

CARS+ Convention Presentation
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RTI/MTSS/UDL/Full Inclusion- It All Means Collaboration

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Presenter: Dr. Tom Green started his special education career as a classroom para educator. He was a K-12 Resource Specialist for 18 years. During his now 48 year career he has served as a teachers' union president, chief negotiator, and grievance chair; school principal, school board trustee, and central office administrator. He has credentials in multiple subjects, learning handicaps, Resource Specialist, history/social science, and administrative services. He retired from K-12 as the Chief Officer for the Alum Rock School District. He now serves as the Head Instructor for the Principal Leadership Institute at UC Berkeley. He still thinks like a Resource Specialist.

Workshop Description: No matter what special education service delivery model(s) your school or district claims to be using, they all require effective collaboration between special education and general education. But how? How can that collaboration be accomplished? What support is needed? What is legal? What about credentials? What about caseloads? Answers to everything in one session! (Just kidding, it's more complicated than that, but hopefully we can get you started!)

For all students to succeed, all educational services (and I do mean all) should be collaborative and coordinated. This workshop will examine the multiple models of coordinated services facilitating at risk student success. Commonly used models such Response to Intervention, Learning Centers, Multi-Tiered System of Supports, Universal Design for Learning, or Full Inclusion all require complex, effective coordination between special education, other categorical, and general education staff and programming. And yet special education and general education are currently organized in separate legal, procedural, staffing, training, and accountability systems that do not easily facilitate coordination.

The workshop will facilitate your analysis of your current instructional and support systems, examine the best practices required for success, the legal parameters, and the options currently available in our educational systems. We will examine tools and resources available to you and the systems you work in, and generate ideas to improve your personal and organizational practices, to in turn improve outcomes for the students you serve. Come with a digital device that will allow you to access the internet to facilitate us examining the tools and resources available.

Assumptions: My approach to this work is based upon a set of essential, foundational beliefs. It is important to be clear about them right up front, because they are not actually fully understood or embraced by many of the people we work with, including many educators.

1. Our legal, moral, professional, and personal obligations is to support 100% of the students we serve to maximize their potential.
2. 95+% of our students are neurologically and intellectually capable of meeting or exceeding grade level standards.
3. It is the intent of education law that special education services are designed to provide targeted, expert instruction to accelerate the current achievement rates of identified students, for that 95+% to facilitate them meeting or exceeding grade level standards and exiting special education prior to graduating from high school, and for the other 4+% to maximize their potential. We currently possess the knowledge and expertise to do so.
4. Many students placed in special education were placed not because of an accurately determined disability, but rather because of inadequate instruction and support.
5. Determination of eligibility and placement for services is racially, socioeconomically, and linguistically biased, resulting in inappropriate placement or exclusion from services.
6. Once placed in special education, historically and statistically achievement does not accelerate, rather it slows down. The overwhelming majority of students placed in special education were inappropriately placed, do not meet or exceed grade level standards and do not exit special education.
7. This current state of practice is not primarily due to intent, but rather to lack of adequate training and support for educators. People do go in to education with the intent of making a difference and realizing belief #1.

Despite the current state of practice, we do currently possess the knowledge and expertise to fulfill our obligations and effectively provide services so that close to 100% of our students maximize their potential, and 90+% meet or exceed grade level standards and graduate from high school with the ability to choose what to do with their lives. Realistically there are limiting factors- the aforementioned inadequate training and support for educators combined with the inadequate access to prenatal care, ongoing health care, preschool and pre-literacy resources, and basic human needs of a significant and growing percentage of the children we serve does decrease our rate of success. Nonetheless, there are examples in our world of school systems serving diverse populations of students that are reaching 90+% of its students succeeding, and significantly greater percentages than current averages of students not needing and/or exiting special education and legitimately graduating from high school.

So, how do we get there?

Specific, practical assumptions framing this workshop:

1. We must strive to become experts, and constantly strive to improve our practice.
2. We must become the experts in the approaches used in our systems.
3. We must be the agents of change in the systems we work in, and initiate and facilitate effective collaboration.

Becoming the expert and agent of change

Now, let's get down to specifics. What do I need to do to facilitate effective collaboration in my system? There are people in the special education business that can help me become that expert that I need to be.

