantage of the student's strengths while overcoming his behavioral weaknesses.

Ideally, this plan will also attempt to determine the motivations behind the student's behavior based on an analysis of behavioral data. For example, some students misbehave to avoid something, like a difficult academic task. Other students misbehave in order to gain something, like attention from adults or peers. The BIP should detail positive interventions that allow the student to meet the same needs with positive behavior. For example, if Charlie is seeking attention from peers and adults by being disrespectful to authority, then the behavioral plan may call for him to be given the opportunity to be a leader in the class, in some way, when he demonstrates positive behavior. He will receive the attention he wants for exhibiting responsible behavior rather than negative behavior. This reinforces the desired behaviors, therefore facilitating growth.

The process of determining the purposes of a behavior is referred to as a Functional Behavioral Assessment. According to the IDEA of 2004, the Functional Behavioral Assessment is not required in every instance, but completing such an analysis will prove very productive in developing an effective behavioral plan. When reviewing this section of the IEP, you should ask yourself, "Are the specific actions called for in the Behavioral Intervention Plan sufficient to enable the student to behave more responsibly

and exhibit fewer, less intense negative behaviors?" And, "If the Behavioral Intervention Plan is implemented, will the student meet expectations by the end of the school year?"

IEP Components - Services Provided and Rationale for Placement. The IEP documents the special education and related services to be provided and where each of those services will be implemented, either in a general education setting such as the general classroom or in a special education setting such as a pull-out special education class. The services and their location are often summarized on the cover page of the IEP, even though they are usually discussed later in the IEP meeting. In addition, the amount of time for each service is listed. For example, Lindsey may receive special education instruction for her English course for five segments/class periods a week. The IEP team decides whether the service will be provided in the general education class, with the special education and general education teachers co-teaching perhaps, or in a separate special education setting by a special education teacher. This section of the IEP not only documents special education instructional services by a special education teacher or paraprofessional, but includes related services to be provided, such as physical therapy, occupational therapy, adapted physical education, audiological services, special transportation, nursing, or counseling.

According to federal law, the IEP team must consider providing educational services in the general education environment with the student's non-disabled peers. If the IEP team determines that a student should receive services in a separate, special education environment, then the IEP must provide a rationale explaining why that service cannot be satisfactorily provided in the general education class. This rationale for placement is usually embedded in the IEP and explains the final placement decisions. When reviewing this section of the IEP, please consider the entirety of the IEP and ask yourself this question. "If the student is provided these services in these locations, will the student meet or exceed the standards on the school-wide assessments?"

It is necessary to review the IEPs of students who are considered bubble or high impact students in order to predict whether their educational programs are well designed. When reviewing an IEP, you should ask yourself the questions that have been provided for each section of the IEP. Those questions are provided below in the following logic model.

IEP Logic Model					
If we work toward the annual goals documented in the IEP, and…	Provide the documented accommodations and/or modifications, and…	Provide the services in the designated locations, and…	Provide the supports outlined in the Behavioral Intervention Plan (if required),	Will the…	Student meet or exceed expectations on the school-wide assessments?

It will be helpful to actually review an IEP. This IEP was developed for Max, reflecting his 8th grade year. He is a student with an emotional/behavioral disability. The core components of Max's IEP are provided below. For the purpose of this activity, only the specific components of the IEP described above are presented. Read Max's IEP and determine if the IEP would measure up, using the questions posed in the logic model above. If not, what needs to be changed or improved so the IEP becomes a well designed instructional program that will enable Max to meet or exceed standards on the school-wide assessments?

INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAM

Student's name: Max Carruthers	School: Eastside Middle School
Date: May 22, 20XX	Grade during upcoming school year: 8th
Disability: Emotional/Behavioral Disability	Age: 13

IEP MEETING PARTICIPANTS

Max Carruthers, Student	Ms. Flay, Special Education Teacher
Ms. Hall, Instructional Lead Teacher	Ms. Foothill, Math Teacher
Ms. Carruthers, Parent	

SERVICES THAT WILL BE PROVIDED

GENERAL EDUCATION CLASSES IN WHICH THE STUDENT WILL PARTICIPATE			
Class	**Frequency**	**Start/End Dates**	**Provider Title**
Math	1 segment daily	August - May	General Education Teacher
Electives	2 segment daily	August – May	General Education Teacher

RECOMMENDED SPECIAL EDUCATION AND RELATED SERVICES				
Service	**Frequency**	**Start/End Dates**	**Provider Title**	**Location**
English	1 segment daily	August – May	Special Education Teacher	Special Education Classroom
Science	1 segment daily	August – May	Special Education Teacher	Special Education Classroom
Social Studies	1 segment daily	August – May	Special Education Teacher	Special Education Classroom
Reading/ Literature	1 segment daily	August – May	Special Education Teacher	Special Education Classroom

PRESENT LEVEL OF PERFORMANCE

Max is finishing his 7th grade year and will begin 8th grade after the summer break. Max transferred to our school system during his 6th grade year from a school system in Illinois. According to the records provided by his former school system at the time of his enrollment at Eastside, Max has an Emotional/Behavioral Disability. Evaluations that were conducted at East Lake confirmed this determination. Max often exhibits problematic behavior. He has uncontrollable outbursts. He yells at teachers and at other students. In addition, Max has friendships with students who may not be positive for him. As a group, these students are often found to be disruptive (i.e., vandalizing the bathrooms, smoking cigarettes, cursing). Max is currently using a behavior contract. If he exhibits responsible behavior during the week, he gets two free segments on Friday in the special education classroom. During that time, he usually chooses to listen to music. Over the last two months, he has earned this reward four times. Mr. and Mrs. Carruthers, Max's parents, have expressed concerns over Max's behavior. He has been caught sneaking out of the house on several occasions since he transferred to our school. He is also disrespectful to his parents. Mr. and Mrs. Carruthers are most concerned about his actions immediately after school when both parents are still at work.

At times, Max can be very pleasant and engaging. When he is one-on-one with a teacher (i.e., when he has attended in-school suspension with no other students), he is very cordial and pleasant. During those times, he becomes engrossed in his work, especially if it is project-based.

In addition to his emotional and behavioral difficulties, he faces challenges academically. He reads at the 4th grade level. He has difficulty reading textbooks and assignments that are provided in his 8th grade classes. Math is a relative strength for him. Max enjoys math, social studies, and science. He is strong in completing group projects, building models, and organizing multiple step activities.

On the most recent school-wide assessment, Max barely missed meeting the criterion in all subjects tested.

<h1 style="text-align:center">MEASURABLE ANNUAL GOALS</h1>

Goals	Evaluation Methods
Goal 1: Max will increase his reading skills from 4.0 grade level to a 4.5 grade level.	Norm-referenced assessment
Goal 2: Max will exhibit responsible behavior for 80% of the school days.	Behavior contract
Goal 3: Max will meet expectations on the school-wide assessments in every subject area.	School-wide assessments

<h2 style="text-align:center">CLASSROOM MODIFICATIONS AND ACCOMMODATIONS</h2>

Max needs more time to complete his work, small group instruction at times, hands-on activities, and an organizational system to keep his work organized. He also needs the opportunity to re-draft his work. At times, he needs to take open-book tests.

<h2 style="text-align:center">ACCOMMODATIONS AND MODIFICATIONS FOR THE SCHOOL-WIDE ASSESSMENTS</h2>

Small group settings. Frequent breaks.

<h2 style="text-align:center">BEHAVIORAL INTERVENTION PLAN</h2>

Describe strategies, including positive behavioral interventions, strategies, and supports to address that behavior.

BEHAVIORS THAT NEED TO BE ELIMINATED:
Outbursts. Yelling and cursing at teachers and other students. Disrespectful comments to teachers.

INTERVENTION STRATEGIES (including positive behavioral interventions to reinforce responsible behaviors and consequences for negative behaviors):
Small group settings.
Frequent praise.
Behavior contract that includes incentives like Free Friday.
3 Step Warning for problem behaviors.
Call home to parents.

DOCUMENTATION OF THE DISCUSSIONS DURING THE IEP MEETING

OPTIONS CONSIDERED:
Regular class. Co-taught class. Pull-out class for some portions of the day.
Pull-out class for the entire day.

OPTIONS REJECTED:
Regular class, co-taught class, pull-out class for the entire day

FINAL DECISIONS AND RATIONALE:

Because of Max's behavioral and academic needs, he requires more support
than can be provided in the general class for many subject areas. He will
participate in the general education class for three segments daily.

Parent's Signature:_____**Date:**_____

What were your impressions of Max's IEP? If you ask the questions provided in the logic model, can you reasonably project that Max will meet or exceed expectations on the school-wide assessments? Probably not. This IEP is weak. Even though there is significant room for improvement in this document, the Present Levels of Performance does provide some meaningful information about Max. He has definite strengths. He is skillful at completing project-based, applied activities. He is also very pleasant when he is interacting one-on-one with adults. In addition to his strengths, Max has weaknesses involving behaviors and academics.

This IEP does not document a systematic plan that will take advantage of Max's strengths in order to overcome his weaknesses. How can school personnel capitalize on his strengths? Building models, completing multi-step activities and working on group projects involving higher-order thinking skills can be used to Max's great advantage. When math, science, and social studies standards are addressed, he can be assigned activities that require him to solve multi-step challenges, create hypotheses, research options, and develop plans of actions. In fact, since he has strengths in these areas, Max could act in an occasional leadership role with other students. He might lead a small group of students as they address a complex challenge. Being a leader for his classmates may meet his need to be important to a peer group, thereby reducing his need to get attention by following his peers into negative behaviors. With this approach, Max should be able to participate successfully in the general education classes for more than three class periods a day.

Max will need accommodations to compensate for his weaknesses in reading. If those accommodations are consistently provided, he may surprise the school personnel with his academic proficiency. He may need some time during the day with a teacher who is well-trained in providing reading instruction in order to systematically improve his reading skills. It will certainly serve him well to become a more proficient reader, but his current reading limitations do not have to limit his access to the curriculum or to general education settings.

Max's IEP has poorly written annual goals. They are insufficient to provide a clear roadmap for his school year. His reading goal, for example, calls for the equivalent of a half-year of growth in reading during the upcoming academic year. At that rate, Max

will get further and further behind in his reading skills when compared to his same age peers. The goal should be more ambitious. An analysis should also be completed to determine the specific reading skills that are barriers for Max. For example, does he have difficulty with decoding, vocabulary, or comprehension skills? Once those target skills are determined, then a strategic instructional plan can be developed and implemented that will help Max increase his reading skills as quickly as possible. Max's other goals are also ineffective. They should outline clear steps that will enable Max to meet or exceed annual expectations.

Max's Behavioral Intervention Plan, even if it is implemented, is also problematic. It will not drastically improve his behavior. The IEP team should determine the motivations for Max's misbehavior. What is he trying to "get" or "get out of" through his behavior? Is he seeking something, like peer approval or adult attention? Or, is he trying to avoid something, like hard work or looking foolish in front of his classmates? Once the IEP team creates theories about the motivations for his misbehavior, it can build a Behavioral Intervention Plan that responds to Max's specific needs. If he is motivated by peer attention, then the IEP team should work with Max to determine ways he can receive positive peer attention for exhibiting responsible behavior. This may be where the academic strengths mentioned earlier are utilized. By leading cooperative learning groups, he might strengthen his academic performance while getting the positive attention he needs from his peers and therefore reduce his negative behavior. In addition, Max may benefit from counseling services. This related service may help Max understand his own motivations and how he can get his needs met by behaving responsibly.

Max's current IEP states that he will receive two class periods a week of free time for fulfilling the commitments on his behavioral contract. This is extremely misguided. Max, after all, is behind his peers academically. His instructional time is too valuable to waste two full periods a week in unproductive activities. On occasion, all students need a little down time, but two class periods a week is excessive. There should also be effective consequences built into his Behavioral Intervention Plan. His current IEP includes a call home to his parents as a consequence. Considering that his parents have said that Max's behavior at home can be less than desirable, it does not seem that calling

home will ultimately increase his responsible behavior. Mr. and Mrs. Carruthers should certainly be informed of Max's progress in school, including behavioral gains and setbacks, but other consequences should be developed to promote responsible behavior.

If you utilize the IEP Logic Model to review Max's IEP, it is clear that even if the IEP is implemented as written, Max does not have a very good chance to meet or exceed standards on the school-wide assessments, nor is his behavior likely to improve. Max's teachers and his parents should reconvene an IEP meeting right away to build an effective educational program that will help Max achieve academically and improve his behavior. Early attention can prevent later failure.

This is one example of what can be learned about the likelihood of a student's success by a careful review of the IEP as an instructional document. The leadership team, in collaboration with the student's teachers, should review the IEPs of bubble and high impact students to determine their instructional utility. The leadership team can provide a fresh perspective from their analysis of patterns, while the teachers contribute more in-depth knowledge about the student. This becomes a brainstorming process as patterns emerge from the review of a number of IEPs. Once patterns are identified, ideas can be developed to improve the educational programs for the students. Of course, any changes to an IEP must be made in an IEP meeting with the student's teachers and parents. IEP decisions can not be made ahead of time and just formally accepted during the meeting.

