Stepping Up for the Next Challenge

Martha Thurlow, National Center on Educational Outcomes, University of Minnesota

There are many advantages to growing old(er)! One of them is the ability to look back at how things were and how far we have come, while at the same time looking forward to what can be.

Since the passage of Public Law 94-142 four decades ago, educational access and opportunities for children with disabilities in the United States have changed dramatically. Today, children who receive special education services must have access to the general education curriculum. No longer can they automatically be shuttled into segregated institutions or classrooms.

These changes have been honored in many celebrations of the fortieth anniversary of the enactment of IDEA—the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act—as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act in 1975. There is, indeed, much to celebrate: Special education has been at the forefront of many of the most dramatic changes in education in the past 40 years. Special educators and related services personnel have helped to generate many successful interventions not only for students with disabilities but also for other students who may be struggling but who do not have an identified disability.

This issue of The Special EDge *is the first of two that explore how school districts are taking the idea of a unified system of education and turning it into reality. The schools and districts highlighted here are breaking down traditional barriers between general and special education, providing special education services and supports as an integral part of an optimal educational setting for each child—not as a prescribed place—and creating school climates and systems in which all students with disabilities are general education students first.*

At this point in the history of special education, when we have earned the time to pause and celebrate the past, the recommendations of the California Statewide Special Education Task Force point to what remains to be done.

This issue of *The Special Edge* explores how school districts in the state are turning some of those recommendations into reality. My goal is to highlight similar efforts—and the amount and kind of work that may be necessary to realize the vision of an inclusive, unified system of education that best serves all children.

The Vision: A Coherent and Unified System

California's task force envisioned an educational system that is coherent. It is a system that reflects "a culture of collaboration and coordination" across the many agencies that affect how children are educated. As in any set of recommendations like these, the list seems overwhelming! And we might not agree with all of them. We can agree, however, that there is much to be done; and it is likely that, as the work proceeds, some of the recommendations will

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Letter from the Interim State Director

We're being called to set the foundation for one coherent system of education in which students receive the supports they need to be successful in the most inclusive environment.

As we look back on 2015, we reflect on all of our accomplishments and look forward to new adventures, including embracing new leadership in 2016! After providing outstanding direction in the Special Education Division for the past five years, Dr. Fred Balcom has moved on in his career. As the Interim Director of Special Education, I am proud to write the director's letter for this issue of *The Special EDge*.

This is the first of two issues dedicated to examining our work toward creating a unified, inclusive, and coherent system of education in California school districts. This concept of a single system for all students is echoed in current initiatives throughout the state and around the nation. From the federal level, the United States Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs has rolled out its Results Driven Accountability initiative, which calls for states to develop a State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP) that focuses on improving outcomes for students with disabilities. California's SSIP has provided a vehicle for collaboration with other programs in the state that serve students with disabilities, such as Title 1 and the English Language Learners program. As we develop the SSIP and examine our infrastructure for serving all students, it becomes even more apparent that a single system for all students involves thoughtfully and deliberately combining our efforts, our resources, and our talents to support student success.

We have provided opportunity for significant changes to our educational system in California by eliminating many categorical programs and associated funding restrictions and instead implementing the Local Control Funding Formula. These changes create more freedom at the local level to determine the best way to serve the local student population. School districts are now charged with constructing a Local Control Accountability Plan, which outlines a comprehensive strategy for the education of all students. This flexibility in funding supports the notion that services to students should be available on a fluid continuum within a single system. Our State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Tom Torlakson, further addressed this collective push for a single system in his *Blueprint for Great Schools 2.0* by calling for us to set the foundation for one coherent system of education in which students receive the supports they need to be successful in the most inclusive environment. Furthermore, in their final report and recommendations, the members of the Statewide Special Education Task Force consistently reiterated the importance of a coherent system—one that reflects collaboration and coordination of services to all students in an environment that is adequately responsive to a full spectrum of needs.

With leadership at all levels consistently pointing toward the creation of a unified, coherent system of education, school districts in California are moving to build infrastructures that supports this vision. The articles in this issue highlight the successes and challenges of embarking on that journey and making the change.

—*Chris Drouin*

Paths to Improving Education:
Why Inclusion?

"When people are not included, they are excluded." —James Ryan

Children with disabilities must be regarded as general education students first."[1] This statement from the U.S. Department of Education reflects the original intent of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), in which special education was conceived as a continuum of services within general education, not a place or system apart. Research shows educational systems to be more effective when they operate cohesively and as one.[2] While not every child with a disability is best served in a general education classroom, research has for decades shown that most students benefit both socially and academically from inclusive settings.[3]

Social Benefits

Parents want their children to know that they are welcomed and included in their school communities. This sense of belonging, which is fostered through inclusive settings, carries with it significant implications for a child's future. According to the National Association of Special Education Teachers, a child's feeling that he or she belongs "positively affects the student's self-image and self-esteem, motivation to achieve, speed of adjustment to the larger classroom and new demands, general behavior, and general level of achievement."[4] Decades of research have shown this to be true. As well, children with disabilities who have the opportunity to interact regularly with their general education peers with "higher-level social skills often imitate these behaviors and skills in the future."[5]

The converse has also proven to be true: when children with disabilities don't have regular opportunities to see how their typically developing peers talk, socialize, and generally behave, they are "less likely to achieve the fundamental social milestones"[6] that are linked to later success in school and life. In summary, "regular, sustained interaction" in inclusive classrooms gives children with disabilities the opportunity to observe typically developing children and develop, expand, and generalize their own social skills.[7]

Academic Benefits

Some parents of students with disabilities fear that their children may not be able to learn in general education classrooms and would perform better in a more restricted setting. But inclusive education does not mean that a child with a disability is simply placed in a general education classroom and expected to figure out how to survive on his or her own. "In a well-designed inclusion classroom . . . the teacher uses inclusion strategies to help students succeed academically . . . students encounter higher expectations—both from their peers and their teachers, as well as the positive academic role models of their non-disabled classmates."[8] In the process of creating these classrooms, general and special educators work together to meet the needs of all students—through team teaching, co-teaching, and support provided by instructional assistants. And while the general educator provides the content expertise, the special educator

1. U.S. Department of Education. (2010). *Thirty-five Years of Progress in Educating Children With Disabilities Through IDEA*. http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/idea35/history/index.html?exp=7

2. Parrish, T. (2010). *Special Education Expenditures, Revenues, and Provision in California*. http://www.smcoe.org/assets/files/about-smcoe/SpEd%20Expenditures,%20Revenues,%20Provision%20in%20CA.pdf

3. Bui, X., Quirk, C., Almazan, S., Valenti, M. (2010). *Inclusive Education Research and Practice: Inclusion Works.* Maryland Coalition for Inclusive Education. http://www.mcie.org/usermedia/application/6/inclusion_works_final.pdf

4. National Association of Special Education Teachers. (n.d.). *Promoting Positive Social Interactions in an Inclusion Setting for Students with Learning Disabilities*. http://faculty.uml.edu/darcus/01.505/NASET_social_inclusion.pdf

5. Henninger, W., & Gupta, S. (2014). *How Do Children Benefit from Inclusion?* http://archive.brookespublishing.com/documents/gupta-how-children-benefit-from-inclusion.pdf

6. Holahan, A., & Costenbader, V. (2000). **A Comparison of Developmental Gains for Preschool Children with Disabilities in Inclusive and Self-Contained Classrooms.** *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education, 20*, 224–235.

7. Strain, P., McGee, G., & Kohler, F. (2001). **Inclusion of Children with Autism in Early Intervention Settings.** In M. J. Guralnick (Ed.), *Early Childhood Inclusion: Focus on Change* (pp. 337–364). Baltimore: Brookes.

8. Brighthub Education. (2012). *Inclusion for Special Education Students: Advantages and Benefits*. http://www.brighthubeducation.com/special-ed-inclusion-strategies/66128-advantages-and-benefits-of-inclusion/

informs how instruction can be individualized so that all students learn. Quality inclusive settings require every student to be able to read, write, and understand mathematical functions.[9] In addition, the diversity of students in these kinds of classrooms gives every child the opportunity to observe and learn new approaches to solving the same problem, contributing to the development of greater mental flexibility and more robust problem-solving skills for all students.[10]

Supporting All Students

Another feature of many inclusive classrooms is the "push-in" model of service delivery, where specialists—physical therapists, reading specialists, speech therapists, etc.—provide special services directly in the classroom. A child with a disability doesn't have to go elsewhere to receive special supports, and the child experiences greater continuity throughout the school day.

