

Strategies for K-8 Students with Disabilities in the General Education Curriculum



International Center

for Leadership in Education

Acknowledgments

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Overview

Introduction

School districts throughout the country are struggling with the challenges of *No Child Left Behind*. No issue has been more confounding to districts than increasing the performance of students receiving special education services. National performance data for these students shows a significant lag in performance, and this trend often begins in the elementary school years. Yet, the Special Education Institute at the International Center for Leadership in Education has identified a growing number of elementary schools that have helped these students achieve success through a persistent, long-term, strategic approach to improving their instructional opportunities. At the same time, many more schools have begun to address this issue as a priority.

Chapter Contents

Strategies for K-8 Students with Disabilities in the General Education Curriculum is designed to assist schools and their districts in improving the performance of special education students by highlighting the strategies that successful elementary and middle schools have used to bring about positive results. The elementary and two middle schools described in Chapters 5-7 all have addressed this issue through a clear vision of what they want to accomplish and a persistent belief that students with disabilities can and will succeed. While the individual school strategies vary, they all are built from the foundation of high expectations for all students.

In addition to the specific school strategies, this resource kit also has information on two primary strategies that highly effective schools are using to improve results for their students who are struggling. Chapter 4 is dedicated to the issue of co-teaching. Co-teaching is used in various ways in schools that have improved the performance of students with disabilities in core academic subjects. When implemented correctly, this approach appears to show significant benefit over the self-contained classroom models of the past, but it needs to be put into operation thoughtfully and with adequate staff development. The co-teaching chapter gives both teachers and administrators a foundation for how to install and support co-teaching, using best practices from successful schools.

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Another strategy is being considered and put into use by school districts throughout the country as a way to reduce the reliance on special education and improve the success of students who are struggling in school and are likely to be considered for referral. That strategy is the establishment of a general education intervention system. Such a strategy is important in elementary school as a tool to reduce the number of students who fall behind, particularly in reading skills. A common label for this approach is Response to Intervention, or RtI. Although RtI has gained momentum in the recent years, Chapters 2 and 3 do not focus solely on this model. Rather, those chapters describe the ingredients that are necessary for any intervention approach to become systemic and thus strengthen the general education system.

While much attention has been given to the relationship between intervention systems and the ability to identify students with learning disabilities effectively, the focus of the kit is on the effect that quality interventions have on the performance of students at risk and their ability to be maintained successfully in the general education environment. This will naturally lead to fewer referrals to special education, but the important attention needs to be on the success rate of the interventions. Chapter 3 highlights the steps necessary to install and implement a systemic intervention system that is likely to be sustainable and become an integral part of the general education system. Chapter 8 offers suggestions and materials for professional development related to Chapter 3.

A tool for schools to use to identify where they stand with respect to issues related to educating their students with disabilities is provided in Chapter 1. The Five Key Elements Checklist helps a school pinpoint structures and practices that need to be in place to support improved results for all of its struggling student subgroups, particularly students with disabilities. By using the checklist, a school can determine what it needs to strengthen in order to promote sustainable student success.

The Five Key Elements Checklist is included on the CD that accompanies the resource kit. A second checklist, this one for districts, is provided in

Two DVDs and a CD are included in the kit.

Items on the CD are indicated by this icon.



the Appendix and on the CD. A district can use the System Strategies Checklist to assess its ability to sustain improvements gained by its schools. Improvements often occur through the efforts of individual leaders at the building level. When these leaders leave, the gains may disappear. Systemic issues need to be addressed at both the district and building levels to sustain improved performance over the long term.

Various other tools and forms are presented in the Appendix and on the CD as well. PowerPoint presentations provide professional development for district and school leadership. One is on system strategies and another offers guidelines for an effective intervention system.

The two DVDs included in the kit were recorded at the 2009 Model Schools Conference. *Meeting the Needs of Special Education Students* explains how many districts and schools across the country have improved the performance of their students with disabilities. *Strategies for Students with Disabilities in the General Education Classroom* explains how to put the material in Chapters 2 and 3 into action and describes one school's experience in educating these students to much higher standards.

Final Thought

Students receiving special education services are gaining increased attention as the accountability for their academic performance increases. Schools that have established a track record of success have broken away from the traditional models used for these students and the low expectation that often accompanies their education programs. We hope that this kit will spark new ways of thinking about how to serve these students effectively, and how to implement strategies that have been identified as consistently in place in highly effective K-8 schools and districts.

