

Title of Session: Special Education Forum

Moderator: Paul Bohac

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Room: Special Education Forum Group

BjB: Welcome to this month's SPED Forum!

BjB: Paul, would you like to start with introductions?

PaulDB: Yes, I am a retired Correctional Administrator with a background in Special Education

BjB: I'm in Pennsylvania and am on Tapped In helpdesk

BjB: . o O (also retired correctional ed teacher :-))

DanielleNR: Hi, I am Danielle a college student majoring in child developmental psychology. I live in Boulder, CO.

KathleenKR: Hi everyone, I am Kathleen a preschool Special Education Inclusion teacher in Chattanooga TN

JulieM: I am a new LD high school teacher, just graduated with my Bachelor's in May 2008 and started right into Teacher licensure/M.Ed. and got hired in August. However, I am a career switcher, so let's just say I am into my 3rd career.

BjB: cheers for Julie...good for you!

JulieM: Thanks!

PaulDB: Julie, welcome to the ever-expanding special education world!!

JulieM: Thanks!

KathleenKR: I am too Julie.!!!

BjB: Kathleen, please tell us more

JulieM: Now I feel I am among those who understand

BjB: nods solemnly to Julie....that's what the Tapped In community is all about

KathleenKR: I worked for an Early Intervention program for special needs children 0 - 3

years of age for 17 years ...two years ago I went back for a Masters in Sped

JulieM: I don't remember how to do it but I am smiling at you, BJ

PaulDB: As a side note, I also teach at the local community college in the fast-track program for those who are switching careers to become teachers.

JulieM: Good for you!

BjB: start the line with a colon Type :smiles

KathleenKR: I will graduate in Dec

JulieM: Thanks!

BjB: looks like a wonderful group, Paul

PaulDB: Lets use the difference in backgrounds as a starting point for tonight's session.

BjB: ahhhh...welcome, Veronica

PaulDB: I presume that we all entered teaching because we want to contribute something to the world in which we live.

PaulDB: We see teaching as a way of transmitting our culture, our beliefs and our value system on to the next generation.

DanielleNR: I am not yet a teacher but that is why I plan on being a teacher

PaulDB: However, when we work with a special education population, there are some unique challenges we face.

JulieM: I sort of came into it after following my two sons to school and doing jobs like subbing or cafeteria, so I wouldn't be home alone, then they entered middle school 4 years ago and I decided to go back to school and do something for myself.

VeronicaLo: I am not a teacher yet either.

KathleenKR: I also have a child with special needs age 25 so I see it from both sides lol so it is my life's passion

PaulDB: What is it about teaching a special ed kid that makes it so rewarding? Any one?

DanielleNR: I would like to teach autistic children ages 3-6 or around that age group

JulieM: I became involved in working with Special Education students during my first

school job 4 years ago as the In-School Suspension Coordinator (it was a teacher assistant position, imagine that!).

DanielleNR: You feel like you have helped them overcome a huge obstacle in their life

PaulDB: I suspect, each of us believes that every child can learn and every child can achieve.

BjB: Special ed kids appreciate it when they learn new things...and you learn to measure success in a different way

VeronicaLo: I think with special ed students you can see the results of your involvement

PaulDB: Both are excellent observations!

JulieM: I work with Special Education students because they are challenging but most often the challenges they face not only with their disabilities, but home life, etc., they are the ones most people would give up on.

DanielleNR: I agree with Veronica, I think that you can see the results clearly but maybe not as quickly

KathleenKR: I like the challenge in finding what works for each individual student

VeronicaLo: I agree, too many people give up too quickly.

PaulDB: What are some of the frustrations that you face? Anyone?

KathleenKR: Others attitudes

BjB: classes are too large and students need a lot of one on one attention

VeronicaLo: campus-wide discrimination is big in our district

JulieM: I work with high school students who have any number of difficulties in their backgrounds. Some of them come to us truly broken and end up in alternative school, etc.

BjB: Julie, I taught in a juvenile correctional facility...the next step after alternative ed

PaulDB: And what do you do to help overcome your frustrations? Anyone?

BjB: . o O (and you are correct...those kids fall through the cracks of public ed)

KathleenKR: Many don't think that social skills are as important as academics

PaulDB: Kathleen, you are so correct!!!!

JulieM: I have had some sent there, some as recently as this summer. Unfortunately, they turned 18 over the summer, so they won't be back to the high school!