As the leadership team reviews multiple IEPs, trends may become apparent. Are many students spending less time in general education classes than they should? Are many students being taught a particular subject by a teacher who is not strong in that content area? Are Behavioral Intervention Plans consistently weak across the school? By looking for trends, the leadership team can gain additional insight into the weaknesses and strengths that may be prevalent across the school. The school can then respond systematically by shoring up the weaknesses while reinforcing the strengths. Teachers may need professional development to help them design IEPs that form the basis for effective instructional planning.

Develop a Support System for Specific Students. There will certainly be other students who benefit from effective interventions, especially those students who score below the

bubble students. Those students will need intensive, ongoing support in order to catch up to their peers. This book, however, will focus on providing a support system for bubble and high impact students. Once the IEPs are reviewed and improved as necessary, the school must develop a tier of support for these students to ensure their success. Each bubble and high impact student should be matched to one staff member whose role is to develop a relationship with the student and to provide the emotional support that the student needs for school success.

The mentor's role does not end there. The mentor should support the student's academic pursuits in the same way that an athletic coach provides supervision, encouragement, and direction for the members of the team. An athletic coach knows each player's strengths and weaknesses and knows how to maximize each player's potential. The coach uses a variety of techniques, like weight training or speed drills, to capitalize on an athlete's strengths while improving areas of weaknesses.

Similarly a mentor should stay in touch with the student's teachers and monitor academic progress, homework patterns, and performance in various classes. The mentor should provide feedback to the student and make suggestions to the teachers. After all, the mentor knows what makes the student tick. The mentor should know what motivates the student and what emotional buttons create barriers for the student. This information can be extremely helpful for the student's teachers. The mentor should also review the student's scores on various assignments, progress reports, and report cards. In the end, the mentor becomes a meaningful person who is in the student's corner. We all need such people in our lives. The mentor can become a very important person in a student's life. With this extra attention by someone who cares, the school is increasing the probability that the high impact and/or bubble students will not fall through the cracks.

At this point, it is reasonable to wonder which staff members should be asked to serve as a mentor for specific students. In most cases, the student's current teachers should not be assigned as the mentor. Each member of the leadership team, the educators who are completing this Six Step Process, should be asked to mentor up to three high impact/bubble students. If additional mentors are needed, there are other options. Every school has a handful of teachers that are the power teachers. They are usually involved in any initiative that has been successful in the school. They are the teachers who go above

and beyond. These teachers could be tapped to be excellent mentors. There are also other staff members, beside teachers, who might be excellent mentors. Custodians, secretaries, maintenance personnel, and lunchroom staff may make excellent mentors. In addition, related service providers (i.e., physical therapists, counselors, and occupational therapists) can be a great support for students.

One challenge in establishing the mentor support program is connecting students to adults with whom they can build meaningful relationships. One way to do that is to encourage the students' input into the selection of their mentor. Students might be asked to list three adults in the school who are important to them. Each mentor can be chosen based on these lists. Mentors can also be matched with students on the basis of shared interests. A student who loves photography might be matched with the sponsor of the photography club. This way a relationship between the adult and student would develop naturally.

In Step 2, we have reviewed a process to identify the bubble and high impact students, and to review, analyze and, if necessary, improve their IEPs to increase the likelihood that they will meet or exceed annual academic standards. We also discussed the development of support mechanisms to connect these students, and possibly other students who are struggling, with a meaningful adult in the building. Through this process, more of the high impact and bubble students will make adequate yearly progress. As you go through Step 2 in this process, complete the following questions.

Step 2: Develop a Support System for Specific Students

Create a chart that includes those students with disabilities who are considered bubble students. How will you inform their teachers of their status?

Create a chart that includes students who are considered high impact students. Which students are in both the bubble and high impact categories?

Analyze these students' IEPs. As the leadership team, brainstorm improvements that may improve each student's IEP. Were patterns of strengths or weaknesses seen across the school? Determine which student's IEPs need improvement and conduct IEP meetings to design IEPs that are more likely to result in student success.

How will students be matched with mentors who will provide emotional and academic support? List the students, assign mentors in a meaningful way, and establish how the mentor-student activities will be implemented in your school.

Step 3

Overcome Instructional Barriers

Framework for Improving the Achievement of Students with Disabilities

Step 6: Implement Actions and Maintain Momentum
    A. Clearly describe what success looks like
    B. Keep it simple
    C. Keep it on the front burner
    D. Continuously monitor student performance
    E. Continuously monitor progress in adult practices
    F. Build effective professional development systems
    G. Share and celebrate success

Step 5: Develop an Action Plan
    A. Build ownership throughout the school
    B. Determine priority actions
    C. Build ongoing professional development systems
    D. Reserve time for conducting classroom observations

Step 4: Overcome Organizational Barriers
    A. Provide a second tier of support
    B. Teach reading at all grade levels when necessary
    C. Include special education teachers in all professional development initiatives
    D. Provide time for co-teachers to plan collaboratively
    E. Provide professional development activities on co-teaching
    F. Align instructional materials to the curriculum

Step 3: Overcome Instructional Barriers
    A. Provide effective instruction in pull out classes
    B. Provide effective accommodations
    C. Ensure uninterrupted instructional time
    D. Implement effective co-teaching
    E. Administer school-wide assessments appropriately
    F. Ensure in-depth instruction
    G. Utilize ongoing formative assessments to guide instruction

Step 2: Develop Support Systems for Specific Students
    A. Identify bubble and high impact students
    B. Review IEPs
    C. Develop a support system for specific students

Step 1: Identify School Needs
    A. Develop a team
    B. Redefine the role of special education administrators
    C. Analyze school-wide data

At this point, your leadership team has completed the first two steps of the Six Step Framework. During Step 1, your team analyzed school-wide data, including assessment data, to develop a general impression of the performance of students with disabilities. During Step 2, the team sharpened the focus by identifying bubble and high impact students. You and your team reviewed their IEPs and conducted IEP meetings as needed to design effective instructional programs to enable them to meet or exceed expectations on the school-wide assessments. Then you facilitated the development of a support system for those students by establishing positive and ongoing relationships for each student with an adult mentor.

Instruction is the ultimate key for increased student achievement. Unfortunately, there can be a variety of barriers to effective instruction. During Step 3 of the framework, you are going to broaden your focus to analyze the instructional program that is provided for all students with disabilities. To help you with this process, we will describe instructional barriers that are present for students with disabilities in many schools. You will consider whether those barriers exist in your school and, if so, what steps you should take to overcome them.

As we review the barriers, consider which ones have the largest negative impact on students with disabilities. On a school-wide basis, it is difficult to eliminate several instructional barriers during a given school year. Therefore, you want to address the instructional barriers that, if eliminated, would have the greatest impact on student achievement.

Instructional Barrier #1: Students do not Receive Instruction at the Appropriate Level in Pull-Out Special Education Classes

One of the hallmarks of federal special education legislation (IDEA 2004) is that students with disabilities should be educated in general education settings with appropriate supports to be successful. This should be the first consideration for every student with a disability. Students should be educated in special education settings (e.g., pull-out classes) only when they can not be educated appropriately in general education settings. There may be some students who will need some instruction provided in pull-out special education settings.

We are going to divulge a deep dark secret that is held by many special education teachers regarding those settings. In many pull-out special education classes, students are taught to the middle. Therefore, many students with disabilities are not participating in challenging work at their instructional level. This seems counterintuitive. Students with disabilities, after all, qualify for special education services because they require specialized instruction based on their individual needs. The problem, however, occurs in the organizational structure of schools and the way special education classes have traditionally been scheduled. An elementary special education teacher in a pull-out class may only have nine students during an instructional segment. During that class, however, three of those students may be reading at the kindergarten level, one may be reading at the 2nd grade level, and four may be reading at the 3rd grade level. It is extremely difficult to provide effective reading instruction to those various groups of students during the same segment. On top of that, one more student may need instruction in math at the 3rd grade level. In order to survive from day to day the teacher decides to separate the class into two instructional groups: one for reading and one for math. She teaches the reading group at the second grade level and teaches the math student at the 3rd grade level.

In the end, no children will make great gains in their reading performance because none of them receive specialized instruction to meet their individual needs. The kindergarten readers will not become proficient because the material is over their heads. The 3rd grade readers are not being challenged because they are essentially completing work that is one year behind their abilities. One would assume that the 2nd grade reader is receiving appropriate instruction, but that may not be the case. The teacher is trying desperately to teach the kindergarten reader while challenging the 3rd grade reader. On top of that, she is delivering a math lesson during the same class. Her attention is fragmented. This scenario is certainly not limited to elementary schools. Special education teachers in middle schools and high schools encounter the same challenges. The difficulty becomes expanded when each instructional period throughout the day carries the same scenario. In total, many special education teachers are expected to prepare for more than 17 or 18 instructional groups during the day. Even if that were possible, could a teacher systematically plan strategic and engaging lessons for all of those groups everyday? Of course not.

What can school leaders do to address that problem? First, school administrators, especially principals and assistant principals, should become aware of the instructional practices in pull-out special education classes. Most school administrators have not been trained in special education. Their classroom experience was in general education. Many leaders feel unprepared to provide guidance for special education pull-out classes. Special education has a mystique and may be intimidating for school leaders not formally trained in the field. They complete the obligatory observations for teacher evaluations, but otherwise they leave the special education teachers alone to do their jobs.

The professional conversation between school leaders and special educators must change if we expect better results. As leaders, we can no longer just do the quick obligatory observations for personnel evaluations.   As a leader, you should systematically observe special education classrooms throughout the year. Determine the effectiveness of the instruction in special education classes, in the same way and with the same expectations that apply to general education classes. You will need to observe in special education classes on multiple occasions to determine if the students are being taught to the middle. If the teacher usually provides large group instruction to a single group of students, you should initiate a series of conversations with the teacher. Ask about the students, grouping practices, the instructional needs of specific students, and about the students' progress.

In the previous step, we discussed the process of reviewing a student's IEP to determine if there is a sound educational program in place. If you see a special education teacher regularly teaching one large group or two groups that seem mismatched, read the IEPs of those students. Are they all being instructed at their instructional level? You may find that the special education faculty does an outstanding job of scheduling students across the special education teachers and collaborating with general education teachers so that all of the students who need a certain instructional level are grouped in Mrs. Brown's class, let's say, while students who need instruction at other levels are placed in Mr. Jones' class.

In many cases, unfortunately, you will find that students are being taught to the middle. If that is the case, keep in mind that the issue may well not be the teacher's lack of skills. The issue is in the organizational structure of the school. The teacher may be

doing as much as is humanly possible in an impossible situation. What can you do, as an instructional leader if that is, in fact, the case? You can reschedule students across the school more effectively so that special education teachers have a maximum of two true instructional groups. A proficient special education teacher can successfully manage two instructional groups during a class period. While one group of students is receiving instruction from the teacher, the other group can be completing productive, independent work, not busy work. As you reduce the number of instructional groups for a teacher, you can begin a professional dialogue regarding the performance of those students.

Instead of conducting one obligatory visit for the purposes of conducting a teacher evaluation, school leaders should engage each teacher in meaningful discussions and reflection on the connection between instruction and student performance. Are the students in the class catching up to their non-disabled peers? Are they responding to instruction? Discuss the implementation of the IEP. As a leader, you may say, "Sarah's IEP says that she really needs explicit practice in decoding multi-syllabic words. Is she showing progress in her decoding skills?" For a student with emotional/behavioral challenges, you may say "Gary's IEP states that he enjoys building model airplanes. How have you used that interest to support his work? Can you use it as a reinforcer when Gary exhibits responsible behavior?" or "As you are working on expository writing in English, can Gary lead a group of students who share his interest as they brainstorm key points for an essay on model-building?" This type of discussion is extremely beneficial for the special education teacher. It provides the opportunity for professional growth for you and the teacher and improves school performance for students with disabilities.

Instructional Barrier #2: Effective Accommodations are not Provided

In this step, you will review the use of accommodations across your entire school for students with disabilities. In many general and special education classes, a combination of low expectations and ineffective accommodations create an artificial ceiling for student achievement. According to Gloeckler (2006), at least 80% of students with disabilities have average or above average intelligence. They have the potential to meet grade level expectations if they are provided with specialized instruction.

With strategic accommodations that enable students with disabilities to participate in general curriculum instructional activities, students with disabilities can meet the same

grade level standards as their nondisabled peers. Without them, they may not succeed. For example, Kim, a student in 10th grade who reads at the 4th grade level, may be receiving history instruction in the general education or special education classrooms. Because of his low reading levels, teachers may assume that he can not successfully meet 10th grade expectations in history. They may mistakenly provide history instruction at the 4th grade level because of his depressed reading abilities. Instead, general and special education teachers should provide history instruction at the 10th grade level, with the accommodations that allow Kim to understand the material and demonstrate what he has learned in spite of the reading deficits. Then, Kim is responsible for becoming proficient in history. He should be able to learn new material, participate in engaging activities, and demonstrate his knowledge without his weaknesses with print becoming a barrier.