These specialists also have the opportunity to look beyond strict assignments and labels; inclusive classrooms give them the chance to observe the progress of all children. The specialists—special educators among them—are in the perfect position to recognize and support those children who are just beginning to have problems with reading, for example, or who may be experiencing difficultly pronouncing the letter "r," or who don't seem to be able to sit still. Research shows that targeted supports at the earliest stages of these kinds of struggles can actually prevent certain learning challenges from developing into something serious, prevent speech and language problems from becoming severe enough to require a child to be assessed and labeled, and prevent a small but disruptive behavior from turning into a persistent problem.

An additional advantage is that, when a specialist can work within a diverse class of students, his or her services are "normalized." No one child is singled out or made to feel different. Everyone simply receives the instruction and supports he or she needs within a general setting. Everyone benefits.

Legitimate Fears

Jane Floethe-Ford is director of education services at Parents Helping Parents, a parent training and information center in San Jose. "In a perfect world," she says, "all schools would be inclusive. That's how it is in life. We're all together. But in reality, many parents worry about the prospect of inclusive classrooms for their children. They worry that there won't be appropriate supports for their child; that there's not enough training for the teachers or the instructional assistants, that the money won't follow." Referring to the Individualized Education Program (the IEP), which details the specialized instruction and related services that a child with disabilities will receive in school, Floethe-Ford and other parents worry that "the 'I' in IEP will be lost."

These concerns are real. And school districts in the state can—and are—addressing them by creating lasting, districtwide commitments to quality inclusive settings: taking the time and resources to prepare staff and providing robust and ongoing training and support to educators (see pages 6, 13, and 16).

The Parent Perspective

Every child has unique learning needs, and every family has different beliefs about—and experiences with—inclusion. Kristin Wright's daughter Shelby was born 17 years ago with multiple and significant disabilities. Wright admits to having "fought to have a home program" for Shelby so that she would always know that

her daughter was safe. But after visiting CHIME, an inclusive charter school in Southern California, Wright was able to imagine her daughter in a similar school. "A home program served a need for Shelby after surgeries and illnesses, but she needed to expand her world and the people in it. I had to learn that the world would be a safer place for her if she learned to navigate it. I had to learn to trust my school team and community. This was the best choice we ever made for Shelby. She is better served in an inclusive setting, and it took me 10 years to realize that."

Wright also talks about the challenge of finding the balance between functional skills and academic skills for her child. While she has faith in the IEP process helping to strike that balance, "there are always trade-offs. As parents we're not taught to navigate the complexities." Parent centers,[11] such as the one that Floethe-Ford helps direct, are designed to support parents in learning how to navigate the options and to find a balance.

Keila Rodriguez is the parent of four children and a busy school administrator. "I didn't have time to create a separate world for Diego," she says of her son who was born with Down syndrome. "Besides, our stores, our church, my kids' swimming lessons, they're all inclusive. I didn't want to isolate him." But when Diego moved into kindergarten, "I hit a brick wall. I had to fight for inclusion. Diego's main deficit is speech. And he was placed in a special day class with 16 other students; 11 of them were nonverbal. How was he going to learn to speak? I know that kids learn as much from their peers as they do from the adults in their lives."

Rodriguez is one of many parents who want their children to be included in school with their general education peers. Sumathi Balaji's daughter, Shrinidhi, has

Rett syndrome. She can't talk, and she uses her eyes to communicate. Yet from kindergarten, "I knew that she could access the general education curriculum, and I wanted that for her," says Balaji. "But I wanted more. I wanted her to be happy. I have my fears about inclusion. Is my daughter going to be safe? Will she be able to communicate her needs? What will happen if she has a seizure? I worry about that. But she is a social child, and she is most happy in an inclusive setting."

Until Michael Adams was 11, he was in a setting that was similar to Diego's. "Most of the kids in his classroom were nonverbal or unable to function on their own," says Michael's mother, Christina Adams, of the county program Michael attended. He and his mother saw the teachers at the county as "amazing. They loved the kids and were part of the family," says Adams. Yet Michael was not developing socially or academically in the way his mother knew he could. "He was completely dependent on his instructional aides and could barely keep up with simple writing tasks. His ability to interact with the kids in that class was very far behind [developmentally] and getting worse. He needed social interaction with typical children."

Denita Maughan, director of student support services at Standard Elementary School District, helped to make it possible for Michael to join a general education sixth-grade classroom. "We were sad to leave what we knew," says Adams, "and we worried about how Michael would adjust." Michael has cerebral palsy, which primarily affects his legs and motor skills, and he is confined to a wheelchair. So his mother was also worried about how he would be able to physically navigate a general education environment. "But Denita, all of the staff, and all of the kids completely surrounded us with support and took

care of us," says Adams. "If Michael had stayed in the county program, he would be dependent on his aide. He's a freshman in high school now and has made so many friends since sixth grade. He barely uses his aide. He has the tools and independence that he needs to be successful in his life.

"Michael is a typical child who, for most of his life, has been treated like a disabled child. I know that there are others like Michael who need the same opportunities to be challenged."

Partnerships

Quality inclusive classrooms are possible, and school districts that are committed to inclusion are attending carefully to the fears and concerns of parents. When Sara Beggs, coordinator of inclusive learning in the Orange Unified School District, and other members of her inclusion team were beginning to offer inclusive settings, "I thought I was going to be a superstar when I shared the news with families. But they really fought me. I had to explain [inclusion] to them and share lots of information with them. Inclusive school wasn't yet in place, so I couldn't take them to see anything. They had to trust our team that this was going to be the best for them and their children. They heard from me a lot. I did offer to take them on observations of the general education sites that they were going to. Within that setting, I would say, 'Look, the children are in small groups right now. So here's when your child will receive special supports.'"

Beggs admits that "there were difficult conversations with parents. But we welcomed hearing their concerns, because then we—teachers, principals, everybody—can move forward to solve them. We didn't shy away from that. And we didn't paint this rosy picture. We have to look at the concerns. Only then can we solve them." ◄

9. Inclusive Schools Network. (2015). *Together We Learn Better: Inclusive Schools Benefit All Children*. http://inclusiveschools. org/together-we-learn-better-inclusive-schools-benefit-all-children/

10. Agran, M., Blanchard, C., Wehmeyer, M., & Hughes, C. (2002). **Increasing the Problem-Solving Skills of Students with Developmental Disabilities Participating in General Education**. *Remedial and Special Education, 23*(5), 279–288. http://www.beachcenter.org/

11. A directory of **Parent Centers in California** is at http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/se/qa/caprntorg.asp

Resources

▶ *Benefits of Inclusive Education* on the Kids Together Web site, is at http://www.kidstogether.org/inclusion/benefitsofinclusion.htm

▶ *Effective Teaching Practices for Students in Inclusive Classrooms* by S. Land at the William & March School of Education Training and Technical Assistance Center is at http://education.wm.edu/centers/ttac/resources/articles/inclusion/effectiveteach/

▶ *Inclusive Education for Students with Disabilities Benefits Everyone* by A. Beninghof is at http://expertbeacon.com/inclusive-education-students-disabilities-benefits-everyone/#.VmBm94tHGXM

Paths to Improving Education:
Getting Ready for Change

School districts in California are erasing many of the traditional boundaries between special education and general education, with the goal of creating more unified systems for all children. These districts are reclaiming the original intents of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which established that students with disabilities are general education students first, and that all special education services and supports are just that—services and supports—and do not constitute a place apart from general education, unless that "place apart" is essential for a student's ability to learn and benefit from his or her education. Through their efforts, these districts have learned a great deal about the importance of "preparing the ground" for change.

