

# **An Evidence-Based Blueprint for Effective Schools and Systems-Level Characteristics to Integrate General and Special Education Services**

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## **An Evidence-Based Blueprint for Effective Schools and Systems-Level Characteristics to Integrate General and Special Education Services**

Over at least the past fifteen years, virtually every state and school district in the country has worked in the area of comprehensive school reform in order to improve the academic and social-behavioral outcomes of all students. Triggered initially by “A Nation at Risk” (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), “school reform” has passed through various phases that have included: the upgrading of professional certification and credentialing requirements, the development and distribution of national curricular standards in most academic and related areas, top-down and community-based mandates for accountability, the identification of national education goals, legislation that mandates school reform and school improvement, and the recognition that school reform may be more about people and process than money and mandates. Through it all, schools have attempted to integrate all of their systems—organization and management, curriculum and instruction, professional development and supervision—into common, articulated, and accountable processes leading to substantive and meaningful results for all students.

With the “No Child Left Behind” legislation, the mandate that schools demonstrate their ability to facilitate all students’ academic progress and success is unambiguous. Highlighting the need for comprehensive school reform and improvement processes, effective and accountable teachers, positive and safe school environments, and standards-based assessments that demonstrate functional academic outcomes, this

legislation also emphasizes evidence-based practices and a measured system of primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention.

This paper will address both of these latter areas first by presenting an evidence-based and prevention-focused blueprint of components that promote students' academic achievement and social, emotional, and behavioral success, and then by discussing their relationship to the integration of general and special education. All of this discussion is guided by the author's experiences implementing these components within the context of Project ACHIEVE, an evidence-based school reform and school effectiveness program that has been implemented in schools and school districts across the country since 1990. Helping schools to design and implement effective school and schooling processes that maximize the academic and social/emotional/behavioral progress and achievement of all students, Project ACHIEVE was designated an exemplary national model prevention program by the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services' Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CASAP) in 2000; and as a Promising Program by the U. S. Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) in 2003.

#### Effective School and Schooling Components

Given the existing research (e.g., Bickel, 1999; Chall, 2000; Gettinger & Stoiber, 1999; Knoff & Batsche, 1995; Wang et al., 1990; Ysseldyke & Elliott, 1999), an evidence-based "blueprint" does exist to guide the organization and operation of effective schools and classrooms. Critically, this blueprint acknowledges the interdependent nature of students' academic and social-emotional and behavioral

successes, respectively. Indeed, when students have positive academic self-esteems and feel safe in school, their potential to be academically engaged and successful increases. Conversely, when students are academically frustrated and unsuccessful, their potential to withdraw, become anxious, demonstrate resistance or apathy, or exhibit aggression similarly increases.

The blueprint also recognizes that the same academic and behavioral expectations should be expected of and taught to all students, even though some students may acquire these skills at different speeds and under different learning conditions. For this reason, the blueprint needs to provide services along a continuum that includes: Services to All Students, Services to Students Needing Strategic Interventions, and Services to Students Needing Intensive Interventions. These areas can be conceptualized as follows:

Services to All Students. Here, school systems need to describe what they are doing to ensure (or to improve) effective instruction and outcomes for all students, including those who are at-risk for slower progress or potential failure. Services here include those available through general education and compensatory education programs, along with 504 accommodations as needed by identified students.

Services to Students Needing Strategic Interventions. Here, school systems need to describe what they are doing to ensure (or to improve) effective instruction and outcomes for students who have made documented slower progress or who are at great risk for school failure. Students here have already received interventions generated by their general classroom teachers and/or linked interventions delivered by general education and compensatory education staff. These interventions have been largely

unsuccessful such that systematic functional assessment and interventions through a multi-disciplinary process are now needed. Services here involve a formal pre-referral problem solving process along with the implementation of evidence-based interventions—largely in the general education or compensatory education-linked classroom—that are evaluated through explicit data-based evaluation procedures.