1. Understand **the legal terms and conditions of my position**. What services do my credentials authorize me to provide? What credentialing restrictions are there on my services? What is my job title and job description? What legal documents define my position and responsibilities? Do I have a written job description? I should! Get a copy of it. If I work under a collective bargaining agreement, get a copy and read it. Whatever agency I work for, under federal and state law, belongs to a Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA) that must have specific descriptions of the services it provides. I must understand the legal framework of my position to be able to effectively navigate the complex interplay of general education, categorical programs, and special education to appropriately serve students. The system was not designed to automatically provide me with this information; I have to find it.
2. Education is the ultimate people business. I have to **reach out to and get to know the people in my system**. They are too busy to think to reach out to me. They are slammed. They are running as fast as they can at all times, work far more hours than they are paid for, their wages do not keep up with the cost of living, they are not provided adequate resources by the system to do their jobs, they were trained to work independently in isolation from each other, and it just doesn't occur to them to spend time getting to know me as a person or my professional responsibilities in serving students. I have to reach out to them. (I know, everything I said about them applies to me too, but I am the one attending this workshop!) I have to learn how they organize their classrooms and their instructional strengths and areas in need of improvement. I have to learn what they really believe about race, class, language, gender, and disabilities to understand how to most effectively work with them to support children.
3. I have to **understand the instructional strategies and materials used in general education instruction**. I have to understand the adopted reading, writing, mathematics, science, social studies, and visual and performing arts curricula in my school and district. Since one of my foundational assumptions is that my students will at some point in their K-12 careers will be able to use those materials to make progress towards meeting or exceeding grade level standards, I must understand those materials to develop appropriate plans to develop their facility with those materials. It is also necessary to understand the materials in order to understand the structure of general education classrooms and instruction.
4. **I have to become an expert in targeted, differentiated, specialized instruction**. I have to understand and be able to use alternatives to the instructional strategies and materials used in general education. There are multiple approaches to teaching and learning. All children do not learn the same way. It is highly possible that my education specialist credential program did not provide me with this training, and it is virtually certain that the educational system that I work in will not readily provide me with that training. (It incorrectly assumes that my credential program providing me with the training.) So, I have to accurately assess my own strengths and

areas for growth, seek out training, and advocate for my system to support me in acquiring that training. I may need release time, access to coaches and/or mentors, materials, and funding for effective training.

5. **I have to understand the student discipline system.** The school-wide behavioral expectations, classroom management practices, office referrals, suspensions, and any adopted or declared models of behavior support (Positive Behavior Intervention Systems PBIS, Restorative Justice RJ, etc.). These systems have a profound impact on the progress of at risk students. Students with identified special education eligibility are disciplined at far higher rates and with greater severity than the general population.
6. Finally, **I have to understand all of the working parts of the support system for students** who are not currently meeting or exceeding grade level standards. This includes the assessment and monitoring system, the student demographic data base, the referral and monitoring system (Student Study Team, Student Success Team, Coordination of Services Team, etc.), and the multiple categorical support programs (English learners, extended learning programs, reading/mathematics support, 504 plans, counseling, migrant or foster youth, etc.) The multiple working parts of this system are often not coordinated or inappropriately exclude at risk students from support from multiple programs.

Models for Collaborative Support for At Risk Students

Most school systems claim to operate under specific models to provide services and support for at risk students. Historically both the training and implementation of these models are inadequate and flawed. It is essential that I fully understand the models being used and engage in an inquiry and analysis of the models. It is also essential that I understand that all of these models are only that- conceptual models. The specific details of implementation are unique to each school system and must be explicitly articulated in detail. Today's training provides you with a basic guide to the most commonly used models and basic references to advance practical, basic knowledge of these programs. We should assume that our colleagues have not actually been adequately trained or provided with comprehensive foundational resources to understand, effectively implement, and monitor and analyze the impact of these programs.

Specialized Academic Instruction (Advisory Commission on Special Education)

Specialized academic instruction (SAI) is one of the new models of service delivery that districts are exploring. Both stakeholders and commissioners have described how these new models are creating confusion about what constitutes appropriate service delivery, and they have raised particular concerns about how SAI is being perceived and implemented in the field. In response to these concerns, the ACSE recommended that the CDE develop and issue a guidance document that explains the continuum of special education services for school-age students with disabilities and clarifies the purposes of consultant teacher services, resource specialist programs, specialized academic instruction, integrated co-teaching services, and a variety of other topics related to education programs for students with disabilities. The resulting document defines SAI as those instructional services in the IEP that typically involve "adapting, as appropriate to the needs of the child with a disability, the content, methodology, or delivery of instruction to ensure access of the child to the general curriculum" and that "meet the educational standards within the jurisdiction of the public agency that apply to all children."

Learning Center (Huberman, Navo & Parrish, 2011. Academically Strong California Districts for Students in Special Education. WestEd.)

The learning center is a place where students are taught through small group or targeted individualized instruction in a general education setting. Also, there is a special education teacher on each elementary school leadership team to ensure that special education is fully integrated with general education. In addition, each elementary school has an instructional coach who facilitates data meetings.

Response to Intervention (source: <http://www.rtinetwork.org>)

Response to Intervention (RTI) is a multi-tier approach to the early identification and support of students with learning and behavior needs. The RTI process begins with high-quality instruction and universal screening of all children in the general education classroom. Struggling learners are provided with interventions at increasing levels of intensity to accelerate their rate of learning. These services may be provided by a variety of personnel, including general education teachers, special educators, and specialists. Progress is closely monitored to assess both the learning rate and level of performance of individual students. Educational decisions about the intensity and duration of interventions are based on individual student response to instruction. RTI is designed for use when making decisions in both general education and special education, creating a well-integrated system of instruction and intervention guided by child outcome data. For RTI implementation to work well, the following essential components must be implemented with fidelity and in a rigorous manner:

- *High-quality, scientifically based classroom instruction.* All students receive high-quality, research-based instruction in the general education classroom.
- *Ongoing student assessment.* Universal screening and progress monitoring provide information about a student's learning rate and level of achievement, both individually and in comparison with the peer group. These data are then used when determining which students need closer monitoring or intervention. Throughout the RTI process, student progress is monitored frequently to examine student achievement and gauge the effectiveness of the curriculum. Decisions made regarding students' instructional needs are based on multiple data points taken in context over time.
- *Tiered instruction.* A multi-tier approach is used to efficiently differentiate instruction for all students. The model incorporates increasing intensities of instruction offering specific, research-based interventions matched to student needs.
- *Parent involvement.* Schools implementing RTI provide parents information about their child's progress, the instruction and interventions used, the staff who are delivering the instruction, and the academic or behavioral goals for their child.