The members of the IEP team are responsible for determining which specific accommodations will enable the student to navigate around his/her disability. For example, Samuel may receive his text materials on audiotape, CD-ROM, or DVD. He may use visual organizers that chunk the instructional information. He could use text that has been color coded so that the main ideas are presented more obviously. The real challenges here are to guard against watering down the instruction and to maintain grade appropriate expectations. As the instructional leader, you can become proficient in observing the instruction for all students with disabilities to monitor that expectations and instruction remain at appropriate levels with effective accommodations.

In some instances, special educators have inadvertently contributed to the problem. By nature, many special education teachers are care-takers. They take great care to provide sufficient support for students with disabilities and in many cases want to protect them. The problem arises when accommodations are provided too liberally – so much so that they interfere with the student's progress rather than assisting the student. Accommodations should be determined and provided in a very systematic fashion. All accommodations are not created equal. An accommodation should always be the least intrusive accommodation that will allow the student to be successful.

Some teachers have the tendency to assume that more is better when it comes to accommodations. It is actually more effective for the student if only those accommodations that are absolutely necessary for success are provided. Do not have

someone read the textbook to the student who can read and truly comprehend the teacher's notes on the topic. Do not provide a calculator when the student could benefit from graph paper in order to effectively line up mathematical equations.

Accommodations are not intended to protect students with disabilities from the possibility of failure. If a student fails to complete assignments, does not do well on a test, does not study, or fails to turn in homework, then the consequences should be the same as for any other student, as long as the needed accommodations have been provided. On the other hand, if the necessary accommodations are not provided, accountability for a student's lack of success rests with the teacher and the instructional leadership of the school.

As we mentioned earlier, the NCLB legislation requires that all students with disabilities are included in the accountability system. Since the enactment of the law, special and general education teachers who teach students with disabilities have focused more on the general education curriculum than ever before. There has been tremendous progress in this area over the last few years. As a school leader, it is imperative that you evaluate whether the students with disabilities are fully participating in the general curriculum. Do teachers have high expectations for students with disabilities? Do they provide creative accommodations that dodge the impact of the student's disability while still allowing pursuit of the general education curriculum and demonstration of knowledge unimpaired by the disability? Are both high-tech and low-tech uses of assistive technology in evidence? Observe general and special education classes. Determine if expectations are high for each student. In answering these questions, look for evidence in classroom instruction. Accommodations on lesson plans and IEPs may look great on paper, but will not impact achievement if not well implemented.

Instructional Barrier #3: Many Students with Disabilities do not have Uninterrupted Instructional Time

Some students with disabilities participate in several related services (e.g., occupational therapy, speech therapy, physical therapy, specialized bussing, counseling etc.) in addition to the special education services that they receive. Unfortunately, these services may compete for a student's time. A student with a disability may be pulled from critical instruction in order to receive a related service. A 5th grade student, for

example, may be pulled from a general education math class in order to receive speech therapy. Over time, the student, who may have strengths in math, will fall behind. A high school student scheduled for a pull-out, special education English class may participate in a weekly counseling session during that same class time. The student's weaknesses in English become magnified because of missed instruction in that content area one day each week.

This type of instructional interruption usually occurs because of the complexities of scheduling. As a school leader, it is imperative to discuss students' schedules with their teachers. Are students participating in special education and related services during core instructional time? Can students participate in special education or related services during an elective, lunch, or other non-academic time? Instead of receiving services for a one-hour weekly segment, can services be provided in 15 minute segments four times a week during a down time? This may be particularly useful for speech therapy in which the student can receive reminders almost daily regarding correct speech or language usage.

Consider other ways for creative scheduling in order to maximize students' instructional time. A counseling session may be very fruitful during lunch. If multiple students are involved in a group session, they can bring their lunch to the session. Counseling sessions could also be provided after school. In that case, the school leader will need to allow for a flexible work day for the counselor. Instead of requiring an 8:00 a.m. arrival, schedule the counselor's work day to begin at 9:00, allowing an hour for counseling after school. Each of these decisions will be made individually based on the students' needs, the flexibility in the schedule, personnel resources and the leaders' ingenuity. There are no absolute rules. School leaders should work collaboratively with the personnel involved with scheduling students to develop a schedule that works as a whole for the students.

Specialized bussing can also interrupt valuable instructional time. There is some truth to the adage that school secretaries, lunchroom personnel and bus drivers ultimately control a school. It is not uncommon for a specialized bus driver to approach teachers with the request that students with disabilities arrive late to school or leave early. As the rationale goes, it will allow the driver to complete the entire route more efficiently. In

addition, it is supposedly beneficial to the students with disabilities as they will not have to navigate the busy school hallways when they are congested with other students. The teachers generally attempt to accommodate the request. In some cases, the system's transportation plan results in one driver running two back-to-back routes, meaning the one bus will arrive late. Almost inevitably, it will be the special bus that is scheduled to be late. Therefore, some students with disabilities miss a significant amount of instruction. If students with disabilities leave their last class of the day 10 minutes early to beat the crowd, they lose approximately 30 hours of instruction during the entire year, virtually one full week of instruction.

The situation can get worse. Some teachers do not feel comfortable continuing with instruction for the rest of the students in the class since one student will be missing the instruction. Therefore, the teacher may end instruction for all students ten minutes early so all students get short-changed. The transportation issue is likely a relic of the time when expectations were so low that it "did not matter" if students with disabilities did not have a full instructional day. To put those expectations into perspective, consider how teachers and parents would respond if the transportation schedule resulted in many honor students missing the first ten minutes of chemistry or advanced calculus? You can imagine the uproar. Unfortunately, in many school districts, transportation issues still limit instructional time for students with disabilities.

What can instructional leaders do about this scenario? First of all, you may not even be aware of this informal arrangement in your school. The bus driver is truly trying to be more efficient while the teachers are attempting to be team players. The central office transportation managers, with good intentions, are trying to make the best use of their resources and perhaps save several thousand dollars by not having to buy another bus. Therefore, the transportation issue flies under the radar of many school leaders. Observe the arrival and departure time of specialized busses. If you see negative patterns, address them with the bus drivers and teachers positively. It is a very easy fix once you realize that problems exist. Then keep an eye on the situation. It is not uncommon for transportation problems to be resolved, just to pop up again later.

Instructional Barrier #4: Co-teaching is not Implemented Effectively

Most students with disabilities spend the majority of their instructional day in general education classrooms. According to the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services *(*2003), approximately half of all students with disabilities spent at least 80% of their instructional day in general education classrooms with their non-disabled peers.

In many of those classrooms, a general education teacher is the sole teacher in the classroom. In other classes, a special education teacher co-teaches the class with a general education teacher. They are both ultimately responsible for educating all students in the classroom, those with and those without disabilities. The general education teacher utilizes subject matter knowledge while the special education teacher implements skills in instructional strategies and differentiation. In an effective co-teaching classroom, these two teachers work seamlessly. It is difficult to identify which is the special education teacher and which is the general education teacher. More importantly, it is difficult to identify which students have a disability since all are actively engaged in learning.

This arrangement can be beneficial for many reasons. General education teachers generally have an in-depth knowledge and skills regarding content. Special education teachers provide expertise regarding differentiated instructional strategies. This combination provides appropriate levels of support for many students with disabilities. In addition, other students who struggle in school but do not qualify for special education services benefit from the support and expertise of both teachers.

There is another benefit of co-teaching. Both NCLB and IDEA legislation require that all teachers, including special education teachers, must be "highly qualified" in the core academic content they teach. This drastically changed the rules for most special education teachers who traditionally have a degree in special education. They do not necessarily have credentials in specific content areas (e.g., English, mathematics, etc.). There are two caveats in the "highly qualified" requirement: 1) Teachers who only teach students with the most significant cognitive disabilities can be considered "highly qualified" if they meet credentialing requirements that are similar to elementary teachers.

2) Special education teachers who provide consultative services to general education teachers in a co-teaching arrangement do not have to be "highly qualified" in the subject matter, as long as the general education teacher has that credential. Therefore, special education teachers who provide consultative services in a co-teaching model do not have to gain additional credentials in the subject area.

As co-teaching has become much more popular over the last several years, it has become important for school leaders to be able to distinguish between an effective co-teaching team and a team that is co-teaching in name only. In many situations, one teacher, usually the general education teacher becomes the leader in the class while the other teacher, often the special education teacher, is viewed as a guest or helper. He or she essentially functions like a paraprofessional. In this scenario, students are not benefiting from the expertise of both teachers. Financial and human resources are being wasted.

There are a couple of definitive works on effective co-teaching. The video, *The Power of Two: Making a Difference through Co-Teaching,* (Burrello, Burrello, & Friend, 1996) outlines 6 models of co-teaching. "One Teach/One Observe," the first approach, is self-explanatory, and often used by teachers at the beginning of the co-teaching partnership. In the second approach, known as "One Teach/One Circulate," the second teacher circulates, helping individual students as needed while being sure students are paying attention. As with the first approach, it should not be overused. Both approaches provide a possible starting point for novice co-teachers. To really impact performance, the team must soon move on to other approaches. The third approach, the "Station Teaching Model" has each teacher working with a group of students while a third group of students works independently. When each teacher covers the same information with split groups, the approach is known as "Parallel Teaching." Using the "Alternative Teaching" approach, one teacher manages a large instructional group while the second teacher works with a smaller group of students within the classroom. When a co-teaching team works seamlessly with both teachers sharing the classroom management, using conversation in place of lecture, maximizing the use of technology, taking risks, and questioning as a team, then the "Team Teaching" approach is being implemented at its best.

In their book *A Guide to Co-Teaching: Practical Tips for Facilitating Student Learning,* Villa, Thousand, & Niven (2004) describe four co-teaching models. They note two approaches most often used by novice co-teachers: 1) "Supportive Teaching" with one teacher leading instruction while the other rotates to monitor student work and provide one to one support and 2) "Parallel Teaching" in which two or more people work with different groups in the same classroom. When one co-teacher enhances the other co-teacher's instruction, "Complimentary Teaching" is occurring. One teacher may model note-taking on a transparency, for example, or teach prerequisite skills and monitor students' use of the skills while the other partner is teaching the lesson. "Team Teaching" occurs when two or more people share the leadership and responsibility for planning, teaching, and assessing and equally assume the responsibility for all students in the classroom.

Regardless of the terms that are used to describe various co-teaching models, there are common messages about effective co-teaching. A co-teaching team will not have the desired impact unless the students are benefiting from the expertise of both teachers. If the general education teacher provides most of the instruction to the entire group of students while the special education teacher hovers above students who are struggling, then the personnel resources in the room are being wasted. In that scenario, the student-teacher ratio is not truly being reduced.

In an ideal co-teaching classroom, students benefit from more strategic instruction than one teacher could provide because the teacher-student ratio has essentially been cut in half. The co-teachers can respond to the specific needs of students within the smaller groups more effectively than could one teacher alone. The approaches will look different depending on the curriculum standards being addressed and the instructional activities during any particular lesson. One co-teacher may pull a small group of students who need additional help or who need additional challenges to a different location in the room to provide a preview of the upcoming lesson, to reinforce the concepts that are difficult, or to offer more complex challenges. Grouping may be based on a specific instructional target, on students' interests, or other criteria. Care should be taken to ensure that flexible grouping practices never result in a group that includes only students with disabilities or only students who are considered to be the most gifted. Flexible grouping

of students should not result in static groups. Groups should change frequently, perhaps daily, depending on the results of ongoing assessments.

An effective co-teaching class may also include splitting the class into two groups of equal size (both groups including students with and without disabilities). Both teachers lead their separate groups in the same instructional activities by covering the same critical skills and concepts. Students in both groups have more opportunities for practice and feedback than if one teacher leads the entire class.

During instruction that includes independent student activities or small cooperative learning groups (e.g., conducting research for a class project), both co-teachers can circulate to provide support to individual or small groups of students. Students receive twice the guidance and feedback available in a comparable class taught by one teacher alone.

During all of these activities, the general education teacher and the special education teacher are both contributing to the co-teaching team based on their respective areas of expertise. The special education teacher provides leadership on the instructional strategies best suited for the individual needs of each student in the class, especially those students who struggle, whether or not they have a disability. The general education teacher provides leadership on the content area, to ensure that students can demonstrate sophisticated understanding of the subject matter. Over time, each teacher's overall expertise is likely to deepen as they collaborate and build on each other's strengths.