Services to Students Needing Intensive Interventions. Here, school systems need to describe the comprehensive services needed by students who are demonstrating significant academic and/or behavioral difficulties, who are not responding to small-group and even individualized intervention strategies and approaches, and who need intensive and coordinated school, home, and community services. Interventions here link functional special education assessments with intervention strategies and programs that are written into students' Individual Education Programs (IEPS). These IEPs often also include home and community outreach with ongoing evaluations that look at the attainment of specific goals and explicit outcomes. Also included here is the identification and implementation of evidence-based interventions, the effective use and integration of resources (including school staff and other professionals, time, curriculum and materials, technology, settings), the measurement and evaluation of functional outcomes, and decision-making processes that look at instruction, inclusion, generalization, and transition.

In order to provide all of these services along the continuum, a number of underlying principles are important at a district or even a school level:

1. A unified system of education is needed that integrates regular, compensatory, and special education and that focuses a district's and school's organizational and other resources toward student success.

2. Accountability for all students must be guaranteed through a system of explicit, high, and realistic academic and social-emotional and behavioral outcomes.
3. Student outcomes should be sensitive to individual student differences and proficiencies; they should focus, as appropriate, on students' knowledge, critical thinking, functional skill, and ability to apply previous learning.
4. Students' academic achievement is typically due to direct instruction and successful practice opportunities that are presented at students' functional and/or instructional levels.
5. Student outcomes, in the context of learning, are evaluated most directly and effectively through functional, curriculum-based assessments that use a systematic scope and sequence drawn from actual classroom (i.e., curricular) materials and course texts. Instructional intervention, when needed, should be linked to these curriculum-based assessments that help explain the reasons why a student's academic progress or success is not occurring.
6. Students are included in general education instruction and in regular classroom activities to the largest degree possible. Within this context, students should receive any needed supportive services in the regular classroom whenever possible. At the same time, they should not be denied access to compensatory and/or special education services when those services are required and have demonstrated efficacy for specific student concerns. These services should be available before a student has experienced substantial failure in the general education curriculum. Moreover, these services should never be denied to simply meet a philosophical goal of "full inclusion."
7. Special services should be considered only when students are not satisfactorily responding to documented interventions that are being delivered appropriately and effectively in the regular classroom. Beyond this, should students need compensatory or special education services, they should be delivered in the regular classroom, even with "pull-in" support unless it has been documented that a more restrictive environment is required.
8. Educators must prepare to educate all students entrusted to them—with supportive and consultative services as required. Staff development should focus on empowering educators as problem solvers, on fostering systems and approaches for continuous improvement, and on increasing the potential for the sharing of expanded resources.

9. Functional data bases, with supportive technology, must be available to all staff such that student and other relevant school outcomes can be tracked and formatively evaluated. Formative evaluation is used to ensure that students are making successful progress, and to help analyze the reasons for a lack of progress such that strategic interventions can be implemented. Summative evaluation helps to confirm that evidence-based programs and interventions are having the desired and expected effect.
10. Student accountability and success are enhanced when parents actively support the philosophical and practical aspects of a unified and integrated system of education, when they communicate and reinforce the expectations of that system, and when they participate and share in school activities or events—even at home. Systematic parent and community outreach by school personnel is critical to the success of the schooling process.

These principles form the foundation of a functional blueprint that consists of seven interdependent domains, each then consisting of specific characteristics that contribute to students' academic and social success as follows:

- **The Strategic Planning and Organizational Analysis Domain**

- Characteristics or Activities:**

- Site-based management through a school improvement team and process
    - Periodic needs assessments that identify community and building needs, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats
    - Periodic assessments of school climate
    - Ongoing grade-level and building-level planning and support meetings
    - The generate of building-level, grade-level, and individual goals, programmatic objectives and action plans
    - Coordinated evaluation procedures that measure goal progress and attainment
    - Use and support of a school advisory council and process that includes parent and community stakeholders

- **The RQC (Referral Question Consultation) Problem-Solving Domain: Using a Building-Wide Data-Based/Functional Assessment Process that Leads to Evidence-Based Intervention**

**Characteristics or Activities:**

- Training in analyzing students' cumulative folders and completing systematic records reviews
- Training in functional analysis, data-based problem-solving, and consultation/intervention processes
- Use of the problem-solving process at the individual staff, grade, and building levels
- Use of the problem-solving process at the prevention, strategic intervention, and crisis management/intensive need levels
- Reorganization of the special education/child study team process to a problem-solving, consultation, and intervention mode of operation
- Identification, integration, and strategic use of instructional and other resources at the building level
- Total building focus on intervention and functional outcomes for students

