

"Don't Get Complacent": Interviews with Educators about Successful Inclusion and Student Achievement in Delaware Schools

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INTRODUCTION

Inclusion, as a philosophy and a practice, remains a complex and meaningful construct in schools. Philosophically and pragmatically, inclusion has numerous meanings depending on whose perspective is asked; nevertheless, its implementation, in whatever form taken, is being watched more closely than ever (Solis et al., 2012). In Delaware, the Access to the General Education (D-AGEC) Committee serves as an important and diverse stakeholder group in the education community, providing feedback on Indicators 3 and 5 of the State Performance Plan and Annual Performance Report for the Delaware Department of Education (DEDOE).

The D-AGEC members are stakeholders from throughout Delaware, including state-, district-and school-level staff from the Delaware public school system, as well as parents and representatives from numerous disability-related agencies within Delaware. D-AGEC members can be involved in D-AGEC activities via participation at the larger “full” D-AGEC meetings or via one or more of the D-AGEC’s smaller sub-groups, or task-forces. For the purpose of this presentation, stakeholders will be identified as full committee members (FCM) or task force members (TFM).

In 2011, DEDOE and the D-AGEC began a multi-year initiative to identify Delaware schools that were leading the state in terms of successful inclusion in the *Placement A* setting (this setting refers to a student spending 80% or more of their day in the general education setting) and interview personnel who were actively engaged in those

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inclusion efforts. This poster outlines how this initiative was met and what were the results of that initiative.

OBJECTIVE

The purpose of this poster presentation is two-fold:

1. Outline steps taken over the course of three years to create, refine and implement a study of schools with promising inclusive practices through a collaboration of diverse stakeholders.
2. Share ground-level recommendations and practices related to increasing the inclusion of students with IEPs in the general education setting while increasing the academic performance of those students at the elementary and secondary level..

DISCUSSION

Through the collaborative structure of this study, a diverse group of stakeholders were able to conceptualize, refine and implement a study that yielded valuable and pragmatic information that school communities can use now and in the future to replicate the success of those schools in that subset. In the end, this study resulted in 69 interviews, across 9 schools. Each interviewed covered the following six aspects of inclusion programming (as determined by FCM and TFM):

- 1) **educators' global understandings/philosophy of inclusion,**
- 2) **successful inclusive instructional practices,**
- 3) **productive collaboration among school members,**
- 4) **effective scheduling practices ,**
- 5) **useful materials & resources, and**
- 6) **access and utilization of professional development.**

Study results share similarities to findings found in other, larger multi-steps investigations of successful inclusion programs (Farrell et al., 2007; McLeskey et al., 2012).

CREATING A STUDY OF SCHOOLS WITH SUCCESSFUL INCLUSION

The following is a brief outline of 12 major steps taken over the course of three years to create, refine and implement a study of schools with promising inclusive practices through a collaboration of diverse stakeholders. The steps are listed in the order of their appearance. The first and second column describe the activities taken and how various stakeholders were involved at each step, respectively. The last column briefly describes lessons learned at each step.

Timeframe & Description of Study Activity	Stakeholder Involvement	Lessons Learned & Recommendations
2011: A study of successful inclusion in DE was proposed at D-AGEC meeting.	FCM discussed and voted to begin this study. DEDOE and SA-CDS started coordinating the study.	Discussions related to OSEP Indicators 3 and 5 are often interrelated so consolidating stakeholder groups for discussions related to both indicators can help explain how/why special education may be functioning a certain way in a given state.
2011: Existing aggregated placement and achievement data related to students	FCM reviewed school-level data and requested	Initially, student-level assessment data was not available. Through this study, procedures for consolidating this type of placement and