How can an instructional leader determine if co-teaching is being conducted effectively? First, spend time in those classrooms. Determine if one teacher is providing the majority of instruction, primarily instruction to the entire class. Also look at how the other teacher's time is spent. Is he/she wandering around the room during the whole-class instruction and providing prompts to students who need assistance? If this is occurring most of the time across the school, then support is needed for the co-teaching teams. Instructional leaders need to provide the direction, training and coaching needed for teams to use more advanced co-teaching models and effectively align these with the instructional strategies of the day's lessons.

A simple way to evaluate the involvement of each teacher is to use two stopwatches (or a computer program) to evaluate the amount of the instructional period

that each co-teacher is actively teaching. In an ideal situation, both co-teachers will be actively involved in teaching (using a variety of instructional strategies) during the entire instructional time. When both co-teachers teach effectively, the actual instructional time occurring in the classroom increases, up to twice as long as the instructional segment. This is a fairly simple way to gauge the involvement of each teacher (S. White, personal communication, June 14, 2006).

You can also ask for all of your co-teaching teams to meet for one planning period every two weeks in order to investigate the co-teaching practices that are being conducted across the school. During those discussions, ask the co-teaching teams to focus on flexible grouping strategies that will reduce the student-teacher ratio. Brainstorm with them how that might work in the classroom as the teachers address various learning standards in the curriculum. At the next meeting of the co-teaching teams, discuss the successes or difficulties that were encountered when the new grouping strategies were implemented.

During these meetings, you should also lead the continual analysis of student performance. How are the students in the co-teaching classes performing in comparison to the expectations? How should the class be grouped during instructional activities to maximize the probability that all students meet expectations and a growing number of students exceed expectations? Continue this job-embedded form of professional development, with ongoing analysis of teacher practices and student performance, every few weeks for most of the school year. Improving educators' practices takes continuous professional development. They must actively refine and improve their use of new practices, with support through feedback, discussion, and reflection, until the new practices become well-grounded, instructional habits.

Instructional Barrier #5: School-Wide Assessments are not Administered Effectively to Students with Disabilities

According to the NCLB legislation, all students with disabilities are expected to participate in school-wide assessments. The overwhelming majority of students with disabilities will participate in the assessment like their non-disabled peers. For some students with disabilities, accommodations may be needed during the assessment. Accommodations should mirror the accommodations provided during routine instruction.

If Sui Lee needs small group instruction as an instructional accommodation, then she should participate in the assessment in a small group. If Kevin typically has difficulty darkening the small circles on an answer sheet and instead marks the multiple choice answer on the actual test instead during the school year, then he should use the same procedure during the school-wide assessment. The IEP team determines what accommodations should be provided to a student for instruction and for assessment. There must be a match. It is the responsibility of the IEP team to consult the examiners' manual(s) for the state's assessments and follow the guidance provided by the State Department of Education before determining instructional and assessment accommodations.

Another group of students will participate in assessments with modified standards. According to the United States Department of Education (2005), no more than two percent of students can be counted as proficient utilizing this iteration of an assessment. This two percent limitation is applied to an entire school system rather than to each school. In other words, some individual schools can exceed the 2% limit as long as the school system overall does not exceed the limit. In fact, a school system can assess more than 2% of students against the modified assessment, but no more than 2% of the students will be counted as proficient for AYP determination. The other students will be counted as not meeting expectations on the assessment for each of the subgroups they represent. The State Department of Education in every state determines what constitutes a modified assessment.

Up to 1% of all students, those students with the most significant cognitive disabilities can be counted as proficient in an alternate assessment approved by the State Departments of Education (United States Department of Education, 2003). Again, this limitation is placed against the entire school system, not each individual school.

As a school leader, what can you do to ensure that school-wide assessments are administered effectively? Since the specific requirements are different for each state, you should access information from your State Department of Education (SDOE). That information may be provided through a training event, phone consultation, or via the State Department of Education website. Since the specific rules for assessment administration differ from state to state, it is best to rely on direct information from your

State DOE. Preferably, you should gather that information in writing (possibly from the website or printed materials) for ready reference as teams make assessment decisions.

Next, as the leadership team implements the Six Step Framework outlined in this book, discuss the assessment requirements to ensure that all team members have a common understanding. Then each leadership team member provides direction and guidance for the teachers who actually prepare students for the assessments and who are responsible for the test administration. When providing direction to staff, be sure that each teacher receives a copy of the written guidance provided by the State Department of Education. That will ensure that the accurate information is ultimately available to the teachers who can reference it as needed for developing IEPs, planning instruction and administering school-wide assessments.

Instructional Barrier #6: Students do not Participate in In-Depth Instruction

Ideally, all students participate in instruction that promotes higher level thinking and sophisticated problem solving. Students should not learn how to chirp back simple answers. They should be expected to elaborate on the solutions of complex problems, demonstrating deep understanding at the conceptual level. Rote surface-level responses are not enough. Depth of understanding is important for all students, including students with disabilities, at all grade levels. Kindergarten students as well as 12th graders should be provided opportunities to develop problem-solving skills according to their respective developmental levels.

Historically, students with disabilities have not been expected to develop such problem-solving skills, nor have they been afforded the opportunity to do so. There are two fundamental reasons for this. First, special education teachers have been expected to be "jacks of all trades." They may have had significant expertise in reading or English but were also expected to teach math, history, and science. Most special education teachers tell the story of being assigned to teach a content area that admittedly made them very uncomfortable.   Essentially, they stayed one step ahead of the students in the class textbook as they planned and implemented instruction.

The second reason, as described previously, is that expectations for students with disabilities have been artificially depressed. Educators and parents thought it was appropriate to only provide surface knowledge, or functional skills, to students with

disabilities in order to adequately prepare them for minimal occupations. If you were to read a cross section of IEPs from your state from the recent past, you would find that a significant number of students with average intelligence had math goals that were limited to functional skills like writing checks, counting money, and doing simple calculation.

What can school leaders do to determine if this is a problem for students with disabilities in their school? Reviewing students' IEPs and systematically and repeatedly observing instruction will provide you with some good information. Are students provided an opportunity to expound on their thoughts and apply sophisticated knowledge?

In particular, math instruction will be discussed. For the most part, though this is not an absolute, special education teachers have more expertise in the English/Language Arts fields than in math. On occasion, you will find special education teachers with deep and sophisticated understanding of complex math concepts and how they interact. By and large, however, it is relatively rare to find special education teachers with strong math backgrounds who can turn that expertise into effective instruction for students. In most cases, your expert mathematicians are your general education teachers.

So it may be more efficient for students with disabilities to receive instruction in mathematics from general education teachers. Many students with disabilities will need the support from special education teachers to systematically provide instructional accommodations that will enable the students to master the mathematics concepts. A special education teacher may partner with a general education teacher and provide consultative support in a co-teaching arrangement. The special education teacher could also provide technical assistance and support to the general education math teacher in how to compensate for a student's disability in order to maximize learning. In addition, a special education teacher could provide additional practice and support to students with disabilities following the mathematics class.

Instructional Barriers #7: Schools do not use Ongoing Assessment Data to Guide Instruction

For many years, classroom assessments have been used for two purposes: 1) to determine if the student has mastered the respective work, and 2) to provide a grade. In countless schools across the country, spelling at the elementary level has been taught the same way for decades. Students receive a new set of spelling words on Monday. During the week, they complete a variety of practice and application activities with those words and on Friday, they are given a spelling test. The grade for the spelling test is recorded in the grade book and sent home. The following Monday, every student in the class receives the next set of spelling words, regardless of how they performed on the previous week's spelling test.

This pattern repeats itself in high schools across the country in various content areas (e.g., English, political science, history, etc.) Every two or three weeks, a test of some sort is provided to the students that reflects the last few weeks of instruction. The test is graded and the next unit is introduced. In both scenarios above, assessment results do not impact instruction. More effective assessment practices would allow teachers to target and focus instruction based on assessment results. Students with and without disabilities would benefit as teachers use assessment information to guide and revise instruction.

There are two general categories of assessment: formative and summative. Teachers should administer assessments, not only for giving a grade, but to inform continued instruction. In the early grades, short probes that take only a few minutes can effectively evaluate whether a student is learning to read or grasping math concepts. The results identify which students need further instruction and target specific needs such as decoding or fluency for reading, or addition, problem solving, or fractions in mathematics. Many schools are starting to administer common formative assessments. Teachers of common content areas (including general and special education teachers) develop common assessments to be used at specified points throughout the year (perhaps every 2-3 weeks). Math teachers collaborate to develop common math assessments, for

example. Teachers ensure that the assessments are aligned to the curriculum and thus to the school-wide assessments at the end of the school year.

After each formative assessment, teachers analyze the results and identify students who need additional assistance. They focus further instruction on specific needs revealed by the analysis. Many schools implement a tier of intervention for students who repeatedly have difficulty on formative assessments. One-on-one tutoring may be provided by an adult (perhaps after school) or by peer tutors using pre-designed instructional approaches. The results of the formative assessments guide the instruction provided by the classroom teacher and serve as an indicator or trigger point for identifying those students who need support beyond their classroom instruction.

It is important to note that such support is not contingent on a specific label. A student does not need a disability label in order to participate in the extra assistance. Nor should a student with a disability be prevented from participating in this tier of support just because of a disability label.

Summative assessments are very different from formative assessment. They are used to determine, after the fact, if students met expectations. The school-wide assessment your state uses to determine whether a school made AYP is one example of a summative assessment. Effective use of both summative and formative assessments is critical for continuous improvement of the school's overall educational program and of instruction for each individual student.

Step 3: Overcome Instructional Barriers

As a member of the leadership team, work with both special education and general education teachers to determine the instructional barriers in your school. What are the current barriers? Which of the instructional barriers, if changed, would have the greatest impact on student achievement in your school? List those here.

Describe the steps that will be taken in order to overcome those barriers. Describe any professional development activities (training, coaching, and on-going support) that will be initiated to overcome those barriers. Also describe any financial resources that will be used to assist in overcoming those instructional barriers.

Describe how the leadership team will determine throughout the year if the educators are systematically and gradually improving their practices in those priority areas. How will teachers' practices be assessed over time? How will job-embedded professional development opportunities be provided to ensure that all teachers in the school improve their instructional practices?

Step 4

Overcome Organizational Barriers

Framework for Improving the Achievement of Students with Disabilities

Step 6: Implement Actions and Maintain Momentum
    A. Clearly describe what success looks like
    B. Keep it simple
    C. Keep it on the front burner
    D. Continuously monitor student performance
    E. Continuously monitor progress in adult practices
    F. Build effective professional development systems
    G. Share and celebrate success

Step 5: Develop an Action Plan
    A. Build ownership throughout the school
    B. Determine priority actions
    C. Build ongoing professional development systems
    D. Reserve time for conducting classroom observations

Step 4: Overcome Organizational Barriers
    A. Provide a second tier of support
    B. Teach reading at all grade levels when necessary
    C. Include special education teachers in all professional development initiatives
    D. Provide time for co-teachers to plan collaboratively
    E. Provide professional development activities on co-teaching
    F. Align instructional materials to the curriculum

Step 3: Overcome Instructional Barriers
    A. Provide effective instruction in pull out classes
    B. Provide effective accommodations
    C. Ensure uninterrupted instructional time
    D. Implement effective co-teaching
    E. Administer school-wide assessments appropriately
    F. Ensure in-depth instruction
    G. Utilize ongoing formative assessments to guide instruction

Step 2: Develop Support Systems for Specific Students
    A. Identify bubble and high impact students
    B. Review IEPs
    C. Develop a support system for specific students

Step 1: Identify School Needs
    A. Develop a team
    B. Redefine the role of special education administrators
    C. Analyze school-wide data

The previous step focused on instructional barriers that are often present for students with disabilities. Those elements are largely impacted by teacher practices. School leaders are critical to changing those instructional barriers, but a very dedicated and talented teacher or group of teachers could make some great strides in overcoming those barriers at the classroom level. Organizational barriers generally require that school leadership facilitate needed change. These barriers are more systemic in nature than the instructional barriers that have been discussed.

Organizational Barrier #1: A Second Tier of Interventions is not Provided for Struggling Students

In the previous step, we reviewed how some schools have a tier of support for students who are struggling. The lack of a tier of support beyond the typical classroom instruction is an organizational barrier, though it also was mentioned in the previous step. Each teacher is responsible for providing differentiated instruction in the classroom. Differentiation can be based on the analysis of the ongoing formative assessments.

Some students need additional support beyond typical classroom differentiation. Depending solely on the creativity and dedication of individual teachers to intervene on behalf of struggling students is not an effective or efficient use of personnel resources; nor will it guarantee that a consistent second tier of effective intervention is established. In collaboration with the general education and special education teachers, the school leadership team should review assessment results and develop a second tier of support to be provided routinely in addition to the typical classroom instruction. This tier of support may be delivered within the typical classroom setting, or it may be delivered in a different setting. Regardless of the location, the second tier of interventions is always in addition to the standards-based, differentiated instruction in the typical classroom setting. It does not replace such instruction. Students receive support in the second tier while continuing to participate in their general classroom instruction. This tier of support may include the assignment of a mentor (as mentioned in Step 2), one-on-one instruction (as mentioned in Step 3), or another form of support.