- **The Effective School Instructional Practices and Staff Development Domain**

**Characteristics or Activities:**

- Training, discussions, clinical supervision, and follow-up with teachers and others to develop and reinforce the classroom-based teacher/instructional behaviors or interactions that maximize students' time on task, academic engagement, and academic learning time (including those behaviors that help to effectively match students with specific curricula and instructional approaches)
- All-staff training in:
  - effective behavior management and the teaching of social skills
  - behavioral interventions
  - functional assessment and data-based problem-solving
  - curriculum-based assessment and measurement
  - curricular and instructional interventions
- All staff training should be accomplished at the knowledge, skill, and confidence levels
- Routine and periodic evaluations (with feedback) of administrative, instructional, and support staff relative to creating and maintaining positive and supportive school and individual class environments



- **The Academic Assessment to Intervention Domain: Using Instructional Consultation and Support to Teachers to Facilitate Students' Academic Success**

**Characteristics or Activities:**

- Teachers skilled in creating safe, well-managed, and effective learning environments that match the curriculum and its academic goals and objectives, the students, and their instructional styles such that student mastery results
- The presence of a systematic scope and sequence matrix in all curricular areas that is cross-referenced with state standards and benchmarks and that can be used as a formative evaluation tool to track student progress
- Academic skill instruction that is guided by research in and an understanding of child and adolescent development and the psychology of learning
- Heterogeneous grouping and use of flexible instructional groups
- Use of cooperative learning approaches
- Classroom-based use of curriculum-based assessment and/or measurement to track the effectiveness of instructional programs and interventions
- Training, evaluation, feedback, and clinical supervision (when needed) in the implementation of effective instructional lessons, early academic interventions for students (when needed), and the utilization of instructional consultation designed to identify and implement more intensive classroom-based interventions (when needed)
- Training and activities to facilitate the assessment of referred students' learning problems by evaluating their progress in and response to instruction, their speed of acquisition of new skills or mastery within the curriculum, and the most effective remedial or compensatory strategies needed to teach them to skills to mastery

- **The Behavioral Assessment to Intervention Domain: Using Behavioral Consultation and Support to Facilitate the Development of Students' Social and Behavioral Self-Management Skills, and Schools' Positive and Safe Classroom and School Environments**

**Characteristics or Activities:**

- Implementation of a school-wide positive behavioral support system that includes:
  - Social skills training for all students, staff, and parents
  - A school-wide, yet developmentally sensitive, accountability system of behavioral expectations, levels of inappropriate behavior, incentives and positive responses, and consequences, negative responses, or strategic interventions
  - Prevention and intervention approaches for common areas of the school (e.g., hallways, bathrooms, buses, cafeteria, playgrounds) and to address peer-mediated teasing, taunting, bullying, harassment, and physical aggression
  - Crisis prevention, intervention, and response approaches
- Staff training in the functional assessment of student behavior relative to prevention, strategic intervention, and intensive needs/crisis management situations

Staff training in strategic behavioral intervention approaches: e.g., stimulus control approaches, behavioral instruction and self-management approaches, behavioral reduction approaches, behavioral maintenance approaches, and behavioral generalization approaches  
Select staff training in behavioral consultation and intervention approaches and implementation for individual, group, classroom, staff, and school problems and issues

## • The Parent Training, Support, and Involvement Domain

### Characteristics or Activities:

Completion of periodic needs assessments related to parents' needs, parent involvement, and parent satisfaction with the school  
The identification of school, district, and community services, similar to those within a full service school model, such that school can refer parents to social, educational, health, and mental health services as needed  
The creation of parent outreach programs and activities to encourage parent participation in school activities and parent understanding of school goals, objectives, programs, and desired student outcomes  
Direct outreach, training, and/or mental health support services for parents with students who are demonstrating persistent academic or social-emotional or behavioral challenges  
The training of parents in parent organization, advocacy, and self-efficacy skills  
Direct home-school communication and collaborative activities (e.g., via newsletters, PTA programs, phone contacts, home visits) to increase parent knowledge and support of school activities and the schooling process