Larry Gloeckler, Executive Director
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Ownership and High Expectations

The Five Key Elements Checklist raises important questions about faculty ownership and high expectations:

- Does your school have a strategy for high expectations? If not, are you going to take special steps to make sure that happens?
- Have you sat down as a faculty or used a leadership team to decide what you need to do if your expectations are not high enough for your students?
- Are high expectations for students with disabilities part of your interviews for new staff, so that all staff understand the culture of your school?
- Do your students know you have high expectations for them? For a true test of whether you have high expectations, ask your students.
- Does your general education faculty take ownership of the performance of students with disabilities in their classrooms?

In some districts, middle school teachers can tell which elementary school the students have come from by the students' expectations of themselves. Why would a district have high expectations in one building and not in another? It is not fair to the students. High expectations are fundamental.

Now consider these questions about the intervention system:

- Do you have a system in place so that failure is not an option?
- Is the system owned by general education?

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Instruction Guided by Student Performance Data

Heartland Area Education Agency suggests that the most constructive manner of improving student performance is through the provision of an effective core curriculum, early determination of performance gaps for individual students, and provision of the necessary supports. In high performing schools, educators regularly use student performance data to determine which students are meeting expectations and which students need additional supports in order to do so. Teachers understand that the data does not provide a signal of student failure, but rather a signal to provide other and varied means of instruction .

Teachers and school-based intervention teams should use several types of student performance data at various points throughout the school year. Many districts conduct assessments at the beginning, middle, and end of the school year. Any instruments used must directly assess specific skills aligned to state and local expectations, report individual results, make comparisons across students, measure growth over time, and display data in a way that is useful to teachers. Teachers and school-based intervention teams can use such data to guide necessary instructional changes at the classroom level and/or implement other intervention strategies specific to a particular struggling learner's needs.

Educators should use different types of assessments in order to obtain the most useful data for choosing effective intervention and instructional strategies that will address specific student needs. Assessments that offer the necessary types of data fall into three categories: screening, diagnostic and progress-monitoring.

How a school responds to the question, “What do we do when students don’t learn?” tells more about the values of that school than anything else. While how is important, when is critical for the success of many children and

Grimes, Jeffrey and
Kurns, Sharon.
“An Intervention-based
System for Addressing
NCLB and IDEA
Expectations”

Blankstein, Alan.
*Failure Is Not an
Option*

2 Action Plan for an Intervention System

young adults. An effective intervention system is based on two premises. 1) The most effective intervention is a high quality classroom instruction that focuses on learning. This is available to each and every learner. 2) Some children and young adults will require additional academic and behavioral support to support learning.

The key to an effective intervention system for children is an assessment process that is aligned to essential academic skills and early warning signs of school failure. This process is systematic with the sole purpose of monitoring the academic and behavioral needs of each and every student so additional supports can be provided to promote success.

The assessment process consists of three procedures. This resource supports the process and purpose of early identification of essential skills that predict future success on high stakes exams as well as early identification of school failure. This resource does not recommend on tool, rather matching resources to the process/procedure.

Screening Process

School districts should implement a process to screening every student at least three times per year to identify whether students are meeting academic and/or behavioral expectations. This process must be aligned to essential skills that predict future performance to guide appropriate timely supports. The screening tool must be aligned to essential skills, state and local standards in the content areas of reading, mathematics, and writing. The tool must include performance benchmarks that allow educators to identify students as benchmark, strategic, or intensive. These terms may vary, but the range allows educators to match the appropriate level of academic and/or behavioral support. The process should take place early in the year in order to respond in a timely and direct manner. The process must include tools to identify both academic and behavioral needs of students. Here is an example:

Step 5: Build Consensus and Develop an Action Plan

At this stage in the process, stakeholders must evaluate what they now know about the existing situation for their district's struggling learners alongside what they now know about effective intervention systems. If stakeholders have obtained all of the necessary information in both areas, they can use it to begin developing an action plan. This process will likely require stakeholders to build consensus on key issues that have emerged in the previous steps. The nature of those key issues and the details of the plan development process will vary among districts. However, any action plan for establishing an effective intervention system should include clearly stated goals and objectives, specific action items to achieve goals, assignment of responsibility for action items, and a timeline for fulfillment of action items, objectives, and goals.

In the Missouri case, stakeholders used small groups to build consensus around the main goals of their plan for establishing an effective intervention system. Those initial goals included:

1. Establish a system that includes the five key components of an effective intervention system.
2. Establish a school-based intervention team that has clearly defined roles and responsibilities.
3. Provide the necessary professional development for teachers and school-based intervention team members to develop effective, research-based intervention strategies that will help struggling learners to be successful in the general education curriculum.
4. Establish a systematic data collection system that will provide teachers and administrators with timely and ongoing performance data for each student and that will help to determine the overall effectiveness of the system.