In fact, it may be necessary to have multiple interventions that become more intensive for students who need layers of support. Many high schools, for example, are

starting to develop a second tier of support to respond to the inordinate number of high school students, both with and without disabilities, who drop out of high school before graduating. Many of those students struggle both academically and socially. High school is not a place where they are experiencing great success.

Ideally, high schools should have a process in place to identify students (both with and without disabilities) who are becoming disenfranchised academically and socially and establish interventions to assist them. Interventions may include peer or adult support in which someone explicitly reaches out to the struggling students. Although the specific interventions may differ, a second tier of interventions should be a routine support structure in all high schools.

Schools should anticipate that some high-risk students are likely to drop out and should respond with a standard intervention to routinely meet their needs. This second tier of instruction should be designed and implemented for the entire school. Developing a second tier of interventions is beyond individual teacher's control. The leadership team has to allocate resources for the second tier of interventions and make the effective implementation of that support a priority throughout the school. For information on how a school's professional learning community can establish a variety of interventions to support struggling students, read *Whatever It Takes* by DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Karhanek, (2004).

O'Connor, Primm, & Stancil (2006) have described four elementary schools in Georgia that have developed effective interventions. In those schools, 1st and 2nd grade students who were not developing reading skills proficiently needed individual attention and instruction. Unfortunately, the financial and personnel resources were not available to provide one-to-one instruction by an adult. With the collaboration of the Georgia Learning Resources System, a regional professional development entity, each school decided to use an untapped resource, high school students. They worked as individual tutors for the young students who were struggling. The high school tutors provided tutoring 4-5 days a week, depending on the specific school. Tutoring was in addition to the regular reading instruction that the 1st and 2nd graders received. The older students used the Direct Instruction text *Teach Your Child to Read in 100 Easy Lessons* (Engelmann, Haddox, & Bruner, 1983) which typically costs around $20.00. The text is

scripted, so everything that the tutor says is merely read from the text, including the directions for the younger student and corrections when needed. The book also contains all of the information that the young reader needs.

Across eight cohorts of primary-aged students at four different schools, 105 students were evaluated and considered to be struggling readers. On average, it took the primary students approximately 6 months to finish the 100 lessons in the text with the direction of their tutor. (Each tutoring session lasted between 30 minutes and 1 hour per day.) Each student was evaluated using two versions of the Woodcock Reading Mastery assessment for a pre-test and post-test. On average, the 105 students gained 9 months in word identification skills and gained 1 year and 3 months in passage comprehension. Therefore, the students' academic growth outpaced their growth in chronological age. An overwhelming majority of students were able to catch up to expected levels and many students were able to surpass expectations for their grade level.   In fact 96% of the students made more progress in passage comprehension (in months) than the amount of time they spent in the tutorial project.

These schools were successful because they anticipated that some students were not going to respond sufficiently to typical reading instruction. They knew that they had to provide an additional tier of instruction to ensure success for these students. The leadership teams in each of those schools committed time, personnel, and financial resources to support the tutorial program. This second tier of interventions was effective in assisting students to catch up to their peers.

Organizational Barrier #2: Reading is not Taught Past Elementary School

Most children learn to read in first through third grade. During the remaining years of elementary school, students deepen their reading comprehension skills. They gain a broader vocabulary and are able to read and understand more sophisticated text. Unfortunately, some students leave elementary school unable to read proficiently. According to Drummond, up to 80% of students with learning disabilities struggle with reading (2005). To make matters worse, many middle schools, junior high schools, and high schools do not complete a comprehensive analysis of students' reading deficits or plan systematic approaches for teaching reading.

Why do some students leave elementary school unable to read? There are a variety of reasons. Through the years, the reading instruction has followed various trends. The educational pendulum has swung between phonetic approaches, in which students are taught to decode, and whole language approaches, in which students are not explicitly taught decoding but are taught through connected text. In addition, many schools have implemented eclectic methodologies from a variety of instructional approaches.

Significant research has been conducted in the area of reading instruction. According to the National Reading Panel,

> In 1997, Congress asked the Director of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) at the National Institutes of Health, in consultation with the Secretary of Education, to convene a national panel to assess the effectiveness of different approaches used to teach children to read. (About the National Reading Panel, 2001a)

One of the panel's first steps was to establish criteria for the types of research they would consider. They determined that they would only include research that had been published in a refereed journal and included either an experimental or quasiexperimental design (About the National Reading Panel, 2001b). At the end of their analysis, the National Reading Panel determined that students need instruction in five areas in order to become proficient readers: phonemic awareness (being able to differentiate between the various sounds in words), phonics (the ability to decode written text), vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency (the ability to orally read quickly and smoothly without interruptions) (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000). Unfortunately, some students did not receive systematic and enduring instruction in those five domains of reading during their initial years in school. Therefore, they left elementary school unable to read proficiently.

It is not necessary, however, to lay all of the blame at the feet of elementary schools. Some students are not authentically available for instruction during their elementary years. They can have family situations, like a divorce or death in the family,

which interfere with their ability to concentrate. They may be transient or sick at critical times in their early years of school. Whatever the reason, there are children who have holes in their reading development, like the inability to read fluently or weaknesses in decoding words. Schools do have it within their power to help students accelerate their learning and catch up so that these gaps do not become permanent barriers to students' success.

Some educators might say that the reason that students with disabilities have trouble is that they have disabilities. That may seem to make sense. But many educators, especially special education personnel, are coming to the conclusion that many students now labeled with a disability, could have actually learned to read proficiently if they had the benefit of quality instruction earlier in their school careers. Therefore, some students who are labeled as having a disability (not limited just to reading disabilities) would not need that label if they had been provided different instruction or interventions at a younger age.

A disability label may be preventable for many students. In Georgia, for example, teachers from a school implementing the *System to Enhance Educational Performance* (2006) have noted that some students with documented disabilities are not being determined to be eligible for special education services. They are catching up with their peers through successful interventions and so they no longer need special education services. (personal conversation, J. Schrum & R. Kelly, April 27, 2006)

What can you as school leaders do to ensure that students read proficiently? Elementary school leaders should require that students are provided explicit, systematic and enduring instruction in the five domains of reading that were mentioned above. They should routinely and systematically analyze children's learning from kindergarten throughout their school careers in order to guide instruction. When the assessments reveal that some children are falling behind, targeted and intensive instruction should be utilized at the earliest possible age in order to assist students with their weaknesses. They should also provide support to those students who are experiencing family difficulties that interfere with their learning perhaps with counseling or mentoring.

Middle school, junior high, and high school leaders should make explicit reading instruction available at all levels. This will take creativity and ingenuity. High schools,

for example, can implement a reliable assessment method to determine which students enter high school unable to read proficiently. Then, a course can be created devoted to explicit reading instruction. In your specific state, you will have to determine how that course will fit within the student's course of study to ensure enough credits can be earned to graduate in the typical four years in high school.

For some students, a longer course of study in high school may need to be considered by their respective IEP teams to give the students time to earn the required credits for a diploma and still have time for support classes. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) states that students with disabilities have the right to participate in public education until they earn their general education high school diploma or until they reach the age of 21.

Success requires careful planning. In some schools, a reading course has been offered. Unfortunately, the teacher who was assigned to teach the reading course may have been the one who drew the short straw, not the one who had real expertise in teaching reading to students who struggle. An effective reading teacher for struggling students must have expertise in identifying a student's specific weaknesses and implementing instruction that responds to those weaknesses. Strategic instruction will enable some students to make great gains in reading in a relatively short time.

There is another option for providing reading instruction to high school students who struggle. It can be embedded in content area instruction. History and math teachers, for example, can systematically provide instruction that will not only improve students' abilities in those content areas, but also will improve their literacy skills. If this approach is taken, all of the high school teachers should participate in sustained, ongoing professional development activities in best practices for increasing literacy levels for high school students.

Regardless of the approach, teaching middle and high school students to read proficiently is different than teaching primary school students. At the primary age, students are learning how to manipulate sounds and decode the letters that make up words. As students become older, instruction should focus more and more on comprehension with a wide variety of texts and vocabulary building strategies.

Organizational Barrier #3: Special Education Teachers do not Participate in Professional Development Activities

In many schools, special education teachers have been exempted from professional development activities for one of two reasons – they were either excluded or they pulled themselves out of the activities. For example, a new instructional initiative is promoted in a school. Unfortunately, the special education teachers are not considered a critical component of the initiative. They are essentially forgotten as professional development initiatives are undertaken. On the other hand, sometimes special education teachers remove themselves from professional development initiatives that they feel will not impact their students.

When school-wide initiatives are undertaken, special education teachers should be full participants in the training and coaching activities. School leaders and special education teachers may have to collaborate in order to expand or modify the initiative to ensure it will impact students with disabilities. Special educators should be involved nonetheless. Once special education teachers are included in professional development initiatives, it becomes obvious that they grow as professionals, as do general educators. Their expertise in adapting the initiative may make the difference in its impact on a wider range of students, those with disabilities, as well as those who struggle, but do not have a disability label.

Organizational Barrier #4: Co-Teachers are not Provided Time to Plan Collaboratively

In the previous step, we discussed effective co-teaching models. It is virtually impossible for a general and special educator to implement effective co-teaching strategies unless they have common time to plan instruction and analyze how students are responding to that instruction. They may not need one hour of common planning time every day, but they do need regularly scheduled time to plan lessons based on the curriculum and the students' learning needs. They need ongoing opportunities to analyze student performance, identify struggling students and those who are exceeding expectations, and design effective instructional activities that promote deeper understanding for all of their students. If school leaders provide teachers with these opportunities, students in co-taught settings will truly benefit from the expertise of both

teachers. When co-teaching teams do not have time to plan and brainstorm together, it is easy for the special education teacher to be relegated to a paraprofessional role. If the special education teachers are unaware of the full instructional arc, their only recourse may be reacting to the instruction that is provided by general education colleagues. Special education teachers' roles in such situations may be limited to providing proximity control to students who are misbehaving.

In most schools, the master school schedule creates a barrier for finding common planning time. According to Hughes, Alberto, & Waugh (2005), strategic development of the master schedule increases the likelihood that co-teachers will be provided common planning time. The need for co-taught classes can be projected each year in January or February to serve as the basis for planning the upcoming school year. Once IEPs have been developed for the school year, students with disabilities and their special education teachers should be scheduled first. Each child with a disability has an IEP requiring that specific services be provided. Because of this, special education students' schedules are much less flexible as required services and specific course requirements may be competing for time during the school day. First, place students with disabilities on the master schedule, in the setting required in the IEP for each service and subject area. Examples include: a pull-out special education class, a co-taught general education class, a general education class with support from someone other than a special education teacher (maybe an educational interpreter or a paraprofessional), or a general education class without special education support. Once the students with disabilities are placed on the master schedule, then their special education teachers should be assigned to the specific instruction periods where they are needed. Both pull-out classes and co-taught classes in the general education setting will need to be covered. Include planning time for the special education teachers on the master schedule. Next, schedule the general education teachers who will be co-teaching. Some of their class periods will be co-taught with a special education teacher while other periods will reflect classes that they will be teaching solo. As general education teachers are scheduled, match grade level or subject area teams' planning time to the planning time of the special education co-teacher assigned to that grade or subject area team. After students with disabilities are scheduled, schedule other students who have specialized services (e.g., English Language Learners,

etc.) and general educators who will not be co-teaching. Finally, schedule all general education students, who do not participate in specialized services. Even when most of the scheduling is facilitated by computer programs, it will often be necessary to hand-schedule special education students and faculty. By implementing scheduling in this manner, you will increase the likelihood that co-teachers will have at least some common planning time. It is very important to be keenly aware of state specific requirements that may impact funding. For example, in some states, a class does not earn funds if the number of students in the class exceeds the maximum class size. School leaders should be very knowledgeable about class size limitations for both special education and general education students.

This, however, will not solve all of the scheduling conflicts. Some scenarios will present themselves that interfere with the ability for co-teachers to have common planning time. At this point, school administrators face the challenge of creatively providing planning time while maintaining compliance with state laws and teacher union agreements. One option, available in some states, is to relieve co-teachers from some additional duties on specific days of the week. In other words, co-teachers who do not have common planning time could be released from bus duty a few times a week to enable them to meet together. In some states, it may be possible to pay the teachers extended day pay for a few segments every few weeks. In this scenario, a teacher may get paid at an hourly rate for an extra hour of planning time one or two days a week. Again, this is an opportunity to be creative. The availability or lack of availability of common planning time will have a direct impact on the success of the students in their co-teaching segments. Refer to Villa, Thousand, & Nevin (2004) to read additional strategies for expanding planning time. They describe a number of strategies for expanding planning time including "borrowed time," "common time," "tiered time," "rescheduled time," "released time," "freed-up time," "purchased time," "found time," and "new time."