## • The Research and Accountability Domain

### Characteristics or Activities:

Identification of measurable outcomes based on the school's strategic planning process and the goals and objectives in each domain of school functioning  
Development of a data-management collection and evaluation process, supported by computer technology whenever possible, to formatively and summatively track the school's progress toward its stated goals  
Development of a data-management collection and evaluation process, supported by computer technology whenever possible, to formatively and summatively track the grade, classroom, and individual progress of students and their academic and other outcomes  
Development of a data-management collection and evaluation process, supported by computer technology whenever possible, to formatively and summatively track the implementation of student academic and/or behavioral intervention plans when written  
Ongoing research and dissemination to keep staff abreast of new information and research related to students, instruction, assessment, intervention, and evaluation  
Ongoing action research and dissemination to validate various aspects of the school reform and improvement process

### **Systems-Level Characteristics to Integrate General and Special Education Services**

Given the blueprint above, the following components would be most helpful, at the district level, to integrate general and special education services:

#### **1. A Single District Approach to the School Improvement Process.**

Strategic planning and progressive school improvement have been required by many states and school districts for many years. At the same time, this process needs to be standardized across the school district, and it must integrate from the beginning services to all students (i.e., general education, compensatory education, and special education students). Beyond this, regardless of state requirements, all school improvement plans should contain goals and objectives for all aspects of an effectively running school. That is, rather than focusing just on academic goals (as most school improvement plans do), a comprehensive school improvement plan also should focus on: student discipline, behavior management, school climate, and school safety; effective school and schooling processes, including staff professional development, teacher mentoring and support, and staff/team success; community and family outreach; and systematic problem solving and intervention for students with individual needs.

#### **2. An Integrated District Scope and Sequence in each Curricular area.**

Given the No Child Left Behind legislation and the continuum (described above) relative to serving all students, the strategic intervention needs of some students, and the intensive intervention needs of a small number of students, it is recommended that school districts develop an integrated scope and sequence matrix for each curricular

area (e.g., reading/language arts, mathematics, social studies, science, study and metacognitive/higher ordered thinking skills) from the early childhood/readiness level to the elementary to the middle school to the high school level. This matrix should be cross-referenced with the district's state curricular standards, benchmarks, and/or criterion-referenced skill expectations. It should also operationalize the criteria for skill mastery (if desired, at the exemplary/above proficient, proficient, functional, and standard/basic levels) in the classroom such that students have the highest probability of demonstrating similar mastery on any state standards test. Finally, the district should adapt the matrix and requirements for mastery to circumstances where individual students need instructional or assessment accommodations (i.e., for specific disabilities) and to situations where students' mastery needs to be evaluated through an alternative or portfolio approach.

Given these curricular matrices, the academic programming and progress for students with special needs would be tracked in a fashion similar to any other student. In fact, from kindergarten readiness through high school, each matrix's curricular goals and objectives could become the same ones written into a student's Individualized Education Program (IEP). Finally, for special education students, the level of curricular proficiency (again, for example, exemplary/above proficient, proficient, functional, and standard/basic) could define the type of high school diploma a student would earn.

### **3. An Integrated District Matrix outlining Behavioral Expectations.**

Similar to the curricular matrices, it is recommended that one set of behavioral expectations, also outlining students' needed self-control, interpersonal, social problem-solving, and conflict prevention/resolution skills, be identified at the early

childhood/readiness level to the elementary to the middle school to the high school levels. With built-in sensitivity to age/maturation, gender, culture, socioeconomic, geographic, and individual differences, these matrices would specify the behavioral expectations for all students both in the classroom and in the common areas of the school. And, the expectations also would be connected to suggested positive responses/feedback, incentives, and rewards that would come from school staff so that students would be motivated to demonstrate these expectations more independently over time.