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with IEPs are reviewed	student-level data instead.	achievement have since become (more readily) available.
2011: Interview questions for the study are brainstormed.	FCM generated the lists of possible mediating factors in inclusion via facilitated discussions.	Inclusion is multifaceted and defined differently by different people; therefore, decisions as how to study the inclusive practices within a state ought to include a diversity of stakeholders to make the study relevant and useful to more people.
2012: New student-level data secured and recoded to identify schools for study	Data met criteria determined by FCM.	Communication between DEDOE and SA-CDS helped to create a new consolidated data set from existing information stored across multiple DEDOE databases.
2012: Through data analysis, schools are identified for study participation.	FCM agreed to use this criteria for the study. SA-CDS conducted the data analysis using SPSS.	For this study, a school was considered to have "successful inclusion when: 1) 60% or more of their students with IEPs were taught in Placement A settings and 2) 40% or more of these students demonstrated proficiency on their ELA and math state assessments.

<p>2012: First task force creates final interview structure and questions for study.</p>	<p>TFM representing school personnel, parents and disability-related agencies, met 4 times.</p>	<p>It took more time and meetings to reach consensus across TFM regarding what topics to include in the final protocol.</p>
<p>2012: In all, 5 administrators, 11 general education and 11 special education teachers and/or related staff were interviewed across 4 elementary schools.</p>	<p>FCM feedback previously collected indicated a strong interest in the study focusing on a diversity of schools, if possible.</p>	<p>It was very helpful to use 1 qualifying school to pilot interview process before starting formal interviews. There were more schools that met the criteria for the study but the final ten schools were picked because 1) available resources and 2) they created a sample that best represented other schools in DE in terms of geographic placement and student demographics.</p>
<p>2012-3: The second task was created to adapt original elementary interview protocol for secondary settings (see handout).</p>	<p>TFM representing geographical diversity in school personnel provided protocol revision feedback.</p>	<p>Secondary schools have different structures from elementary schools so a universal protocol related to inclusion and that included questions related to scheduling was not suitable.</p>

<p>2013: In all, 6 administrators, 19 general education and 17 special education teachers and/or related staff across 3 middle and 2 high schools were interviewed across these schools.</p>	<p>FCM feedback previously collected indicated a strong interest in the study focusing on a diversity of schools.</p>	<p>Interviews averaged 30 minutes, which seemed to work well for the staff but made some interviews more rushed. Focusing on the main protocol questions helped to ensure that all topics were discussed.</p>
<p>2013: In total, 11 administrators, 30 general education and 28 special education teachers and/or related staff were interviewed on-site. Interviewers identified trends in the data.</p>	<p>The protocols designed through FCM and TFM input were used at these interviews. Interviews were conducted by SA-CDS personnel.</p>	<p>In general, all interviews at a school interview were conducted on-site and over the course of 1 day. DEDOE provided substitute reimbursements for interviewees. Using a semi-structured protocol meant that interviewers needed in-depth previous knowledge of existing school practices and acronyms.</p>
<p>2013-4: 2 additional task forces were created to review data collected the 9 schools. Trends identified by TFM were added to interviewer-</p>	<p>Two groups of TFM met; one reviewed ES data collected during interviews and the other reviewed SS</p>	<p>Although brief, each interview produced a large amount of data for review. Having an organized agenda and distinct data review prompts was helpful for TFM when reviewing the data.</p>

observed trends.	data.	
2013-4: Findings from the interviews were shared with the full AGECE committee.	FCM reviewed the study results and provided their feedback regarding future dissemination of study findings.	DE-DOE is currently focusing on dissemination to administrators since this group of professionals appear to have a strong impact on the success of inclusive efforts in schools.

LIMITATIONS

This study provides valuable perspectives for consideration when crafting future initiatives and/or professional development related to inclusion at the elementary and secondary level. The data collected during the interviews are self-reports from a small sample of convenience (Battaglia, 2008) of educators in one state and do not include any triangulating outside observations (McLeskey et al., 2014), so the results cannot be generalized to all schools or inclusive initiatives. Instead, readers can use the results, processes and recommendations outlined in this poster as points of consideration when designing their own investigations into the inclusion of students with IEPs in the general education setting and the successful academic performance of those students.

RESULTS

[see attached slides]

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Global Understanding and Philosophy

Elementary

Sense of Community: There is a strong sense of community within the school.