Organizational Barrier #5: Co-Teachers do not Participate in Professional Learning Activities on Co-Teaching

Teaching is unlike many other professions in that it has usually been done in isolation. Doctors, lawyers, retail providers, military personnel, and virtually all other professions complete at least some of their professional practices in collaboration with their colleagues. Teachers on the other hand, often close the door to their classroom and practice their profession in isolation, sometimes year after year. Teaching side-by-side with another teacher is a new experience for many and it naturally involves the acquisition of new skills. Some teachers with co-teaching experience have not yet experienced a partnership in which each teacher is an equal and complimentary member of the team. In the previous step, we discussed the effective co-teaching models that maximize instructional opportunities for all students by providing optimal content instruction, with the accommodations and differentiation needed to meet group and individual needs. In this situation, neither teacher is functioning as a glorified paraprofessional. To be effective, teachers need an opportunity to participate in professional learning that will strengthen their co-teaching knowledge and skills. Unfortunately, many co-teaching partners are thrown together without the benefit of systematic opportunities to prepare for and strengthen their collaboration skills.

If this has happened at your school, you need to initiate conversations with the co-teachers and determine training needs. It may be necessary to build a shared vision in the school of what successful co-teaching looks like and how it can benefit students. As a member of the leadership team, you should facilitate this process at your school. As the common vision is defined, teachers come to recognize and appreciate the fact that all students arrive in the classroom with unique strengths and needs. Some are tall and some are short. Some are outgoing and some are reserved. They come from diverse backgrounds and have various ethnicities. Some have disabilities. All have strengths and weaknesses. Every child in the class belongs to both teachers. They will all benefit from the expertise of both the general education teacher and the special education teacher. All students are the responsibility of both teachers.

With an opportunity to lay the groundwork before co-teaching begins and with an ongoing and systematic opportunity to refine their collaboration and co-teaching skills, teachers will ensure that students receive maximum benefit from both professionals. If the groundwork has not been laid or there has not been systematic training, now is the time for you and your leadership team to address these needs.

Organizational Barrier # 6: Instructional Materials Used for Students with Disabilities Are Not Aligned to the General Education Curriculum

When a special education teacher candidate walks across the stage at graduation and receives the degree, he/she is inevitably equipped with the skill of scavenging. Teachers rummage through garage sales, old book rooms, and discount stores in order to equip their classrooms with educational materials. Many special education teachers do not throw anything away. Year after year, they collect educational materials to make their lessons engaging and effective for their students. The problem with this ingenuity, however, is that much of this material is not aligned to the general education curriculum. A special education middle school teacher may teach a history unit on Austria because of the availability of puzzles, used history books, and souvenirs bought on a summer vacation to Europe. Austrian history, however, may not be in the middle school history curriculum.

Educational leaders need to insist that teachers align both instruction and materials to the curriculum. They should determine which standards in the general education curriculum they are going to teach, and then match the instructional materials and activities toward achieving those objectives. The educational materials, no matter how fascinating and intriguing, should not guide the instruction. The curriculum should drive the instruction. As an educational leader, observe in classrooms and ensure that the materials that are being used are aligned to the standards in the curriculum. Also generate conversations among the staff about how they are choosing materials once they have determined the standards they are teaching. When you see a general education or special education teacher using materials that are somewhat unusual, determine if they are effectively used to help students attain the educational standards. At times, you will find that the teachers are being creative and are teaching effectively. At other times, you will find that the instruction is mistakenly being driven by the materials.

Step 4: Overcome Organizational Barriers

As a leadership team, how will you determine the organizational barriers that are having the largest impact on the performance of students in your school? Will you utilize observations, discussions with your staff, or some other method for determining the organizational barriers that are the priority areas for improvement?

Is there a pre-established tier of interventions for students who struggle and who do not initially meet standards? If so, describe those interventions and how it is determined that specific students need those interventions. If a tier of interventions does not exist in your school, describe interventions that will be implemented.

If your team is working in an upper elementary, middle or high school, is there a plan for reading to be explicitly taught to students who are still struggling readers?

Describe how special education teachers participate in professional learning with other teachers?

Do co-teaching teams have scheduled time to plan instruction jointly?

What mechanisms are in place to determine if co-teaching is being implemented effectively (e.g. routine observation by the leadership team)?

How effectively is co-teaching being implemented in your school?

Are instructional materials that are used for students with disabilities aligned to the general education curriculum?

Of the organizational barriers described above, which would have the greatest impact on student performance if it were improved? Which organizational barriers will be systematically eliminated during the next year?

Describe the steps that you will take to overcome those organizational barriers.

Step 5

Develop an Action Plan

Framework for Improving the Achievement of Students with Disabilities

Step 6: Implement Actions and Maintain Momentum
    A. Clearly describe what success looks like
    B. Keep it simple
    C. Keep it on the front burner
    D. Continuously monitor student performance
    E. Continuously monitor progress in adult practices
    F. Build effective professional development systems
    G. Share and celebrate success

Step 5: Develop an Action Plan
    A. Build ownership throughout the school
    B. Determine priority actions
    C. Build ongoing professional development systems
    D. Reserve time for conducting classroom observations

Step 4: Overcome Organizational Barriers
    A. Provide a second tier of support
    B. Teach reading at all grade levels when necessary
    C. Include special education teachers in all professional development initiatives
    D. Provide time for co-teachers to plan collaboratively
    E. Provide professional development activities on co-teaching
    F. Align instructional materials to the curriculum

Step 3: Overcome Instructional Barriers
    A. Provide effective instruction in pull out classes
    B. Provide effective accommodations
    C. Ensure uninterrupted instructional time
    D. Implement effective co-teaching
    E. Administer school-wide assessments appropriately
    F. Ensure in-depth instruction
    G. Utilize ongoing formative assessments to guide instruction

Step 2: Develop Support Systems for Specific Students
    A. Identify bubble and high impact students
    B. Review IEPs
    C. Develop a support system for specific students

Step 1: Identify School Needs
    A. Develop a team
    B. Redefine the role of special education administrators
    C. Analyze school-wide data

At this point, you have completed the first four steps of the Six Step Framework. In Step 1, you analyzed the school-wide data, including assessments, to find patterns in how students with disabilities are performing in your school. From that analysis, you determined which subject areas are strengths and weaknesses for students with disabilities. You also dug a little deeper into the specific domains in those subject areas. Students in your school may have strengths in Vocabulary in English/Language Arts while needing improvement in Patterns and Relationships in math. You may have found differences according to grade levels. As you analyzed multiple years of data, you may have determined that student achievement is slowing down at certain grades that now require your attention.

You also turned your attention to other types of school-wide data, like office discipline referrals. This data may have shown that students are missing valuable instructional time because of misbehavior or the data may have revealed the specific location on campus where most problems are occurring. It may have pointed you to a specific group of students who need additional supports or specific teachers who would benefit from behavior management training. After completing the analysis described in Step 1, you have a broad picture of your school as a whole for students with disabilities.

In Step 2, you determined which specific students need additional supports to make them successful by identifying bubble and high impact students. Then you established a support system for those students. Selected school staff members were recruited to partner with those students, to mentor and direct them, to be their advocates, to have high expectations for them, and to generally be in their corner. The mentors keep on top of their students' progress in school and offer input and assistance to the teachers. They also provide social support and mentoring. (It should be noted that we are not suggesting that only high impact and bubble students should receive extra support. Many other students will also benefit.)

After that support structure was established, you turned your attention to the instructional (Step 3) and organizational (Step 4) barriers that often exist in schools for students with disabilities. You considered the structure of your school to determine which adult practices promote or inhibit student progress. You identified which

instructional barriers and organizational barriers, if eliminated, would have the greatest impact on the performance of students with disabilities.

During Step 5 of the framework, you will incorporate all of that information into a useable, simple, action plan that will enable you to take systematic steps for improvement. This simple action plan can easily communicate your priorities, actions, and efforts to your faculty, to your students, their families, and to the community. Most importantly, perhaps, you will align and focus your efforts. Schools right now are abuzz with improvement programs. Unfortunately, there is a fine line between multiple activities and chaos. Many teachers find the demands, training, and expectations for change overwhelming. Some are going through the motions without having a strong understanding of the purposes of the new practices. There are too many trees to see the forest. Aligning improvement goals, professional learning, and expectations for improved professional practices within the school's organization to focus on activities that will lead to the expected results can make change efficient and systematic. In many cases, alignment will result not in more work to do, but in a more effective way to do what you already do. You will align the initiatives so that your faculty persistently moves in the same direction and does not splinter off into various directions. Let us begin on Step 5 of the framework. We will demonstrate the components of Step 5 of the framework, developing an action plan, by describing a hypothetical school, Encouragement Middle School, and how the leadership team built an effective plan.

Build Ownership Throughout the School

The Encouragement Middle School principal, Ms. Logan, realized that she could not make significant improvement alone, so she started by gathering together a team to provide leadership. All school administrators were involved along with the school counselors, and teachers representing each content area and grade level - special and general education. Ms. Logan demonstrated her vision and inventiveness by recruiting the president of the Parent Teacher Association to participate in this group. She also recruited the lead custodian to represent the support personnel. (This unified group is referred to as the leadership team during the remainder of this discussion.) The team realized that they had to focus attention on the disability subgroup because the school did not make AYP based on their performance.

The entire team completed the analysis described in Step 1 and determined that students with disabilities had weaknesses in math, specifically in the domains of Statistics/Probability and Problem Solving. These weaknesses were seen across the 6th, 7th, and 8th grades for students with disabilities. Too few students with disabilities met expectations in math. In addition, none of the students with disabilities met the threshold for exceeding expectations in math. English/Language Arts scores were not terribly strong, but were less of a problem. In an effort to determine if these weaknesses impacted more students than the students with disabilities, they analyzed the performance of all students in the school. Not surprisingly, they determined that math was a challenge for the school as a whole. In a way, this made sense. For the past several years, they had placed tremendous effort on improving literacy skills for their students. Steady improvements were seen in English/Language Arts through the years. Math achievement, on the other hand, was relatively flat.

Once the leadership team determined that math was a weakness, the next step was to share this analysis with all members of the faculty and staff and to seek their input to determine the priority actions for improvement. There was one school-wide staff meeting to discuss these findings. In addition, each member of the leadership team led small group meetings in which the findings were examined more thoroughly. For example, general and special education teachers from the leadership team partnered to present to their respective grade level peers (general and special education). The lead custodian shared the information with other support staff (secretaries, cafeteria personnel, custodians, etc.). The PTA president shared it with her constituencies, and so forth.

Determine Priority Actions

Next, a determination was made regarding which students were high impact and bubble students. The entire student body consisted of 1042 students, 125 who were categorized as having a disability. Of the 125 students, 36 were in three different subgroups. Most frequently, those students were included in the following subgroups: disability, their respective ethnicity, and poverty. In addition, 9 students were in a total of four subgroups. They also determined which students with disabilities were bubble students, those who either barely missed or barely met expectations on the school-wide assessments the previous year. Forty-two students with disabilities were on the bubble

for meeting the following year's criteria on the school-wide assessments. It was determined that many of the students who were classified as high impact students also met the criteria for being considered a bubble student. The Encouragement Middle School leadership team chose not to limit their analysis to students with disabilities, so they looked at the whole student population. They determined that there were 100 students total (including students with disabilities) who were in at least three subgroups. And there were 117 students (including students with disabilities) who were on the bubble for meeting baseline criteria. Again, many students overlapped categories.

Then, the Encouragement Middle School team made sure all teachers knew which students in their classes were in the bubble and high impact categories. (It was not necessary to identify subgroups for each student because of the possible sensitivity of the information, but each teacher must know which students need support.) Next, they established a mentoring program in which the targeted students were matched to staff members. Students completed questionnaires asking which three faculty or staff members they would like as their mentor. Each was matched with one of those staff members. The mentor and the student established check-in times during the week. In addition, many of the mentors naturally spent additional time with their respective student. They often found common interests, such as an extracurricular activity they both enjoyed; increasing the time they spent time together. The mentor was asked to not only encourage the student socially, but to ask to see grades and discuss academic successes and challenges on an ongoing basis with the student.

The leadership team then analyzed the instructional barriers for students with disabilities described in Steps 3. They determined that there were co-teaching teams in their school, but they were not implementing co-teaching effectively. The special education teachers in many of those classes were essentially acting in the role of a paraprofessional. They also determined that they needed to increase the number of co-teaching classes that were offered. In addition, in-depth instruction was not being provided in pull-out or general education environments particularly in the area of mathematics. During pull-out classes, special education teachers were facing too many students who needed instruction at too many levels. They also lacked a deep understanding of the mathematics content. Likewise, the mathematics instruction that

was provided in general education classes (sometimes with co-teachers and sometimes with a general education teacher alone) did not involve higher-order thinking skills. The students were following rote steps in computation without understanding the underlying concepts. In addition, ongoing formative assessments were not systematically being implemented, analyzed, and used to guide instruction.