Conversely, the “Behavioral Matrix” would also identify developmentally-appropriate “intensities” of inappropriate behavior. For example, the Matrix might identify four intensity levels as follows:

- Intensity I (Annoying) Behavior: Behavior problems in the classroom that teachers handle with a minimum of interaction or intervention (e.g., using physical proximity, a social skills prompt, reinforcing other students’ appropriate behavior, giving a non-verbal cue to the student).
- Intensity II (Disruptive or Interfering) Behavior: Behavior problems in the classroom that teachers handle with a more directed intervention (loss of student points or privileges, a classroom time-out, a note or call home, completion by the student of a behavior action plan).
- Intensity III (Persistent or Antisocial) Behavior: Behavior problems in the classroom that are so significant or so persistent that they require some type of out-of-classroom intervention (e.g., a referral to the office or in-school suspension room) and some type of systematic problem solving and classroom-based intervention after the out-of-classroom consequence.
- Intensity IV (Severe or Dangerous) Behavior: Very severe behavior problems that are usually addressed in a District’s Code of Conduct and that usually require some type of student suspension from school.

The Intensity I inappropriate behaviors would be connected with responses that would communicate a teacher’s disapproval of that behavior along with prompts guiding the student toward expected behaviors. The Intensity II inappropriate behaviors would

be connected with negative teacher responses and consequences that would motivate the student toward expected behavior. And, the Intensity III and IV inappropriate behaviors would result in consequences and, eventually, strategic interventions to replace the inappropriate with appropriate behavior, thereby preventing the inappropriate behavior from reoccurring.

This Behavioral Matrix also would include behavioral expectations for the common areas of the school—that is, the hallways, restrooms, cafeteria, school buses, playgrounds and gathering areas, etc.

As with the curricular matrices, these behavioral matrices would set the “standard” for all students’ behavior and would help to determine when some students might need strategic interventions or intensive programming (because they were not meeting the behavioral standards over time). The matrices would also set a standard for the behavioral skills that would need to be taught to all students in a school or district, and they would help to facilitate staff consistency when responding to students’ appropriate and inappropriate behavior.

#### **4. A Single District Process for Prereferral Interventions and Identifying the Need for Special Education Services.**

It is recommended that districts develop a single, integrated prereferral intervention process for students who are not making appropriate academic and/or social-emotional or behavioral progress in the general education classroom and curriculum. This process should be based on a “problem solving, consultation, intervention” mode of operation; it should have a standardized set of problem identification, functional analysis, and intervention implementation and evaluation steps and forms; and it should be designed such that a student’s need for more intensive services, based on an

insufficient response to intervention, should determine when and if that student needs to be considered for special education services. The process also should focus predominantly on early intervention in the general education classroom. Finally, the entire process should be implemented by a single multidisciplinary team that includes the building's best intervention specialists and that works coordinately at both the grade level and the building level depending on the persistence of the student challenge.

More globally, this integrated prereferral to special services process should reflect the following principles:

1. Early intervention is critical to all students. Students should not have to fail in order to receive consultation, problem-solving, and intervention services. This means that coordinated and integrated grade-level, building-level, and district-level resources are needed early on in the intervention process so that the early academic and social-behavioral success of students is maximized. This requires the use of building-level child study, pupil personnel, or early intervention teams that meet, work, and coordinate their service delivery processes together.

2. All referrals to a grade or building-level team are referrals for problem-solving. Moreover, instructional environments, rather than students, are referred for problem-solving. Instructional environments are comprised of the student, the curriculum, and the teacher/instructional process (see below). Thus, problem-solving, as well as intervention, potentially involves multiple domains.

3. Functional assessment is part of a systematic problem-solving process that involves:

- (a) Problem Identification,
- (b) Problem (functional) Analysis,
- (c) Intervention, and
- (d) The Evaluation of Intervention Effectiveness.

In saying this, functional assessment links directly to and guides intervention (see below). That is, interventions are functionally and strategically generated by determining why a referred problem situation is occurring. Once identified, high probability of success interventions then are implemented with attention to treatment integrity (the implementation of interventions effectively—the way that they were designed), desired outcomes, explicit timelines, and the evaluation of outcomes.

4. All interventions are outcome-based. That is, interventions need to be formatively evaluated in an ongoing way to track the student's progress over time. Some interventions are prepared and implemented by classroom teachers to maximize a student's success ("Preventive intervention"), some interventions are implemented to respond to a student's lack of success ("Strategic intervention"), and other interventions are implemented to help a student to be successful at his or her own individual level of functioning ("Intensive intervention"). Regardless, the ultimate goal of any intervention program is (a) to help students to be successful in the general classroom setting and curriculum (with as few modifications as possible), and (b) to help students to be largely responsible for managing their own success—implementing, monitoring, and evaluating their own intervention and success.