Seven principles guided the earliest efforts of educational leaders in the state who are creating inclusive and unified school systems and cultures. These principles are helping to ensure that the change these districts seek to develop is lasting.
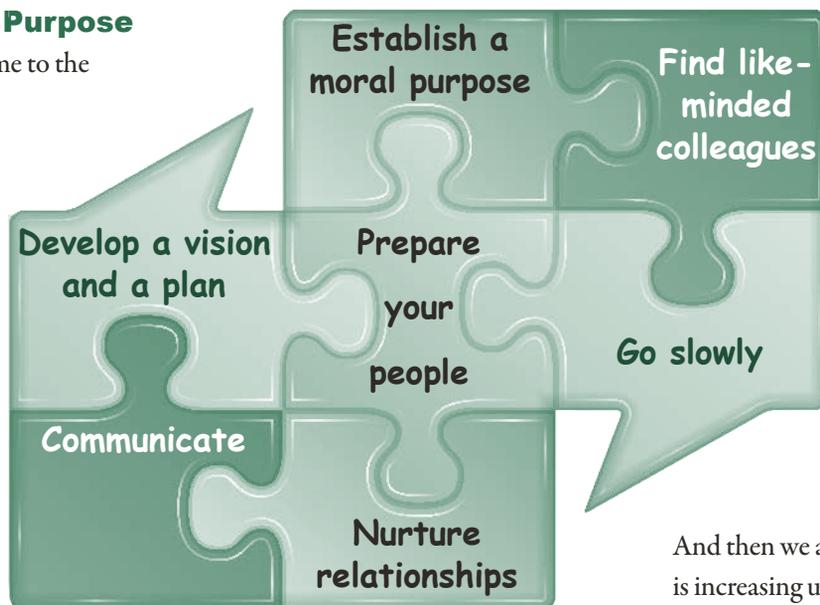
Establish a Moral Purpose

When Holly Wade came to the Palo Alto Unified School District (USD) seven years ago as a new director of special education, she recognized a troubling pattern of school placement. Young students with disabilities often had to change schools as many as four times before middle school—not because their families changed addresses, but because the district was assigning these students to the few schools that offered specific services and programs. Wade wanted the children in her district to be able to receive services in their neighborhood schools, to walk to school with their friends and siblings, and to

know that they belonged. "We stopped moving kids around because we knew it was wrong," she says. At the statewide Inclusion Collaborative Conference in October, Wade talked about "the sheer force of a group of people who believe in the civil rights of this." She has seen

schools address equity issues for students of color and for LGBTQQ[1] students. She calls "disability the last frontier in building classrooms where all kids feel like they're members of the community."

"The work that we ask others to do and help others do" related to creating inclusive environments "is not invention

work," says Erin Studer, director of the award-winning CHIME charter school, which has become a national leader in developing and implementing inclusive education. "It's change work," says Studer, "and that can be different. Sometimes it can be harder. The good news is that it's not impossible.

"When we do our 'Creating Inclusive Environments' training, I always say, 'People, your goal is not to become CHIME. Your goal is to take your next step on this pathway. Whatever that is. My advice is, first, that it's not impossible. It's been done before. And then we all know in our hearts there is increasing urgency around this. As a K–12 system we're in our fourth decade of special education as a national law. There's even longer history and knowledge about how to help individuals with disabilities beyond IDEA. We have enough data and understanding of the limitations of segregated service delivery; we know it's not working in the way we want it to work."

Find Like-minded Colleagues

Annalisa Gross, coordinator of special education at the elementary level in Orange USD, talks about the importance of looking for like-minded people in order to effect lasting change. "In any district you can find five people who want to support children with disabilities in a general education environment." She encourages others to "get them together. Build a team. Do what is right for all children." Her colleague Julie McNealy, teacher quality coordinator at Orange, agrees. "If you find a few people in your school site who are excited about collaborating as general and special educators," says McNealy, "and who are willing to try something completely different from what we as teachers have done for the past I-don't-know-how-many years, that's where you really get that fire started. It just spreads, and it's a good fire."

Prepare Your People

One of "the most flagrant problems we see related to systemic change" in education, writes Howard Adelman, co-director of the Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA, is the "failure to give sufficient strategic attention and time to . . . creating readiness among a critical mass of stakeholders."[2] Denise MacAllister, executive director of special education at Orange, and her special education team seem to have known instinctively how to address this problem. They spent a great deal of time "creating readiness" as they focused first on the issue of "mindset"—fundamental attitudes among staff about student ability, human rights, and personal capacity.

"About eight years ago, a group of us went to visit Torrance" to see how that district's inclusive model worked, says MacAllister. "Children there were all being taught in the same classroom. Some children were being given extra services through an aide in the classroom, through co-teaching, or from an extra teacher who was there. All of the supports were there" for the students with disabilities. "So we started talking about what we could do in our district" to replicate this model. "But at the time, we didn't know where to go with it. So we'd been talking for years—over eight years—about how we could include more students" with disabilities in general education settings. "It's been a passion of ours. A couple years ago, we realized that the mindset in our district wasn't quite ready for inclusion; we had not provided the training. And we knew we could work on that."

The district's special education team spent six months "just talking" about how to address issues of mindset, says MacAllister. Then "we met with our principals and shared our ideas with them. We had them read articles[3] ahead of time. We talked about all the possibilities. As we brainstormed with them, they could see how these possibilities could come to fruition." Orange USD spent a full two years working with school staff on attitudes and ideas related to merging its general and special education efforts.

"Our district is studying the book *Mindset*,[4] by Carol Dweck," says MacAllister. "We've had a lot of trainings on it from the top level down. The book is now in all our classrooms. We also started helping people understand the terms of inclusion so that everybody has the same vocabulary. And we knew we needed a lot more training. So we spent all last year [providing] trainings after school and just doing cohort meetings."

This focus on mindset is a critical component to success. Christine Finnan studied at Stanford the interplay of culture and school reform. She identified five

1. **LGBTQQ**: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transexual, Queers, and Questionning

2. Personal e-mail communications with **Howard Adelman**, September 30, 2015.

3. Two articles that Orange USD uses to support inclusive efforts (and inform attitudes) in the district are "**Inclusive Schooling: Are We There Yet?**" by Julie Causton and George Theoharis, February 2013, School Administrator 2(70), at **http://www.aasa.org/content.aspx?id=26752**; and "**New Roles for All Educators: Special Education Within the Context of General Education**," by Robert Stodden, summer 2011, *The Special EDge 3*(24), at **http://www.calstat.org/publications/pdfs/edge_summer_2011.pdf**

4. The book ***Mindset*** is about the difference between a fixed mindset—in which people believe their basic qualities, such as their intelligence or talent, are fixed traits—and a growth mindset, in which people believe that their most basic abilities can be developed through dedication and hard work and that brains and talent are just the starting point to learning and success in life. To learn more, go to **http://mindsetonline.com/whatisit/about/index.html**

Notes & Resources

underlying assumptions that influence the success or failure of efforts to introduce changes in schools.[5] If the assumptions that adults hold—their mindset and attitudes—about students, leadership, decision making, adult roles and responsibilities, and the value of change are not addressed and altered when necessary, no amount of professional development on inclusion and best practices is going to help a school or district become a more unified and inclusive place.

Find a Mentor District

Sara Beggs, coordinator of inclusive learning at Orange, encourages other district staff to find a mentor. She and the members of the Orange special education team all express deep appreciation for the staff at neighboring Tustin USD for helping them figure out how to begin. "As we were learning about [inclusive practices]," says Beggs, "the inclusive coordinator in Tustin was very open and welcoming to anything I asked about how they trained their teachers and their rollout. They have been instrumental to our success." Beggs talks about how Orange staff were able to learn from Tustin that the difficulties, challenges, and frustrations that she and her colleagues were experiencing are all just part of the process and—as important—they learned what strategies Tustin used to successfully address these challenges. "Their advice and experience calmed our fears," says Beggs.

Develop a Vision and a Plan

Sustaining change requires a clear plan. Adelman, in his book *Transforming Student and Learning Supports: Developing a Unified, Comprehensive, and Equitable System*,[6] writes that "developing a design document to communicate and guide the work" and

"developing a multi-year strategic plan" are essential components to ensuring change that lasts in (as he quotes Seymour Sarason) "complicated organizations (like the school) with traditions, dynamics, and goals of their own."[7]

Kristin Ludovico, co-creator of the award-winning C.L.O.U.D.S.[8] inclusive preschool, agrees. Ludovico now works with the Inclusion Collaborative project

at the Santa Clara County Office of Education, specifically on the Supporting Inclusive Practices grant.[9] That project identifies school districts that are models of inclusion and pairs them with districts that want to implement similar practices but need support in their beginning efforts. In her work to provide guidance to the latter cohort, Ludovico emphasizes the importance of creating "an action plan for success," similar to what she used to get C.L.O.U.D.S. off the ground. But she is quick to insist that "a root cause analysis" of the district's most powerful barriers to inclusion is as important as the action plan. Through this kind of analysis, Ludovico helps districts figure out what might get in the way of the best of plans. "Is it money? Does it have to do with training—the people just don't know what to do or how to do it? Is it the lack of collaborative time? Is it the curriculum?