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5. Establish a timeline for implementation and assign roles and responsibilities in plan implementation.

Essential Questions on Building Consensus and Action Planning



1. Do we have all of the information that we need in order to build consensus and develop a plan for establishing an effective intervention system?
2. How should we build consensus and solicit stakeholder ideas for action plan goals?
3. Do we need professional support to build consensus and develop an action plan?

As stakeholders implement their action plan, they must remain focused on the fact that quality professional development for all teachers and administrators will provide the foundation for success of the new intervention system. Stakeholders should purposefully design and deliver ongoing professional development opportunities that address not only theoretical issues around effective intervention, but also practical training in implementation of the intervention strategies that will ultimately have a positive impact on struggling learners. Educators will need these different types of professional development support throughout the process of implementing the new system – not just in the beginning.

In the Missouri case, stakeholders learned important lessons about topics that are critical to cover in a professional development program. These topics included:

Step 6: Ensure Adequate Professional Development to Support the System

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Outcome data is collected to determine the impact of the intervention system (i.e., requests for initial evaluations, classification rate, and increase in the percentage of students meeting expectations).

Data-Driven Decision Making — Questions for School Leaders

- What is our current basis for decision making?
- What does our district's data tell us about academic and/or behavioral performance?
- Is this data acceptable?
- Do the instruments that we use provide the kind of data we need to assess the needs of all learners, and especially struggling learners?

In the Carthage effective intervention system, instruction is conceptualized in a three-tiered model. That model is described below.

Tiered Model of Research-Based Intervention

Tier 1 — Quality Academic Instruction in the Regular Classroom

The first line of support for all students is high quality core academic instruction in the regular classroom. Core academic instruction must include the following components: guaranteed to all students, standards-based instruction, consistently provided to students, assessments guide future instructional decisions, and based on research. Educators must be able to

3 System of Support for Struggling Learners

count on effective classroom instructional practices as they begin to review the needs of students who are not meeting expectations.

- An intervention system without quality classroom instruction will result in overall low performance for all groups.

Tier 2 – Strategic, Targeted, or Supplemental Instruction

For some students, instructional support must be provided to enable them to meet expectations. Tier 2 is characterized as strategic, targeted, or supplemental instruction. It includes instruction that is: in addition to core academic instruction, deeper and more prescribed than core academic instruction, based on screening results, specific and intentional in the way that data can be used to monitor the effectiveness of the support, designed through problem-solving approach (schoolwide or individual), and delivered to an individual or small group.

- An effective intervention system must include instructional support that supplements — but does not replace — classroom instruction.
- Intervention systems that do not provide supplemental support to classroom instruction lack the resources to support the diverse learning needs of students.

Tier 3 – Intensive Interventions

A few students will require intensive interventions that are in addition to core academic instruction to make continuous progress toward expectations. This intensive intervention is: designed based on progress monitoring results, designed through a problem-solving approach, and individualized.

Designing a Co-Teaching Program

Once the readiness of a district or school to implement a co-teaching model has been assessed and administrators and teachers have had opportunities to learn more about co-teaching, the team can begin to design the co-teaching program. Dedicated planning time set aside for the collaborative design and planning of the program is key to successful implementation. Steps involved in the design of a co-teaching program include:

- selecting co-teaching approaches
- building co-teaching relationships
- identifying students with disabilities to participate in co-teaching classrooms
- scheduling co-teaching classes

Selecting Co-Teaching Approaches

The research on co-teaching has identified a variety of approaches to the model, and often different labels have been used to describe a particular approach. Friend, Reising, and Cook described five co-teaching approaches generally used: lead and support, station teaching, parallel teaching, alternative teaching, and team teaching. In a 1995 survey by the National Center for Educational Restructuring and Inclusion, teachers indicated they primarily used four approaches when co-teaching: supportive teaching, parallel teaching, complementary teaching, and team teaching. Hourcade and Bauwens later referred to six approaches similar to those already mentioned: presenter-helper, part A-part B, two smaller groups, higher understanding, standard team teaching, and follow-up. Following is a list that clarifies which terms describe the same approach and provides a description of each approach.

Friend, M. and Cook, L. "The New Mainstreaming: How It Really Works"

National Center for Educational Restructuring and Inclusion. *National Study on Inclusive Education*

Hourcade, J. and Bauwens, J. *Cooperative Teaching: Re-Building and Sharing the Schoolhouse*

- **Lead and Support/Presenter-Helper:** One teacher leads, planning lesson content and presentation with some input and feedback from the co-teacher. The other teacher plans for and assists with students' individual learning and/or behavioral needs.