5. Accommodations are not the same as interventions. Accommodations (e.g., preferential seating, tape-recorded books, shorter assignments) help students to compensate for learning processes that cannot be remediated. Accommodations do not change the specific nature of a child's area of weakness or disability; they simply help to minimize its impact on the student's academic or social-emotional/behavioral progress. Interventions focus on changing a student's skills or behaviors, motivation, or ability to transfer skills or behaviors to new situations, settings, or contexts. Thus, the goal of intervention is to improve a student's skill level or behavior.

6. At times, teachers may benefit from consultations with other professionals. The goals of consultation are to:

- (a) Solve the presenting situation that is being "referred;"
- (b) Implement successful, strategic interventions;
- (c) Increase the intervention skill level of all professionals involved in the case;
- (d) Enhance the teacher's skills relative to problem-solving in the future.

As this is successful, teachers and other staff will gain a full understanding of how, why, and with whom specific interventions can be used in the future. They also will more competent in their ability to independently facilitate students' success.

7. Finally, every staff person in a school should be viewed as a potential consultant to some other staff person. Schools, therefore, need to systematically identify the professional and personal skills of each staff person in and available to the building. This process helps building staff to use each others' skills to address specific student issues. This "sharing" should occur regardless of staff role, assignment, or department.

## **5. A Single District Blueprint for Teacher Expectations, Professional Development, Evaluation, and Tenure.**

It is recommended that districts develop an integrated matrix outlining the instructional and classroom management skills and expertise expected of teachers at their Early, Mid, Mature, and Advanced Leadership levels of professional experience. These expectations should be aligned with a professional development and mentoring process, which also should include the writing and evaluation of an annual Professional Development Plan (PDP) for all teachers. Critically, most of the PDP goals will be determined by district and/or school leaders for Early Career Teachers, many of the goals will be so determined for Mid-Career Teachers, some of the goals will be determined for Mature Career Teachers, and few goals will be determined for Advance



Leadership Teachers. Finally, for Early Career Teachers, the attainment of specific PDP and other district-determined goals and objectives will form the basis for all teacher tenure decisions.

Relative to the expected skills and expertise, for all teachers (i.e., regular and special education), there should be a single set of core skills that are applicable to all classrooms and all instructional levels. For example, based on the research, the following characteristics have been found to be related to students' classroom success:

Student Metacognition

Teaching students metacognitive or organizational or "learning how to learn" strategies

Effective Classroom Management

Establishing effective expectations and routines during the first weeks of school

Well organized classrooms where the use of space and seating arrangements maximize learning and interaction

Teaching, reinforcing, and maintaining student on-task behavior

Quantity Of Instruction

Teaching students at their instructional levels with high and reasonable expectations

Using effective instruction strategies that include an evidence-based pedagogical sequence (as appropriate): daily review with reteaching when necessary, presentation of new content and skills, initial student practice with high probabilities of success and teacher feedback with guided or corrective or reinforced practice, independent practice, weekly/monthly reviews and reteaching, transfer of skills to new applications

The use of varied and strategic instructional practices to enhance skill and concept acquisition

Instruction that uses active, participatory learning and interactive lessons whenever Possible

A focus on direct instruction and mastery learning balanced with conceptual and higher ordered thinking activities

The use of flexible homogeneous and heterogeneous grouping patterns that allow for skill mastery at the instructional levels but concept mastery at a universal level

Instruction that utilizes continuous progress monitoring in the classroom to confirm mastery

Positive And Productive Student/Teacher Interactions

An emphasis on student effort along with outcome

Making learning meaningful to a diverse classroom of students

A Classroom Climate Conducive To Learning

The creation of a positive, cohesive, tolerant, and sensitive (e.g., to culture, race, gender, disability) classroom and school environment where students receive five positive interactions for every negative one

Instruction and interactions that emphasize the use of praise and cooperation while minimizing criticism and competition

A Peer Culture Supportive Of Academic Achievement

Effective use of cooperative learning strategies

Beyond this core set of skills, a differentiation of skills is expected based on teaching level (elementary, middle, high school), teaching focus (elementary versus the more typical subject matter focus at the middle and high school levels), student focus (general versus compensatory versus special education—high versus low incidence disabilities), and areas of special expertise needed by a school district based on specific student circumstances. Once again, the importance of viewing general and special education teachers as more alike than different is crucial, as is the recognition that all teachers should nonetheless still have special areas of curricular and/or behavior management expertise.