KathleenKR: It needs to start early

BjB . o O (I log in to Tapped In and meet with colleagues who have 'been there' and understand what you're going through)

CariS: social skills are as important as academics or how are they going to function in the real world?

DanielleNR: I think it should start as early as daycare, before age 3

KathleenKR: agree!!!

PaulDB: Good social skills can overcome poor academic skills in the world of work.

CariS: I agree with that

VeronicaLo: I would love to see more early education for these students!

KathleenKR: I teacher 3 and 4 years olds in a day care setting

DanielleNR: I teach, or rather help teach, 15 months to 2 year olds

VeronicaLo: Too often these kids are simply kicked out of daycare

PaulDB: The only time academic skills are important are during the school years and in those instances where possible re-training is needed to accommodate a more technological employment opportunity.

KathleenKR: but others don't take our work seriously and I felt unrespected in the teaching profession

JulieM: Some of them have never been taught any social skills, that's why they are always in trouble. I team taught in 2 social skills classes for 9th graders over the past 2 years. It is a great concept, but sometimes by 9th grades, old habits are hard to change or break. Also, when there is no reinforcement at the home, or the home does the opposite, I feel the students see us at trying to shove something down their troughs that is foreign to them.....

PaulDB: Okay, if we can identify our frustrations, then we can develop a plan as to how we will deal with them.

BjB: our frustrations, Paul?

JulieM: The only frustration or anxiety I have right now is trying to meet the needs of my students on my caseload, but still meet the demands of the teachers I team teach with in 5 classes. I get 1.5 hrs a day for planning but that goes by fast or something will happen that needs my attention and then my plan for that time is gone.

PaulDB: Well, I think every special education teacher looks at their students and wants to do everything possible.

PaulDB: But we can't, we have neither the time, the resources or the energy to meet their collective needs.

PaulDB: So what we need to do is target our efforts to achieve maximum effect.

JulieM: I'm talking about trying to work on an IEP uninterrupted or get help from someone since I have only done one other IEP and that was last week!

KathleenKR: I think a well written IEP can help a teacher be more focused, I try to stick to those goals and objects for that reason

PaulDB: Lets talk about that Julie.

JulieM: ok

PaulDB: You are on the right path Kathleen.

KathleenKR: Often I get them already written.

DanielleNR: I'm sorry can some explain what an IEP is

CariS: Individualized Education Plan

CariS: for a special education student

DanielleNR: Ok, thank you

CariS: yup

JulieM: I am just learning how to do them and understand that parents will be viewing/agreeing with them so I take the same attitude in writing them as I would an assignment for one of my classes.

PaulDB: When developing an IEP, what information do you have available, who is a part of the IEP team, and what do the various members of the team (including the parents) want the child to achieve?

CariS: the special ed teacher, regular ed teacher, parent, social worker and principal or assistant principal are usually involved

KathleenKR: Many parents can't verbalize that

JulieM: I have a previous IEP, then I ask for input from current core subject teachers to formulate the PLOP. I now (after new new regulations have been imposed) have to show data

PaulDB: Probably you are being asked to develop some form of RTI.

JulieM: Data which can be ratio of missing/turned assignments, grades, whether tests, quizzes, HW, or cw that are a D or below.

KathleenKR: I look to the educational standards

StephaniLN: I know what an IEP is but what does PLOP stand for?

PaulDB: Kathleen, parents can't or don't know what it is they want their child to achieve?

JulieM: present level of performance, how are they doing in classes at the present time

CariS: parents also have a hard time understanding the goals the teachers write on an IEP

StephaniLN: Are the teachers given some kind of checklist to answer some of the questions that you are talking about in data? Do the teachers really know what you want from them?

KathleenKR: Many do not know how to verbalize the specifics

JulieM: Yes, teachers fill out a teacher

StephaniLN: For parents, do you write a different report that stresses students strengths and weaknesses so that parents can understand them?

PaulDB: The point here is that the IEP is a tool but is only as usefull as the process and contents allow.

JulieM: sorry, they fill out a "teacher's education report" that asks various questions about the student's current performance and the teacher can provide info on any other observations

StephaniLN: When making an IEP do you concentrate on what the students strengths are or do you focus on weaknesses

DanielleNR: How useful or effective are the IEP

KathleenKR: the strengths

PaulDB: Every member of the IEP team has an area of expertise, including the parents.