Is it a fear of failure?" Finding the one or two barriers and then "bringing the stakeholders together to establish a vision and a plan" for overcoming those barriers, she says, are critical parts of making change that lasts.

When asked how she went about developing a plan for C.L.O.U.D.S., she says, "I talked to anyone who could provide the information I needed. I spent a lot of time in our business office asking questions. I talked with our facilities guys. I worked with our lead psychologist [on] developmentally appropriate practices and selecting qualified staff. Above and beyond that, I had the support of our superintendent. You need to get the right people."

Elsie Simonovski introduced inclusive practices and co-teaching in high schools in Orange. When describing how she and her colleagues designed a process for implementation, she says, "We worked with principals on what the implementation model would look like." That model included mandatory trainings on co-teaching for teachers and principals both. Then more trainings; then time for co-teachers to plan ground rules, address issues of expectations and parity, develop a parent letter, "and just generally plan, prepare, and get classes organized. We were very methodical and intentional about what the model would look like," says Simonovski.

During the first year of co-teaching, Simonovski and her staff regularly visited "each school site to help them get going. There was a lot of personalization in the supports. Then we would provide three to four days during the year of professional development and planning time. We'd also share best practices and the success stories of what is happening."

Go Slowly

Districts that have made a commitment to developing inclusive, unified systems aren't trying to do too much too fast. Wade, now chief student services officer at Palo Alto USD, wanted to see her district make significant changes toward a more inclusive model when she started her work there as director of special education. "But I realized quickly," she says, "that I couldn't make all the changes that needed to happen in one year; it was impossible to do."

Charlayne Sprague, assistant superintendent of instruction and pupil services at Etiwanda USD in Rancho Cucamonga, talks about her district's "five-year time lines. I see nothing happening fast. I don't want it to happen fast. I want it to happen well, and slowly and carefully. If we need to backtrack a little to move forward, let's do it."

Communicate

McNealy says that "there are two crucial elements" to being successful in efforts to create inclusive, collaborative teams and systems. "One is transparent communication. From the top to the bottom," she says. "You can't over-communicate when you're trying this kind of initiative. It's been a consistent, transparent message. And it's been the same from everybody on this team. This has really driven the initiative forward."

Nurture Relationships

The "second most important thing" McNealy points to in creating unified and inclusive systems and cultures "is relationships—building relationships on all levels—relationships with administrators, relationships with general educators, with special educators, relationships with students, and relationships with parents."

Ludovico agrees. When she was a speech therapist in the Etiwanda school district, she says that her inspiration for creating C.L.O.U.D.S. grew out of the relationships she had developed with families.

"Child Find [law] dictates that we have to identify, assess, and evaluate [every child for a disability]," she says. "If they are eligible, we need to write an IEP and provide supports and services. Within the district [and before C.L.O.U.D.S.] the only placement option for students was in a county-contracted program. It's not that the county didn't run a great program. We were just missing the relationships, local schools, and inclusion aspect of education."

In her work with young children and their families, Ludovico recalls numerous parents saying to her that "We moved to Etiwanda for the schools. And now you're sending my child off to the county? We want him to go to school with his friend next door, and now he can't do that!'

"We have to remember," says Ludovico, "that we're not making a product in a factory and shipping it out. These are children and precious lives. The parents, too, just wanted to have a set of folks to hang out with. They were struggling with too many transitions. Their children had just been identified as having a disability, and now they were being sent away from their neighborhood school. The parents would ask me, 'When am I going to get out of the county system?' And I couldn't tell them.

"I was missing that relationship with my families. It also cost us so much money every time we sent our students off— the fees for services are huge. But mostly it was the relationship piece. I finally asked myself, 'Why can't we just keep our kids?'" ◄

5. Finnan, C. (2000). **Implementing School Reform Models: Why Is It So Hard for Some Schools and Easy for Others?** Paper presented at the meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED446356), p. 9.

6. Adelman, H. (2015). *Transforming Student and Learning Supports: Developing a Unified, Comprehensive, and Equitable System.* Retrieved from **http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/book/book.pdf**

7. Sarason. S. (1996). *Revisiting "The Culture of School and the Problem of Change."* New York: Teachers College Press.

8. **C.L.O.U.D.S**.: Creating Learning Opportunities and Understanding Differences in Students. To learn more about this preschool, go to **http://teacherweb.com/CA/CLOUDSPreschool/CLOUDS/apt9.aspx**. For a profile of C.L.O.U.D.S. and other early childhood programs that are exemplars of inclusive practice, go to **http://www.seedsofpartnership.org/SEEDSexemSites.html**

9. The Inclusion Collaborative's **Supporting Inclusive Practices** project features valuable resources for school districts that are committed to creating inclusive and unified systems. Go to **http://www.sccoe.org/depts/students/inclusion-collaborative/Pages/sip.aspx** to learn about the project and the four phases of implementation through continuous quality improvement.

evolve to define—more specifically and more accurately—what exactly needs to be done to achieve this coherent and unified system.

How Others Have Addressed the Challenge

A recent effort to identify what it took in ten districts across the nation to change their educational practices and structures is reflected in the *Moving Your Numbers* study.[1] The selected districts, regardless of the extent of their demographic challenges (e.g., poverty, ethnic diversity), found that the work they did to achieve a coherent and unified system was very difficult, yet extremely rewarding. The executive director of leadership development in Gwinnett County Public Schools, Georgia, referred to "continuity, consistency, and courageous behavior" as critical to the district's success. A principal in the Stoughton Area School District in Wisconsin commented on the passion that educators had for reaching and supporting all children, even though "the work we do now is the hardest work" teachers have ever had to do. The director of assessment and accountability in Val Verde Unified School District, California, described the teachers as being "passionate and obstinate about getting kids what they need."

The *Moving Your Numbers* (*MYN*) study identified six essential practices that educators used in districts where students with disabilities were doing well and were part of an overall coherent and unified system. The practices ranged from very specific activities, such as using data, to more generalized approaches, such as implementing practices deeply. Achieving coherency and unification required a focused, long-term commitment that involved everyone—from classroom teachers and instructional aides to school

psychologists and speech therapists to site principals and bus drivers—any and every adult who is connected to the daily school life of the students. Further, it involved taking intentional actions to transform core beliefs, organizational structures, use of data, personnel roles, strategies for professional development, and much more. With the implementation of the essential practices, districts found that attitudes and beliefs shifted. In the Stoughton district, for example, teachers talked about moving from a "deficit model and being full of excuses to having no excuses and focusing on what we can do to ensure each child succeeds."

Highlights of each of the six essential practices identified in the *MYN* work,[2] provided here, reinforce the need for collaboration and coherence throughout the system.

Use data well. As described in the *MYN* work, effective use of data is a foundational practice. The study refers to "using data well and on an ongoing basis, not only to identify critical needs, but also to gauge performance and make better decisions about the effectiveness of the instructional practices being used and the degree of student progress and learning" (p. 4). Data use was a part of district strategic plans and always helped change professional practice in the districts.

Focus your goals. Although the *MYN* districts used a variety of approaches to achieving district change, such as multi-tiered systems of support and universal design for learning, the critical practice was an unconditional focus on full implementation of the agreed-on approach. Further, the approach was one that was selected through a process that involved personnel at all levels of the district, and one to which everyone could align their work.

The goals were small in number, but significant in impact.

Select and implement shared instructional practices. In the *MYN* districts there was both an increased focus on instruction as the priority for the district and an increased use of collaborative structures. The focus on instruction was pervasive and existed at every level of the education system. For example, a principal in Bloom Vernon School District in Ohio commented, "We never have an administrative team meeting where we don't focus on student learning." In Gwinnett, each school in the district is expected to "accelerate instruction not only for students who excel, but also for those who are academically behind." In all of the *MYN* districts, student learning and improved instruction were prioritized above all other goals.