**6. A Single District Data-base should exist for all schools and all students.**

It is recommended that districts construct and maintain a single data-based for all schools and all students. At the school level, this is largely accomplished as most schools now develop an annual, public “School Report Card” of academic and other outcomes relative to No Child Left Behind. At the same time, the data in this Report Card are often only summative in nature. The data are no loaded onto an interactive data-base that can provide formative data for use in strategic problem solving. For example, rather than knowing the number of discipline referrals sent to the Principal’s

Office at the end of each year, it is critical to know—sometimes on a month to month basis—how many discipline referrals were sent differentiated by student, grade level, teacher, time of the day, place of the behavioral incident, type of offense, seriousness of the offense, and what was done to respond to the offense. If these data were available, then a school might determine that most of its discipline referrals occurred during a specific month; they might determine that most of the offenses occurred in the common areas of the school rather than the classroom; they might determine that most of the discipline problems in the school were coming from a specific grade level of students who had historically exhibited the same problems over the course of many years. With these analyses in hand, the school would be able to strategically respond to these circumstances with interventions that were linked to the problems identified. This would help to solve more situations earlier and more efficiently. This also might help to increase students' success in the school, thereby decreasing the need for special interventions and services.

Relative to a data-base for all students, the need to access student information in an effective and efficient manner is critical especially when a student is exhibiting academic and/or social-emotional or behavioral difficulties. With an electronic “cumulative folder” with embedded folders that are accessible only to specific staff (e.g., special education “folders” only available to special education staff, medical “folders” only available to medical or administrative staff), schools can have access to all of the background and progress information needed on specific students so that problem solving can move expeditiously toward intervention and success. In addition, an electronic data-base will decrease the probability that records or information might get lost, and it can ensure that

certain information is not collected repetitively. Finally, the electronic data-base can keep track of services provided to students over time (e.g., prereferral interventions), along with the success of those services.

### **7. An Integrated Articulation Process for all schools and all students.**

Finally, it is recommended that districts design and implement a systematic grade-to-grade and school-to-school articulation process so that students can seamlessly progress from year to year. Especially important for students who have received prereferral interventions, who receive Section 504 accommodations, and who received special education services, this articulation process should ensure that services move effectively and efficiently with students from grade to grade and when they move, transfer, or graduate from one school to another. More specifically, this system should make sure that all teachers are briefed and prepared to teach all students from the first day of the school year on, that all teachers receive the benefit of what prior teachers have learned about specific students the year(s) before, and that all teachers know what academic and behavioral skills students have mastered at the end of the previous year so that they can begin the next year at each student's instructional level. Finally, this system can take advantage of the electronic data base and the curricular and behavioral matrices described above to facilitate this articulation process and, ultimately, to maximize all students' success.

### Summary

In schools that conceptualize and implement their general and special education services as a single, integrated process, staff are committed, from the beginning, to instruction where diverse student learners are accommodated in effective ways, and to

creating positive classroom environments that maximize all students' academic engagement and ultimate success. In doing this, teachers and other support staff build an instructional and curricular infrastructure that wraps around students such that their academic, social, emotional, and behavioral progress is continuously tracked and evaluated against explicit goals and/or outcomes. And, they use evidence-based practices such that all students—even those needing strategic interventions or intensive services—can academically and behaviorally succeed. When we have high and realistic expectations, all students can learn.

As noted above, to best accomplish this, schools need to integrate the organizational, instructional, curricular, teaming, and problem-solving processes for all of their students at all levels of the building. Relative to No Child Left Behind, schools also need to maintain high and realistic expectations for their students where they are taught in supportive environments at their instructional levels by effective teachers who are backed by others in the school and district as well as by the home and community.

In the end, integrated, coordinated, and effective schools are not just a legislated mandate; they are a functional necessity. Beyond the research that demonstrates the impact of integrated school processes on positive student outcomes, the simple fact is that these schools and processes are more effective at the staff, organization, home, and community levels as well.

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