DanielleNR: From the discussion it sounds like the IEP is a tool but is not as useful as it could be

JulieM: We show both in the PLOP; strengths, what they are doing well at, and weaknesses as they relate to their deficit area, such as reading or organizational habits.

StephaniLN: Do you give parents suggestions on how they can help students better their weaknesses in school?

JulieM: Danielle, sometimes I believe you are right, because we just have to do the best we can for the student and if we don't have the student in any of our classes (like it is in high school) we just have to hope they are getting the assistance they need.

BjB . o O (as an aside: One of the resources in this room leads to LD Online: <http://www.ldonline.org/indepth/iep> Check it out later)

JulieM: Yes, we do give them suggestions, we offer after school tutoring in all core subjects, they just have to show up.

KathleenKR: If I can get them to a meeting or answer a phone must don't show..must parents don't understand what their role is

DanielleNR: I agree that we need to the best for the students, but it does not sound like the IEP is doing the best we can. Isn't there another way that would be more beneficial to everyone, mainly the students?

PaulDB: Stephanie, parents sign off on the IEP and there is nothing that would prohibit the inclusion of a parental involvement in helping the child achieve the IEP goals.

JulieM: Well, the IEP is the law for Special Ed. students, and unless something else replaces it, that is it.

KathleenKR: Good lesson plans but the IEP is the letter of the law so I think we make them useful

DanielleNR: Oh ok, I did not realize it was the law

PaulDB: Julie is correct, but the recent interest in RTI (Response to Intervention) does offer an alternative approach that builds on the IEP.

KathleenKR: I think it has to be a linked system assessment, IEP, instruction

JulieM: True, but for example, I have several students now on IEP's who are capable, but will tell you to your face they don't feel like doing something, yet mom emails several times a day asking about assignments, missed work, etc. It's like the parents (some) want to get their kids through school, but the kids need to do the work (bear in mind, I work with high school students).

KathleenKR: RTI is one option for special ed students

PaulDB: You are correct Kathleen, but think about what is involved in assessment, IEP, and instruction as individual elements of the linked system.

KathleenKR: agree

JulieM: We don't really have RTI in high school. That seems to be more in the early grades, at least where I live.

KathleenKR: I agree Julie

PaulDB: Julie, high school students are different.

StephaniLN: Do parents understand the importance of being involved when it comes to IEPs?

KathleenKR: a general ed, mostly here in Tennessee uses that model for elementary school

PaulDB: They are trying to figure out how to become adults but the special ed programming may not have prepared them for their new role.

StephaniLN: Maybe if they understand their importance in the involvement, the students importance involvement, and the teachers involvement is like a small community?

KathleenKR: Stephanie I don't think they want to know.

JulieM: Also, where I live in Virginia, we have the state Standards of Learning tests (SOLs) that high school students have to pass 6 of in order to graduate (of course in 4 years) that takes a lot of teacher prep and with tutoring, I don't see where they would fit an RTI program in high school.

StephaniLN: Are all of these IEP students involved in regular classroom work or are they still in one room with all students having IEPs?

BjB . o O (in a perfect world, Stephanie!)

PaulDB: It was not the implementation of an RTI program I was suggesting but rather

the principles of the program as a guide to the instructional process.

JulieM: Most of our students are in team taught classes, we have very few "self-contained" classes, and they are mostly for ED or MR students.

KathleenKR: that is a CDC classroom Stephanie there are still too many

PaulDB: It is called an "inclusive classroom".

DanielleNR: What is easier and more beneficial for an IEP student, in an "inclusive classroom" or in a regular classroom?

KathleenKR: Paul tell me more about your thoughts of RTI as a method of instruction?

PaulDB: Every IEP has a list of goals to be achieved.

KathleenKR: Danielle that is a individual child issue not a global one

PaulDB: For every goal, there is usually one or more strategies or other forms of "intervention".

KathleenKR: Interesting way to look at RTI

JulieM: An inclusive classroom simply means that they are in a regular class with the core content teacher and other "general education" or "non-disabled" peers (I wish they would stop changing the terminology) for that class, but that a special education teacher is there in class also to assist them in meeting their goals, but are also expected to be partly responsible for content teaching.

StephaniLN: So do you think that RTI is like differentiating the learning for the IEP students, so that they can maybe come back into the classroom?

JulieM: That's the way it is where I work. There is never enough time to get the special ed work done.

PaulDB: I see those strategies as the basis for instruction. For example, if the goal is to improve reading skills, then usually there is an identified mechanism for measuring that reading skill improvement.