An analysis of the organizational barriers revealed that co-teachers were not provided professional development on co-teaching strategies or time to plan collaboratively. At the end of the day, the leadership team decided that the priority areas for improvement were: 1) More effective math instruction throughout the school, 2) Increasing the number and effectiveness of co-teaching classes, 3) Finding the time for co-teachers to plan collaboratively, and 4) Implementing formative assessments.

Build Ongoing Professional Development Systems

All of these areas for improvement needed to be aligned so that improvement did not turn into chaos. They determined that all math teachers, both special education and general education, needed the opportunity to participate in sustained professional development activities in mathematics. As a component of the professional development activities, the mathematics teachers would develop assessments for math courses that would be given to all students every 3 weeks, and used as formative assessments. The first formative assessments would be graded and students' weaknesses analyzed to guide the teachers' instruction over the next three-week period. Teachers would focus on those areas of weaknesses. If the students' specific weaknesses were seen again in the subsequent formative assessment, three weeks later, then grade level teams would brainstorm effective instructional strategies for the specific students. Co-teaching teams who were partnered for math courses would be given time during the professional development activities to brainstorm, discuss, and plan the most effective ways to implement math instruction together. The master schedule would also be developed so that the co-teachers had 1-2 periods of common planning time per week and a half-day or more of time early in the year for long-term planning.

The success of the Encouragement Middle School initiatives relied heavily on effective professional development. Traditionally, educators participate in one-day workshops without any follow-up and support during implementation. In the end, this

type of professional development does not improve educators' practices any more than one golf lesson, even by the greatest golf pro, makes someone a talented golfer. Teachers need to learn about new skills on an ongoing basis. They have to try out those new skills and receive feedback. Then they can reflect and brainstorm with their colleagues about the effectiveness of the instructional strategies. They need to evaluate the impact of the instructional strategies on their students' learning, and adjust the implementation until students' learning is maximized. Professional development that provides opportunities for these kinds of learning activities takes considerable planning and attention during implementation. Hiring a one-day speaker is much easier for a busy leadership team, but will not ultimately impact the practices of educators or the performance of their students.

When the leadership team of Encouragement Middle School created their professional development action plan, they were careful to provide ongoing training for educators to improve their practices over time. Therefore, student performance should increase accordingly. They started by garnering the support and enthusiasm of the faculty and staff. During the summer prior to the school year, the leadership team hosted a one-day, voluntary training for the staff. They elicited support from a community restaurant, their school business partner, to provide lunch during the training. During that day, the school staff reviewed the results of the previous year's school-wide assessments. From this analysis, the school finalized their improvement priorities for the school year (improving math instruction, increasing the number and effectiveness of co-teaching teams, scheduling common planning time for co-teachers and utilizing formative assessment to guide instruction.) They also discussed the students in the bubble and high impact categories and brainstormed how the mentoring project might be established. In addition, they considered other students, those without disabilities, in need of support, knowing that they could not afford to ignore the lowest performing students if they wanted to make AYP over the next few years.

After lunch, two hours of math training was provided. Surprisingly, the training did not focus on techniques for math instruction. Math teachers completed complex math challenges in small teams that included both general education and special education teachers. A professor of mathematics from a local college who had a reputation of making math engaging and fun was the instructor. Next, co-teachers were provided an

additional hour of professional learning activities in which they discussed their teaching practices. Special education teachers and the general education teachers who would be co-teaching discussed their preferences for classroom procedures (class rules, expectations for students, grading procedures, etc.) and brainstormed how to incorporate each teacher's preferences into an inclusive plan for the upcoming school year. (In most cases, the co-teachers only co-taught daily for one segment.)

During a training session teachers have often said, "I need to be in my classroom getting ready for my students. This is such a waste of my time." It was exciting for Encouragement Middle School's teachers to find that time for planning and discussion was embedded in their professional development sessions.

This initial day of training was followed by another training session on the first day of planning prior to the opening of the new school year. Final mentoring plans were developed for high impact/bubble students. The mathematics professor led another two-hour session, once again focused on solving complex math challenges. Following the two-hour training, the mathematics teachers (general and special education) from the respective grades, met in small groups to discuss how they could incorporate the math concepts into their instruction.

A significant portion of time that day was spent beginning to develop common formative assessments for each grade level. Grade level teachers continued to work together during the first six weeks of school to develop the formative assessments for the entire year. In so doing, they delved more deeply into the mathematics curriculum. They analyzed the math standards for the entire year, developed an annual overview of the knowledge and skills, and developed benchmarks for the year with related assessments.

The mathematics professor provided one hour of training to all of the math teachers every other week. These sessions supported teachers in pushing instruction to deeper levels and using the new formative assessments. Often, these training sessions occurred during teacher's planning period. Sometimes, the training was provided after school. During these sessions, the professor continued to challenge teachers with increasingly complex math content. They also reviewed the student performance on the formative assessments and brainstormed interventions to assist the students to increase their mathematics proficiency. The co-teachers met one hour per week to plan together

in pairs. Teachers collaborated to design and deliver math lessons using co-teaching models suited to the planned instructional goals and strategies. Flexible grouping practices were also considered.

<h3 style="text-align:center">Reserve Time for Conducting Classroom Observations</h3>

At least once a month, the school district's Coordinator of Mathematics visited each classroom for an observation and discussion of the instructional strategies being implemented. The principal and the members of the leadership team also visited the classrooms monthly in order to monitor implementation. Knowing that the principal would be visiting and specifically looking for indications that the math strategies were being used also provided gentle, but real pressure for the teachers to stay the course. Implementation of new strategies can seem awkward at first. It is expected and natural that teachers will revert to their earlier routines without encouragement, support, and just enough pressure to sustain the improved practices.

Encouragement Middle School utilized the Six Step Framework to impact both the practices of educators and the performance of their students. An analysis of the students' performance on school-wide assessments was completed, support systems for high impact/bubble students were built, and instructional and organizational barriers were systematically addressed. The school leadership team persistently and clearly articulated the priorities for the school year (improving math instruction, increasing the number and effectiveness of co-teaching teams, providing common planning time for co-teachers, and implementing formative assessments to guide instruction). Encouragement Middle School built effective professional development systems that included staff buy-in, ongoing training and support, continuous analysis of data, and training provided by a content expert. Most importantly, they aligned all of the priorities for the school into one cohesive whole. This enabled the entire staff to move forward in the same direction.

Step 5: Develop an Action Plan

Now it is your turn to develop a plan that will enable the students with disabilities in your school to exhibit improved performance. At the conclusion of each preceding step, you were asked to complete each step of the framework for your school. Review your responses from the previous steps in order to complete the following action plan.

What did the analysis of school-wide data (Step 1) reveal about your students with disabilities? What are the areas that need to be improved for students with disabilities?

What are the weaknesses that are seen for other students in the school? Are the areas of weakness similar to those for students with disabilities?

In order to improve the weaknesses described in the two previous questions, which staff members need professional development in order to improve their practices? What content should be addressed in the professional development initiative(s)? Can the professional development be aligned for special education teachers and general education teachers? How will coaching, support, and just the right amount of pressure to sustain change be provided?

According to the most recent school-wide assessments, how many students with disabilities do you consider high impact/bubble students (Step 2)? Who are they?

Are there other students who do not have disabilities who should be considered high impact/bubble students? Who are they?

Describe the mentoring program that will be established to match the high impact/bubble students with caring adults in the school. Consider whether other students need support as well.

What instructional barriers are priorities for elimination? How will you systematically remove those barriers and improve teachers' and administrators' practices?

What organizational barriers are priorities for elimination? How will you systematically remove these barriers and improve administrators' and teachers' practices?

How can all of the needs be aligned into one coherent plan? How will this coherent set of activities and goals be simply communicated to the faculty, staff, and parents of the school?

Step 6:

Implement Actions and Maintain Momentum

Framework for Improving the Achievement of Students with Disabilities

Step 6: Implement Actions and Maintain Momentum
    A. Clearly describe what success looks like
    B. Keep it simple
    C. Keep it on the front burner
    D. Continuously monitor student performance
    E. Continuously monitor progress in adult practices
    F. Build effective professional development systems
    G. Share and celebrate success

Step 5: Develop an Action Plan
    A. Build ownership throughout the school
    B. Determine priority actions
    C. Build ongoing professional development systems
    D. Reserve time for conducting classroom observations

Step 4: Overcome Organizational Barriers
    A. Provide a second tier of support
    B. Teach reading at all grade levels when necessary
    C. Include special education teachers in all professional
        development initiatives
    D. Provide time for co-teachers to plan collaboratively
    E. Provide professional development activities on co-teaching
    F. Align instructional materials to the curriculum

Step 3: Overcome Instructional Barriers
    A. Provide effective instruction in pull out classes
    B. Provide effective accommodations
    C. Ensure uninterrupted instructional time
    D. Implement effective co-teaching
    E. Administer school-wide assessments appropriately
    F. Ensure in-depth instruction
    G. Utilize ongoing formative assessments to guide instruction

Step 2: Develop Support Systems for Specific Students
    A. Identify bubble and high impact students
    B. Review IEPs
    C. Develop a support system for specific students

Step 1: Identify School Needs
    A. Develop a team
    B. Redefine the role of special education administrators
    C. Analyze school-wide data

At this point, you may assume that you are nearing the end of your task. Your effort, however, is only partially complete. Effective analysis and planning are enormously important for impacting the performance of students with and without disabilities. But the real work is seen when those plans are put into practice and sustained. Educators who have had action plans end up on bookshelves over the years without discernable results may be reluctant to put time and energy into changes that they think will go away like all the other initiatives that have come and gone over their careers. A primary responsibility of the leadership team is developing an action plan and, even more importantly, maintaining momentum. Teachers and administrators who are learning and trying new skills must have continuous nurturing and support. At first, the new skills and efforts will seem clumsy and inefficient.

Your job as a member of the school leadership team is to assist your colleagues to move through those initial stages and make improved practices become routine. You can do this by building a context that will survive the test of time. In this step, we will discuss critical components that are necessary to increase the likelihood that strategic action plans will result in improved adult practices that are institutionalized in the school culture and that ultimately increase student performance.

Clearly Describe what Success Looks Like

When schools implement action plans, a critical step is often missing. It is common to see a goal involving increasing student achievement in a particular content area, like reading or math. Educators then participate in professional development activities that focus on the content itself or promising instructional strategies. There is a step between the goal-setting for students and the development of professional learning activities. The leadership team must articulate what effective teacher practices will actually look like. In order for students to increase their practices, what do teachers and administrators have to actually know and do? How will the promising practices be operationalized? In our preceding step, we discussed Encouragement Middle School's efforts to increase math achievement for students with and without disabilities. They decided that students need an opportunity to dig deeply into mathematics by solving problems that require sophisticated understanding of math concepts, patterns, and relationships. The questions to ask are, "If I observe a mathematics class, how will I

know if that is happening? What will students be doing in the class? What will teachers be doing? How will those practices differ from what is currently occurring in the school?" There should be very specific answers to these questions.

Unfortunately, in educational circles, we have the tendency to talk in a general, almost hypothetical manner. We discuss how students will be challenged and how they will be life-long learners. But, we need to accompany that with a specific list of adult practices and student activities that are clearly observable and recognizable. Encouragement Middle School may operationalize their efforts by stating that students in the math classes will:

- Solve multiple-step problems, selecting from multiple solution options.
- Develop not only solutions, but be able to create complex math challenges that need to be solved.
- Describe the approach (either orally or in writing) that was chosen to solve the problem, including a description of other options or routes that could have been taken and benefits or drawbacks of those routes.
- Teach other students, who may be younger, to solve similar problems.

If these activities are expected from students, then an observer will see teachers:

- Provide opportunities for students to solve multi-step problems that move from simple to more complex as the year progresses.
- Provide opportunities for students to not only solve problems, but to also to develop complex problems that need solutions.
- Spend less time leading whole group instruction and more time facilitating opportunities for students to work by themselves or in small groups.
- Give students ample opportunity to explain their work orally or in writing and strategically facilitate these discussions so that students' verbal explanations become more complex and independent throughout the year.
- Give students an opportunity to be the teacher in small and large groups within the class and possibly with younger students. Teachers should reduce their support of these student-driven mini-lessons over time as the students become more adept in the teaching role.

- Describe how the results of formative assessments are guiding continued instruction. For example, each teacher should be able to say something like, "The last formative assessment revealed that 6 students could not adequately describe the options available for solving the problem or why they selected the one they used. So, at the beginning of each lesson, those students will meet in the back of the room and solve a multi-step challenge together. The next day, they will each describe their problem solving steps to me. That will give each of them the chance to hear other students' explain their efforts repetitively. Once I have this group functioning smoothly, I will ask another student who is strong in this skill, to facilitate this group and listen to their explanations."