Professional learning communities, learning teams, data teams, and teacher-based teams were all examples of the kinds of collaborative structures that were created. *MYN* quotes Michael McCormick, assistant superintendent for educational services at Val Verde:

Breaking down isolated practice and raising the capacity of the entire system of 850 teachers through collaborative teaming is a substantial cost to the district, but one that is necessary for improving learning for all students (p. 6).

Implement deeply. In all *MYN* districts, implementing the practices they had targeted was the most challenging part of their work. Consistent with implementation science,[3] these districts made sure that the practices were clearly defined, used with fidelity for a sustained period of time, and implemented on a scale sufficient for districtwide goal attainment. To do this, they provided

targeted professional development and held all personnel accountable for the implementation of agreed-upon practices. Regardless of the amount of time that districts had been engaged in their work, they all indicated that their work was not done. Even Bloom Vernon Schools, which had started some of its work more than 10 years before, still saw the work as unfinished; and the administrative team in Lake Villa, Illinois, reflected on the improvements and successes since 2006—and noted that their work is not done.

Monitor and provide feedback and support. Monitoring became part of the instructional process for continuous improvement rather than an externally imposed compliance requirement. It was always accompanied by feedback to principals and school-level teams and included problem solving on what to change, what additional training was needed, and what other possible strategies were necessary to ensure that the targeted goal was realized. As noted by the *MYN* researchers, "the notion of monitoring was redefined—from a heavy-handed 'gotcha' to a joint responsibility for continually gauging progress and holding each other accountable for reaching common goals."

Inquire and learn. As noted in the *MYN* work, "district and school personnel acknowledged that their work is never done and that they must always strive to reach the next level of effective practice in supporting student progress and learning" (p. 9). The director of curriculum and instructional services in Stoughton described the culture of inquiry and learning in the following way:

All adults in all buildings are responsible for all children. It's not a thing you have to do; it's evidence of our core beliefs (p. 9).

It was difficult for individuals in the *MYN* districts to say what specifically

caused the attitudinal shift that enabled them to continue to work on the challenges they faced. Perhaps a sense of how the shift occurred is reflected in the comment of the superintendent of schools in the Lake Villa area:

The more evident it becomes that our work results in improved performance, the easier it is for more people to embrace the direction we've taken and stay focused on the work (p. 27).

Or, as stated by the assistant superintendent for business services in Val Verde, "I get jazzed by the incredible things going on in our classrooms."

Challenges Ahead for California

Several experts in educational change have succinctly identified a number of the challenges to successful change endeavors. For example:

- "The lack of a coherent, big-picture approach to improvement can help to explain the disappointing lack of success of many apparently promising educational reforms."[4]
- "Human capital must be complemented by social capital—groups working hard in focused and committed ways to bring about substantial improvements. Social capital can raise individual human capital—a good team, school, or system lifts everyone. But, as we often see in sports, higher individual human capital—a few brilliant stars—does not necessarily improve the overall team."[5]
- "Whole district reform depends on resolute leadership at the district level, which in turn develops collaborative capacity within and across schools."[6]

Central to these insights is the recognition—and acceptance—of the fact that each challenge is an integral

1. **Moving Your Numbers** Web site: **www.movingyournumbers.org**

2. Telfer, D. M. (2012). *A Synthesis of Lessons Learned: How Districts Used Assessment and Accountability to Increase Performance of Students with Disabilities as Part of District-wide Improvement*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, National Center on Educational Outcomes.

3. Blasé, K. A., Fixsen, D. L., & Duda, M. (2011). *Implementation Science: Building the Bridge Between Science and Practice*. Presentation to the Institute of Education Sciences.

4. Dougherty, C., & Rutherford, J. (2009). *The NCEA Core Practice Framework: An Organizing Guide to Sustained School Improvement*. Austin, TX: National Center for Educational Achievement, p. 1. Retrieved from **http://files.eric. ed.gov/fulltext/ED516793.pdf**

5. Fullan, M., & Hargreaves, A. (2012). **Reviving Teaching with "Professional Capital."** *Education Week, 31*(33), 30, 36.

6. Fullan, M. (2010). *All Systems Go: The Change Imperative for Whole System Reform*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin, p. 2.

▶ D. M. Telfer and A. Glasgow developed a self-assessment guide to support districts as they strive to develop comprehensive and coherent systems. See *District Self-assessment Guide for Moving Your Numbers: Using Assessment and Accountability to Increase Performance for Students with Disabilities as Part of District-wide Improvement*. 2012. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, National Center on Educational Outcomes. This guide is available at **https://ici.umn.edu/ index.php?products/view/533**

part of the work itself. In this vein, Bloom Vernon's superintendent reflected on the ability of staff in his district to see each challenge as another stepping stone on the way to continued improvements. "We believe," he says, "in constancy of purpose and continuous discontent with the present."

New Hampshire's Somersworth School District provided a piece of advice to others engaged in district reforms:

Recognize that the changes needing to be made are "a process, and the process has to be valued as much as the product is valued."

As you and other educators in California start this process, dialogue and discussion will become part of your everyday practice, just as they did for educators in the *MYN* districts, just as they are for the district leaders highlighted in this issue of *The Special*

EDge. You will find that collective conversations, coupled with occasional checks on the progress you are making, will be motivating—even when things are not going exactly as you had thought they would. I know that, like the districts in the *MYN* study, you will find that stepping up and embracing the challenge of excellence for all is more than worth your while—and does benefit all of your students. ◄

$10 Million to Design MTSS in California

I n July 2015, a State Assembly bill was passed, and ultimately signed by Governor Brown, that makes available an unprecedented $10 million to support local educational agencies (LEAs) in developing and sharing models of a multi-tiered system of supports. In the language of this "trailer" bill, AB104, the money will be awarded "to a designated county office of education [COE] or two designated county offices of education applying jointly to provide technical assistance and to develop and disseminate statewide resources that encourage and assist local educational agencies and charter schools in establishing and aligning schoolwide, data-driven systems of learning and behavioral supports for the purpose of meeting the needs of California's diverse learners in the most inclusive environments possible."

A request for applications (RFA) will be available in January 2016. The COE(s) that receive the award will "identify existing evidence-based resources, professional development activities, and other efforts currently

available at the state, federal, and local levels, as well as develop new evidence-based resources and activities, designed to help local educational agencies and charter schools across the state replicate effective systems of tiered supports." Within a framework of system reform, the initiative addresses "standards-based instruction, interventions, mental health, and academic and behavioral supports aligned with accessible instruction and curriculum using the principles of universal design, such as universal design for learning, established in the state curriculum frameworks and local control and accountability plans."

Carrie Roberts, director of the Professional Learning and Support Division, California Department of Education, is managing the award. She sees the RFA as "an opportunity for local education agencies to look at the programs and services they are providing for all students. The RFA requires the successful applicant to provide assistance to LEAs in the utilization and scaling up of a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS)

framework, which helps all students achieve more. This includes students who may struggle academically, socially, or emotionally as well as students who need advanced instruction or alternative instruction. The MTSS continuous improvement process can be used to develop and align resources, programs, supports, and services at all organizational levels to increase positive student outcomes. Additionally, this RFA has the potential to ensure optimal educational access and engagement for all students, including a systematic and aligned approach to implementing evidence-based academic, behavioral, and social-emotional programs. We are excited for this project to complement our current state system of supports and provide valuable state resources for LEAs that are seeking guidance."

In January 2016, county offices of education and local education agencies interested in learning more about the award will want to visit the Web site of the California Department of Education—**http://www.cde.ca.gov**— where the application process will be detailed.

Paths to Improving Education:
Funding Unified Systems

"Special education is grossly underfunded. Too much money from the general fund is being siphoned off to pay for special ed services."

"The notion of special education encroachment is a red herring. It was never the intent of IDEA to fully fund the education of children with disabilities. IDEA money was always intended to be a little gravy over the top."

"Special education financing could work in most places, but the funding needs to be more flexible."

"Special education funding flexibility is not the issue; there's never enough of money in that coffer, so it's easily all used up for special education services anyway. It's Title I money that can and should be made more flexible."

"There is no flexibility in Title I money."

"In our district, money is not the issue. We have what we need to support all students in inclusive settings."

The topic of special education financing generates opinions as complicated as the topic itself. According to Jannelle Kubinec, director of the Comprehensive School Assistance Program at WestEd, all of the above comments "are possibly true. It just depends on what part of the elephant you're looking at. We tend to start where our experience is."