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- **Station Teaching/Part A-Part B:** Two diverse groups of students work at classroom stations with each teacher. Each teacher plans the content of her/his respective station based on the overall lesson plan. The two groups of students switch stations in the middle of the class period or the next day.
- **Parallel Teaching/Two Smaller Groups:** Co-teachers jointly plan instruction and independently deliver content in the same way to separate groups of students. Each teacher may take half the class or small groups of students.
- **Complementary Teaching/Alternative Teaching/Higher Understanding:** One teacher instructs the large group while the other teacher preteaches, reteaches, supplements, or enriches instruction for a smaller group of students.
- **Team Teaching:** Co-teachers share the planning and instruction for all of the students in a highly collaborative manner. Both teachers can lead large group and small group instruction.
- **Team/Follow-Up Teaching:** Co-teachers jointly plan and present the basic lesson to all of the students and then split the class into two groups, each instructed by one of the teachers. The groups are divided based on the different needs of students for review, reteaching, or enrichment of the concepts taught.

Co-teachers need not confine themselves to one co-teaching approach. Depending on the needs of the students in the class or the goal of a given lesson plan, they may decide to use different approaches at different times. It is important for co-teachers to decide together which approach or approaches to use by considering both their own skills and comfort levels alongside the goals of the instructional activities.

Teachers new to co-teaching may feel more comfortable beginning with an approach such as lead and support, which may allow them to build



Chapter 8

Professional Development for an Effective Intervention System

Introduction

The sole purpose of an effective intervention system is to create strategies so that students are successful in the general education curriculum. An intervention system is not a process to justify a referral to special education or other alternative placements. Rather, the system is used to make specific data-driven decisions to provide additional support so that students can meet academic and/or behavioral expectations.

An effective intervention system must include a process to identify students who are not meeting expectations or who are at risk of not meeting standards. This process is typically referred to as a universal screening, which is a critical characteristic of an effective intervention system. It allows a district or school to establish additional supports for individual and/or groups of students. This additional support is typically associated with the pyramid of interventions (Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3). The most effective intervention systems include the following characteristics:

- culture of high expectations
- universal screening process
- collaborative teams
- problem-solving approach
- implementation plan for the process
- evaluation process

An effective intervention system includes a highly trained team. This team has clearly defined roles and responsibilities related to the problem-solving process. It uses the problem-solving approach to identify the student's gap and design a plan of instruction, as well as to monitor the progress. This data is used to revise the intervention plan or make further instructional decisions for the student. A good intervention system also includes an evaluation system to determine the effectiveness of the process, quality of the intervention plans, and other identified outcomes (e.g., classification rate and number of students meeting goals).

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Presentation Activity: Pyramid of Instruction

The group will identify and describe core academic instruction (Tier 1), list and describe supplemental instruction (Tier 2), and list intensive interventions (Tier 3). This begins to build common language among the staff and eventually identifies gaps.

Defining the School's Tiers

	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3
Reading			
Math			
Social Expectations			

CD

Intervention Team and a Problem-Solving Approach

Intervention teams go by many names: CARE Team, Success Team, Student Support Team, etc.

An intervention team that uses a problem-solving approach is at the heart of an effective intervention system. The purpose of this team is to create strategies so students can meet expectations. The team does not rubber-stamp “things tried” by a classroom teacher, and it is not viewed as a step in the special education referral process. This team is success-oriented and utilizes a process to design a student-specific intervention plan.

The team meets regularly, sometimes as often as once a week, to develop and review intervention plans. Members of the team have clearly defined roles and responsibilities and must include teachers who are knowledgeable in core instruction. Members must be able to place students at the center of education efforts and decisions. They must embrace the belief that some students will require supplemental assistance in addition to the general education classroom instruction to meet expectations. Again, this is a solution-oriented process.



Appendix

The Appendix contains resources that can be used to help implement the approaches presented in this resource kit. They are organized by the chapter that introduced them.

All of the items in the Appendix are also on the accompanying CD.

The International Center for Leadership in Education has experts in all areas related to these materials. These consultants can assist districts and schools in using the strategies and implementing effective systems. Please contact us at (518) 399-2776 or info@LeaderEd.com.

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Intervention Form	
Statement of concern	
State the measurable goal	
Describe the instruction –intervention	
Who will be providing the instruction?	
How often will the student receive the instruction?	
Where will the instruction be provided?	
What tool will be used to collect data to monitor the progress?	
Graph: Baseline and data points	