An extra layer of observable expectations can be outlined for co-teaching classes. Teachers in those classes should:

- Be actively engaged in instruction at all times. Neither teacher should act as a glorified paraprofessional.
- Use co-teaching models that utilize the expertise of both teachers.
- Use co-teaching models to effectively reduce the student-teacher ratio.
- Explain the instructional rationale for the selected co-teaching model.
- Increase the time in which both teachers are actively teaching, in a variety of activities, until the amount of teaching is almost twice the amount of time in the instructional segment.
- Be able to articulate how their instruction is being shaped by the results of the formative assessments.

These observable student and teacher practices should be clearly and continually articulated to teachers throughout the school year. As ongoing professional development activities proceed, these observable expectations will be established. It would be overwhelming to introduce all of these ideas at the first training session, but over time, each teacher, administrator, and member of the leadership team, should be keenly aware of what success actually looks like.

Keep it Simple

Many educational leaders start a new initiative by heralding it as a complete change in practices. It is hoped that this type of introduction will generate excitement.

Unfortunately, just the opposite it true. This type of announcement usually results in significant resistance. Change is never easy. If staff members perceive that great changes are expected in their practices, many will respond with corresponding levels of resistance. Psychologically, that makes sense. In order to jump on the bandwagon of great change, you have to acknowledge that your existing practices are ineffective to some point and that your teaching is not resulting in sufficient levels of student learning. That is a hard pill to swallow. Instead of painting the picture as wholesale change, sell it as an enhancement of the existing program. School staff will be much more open to an initiative that continues practices that have shown to be effective, but enhances those practices that will have a significant impact on student achievement. School personnel must perceive the initiative as both simple and doable.

There is another aspect of keeping it simple. Virtually every school in the country develops some sort of strategic plan. These strategic plans are described in large notebooks that usually sit on administrators' bookshelves. In order to effectively communicate an annual strategic plan, it should be summarized on one page. This description should include the current status, usually reflected in a chart or description of the data, the annual goals, and steps that the school will take to meet those annual goals.

Let's continue to look at Encouragement Middle School. The following one-page Action Plan summarizes Encouragement Middle School's activities that are planned for the school year. As you remember, Encouragement Middle School determined that improving math performance was a priority goal for students with disabilities as well as for students without disabilities. Therefore, the Action Plan reflects the activities for the entire school. There are not separate plans for students with and without disabilities. There is one plan that every teacher can post on the classroom wall in order to organize the goals, expectations, and activities for the year.

ENCOURAGEMENT MIDDLE SCHOOL
ANNUAL ACTION PLAN

Goals

Encouragement Middle School will meet Adequate Yearly Progress by:

- Increasing math achievement. A minimum of 70% of each subgroup will meet or exceed expectations, or there will be a reduction of 10% in each subgroup of students who do not meet expectations.
- In other content areas, continue to have at least 70% of students (state standard) meet or exceed expectations.

Current Status

- Last year, Encouragement Middle School met the state standard in all content areas except mathematics. The trend line over the last three years for math has been flat.

Action Steps
(Developed by the faculty and staff of Encouragement Middle in collaboration with our students and their families.)

- Every student who needs assistance in meeting expectations or those students who are in at least 3 subgroups will receive support from an adult mentor.
- Mathematics teachers will provide opportunities for students to engage in complex and sophisticated problem solving activities in addressing the state curriculum.
- An increased number of co-teaching teams will provide support for all students in their classes.
- In collaboration with State College, all math teachers will participate in one-hour professional development activities every other week. During the professional development sessions teachers will:
    - Develop common formative assessments.
    - Analyze the results of the assessments and develop targeted instructional activities for the students who are not demonstrating proficiency.
    - Brainstorm intervention strategies for any student who does not show proficiency on the same skills on two consecutive formative assessments.
    - Participate in complex mathematics problem-solving activities that they can use in their classrooms.
- Co-teachers will have at least one common planning time each week to discuss effective co-teaching strategies for mathematics instruction.
- The Coordinator of Mathematics and leadership team will visit classrooms at least monthly to coach and support teachers.

Keep it on the Front Burner

This action plan clearly states the activities that will be conducted during the year to improve the math achievement of all students, including students with disabilities. By keeping the message simple, you increase the probability that the faculty and staff will remain on the same course in coordinated improvement activities.

Teachers have demanding jobs. In addition to the instruction and learning that takes place, teachers juggle many other responsibilities. Reports have to be submitted to the central office for data analysis or state funding purposes. The school schedule has to be established and supplies have to be ordered. Discipline problems have to be addressed. Special education teachers are inundated with required paperwork to document due process procedures. Extracurricular activities need to be supported. The list goes on and on.

Administrators are also incredibly busy. Leading a large school is similar to being the mayor of a small community. You have to deal with transportation, food service, communications, employee issues, employee unions, safety and emergency issues, and maintenance, just to name a few. It is extremely easy to start an initiative and then get distracted with all of the other daily demands that are present. Many times, educators participate in a training activity that is received with great excitement. Two weeks later, however, only a few teachers are actually implementing their new instructional strategies, and those educators are not implementing the strategies with fidelity.

What happened? The educators got back to their schools and were met with all of those demands. As the school leadership team, how can you keep your priority initiatives on the front burner? You have to continually stress the importance of the initiative, not through nagging but through prominence. If you have a weekly e-mail that goes out to your staff, provide helpful hints to make implementing new practices easier, while keeping them on the radar. Include articles that highlight teachers who are doing a great job implementing instructional strategies related to the initiative. At faculty meetings, have a set time to discuss the initiative. Review ongoing data that shows that progress is being made. Have a contest in which students develop slogans that reflect the initiative. And perhaps most importantly, observe in classrooms for the sole purpose of determining

if the desired practices are being implemented with fidelity. (This process is described below in the "monitoring adult practices section.") By providing prominence to the initiative in these ways, improving mathematics instruction at Encouragement Middle School will remain on the front burner.

Continuously Monitor Student Performance

Teacher effectiveness is ultimately measured by how well their students are performing. Student performance should be continually monitored in order to inform continued instruction at the classroom level and to guide overall school activities. The formative assessment data should be used to determine which specific students are on the right pace to meet year-end expectations and which students will need adjustments to their educational programs in order to meet those goals. Teachers should analyze data at the classroom level while the members of the school leadership team analyze formative data across teachers and grades.

By reviewing these data, school leaders and teachers can identify those students who need additional support and build targeted instructional strategies to meet those needs. At a minimum, teachers should review formative data once every three weeks and identify those students who need additional assistance and the specific skills that the students need. During the next three weeks, teachers should enhance instruction for these students to ensure that they meet the appropriate benchmarks. If the formative assessments data during the subsequent three-week period indicates that a problem still exists for specific students, then the teacher should seek input from other professionals including grade level teams of teachers and administrators. The school leadership team should review the results of the formative data and provide targeted support or a second tier of interventions based on students' needs.

Continuously Monitor Progress in Adult Practices

By monitoring teacher implementation, you will send the very clear message that the initiative is important and that you are willing to provide support to teachers as they slowly learn how to implement their new skills effectively. The members of the school leadership team should observe routinely teachers in their classrooms, prioritizing those teachers whose students are not making sufficient progress on the formative assessments. These sessions are different from the traditional twenty-minute

observations conducted for teacher evaluation. It is important that teachers understand the purpose of these visits is coaching and support, *not* evaluations for the personnel file.

Spend time in classrooms determining if teacher practices are progressing. Make it clear that you are observing for those specific practices that were outlined earlier and for instructional strategies that are matched to students' specific needs. Are students completing complex, multi-step problems? Are they describing the processes they employed to complete the exercises while explaining other options that may have also worked? Are they teaching other students how to complete similar problems? Are the teachers strategically scaffolding support so that students are becoming more and more proficient in their ability to comprehensively explain their thought processes as they are completing the math challenges? For co-teaching teams, are teachers utilizing the expertise of both teachers while students are benefiting from two professionals in the classroom?   Can they explain why they selected a specific co-teaching model for the lesson? Self analysis can be a very valuable tool as teachers move forward. A well crafted rubric can provide teachers an opportunity to evaluate their own skills and provide feedback for improving those skills.

The school leadership team should determine where each teacher is on the continuum of effectiveness with their new skills. In the beginning, some teachers will gain the new skills relatively effortlessly. There are always those talented, fast learners. Some teachers will struggle with the new initiatives, while most teachers will be somewhere in the middle. As a member of the school leadership team, determine where each teacher is in effectively implementing the expected teacher practices. Then systematically build experiences and provide feedback so that the teachers move along the continuum of effectiveness. With ongoing feedback and opportunity for brainstorming among the professionals in the building, each teacher should be provided with the support needed to improve those skills. There should be significant improvement seen in teachers' skills over time.

Build Effective Professional Development Systems

We have described professional development in the prior step, but it is so critical that it is important to emphasize it in this section also. It is imperative to remember that adults and children learn in similar ways. We all need continuous

opportunities to learn new skills, practice those skills, debrief their effectiveness and brainstorm ways to continually improve. We need opportunities to see those skills implemented effectively and to learn from others. Do not limit your idea of professional development to "sit and get" workshops. Provide multiple and systematic opportunities for teachers and administrators to engage in professional conversation. That dialogue should include an analysis of their students' performance, based on the formative data. It should focus on how instruction needs to be adjusted to maximize the number of students in the class who meet or exceed the expected standards. Use classroom observations and other formative data to guide and revise professional learning for teachers and administrators.

Share and Celebrate Success

In every school, there are staff members who love to entertain and bring fun to their colleagues. Utilize their enthusiasm and skills for the purpose of celebrating successes throughout the school. Let them plan special activities in which your staff and the students can celebrate their accomplishments. Make a commitment that at least once a month the staff will participate in a celebratory activity. It doesn't have to be a major production every month, but recognizing the faculty's effort and highlighting specific successes is extremely important.

In addition, reinforce students for their effort and achievement. For example, have school postcards printed that can only be used to congratulate students for their great work or effort. Each teacher should be required to mail at least 10 postcards a month to the student's parents detailing the student's accomplishments. By the end of the school year, each family in the building should receive one postcard about their child. In addition, provide regular reinforcement, in a variety of ways for students across the school.

Step 6: Implement Actions and Maintain Momentum

Based on the priority actions that you determined at the conclusion of Step 5, clearly and succinctly describe the observable actions that you want to see students performing.

Clearly describe the observable practices that you want to see teachers performing.

How will you communicate the initiatives so that you garner support from the faculty and staff and minimize resistance?

Develop a one-page action plan that summarizes your improvement activities for the year.

How will you keep the initiative on the front burner throughout the school year?

How will you continually monitor students' performance? Include a description of the formative assessments that will be provided and how instruction will be enhanced for students who are not meeting benchmarks sufficiently.

As a member of the leadership team, how will you analyze and respond to the formative assessment results?

How will you monitor teachers' practices toward the schools goals? How will you identify teachers who are progressing sufficiently and those who need additional support? What type of support will you provide?

Describe the professional development systems that will be utilized to improve adult practices. Include how you will provide an array of experiences that allow staff members to analyze the performance of their students and build instructional activities that respond to students' needs.

How will you celebrate success? Which staff members will you enlist to assist in building activities that reinforce both staff and students for their effort and achievement? How will you find and highlight specific examples of success?

Epilogue

In the introduction of this book, we described the remarkable gains that have been made for students with disabilities in our educational system. Until recently, those gains were focused on ensuring that students with disabilities received all of the special education services needed in order to receive an "appropriate" education. As you read this book, it should have been obvious that we are not focusing on the due process procedures that are required in federal special education legislation. We are no longer just focusing on the services provided or the due process procedures that are implemented. We are focusing on results, the achievement that ultimately prepares students with disabilities for the same options in life that are available to students without disabilities.

Over the last few decades, we have undergone an evolution in educating students with disabilities. We first provided access to public schools for all students regardless of their disability. We then focused on fully informing and engaging parents as they participate in the various decision-making processes. Next, we educated students in special schools, then in regular schools in special education classes. Finally, most students with disabilities are educated in general education classes with supports and accommodations.

Now, it is time to have high expectations for all students. It is time to organize schools and instruction so that those expectations are realized. We should no longer use a student's label or an IQ score to set lifelong limits on students and to make us feel better as educators. We have to dive diligently into continually improving our leadership and teaching skills so that we can help all students with disabilities meet their potential.

As educators, we will not be judged by meeting the due process expectations or by providing a variety of education services. In fact, we should not even be judged by how tirelessly we work. We should be judged by the achievement of our students. This makes the challenge much harder. Diligently and passionately, we must continually analyze ours students' performance, in our classrooms and across our schools, and meet students' strengths and weaknesses with improved practices.

We will know our educational practices have improved, not by our performance as educators, but by the performance of our students with disabilities. We are truly at the next and most meaningful stage of the evolution of educating students with disabilities. Can we meet this challenge?

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