The question challenging many school districts is how to change in response to new systems of funding, new educational standards, and recent federal encouragements to "blend and braid" money and to unify, coordinate, and align systems and services. There is no question that special education supports and services, as laid out in Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and particularly for students with significant disabilities, can be massively expensive and can create heavy financial burdens on school districts. However, some districts are finding that more inclusive programs can reduce part of this burden. By taking their students back from county programs, they are able to provide appropriate services less expensively in the students' home schools—and have

enough money for their inclusive efforts *and* their special education services.

Kristin Ludovico, project specialist for the Inclusion Collaborative at the Santa Clara County Office of Education, talks about cost savings as one of her incentives when she advocated for inclusive preschools in the Etiwanda School District in Rancho Cucamonga. "Once I dug into the funding and calculated the cost of services involved in sending children with disabilities to county programs, it dawned on me that we could provide services for less money in house." The resulting inclusive preschool program, C.L.O.U.D.S., has been an award-winning presence in the district and an incentive for expanding the district's inclusive efforts overall (see page 8).

Denita Maughan, director of student support services at Standard Unified School District in Bakersfield, is pursuing a similar tack. "When I began in this district we had more than 40 students being served in programs operated by the county. Instead of serving these students in their home schools, we were sending them two hours away to county programs. With transportation included, you're looking at $50,000 per student per year. I began five years ago building capacity

within the district" to educate most of these students in their home schools. "For the current school year, we've gone from more than 40 being served in county programs to 15."

Terena Mares, deputy superintendent of business services for the Marin County Office of Education, is cautious about the fiscal optimism this approach might generate; in her experience, bringing students back to their home schools from county programs would "tend to be more possible for students with mild to moderate disabilities.

"Under the right circumstances, bringing kids back to their neighborhood schools is a positive thing for children," says Mares. "But it may not necessarily save money. Small districts cannot easily provide the services that some students with moderate to severe disabilities need.

"Every county is a blend of small and large districts. It's easier for large districts to take advantage of economies of scale and provide sufficient supports and services for many of their students with moderate to severe disabilities. The larger ones are in a better position to provide appropriate services to all of their students."

Most educators agree that "special education rules and accounting are enormously complex, and experts disagree about their interpretation."[1] This complication does not dissuade Erin Studer, director of CHIME charter school, from being a strong advocate for a unified system of education as a way to make school districts financially viable. "We know that, as a fiscal model, it becomes increasingly untenable to run, year after year, what amounts to parallel schools," he says. "We have this school for children with special needs, and we have this other school for kids who are typically developing. And that leads to unproductive conversations about encroachment, which happen because we've decided to slice up the fiscal pie. We pretend that the special education dollars and the general purpose dollars need to be separate, when really, they're all our students," he says—and repeats: "They are all our students."

Blending and Braiding Funds

As one way to address issues of unmanageable expense, the federal government is encouraging states and school districts to make funds "braided and blended to provide more coordinated and seamless services and supports to struggling students, regardless of subgroup label.[2] Given the 45-year-old history of treating special education and general education as "separate but equal" parts of the school system—a history that includes accounting, credentialing, instructional, and attitudinal patterns of separateness— the prospect of blending and braiding funds and of ignoring subgroup labels is easier said than done.

One factor that contributes to conflicting opinions, according to Mares, is that "there is no clear policy on where the demarcation exists between what general services are due a child with disabilities and what exactly constitutes special services. The federal government tells us that we have a funding responsibility to provide a core level of educational services to all students, including our students with disabilities," Mares says. "The federal government never set itself up to be the sole provider of money for educating students with disabilities; it supplements. The core level of responsibility belongs to the states."

The Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) is taking an important step toward unifying systems by changing "how California policy is addressing subgroups," says Mares. While three student subgroups (English learners, foster youth, and students in poverty) generate additional district funding under the LCFF, the statute calls for districts to address all numerically significant subgroups—and specifically students with disabilities—in the required Local Control Accountability Plans (LCAPs). Mares says she believes "that between RtI [response to itervention[3]] and LCFF there is an important shift that is requiring school leaders to think differently about special education services. LCAPS are really just IEPs for districts," requiring districts to look at the needs of students, to find strategies to address those needs, to allocate money to implement those strategies, and then to create methods for tracking and reporting on their progress.

"Prior to the LCFF," says Mares, "money was parceled out in categories. So children were thought of in terms of those categories and as labels. Now the money is not the first thing. We're finally focused on the right thing: student need. And then we'll find the resources to address those needs. I believe that, over time, this will translate into a whole new way of thinking about school financing."

Kubinec agrees. "When the perspective is on where the money goes, the focus is on the money," she says. "Then that becomes what leads us. Through the LCFF we're taking steps to look at programs instead. What are the right ones to meet the needs of students? And how can we ensure all needs are being met?"

Flexibility

To return to the question of how much flexibility there is in special education financing and the metaphor of the elephant (and perceptions), Kubinec says, "if you're looking at financing issues from a strictly special education services perspective, then there is no flexibility." Certainly special education money can be used only to pay for special education services. But, says Kubinec, "if you're looking at the whole of educational services and at what best serves all children from a general education, whole-district perspective, supporting all teachers to provide the best services to all students— then you have a different picture. Because we've learned that what's good for one category of kids is generally good for all kids."

Kubinec points to California's *English Language Arts/English Language Development Framework*,[4] specifically its chapter on access and equity; the research cited there confirms that improving instruction for one subgroup improves instruction for all. If you support "all teachers to provide the best services to all students," then the money used to pay for that training carries no categorical tag. "The funding is about the provision of educational services. That's where the blending and braiding is," says Kubinec.

LCAP Rubrics

How and what educational services are provided through public dollars, and

how data reflect the provision and effect of those services, are questions that occupy most of Kubinec's time these days. She and fellow WestEd colleagues are involved in an unprecedented effort to "combine data with practice" as they create the final evaluation rubrics for the LCAPs. "Other states," says Kubinec, "have excellent data dashboards. We're going beyond that. We don't want to display just data. We must have feedback on practices and show how practices reflect outcomes."

The ultimate goal of inclusive efforts is to improve school outcomes for all students. The path involves special education students—along with all categories of subgroups—being embraced both fiscally and instructionally as general education students first, all teachers owning all students, and all staff receiving the training they need to provide the necessary supports. The LCFF hold great promise as an important piece of legislation for success on this path. And across California, strong leaders are enhancing the possibilities. ◄

Notes for "Funding"

1. **Special Needs: Why Not Teach All Kids Alike?** Retrieved from **http://ed100.org/students/specialneeds/**

2. American Institutes for Research. 2014. *Leveraging Federal Funding Focus Group Proceedings: Final Report*. Retrieved from **https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/osep/idea/leveraging-federal-funds-proceeding-document.pdf**

3. For more about **Response to Intervention**, go to **http://www.rtinetwork.org/**

4. *The English Language Arts/English Language Development Framework* is at **http://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/rl/cf/elaeldfrmwrksbeadopted.asp**

he or she is part of that classroom, is a meaningful part. TOSAs also train instructional staff on how to work with students, and they support general educators throughout the district. They are in schools every day giving teachers support, resources, and community planning time. That time to plan, prepare, and work together is critical—to talk at work and receive coaching.

"Because of our focus on professional development, teachers feel supported," says Wade. "You have to support your teachers."

Howard Adelman at UCLA studies what school districts need to do to create lasting, unified, coherent systems. His findings stress the importance of helping teachers develop their skills and of providing continuing education as "a critical vehicle for enhancing productive changes and generating renewal (and countering burnout)."[7] Adelman also stresses the importance of coaching and mentoring as "critical elements in moving in new directions for student learning and supports." [8]

Being Responsive

While each school district in the state will devise its own professional development plan to expand inclusive practices, Palo Alto's approach offers practical and research-supported guidelines: invest in your teachers, listen to them and respond to their needs, and support them at every step of the way.

"There are a lot of teachers who didn't feel comfortable" working in classrooms with students with disabilities, says Wade. "So we go in and do a lot of coaching. And I've been surprised at the teachers who rise to the occasion. It goes back to providing the necessary support.

