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Each and Every Child

Quick news for Parents, Teachers and Students

An e-newsletter by the Iowa Department of Education's Bureau of Student and Family Support Services

Survey: Our belief systems are on track

As the Iowa Department of Education continues to pore over results from the special education survey taken statewide two months ago, one clear finding is emerging: An overwhelming number of respondents agree that an effective tiered system would drastically cut into Iowa's academic achievement gap among students with disabilities.

The vast majority believe that using evidence-based practices is key to a student's success. They also believe that using data is crucial to ensuring the student is on the right track. As we review work of other states and schools who are reporting successes in addressing achievement gaps, they too are implementing evidence-based practices and using data.

The survey also shows areas of improvement, with a slim majority saying that Iowa does not provide an effective tiered system of supports. Another slim majority believes that educators are not trained sufficiently to use the collected data.

"Iowa's educators have confirmed some of our thoughts around using data and evidence-based practices," said the state's director for special education for school-aged children Martin Ikeda. "Likely components of the work we need to do in order to raise Iowa's achievement include helping schools and AEAs integrate ideas like evidence-based practices; unpacking the Iowa Core and implementing it effectively in every classroom; building professional learning communities in schools to understand student needs; building instructional and learning supports at the school level; and using data to understand needs and evaluate effectiveness."

Ikeda said working to end the gap will be a multi-pronged approach.

"Ensuring special educators have time to collaborate with other teachers, including general education peers, and developing ways in which strategies can be modeled and coached, also need to be considered," Ikeda said.

"But we can use the survey data and the professional literature to help us prioritize our work as a system so that we can impact the gap in the next three-to-five years and not have to wait 10 years to see marked change. I've been out to schools in Iowa. Faculty are studying the issue and implementing solutions.

"Everyone is doing their best to get more students with disabilities ready to exit IEP services or leave school ready for college and career. We need to do this together so that all parts of our system support the others. This is really an exciting time for special education," Ikeda said.

In the survey, respondents were given a long list to contemplate why Iowa has an achievement gap. They could click as many items on the list as they wanted. Here are the top three responses:

Response one. As a system, Iowa does not provide a tiered system of supports to prevent students from failing (our system is reactive rather than proactive).

51.5% listed this

Response two. Parents are not appropriately involved in the education of their children with disabilities.

35.0% listed this

Sufficient resources are not in place to accelerate the performance of most students with disabilities.
60.0% listed this

The following shows more results from the survey. They numbers do not add up to 100 percent because "don't know" replies were omitted.

The majority of teachers know what to do with assessment data they collect, including universal screening, diagnostic, and progress monitoring data.

32.51% agree or strongly agree
52.12% disagree or strongly disagree

For students with IEPs, progress monitoring data should be collected weekly and used to inform instruction.

63.07% agree or strongly agree
27.52% disagree or strongly disagree

Using student performance data to determine intervention effectiveness is more accurate than using teacher judgment alone.

78.49% agree or strong agree
12.94% disagree or strongly disagree

We should rely on the evidence base to help us improve teaching and learning, including special education.

85.00% agree or strongly agree
3.53% disagree or strongly disagree

Currently, there are research- and evidence-based interventions available that will enable the majority of struggling students to reach basic proficiency in reading.

64.61% agree or strongly agree
13.68% disagree or strongly disagree

Increasing scores by 20 percent?

Professional development targets children with significant disabilities.

A new professional development opportunity that aligns instruction of the Iowa Core to the Iowa Alternate Assessment designed by a teacher-turned-consultant at the Iowa Department of Education is increasing proficiency scores among students with significant disabilities by 20 points or more.

Within one year, students with significant disabilities went from 74 percent to 92 percent in alternative assessments in the Muscatine School District. Davenport schools – in which only half of the district's teachers had been trained – went from 46 percent to 67 percent in the same time period.

The professional development opportunity is the brainchild of Emily Thatcher, who joined the Department three years ago. Titled "Framework for Effective Instruction: Students with Significant Disabilities," it focuses on three elements: aligning instruction of the Iowa Core to the Iowa Alternate Assessment, learning strategies and instruction, and providing ongoing collaboration among teachers and AEA staff.

Emily and Brian Foy, Assistant Coordinator of Low Incidence for AEA 9, launched the pilot two years ago.

"Teachers have really embraced this," Brian said. "It has enhanced their community with gen. ed. teachers because they are now teaching the same things. And the gen. ed. teachers are learning that these students

can do this.”

In essence, the professional development focuses on five broad areas:

- Know your student (understand student learner characteristics and requirements).
- Know the Iowa Core.
- Adapt the instruction of the Iowa Core using Universal Design for Learning and accommodation.
- Monitor specially designed instruction with formative assessment.
- Report out (the Iowa alternative assessment and using a data team process for subsequent planning).

For teachers participating in the pilot, the process has been a game changer.

“I have one student and I cannot believe the skills she can do out of the general education curriculum and that she can participate with other kids her age,” said Tammy Holcomb, a Jefferson Elementary School teacher out of Muscatine.

“The only surprises were that she actually mastered many skills and we still have over 40 days of school left. I did not believe that she could master the skills that she did.”

The results for students – and enthusiasm among teachers – has prompted the expansion of the pilot program in AEA 9, Brian said. In fact, the last group of teachers will be launching into the two-year training program in the fall.

The goal is to eventually get “Framework for Effective Instruction” throughout the state. A state leadership team composed of a cross section of educators statewide has been charged with the deployment of the professional development.

Though the program is not quite ready for a statewide push, Emily said, it doesn't mean you cannot get a head start.

“Contact your AEA and ask for their support in aligning your instruction and assessments to the Iowa Core,” Emily said.

“If you can do that, you're more than half way there.”

Feedback from a reader

I feel we should be focusing not only on what is best for the student, but also making the type of contact with parents and or guardians that allows them to talk and share more.

We, special education teachers, are drilled so much about the "details" of the IEP and making sure that we talk about all of this that I believe we do not focus on the human exchange more and simply allow the parents to talk and share more. That is what it should be about.

I strongly feel that it is critical that parents have the opportunity to talk as much as the teacher within an IEP meeting.

Mary Messler
Special Education Instructor
Jefferson Middle School
Dubuque Community School District

Getting to know one of our partners

Access for Special Kids (ASK) Resource Center is a training, information and advocacy center for children

and adults with disabilities and their families throughout the state of Iowa.

Through various projects and partnerships, ASK Resource Center provides a broad range of information, training, advocacy, support, referral and direct-services coordination related to the needs of persons with all types of disabilities.

A single contact to ASK will provide individuals and families a direct link to the most appropriate services and supports to meet their needs regarding legal matters, special education, health care coordination, mentoring opportunities, and more. ASK Family Resource Center is there for you - Just ASK!

Email:
info@askresource.org

Phone:
515-243-1713
800-450-8667

Special education conference registration is under way

Register today for the Iowa Department of Education's free special education conference Pursuing the Promise held in Des Moines June 11 and 12.

In that there's room for only 1,200 participants, registration will be on a first-come, first-served basis.

The conference is an opportunity to learn what is going on statewide to eliminate the achievement gap, hear about evidence-based practices in special education and network with the community of special education teachers, parents, students, researchers and policymakers. Speakers include the Iowa Department of Education's Director Jason Glass and state Special Education Director Martin Ikeda.

There is a wide range of sessions, including literacy, legal, learning supports, and postsecondary transition. For people with visual disabilities, they may get additional information and register for the conference by calling the Department of Education's Amy Williamson at 515-339-4122.