Collaboration: Collaboration is expected - everyone works together (teachers & administration).

Curriculum accessible to all: All students are taught to grade level curriculum and all teachers have grade level materials

Unique Student Needs: Educators respond to the unique learning needs of all students.

Secondary

Administrative Support: Non-evaluative feedback through walk-throughs.

Relationship-building: with students is important. Sense of Professional Responsibility to Students

Administrative Support: Administration is active in leading inclusion efforts and building a culture of inclusion.

Expectations for Students: All teachers have high expectations for all students.

Shared Responsibility: All teachers work with and care for all students. "Our Kids" – not yours or mine.

Instruction

Elementary

Common Core: The Common Core is deliberately embedded in the curriculum for all students.

Data: There are numerous systems in place to help teachers monitor all students' skills including those before, during, and after intervention.

Small Groups: Teachers are using these in numerous ways

Secondary

Learning Focus
Strategies: LFS was consistent across secondary schools

Prescriptive reading instruction: Made time in the schedule for prescriptive reading instruction

Rigor: Start and end with rigor, differentiate in the middle

Accountability: You are accountable to all students and all students can learn.

Data: Teachers continually using formative and summative data for instructional decision-making.

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs): PLCs are being used to help teachers adjust their instruction to meet student needs and to help maintain fidelity to the Common Core.

Small Groups: Flexible groups are used to meet the needs of all students.

Walk-Throughs: Administrators look at the instructional components teachers are using.

Collaboration

Elementary

Peer Support:

Teachers view each other as resources for support, problem solving and personal growth. Teachers provide feedback to one another.

Secondary

Planning in Multiple

Ways: Schools used vertical and horizontal planning time to shape instruction.

Cross-curricular conversations:

Schools used these so teachers understood what others were doing and how.

Team Monitoring:

Administration monitors teams carefully and they reconfigure teams as needed.

PLCs: PLCs provide the time and space for a lot of collaboration between teachers (e.g., data gathering, data analysis and reviewing lessons).

Relationship-building: Co-teaching and other collaborative relationships within the schools are considered important and are given support, namely time.

Special education staff: Special education staff attend grade-level PLCs regularly and sometimes present or coordinate special education-related discussions at PLCs.

Variety: Various models of inclusion used – consultation, co-teaching, etc.

Schedule

Elementary

Teacher Needs: The schedule provides valuable PLC time for teachers and time for special education staff to visit classrooms to provide support.

Assigning Students to Teachers: Scheduling tries to reflect the instructional needs of students first.

Secondary

Priority Scheduling: Special education students are hand-scheduled, before the rest of the student body. The school schedule is built around the instruction needs of the students with disabilities first.

Incoming Students Had Purposeful Transitioning: Purposeful discussions for students transitioning into and between secondary schools.

Team Approach: The scheduling process is collaborative between administration and staff.

Materials/Resources

Elementary

District Funds: The district is where the schools are finding funds for helpful instructional and assessment-related resources.

Paraeducators: These staff members are being used to support instructional objectives for all students, not just individual ones.

Shared Resources: The school makes instructional supports available to any/all students who need them.

Secondary

Ready Formative Assessments: Teachers felt they benefit from having access to multiple formative assessments that provide them with ongoing data about students.

Technology: Teachers used technology at these schools; however, the teachers reported that technology at these schools was typical to other schools.

Professional Development

Elementary

Applicable to All Students: Teachers are receiving PD to promote the achievement of all students.

PLC Time: Teachers viewed PLC as valuable professional development time. School staff provide professional development (PD) related to their area of expertise through their PLCs at school.

Secondary

Peers as Resources: Teachers use each other as resources for inclusion and instruction.

Identifying PD Needs: PD was administrators and teacher-identified (example: *"Do you have the perfect marriage?" – in-house PD that emphasize an equal partnership and investment of time and expertise in a co-taught class*)

District Support: Teachers are receiving a majority of their professional development from district PD initiatives.

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