"Helping teachers grow," says Wade. "This is what we do." ◄

7. Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA. (n.d.). *Getting from Here to There: A Guidebook for the Enabling Component— Getting Schools to Teach and Students to Learn*. Retrieved from **http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/enabling/gettingfromhere.pdf**

8. Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA. (2013). *Guide for Practice: Guide for Planning Coaching for SEAs/LEAs to Establish a Unified and Comprehensive System of Learning Supports*. Retrieved from **http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/coaching.pdf**

► A mini-course titled *"What Is Reflective Teaching?"* created by The Knowledge Network for Innovations in Learning and Teaching, is available at **http://tccl.rit.albany.edu/knilt/index.php/Unit_1:_What_is_Reflective_Teaching%3F**

► **"Becoming a Reflective Teacher"** by M. Carter, W. Cividanes, D. Curtis, & D. Lebo (2009), in *Teaching Young Children, 3*(4), is available at **https://www.naeyc.org/files/tyc/file/TYC_V3N4_Reflectiveteacherexpanded.pdf**

► *Tight but Loose: Scaling Up Teacher Professional Development in Diverse Contexts*, by E. C. Wylie. (2008), is available at **https://www.ets.org/Media/Research/pdf/RR-08-29.pdf**

► *Changing School District Practices*, by B. Levin, A. Datnow, & N. Carrier, (2012) and part of the Students at the Center series, is available at **http://www.studentsatthecenter.org/sites/scl.dl-dev.com/files/Changing%20School%20District%20Practices.pdf**

Paths to Improving Education:
Supporting Professionals

School reform guru Michael Fullan writes that effective school leaders are "focused on the development of teachers' knowledge and skills [and the] professional community."[1] In fact, "it's easy to have a bad attitude if you have no competence," says Pam Winton, senior scientist and director of outreach for the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. At her keynote address at the Inclusion Collaborative Conference in San Jose in October, Winton spoke at length about what implementation science calls the "key drivers" of change that must be in place for schools to become effective in helping all students learn.[2] "Professional competence is the first driver," she says, speaking specifically to "the need to support the workforce."

Many school districts throughout the state are committed to creating inclusive, collaborative schools; and they are focusing significant resources on their professional development to make that happen, giving it the degree and kind of attention that Winton says it deserves.

Carefully constructed and robust professional development is important because "the fear of not knowing," gets in the way of serving students with identified disabilities, says Holly Wade, chief student services officer at the Palo Alto Unified School District. "All of our teachers are highly capable instructional leaders. They don't want to do anything wrong, but they don't know what they don't know."

Wade is ensuring that the teachers in Palo Alto in fact do know how to serve all students in their classrooms. According to Palo Alto's director of special education, Chiara Perry, "this is the only district I've ever worked in where professional development is a priority. We provide training for teachers and for parents. Everyone learns together. Teachers feel supported." Providing ongoing support as an integral part of professional development appears to be one of the keys to this district's success.

New Kinds of Professional Development

Traditionally, workshop-based events have been the standard delivery model for in-service learning for teachers, with more than 90 percent of teachers participating in this type of professional development during a school year.[3] Yet this approach has an "abysmal" track record, with "one-shot" workshops typically effecting little change in teacher practice and having no effect on student achievement.[4]

According to the Center for Public Education, "the largest struggle for teachers is not learning new approaches to teaching but implementing them."[5] Generally it takes "20 separate instances of practice before a teacher has mastered a new skill, with that number increasing along with the complexity of the skill."[6]

Providing a teacher with information about a new educational strategy or teaching approach, without supporting that teacher's efforts to practice it, would be tantamount to talking to a child about riding a bicycle, even showing videos of other children riding bicycles, and then expecting the child to simply go out and successfully ride a bicycle. The point is that mastering any new skill requires practice; and in optimal circumstances, people will receive coaching as they move from novice status to mastery.

The good news is that the traditional "one and done" approach to professional development for teachers seems to be a thing of the past in those school districts that are consciously and intentionally working to develop collaborative, inclusive, and unified structures and programs.

Support and Coaching

When Wade was in the process of introducing inclusive, neighborhood preschools to Palo Alto, "a lot of teachers

didn't know how to work with children with disabilities," says Sharon Keplinger, then preschool director. "What do kids do in preK? They learn to get along. They learn how to behave and to develop the skills they need to be successful in school. Our question was 'How do you break that down for all kids?' Our teachers needed a lot of professional development, especially to learn how to deal with behavior."

Wade talks about the importance of providing this professional development to all teachers, essentially "demystifying" the work so that a teacher can be confident that "this child [with disabilities], when provided adequate supports, can be very successful in your classroom and can add an incredible amount of value to what you do and how you do it and to how all your children learn."

But Wade went one step further—by providing ongoing support. As Palo Alto

has expanded its inclusive classrooms into the grades, the district started providing that extra support, in addition to PD, through its TOSAs: teachers on special assignment.

"Three years ago," says Wade, "we put inclusion teachers on special assignment. One of the reasons we used that model is because it already existed in the district: we have math TOSAs, literacy TOSAs, secondary school TOSAs. So I used an existing framework to provide support for questions about inclusion: how can I help a student with disabilities be a part of this general education classroom. What does that look like?

"The inclusion TOSAs are responsible for observation, curriculum suggestions, curriculum modification suggestions, working with the onsite special education team to ensure that a student, when

The Impact of Coaching*

Outcomes

% of participants who demonstrate knowledge, demonstrate new skills in a training setting, and use new skills in the classroom

Training Components	Knowledge	Skill Demonstration	Use in the Classroom
Theory & Discussion	10%	10%	0%
. . . + Demonstration in Training	30%	30%	0%
. . . + Practice & Feedback in Training	60%	60%	5%
. . . + Coaching in the Classroom	95%	95%	95%

*From Joyce, B., and Showers, B. (2002). "Designing Training and Peer Coaching: Our Needs for Learning." In Student Achievement Through Staff Development, 3rd Edition. Retrieved from http://www.ascd.org/ publications/books/102003/chapters/Designing-Training-and-Peer-Coaching@-Our-Needs-for-Learning.aspx

1. Fullan, M. (2002). **The Change Leader**. *Beyond Instructional Leadership 59*(8), 16–21. Retrieved from **http://www.ascd.org/ publications/educational-leadership/may02/vol59/num08/ The-Change-Leader.aspx**

2. The **National Implementation Research Network** is at **http://nirn. fpg.unc.edu**

3. Darling-Hammond, L., Chung Wei, R., Andree, A., & Richardson, N. (2009). ***Professional Learning in the Learning Profession: A Status Report on Teacher Development in the United States and Abroad.*** Oxford, OH: National Staff Development Council.

4. Yoon, K. S., et al. (2007). ***Reviewing the Evidence on How Teacher Professional Development Effects Student Achievement***. REL Southwest. Retrieved from **http:// ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/ southwest/pdf/rel_2007033.pdf**

5. Center for Public Education. (2013). ***Teaching the Teachers: Effective Professional Development in an Era of High Stakes Accountability***. Retrieved from **http://www. centerforpubliceducation.org/ Main-Menu/Staffingstudents/ Teaching-the-Teachers-Effective-Professional-Development-in-an-Era-of-High-Stakes-Accountability/Teaching-the-Teachers-Full-Report.pdf**

6. Joyce, B. & Showers, B. (2002). ***Student Achievement through Staff Development***. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Notes & Resources

That change didn't come effortlessly. "We had to create an understanding for the general practitioners of what MTSS means, to ask them what supports they needed; there were some touchy conversations at first," Navo says.

Some of that touchiness came out of the district's efforts to break down the separate silos of general and special education. Sanger began by offering joint professional development opportunities and training to teachers in both departments and by including special education teachers on school leadership teams.

The role of principal began to change, too. School site leaders were no longer seen as just managers of their buildings. The district invested in training them to be "transformational leaders" of their schools and holds them accountable for progress. Every fall, at a Principal Summit, they present school data, including API, to the administration.

## Professional Learning Communities

But the "foundational" change for Sanger, says Salomonson, was the creation of Professional Learning Communities (PLC) where all staff members who teach in a particular grade level or subject area meet to share their experiences. "PLCs are fundamental to the success of our initiatives," she says. General and special education teachers "come together in a trusting environment where they have the ability to collaborate, be interdependent and accountable to each other." They share the results of student assessments and discuss how to support students who aren't meeting grade-level standards.

"There are no 'gotcha' moments," Salomonson says of these communities. "We're asking them to be vulnerable, but with support." All teachers are offered structured time for the meetings, which, she says, now result in "rich conversations around instruction and intervention."