CariS: my class is considered an inclusion classroom however all my special ed students are pulled out for everything. the special ed teacher never pushes in to teach. so is that still considered an inclusion classroom?

BjB . o O (something else to read later: <http://www.wrightslaw.com/info/rti.index.htm>)

KathleenKR: yes it works well for reading but what about generalizing to other

academic areas

JulieM: It seems the definition of "inclusive" varies by grade (elementary to middle to high school) and from county to county, etc.

PaulDB: By implementing the reading improvement strategy identified in the IEP and then evaluating the student's performance on the test, or word list or whatever, it is possible to determine if the goal and the strategy is appropriate for the child.

StephaniLN: If you have RTI are you implementing it more in the early grades or middle grades or high school?

PaulDB: The same is true for any academic goal on the IEP.

KathleenKR: RTI is implemented here in elementary school

JulieM: We do not have it in high school

PaulDB: Social skills development also includes some form of evaluation tool or process.

StephaniLN: I have heard my district talking about it in the early grades and not really the middle grades where I am yet.

KathleenKR: Even with students with low cognitive skills?

JulieM: In the classes I was in, we didn't really have an evaluation tool or process.

PaulDB: Again, I am not suggesting implementing an RTI program but rather that the teacher look at and understand the basic principles of the program for use in the classroom as another "teaching tool".

KathleenKR: very interesting Paul

JulieM: This was a 9th grade social skills class for students with emotional disturbance.

PaulDB: Yes, even with kids having low cognitive skills, the process can be useful if not outright successful.

PaulDB: It is predicated on a direct teacher-student interaction.

KathleenKR: much like scaffolding..

PaulDB: It asks the teacher to "look" at the student and determine if the current efforts to work with the student are being successful and bases that perception on valid empirical data collected as a part of daily instruction.

JulieM: I would say that in high school, we don't have enough teachers to do RTI, unless they changed our responsibilities from content teaching (in team taught classes) to working on rti, goals, etc. They need to decide what is the best for the students, and then let us do our jobs.

KathleenKR: That requires a lot of one on one instruction rather than embedded teaching in an inclusive setting

BjB . o O (later reading: RTI for Secondary <http://www.rtinetwork.org/High-School>)

JulieM: Kathleen, you are right!

BjB checks the clock on the wall

KathleenKR: I like the concept though

PaulDB: Actually it does not Kathleen.

BjB: this is an amazing discussionI hope it will be continued next month!

KathleenKR: well depends on how you tier it

StephaniLN: Do some of the links that you have for this discussion board help give a better understanding of RTI for those of us who are not real knowledgeable on the new item?

JulieM: In high school, everything moves so fast, they don't want us pulling kids out because they will be ostracized as being special ed. so when are we supposed to work with them?

PaulDB: If you think of RTI as an approach, then it allows you to look at each child individually but also look at the class as a collective whole.

KathleenKR: Is there a transcript of this session?

BjB: The next SPED Forum will be on December 8

KathleenKR: I will look at that some more Paul

BjB: Kathleen, you will be emailed a transcript about 10 minutes after you log out

StephaniLN: So with RTI you look at each individual child's strengths and weaknesses then as a whole you could differentiate instruction to meet all learners.

KathleenKR: great!!

PaulDB: I think you will find it helpful as you work in the high school.

JulieM: It has been fun, appreciate everyone's insights and opinions. One thing about those of us in special education, we do have patience and we certainly do care. Thanks to everyone.

PaulDB: Well said Stephanie!

KathleenKR: well my little one might see more of it!!!

StephaniLN: Thanks for helping to give a better understanding of what RTI is.

StephaniLN: I enjoyed the conversation.

BjB: when you get a chance, look through some of the urls I shared during the discussion

JulieM: Goodbye, everyone! Thanks for the links to other info, BJ!

KathleenKR: yes that is what I was hoping for thanks Bj

BjB hugs Paul goodnight. Thanks for the great info!

StephaniLN: Do you have to be a member of the group to get a transcript? or will you get one just for being a participant?

PaulDB: You will find that it is a relatively new approach originally intended to help guide the Pre-referral process but has benefits far beyond that application. Not as a specific "program" but rather as a guide.

BjB: you will get a transcript because you are a member of Tapped In

BjB: but you might want to join the group...

BjB: so you'll get reminders about the next discussion

BjB . o O (right, Paul? ;-)

KathleenKR: nite thanks see ya next time!!

BjB waves goodnight