MTSS: Academics and Behavior

The interventions that led to district-wide MTSS began with Response to Intervention (RtI), the three-tiered program of academic supports, with the intensity of the supports increasing with the number of the tier. "We backed into the concept of MTSS through RtI," says Salomonson. "RtI at first was born out of and sustained by special education." It took a while, she says, for general education teachers to acknowledge that RtI was appropriate for all students and "to take ownership of all the kids in their classroom."
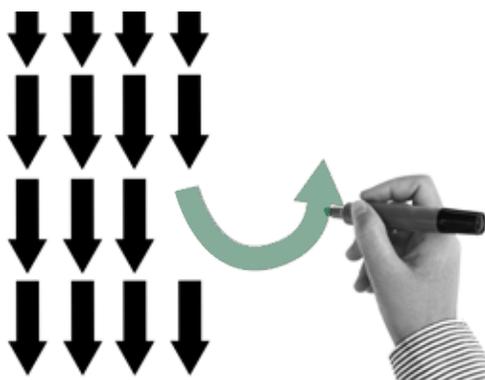
MTSS at Sanger features a classroom-based Tier 1, which serves all students with preventive, proactive interventions; this is all that 80–90 percent of students need. Tier 2 offers strategic group interventions for 5–10 percent of students who require extra support; and Tier 3 provides individual support for students who need ongoing, intensive interventions.

In order to prevent the loss of instructional time, core instruction stops for 30–45 minutes most days to allow for differentiated interventions. During this time, students are deployed into groups based on their need, not on a designation of disability. Some will get intensive support; others may need only re-teaching, and students performing at grade level will be involved in enrichment activities designed by the teachers.

To complete MTSS, the district added Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), also a three-tiered, systematic approach, but one that emphasizes behavioral expectations and offers positive rewards for appropriate behavior. Expectations are posted throughout the schools, in such areas as cafeterias, hallways, and libraries. As with the academic tiers, PBIS offers increasing levels of support for students whose behavioral issues are not resolved in Tier 1, where appropriate behavior is treated as a course of study that everyone learns.

Gaining Parental Support

As the district began to move towards inclusion, Salomonson says, "we started to build the capacity in our general education teachers to support our students with disabilities. . . . From that success, parents started to trust that their child's needs and goals could be met" in both special and general education settings. Secondly, she says, "We moved to a facilitated format for our IEPs. We focused on three areas: strengths, challenges, and outcomes. We have found that a conversation around those areas has greatly increased our parent participation, and the creativity and richness of our IEPs have grown greatly." All communication with parents, Salomonson says, occurs within the framework of inclusion. "From this work, our parents . . . have grown accustomed to having robust conversations about all the services and supports that could help their child succeed."

As the district moved to full implementation of MTSS, and "once

parents began to see the response to intervention, the improvement in literacy, the standards-based instruction, and the services," says Navo, "they confirmed that this was the right move by showing their support" in annual parent surveys.

Securing Data

With these systems in place, the district needed to know if students were actually learning. "Even if you believe in what you are doing, you need the data," Navo says. "Data-based conversations are part of MTSS."

Salomonson says that "a robust RtI created the capacity of all teachers to analyze student progress data and to create better common and formative assessments." Student progress is monitored every 4–6 weeks in Tier 1, every other week in Tier 2, and every week in Tier 3. And, as noted, the data are shared at PLC meetings.

RtI interventions also helped the district determine eligibility for special education and reduce the number of identified students from 12 percent to 8 percent of the total population. Prior to 2004, Salomonson says, many students "were falsely identified because there were no systematic [and early] interventions available to them."

Creating Inclusion

While students with disabilities receive the same tiered supports at all district schools, district leaders decided early on in this far-flung, mostly rural district to group the 51 Special Day Class (SDC) elementary students at one site, Lincoln Elementary, so they wouldn't have to travel for services and so their teachers could collaborate.

Principal Leo Castillo says all teachers at Lincoln, including the five SDC teachers, were trained together. Every student is with his or her general education peers for at least part of the day, even if only for lunch and recess. But SDC teachers like Zachary Smith are aiming for more. Smith meets regularly with general education teachers. "They go over what they are teaching the next week, and I go over our students and what accommodations will be needed. We problem solve about individual students. We don't see general ed and special ed as separate," he says. "We're in this together, and we are learning from each other. We want to put kids where their strengths are." For example, four of his students are strong in math, so they attend a general education classroom with an aide during math period. "Our goal is to build up our students, push them into general education, and not be able to tell who is being supported." That's how fifth grade teacher Jillian Poe sees it. "To me, they are all my students," she says. "They are getting the same lesson, the same homework, but the [instructional assistant] will modify it for them."

Universal Design

Now Lincoln is serving as a pilot site for the newest district initiative, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), a general education process that offers options and opportunities for all students to access a lesson from Tier 1 "so we require fewer interventions at Tiers 2 and 3," says Salomonson. As Principal Castillo says, "The best intervention is a great Tier 1."

The district is able to respond to and incorporate new ideas such as UDL because the necessary structures and philosophy are in place. That doesn't mean the initiatives will look the same at every site.

One System: Many Supports; Endless Flexibility

There is a difference, administration officials say, between fidelity and implementation. School staffs are expected to faithfully adhere to the district's goals and priorities. But how those priorities are implemented "can look different at each school," says Navo. "That allows for creativity at individual sites." For example, while all teachers have structured time for PLC meetings, some sites may start school late or end the day early once a week to allow teachers to meet. Others may build PLC time into the school day. The differentiated interventions also are site-based and can vary from school to school.

Homegrown and Committed

All of these changes have been initiated and instituted by a mostly homegrown staff with longstanding ties to the community. Leo Castillo is a graduate of Sanger High; Superintendent Navo attended school in neighboring Clovis, and many of the teachers received their credentials at nearby Fresno State University. Back in 2004, Navo noted a lack of consistency in the district. Now the staff is "built from within," he says, and there is very little turnover. "Many principals could have left, but we don't have leaders who are looking for the next best thing." Sanger has achieved much success in the past decade by taking the long view and staying true to its core principles, but there's no resting on laurels. "We're learning by doing in the MTSS world," says Navo. "There are challenges every day," adds Salomonson. "The work never ends."

Today educators from far and wide come to Sanger to hear its story and observe its classes. Can other districts replicate Sanger's success? "Our beliefs, principles, and philosophy are replicable," says Navo. "The question is, are you willing to do what's necessary to give all kids the education they deserve?" ◀

Tracking Changes at Sanger

Snapshot: Sanger Unified School District in 2004

In the bottom two percent of state schools, an Academic Performance Index of 599 (well below the state target of 800), seven schools in Program Improvement, 12 percent of students in special education, and a roadside billboard proclaiming Sanger "The Home of 400 Unhappy Teachers."

"We had no consistency or agreement on goals," says Superintendent Matthew Navo, who was an elementary school principal at the time. Teachers tended to work in isolation. Support for struggling students was offered primarily through special education "so that you had to fail in order to access support," says Kimberly Salomonson, director of pupil services.

Snapshot: Sanger Unified School District Today

One of the top school districts in the state, an API of 833 (as of 2013), no schools in Program Improvement, 8 percent of students in special education, and a collaborative culture in which administrators and teachers share common goals and aspirations.

How did a relatively small, high-poverty district in California's Central Valley achieve this turnaround in a decade?

The Sanger Turnaround

As district leaders tell the story, Sanger's transformation required a change in focus, one that made student learning primary, and a long-term commitment to that focus at every level of the system. District staff understood that there were no quick fixes.

Under then-superintendent Marc Johnson, the district adopted three, simply-stated core principles:

- Hope is not a strategy.
- Don't blame the kids.
- It's all about student learning.

There followed three goals: Raise all students' achievement, close the achievement gap, and ensure a safe environment. And the district's over-arching mantra: "Every child, every day, whatever it takes."

District staff then made commitments in direct support of these goals: to create one inclusive system of education in which students with disabilities were integrated into general education classrooms wherever and whenever possible; to adopt a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS), with both academic and behavioral interventions for all students; and to develop and then rely on robust data-collection systems that assessed student progress throughout the school year.

"We said we're going to do this, and there's no turning back," Navo recalls. "MTSS changes the culture and climate of a school to meet the needs of students," says Navo, explaining why MTSS was the chosen framework for effecting change.

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