Multiple Tiered Systems of Support (<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/ri/mtsscompri2.asp>)

CDE's Definition of MTSS

In California, MTSS is an integrated, comprehensive framework that focuses on CCSS, core instruction, differentiated learning, student-centered learning, individualized student needs, and the alignment of systems necessary for all students' academic, behavioral, and social success. California has a long history of providing numerous systems of support. These include the interventions within the RtI² processes, supports for Special Education, Title I, Title III, support services for English Learners, American-Indian students, and those in gifted and talented programs. MTSS offers the potential to create needed systematic change through intentional design and redesign of services and supports that quickly identify and match the needs of all students.

Comparing MTSS to RtI²

CDE's RtI² processes focus on students who are struggling and provide a vehicle for teamwork and data-based decision making to strengthen their performances before and after educational and behavioral problems increase in intensity. Please visit the [CDE Web site on RtI²](#) for further information.

MTSS Differences with RtI²

MTSS has a broader scope than does RtI². MTSS also includes:

- Focusing on aligning the entire system of initiatives, supports, and resources.
- Promoting district participation in identifying and supporting systems for alignment of resources, as well as site and grade level.
- Systematically addressing support for all students, including gifted and high achievers.
- Enabling a paradigm shift for providing support and setting higher expectations for all students through intentional design and redesign of integrated services and supports, rather than selection of a few components of RtI and intensive interventions.
- Endorsing Universal Design for Learning instructional strategies so all students have opportunities for learning through differentiated content, processes, and product.
- Integrating instructional and intervention support so that systemic changes are sustainable and based on CCSS-aligned classroom instruction.
- Challenging all school staff to change the way in which they have traditionally worked across all school settings.

MTSS is not designed for consideration in special education placement decisions, such as specific learning disabilities. MTSS focuses on all students in education contexts.

MTSS Similarities to RtI²

MTSS incorporates many of the same components of RtI², such as

- Supporting high-quality standards and research-based, culturally and linguistically relevant instruction with the belief that every student can learn including students of poverty, students with disabilities, English learners, and students from all ethnicities evident in the school and district cultures.
- Integrating a data collection and assessment system, including universal screening, diagnostics and progress monitoring, to inform decisions appropriate for each tier of service delivery.
- Relying on a problem-solving systems process and method to identify problems, develop interventions and, evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention in a multi-tiered system of service delivery.

- Seeking and implementing appropriate research-based interventions for improving student learning.
- Using school-wide and classroom research-based positive behavioral supports for achieving important social and learning outcomes.
- Implementing a collaborative approach to analyze student data and working together in the intervention process.

Universal Design for Learning (<http://udlguidelines.cast.org>)

UDL is a framework to guide the design of learning environments that are accessible and challenging for all. Ultimately, the goal of UDL is to support learners to become “expert learners” who are, each in their own way, purposeful and motivated, resourceful and knowledgeable, and strategic and goal driven. UDL aims to change the design of the environment rather than to change the learner. When environments are intentionally designed to reduce barriers, all learners can engage in rigorous, meaningful learning.

Full Inclusion (<http://weac.org/articles/specialedinc>)

Full inclusion means that all students, regardless of handicapping condition or severity, will be in a regular classroom/program full time. All services must be taken to the child in that setting. In addition to problems related to definition, it also should be understood that there often is a philosophical or conceptual distinction made between mainstreaming and inclusion. Those who support the idea of mainstreaming believe that a child with disabilities first belongs in the special education environment and that the child must earn his/her way into the regular education environment. In contrast, those who support inclusion believe that the child always should begin in the regular environment and be removed only when appropriate services cannot be provided in the regular classroom.

Mainstreaming (<http://weac.org/articles/specialedinc>)

Generally, mainstreaming has been used to refer to the selective placement of special education students in one or more “regular” education classes. Proponents of mainstreaming generally assume that a student must “earn” his or her opportunity to be placed in regular classes by demonstrating an ability to “keep up” with the work assigned by the regular classroom teacher. This concept is closely linked to traditional forms of special education service delivery.

Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS) (<https://www.pbis.org/>)

Referenced in IDEA to refer to a framework for delivering practices and systems to enhance academic and behavior outcomes for students with disabilities and their families.

Restorative Justice (RJ) (<https://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/classroom>)

Restorative justice (RJ) is a powerful approach to discipline that focuses on repairing harm through inclusive processes that engage all stakeholders. Implemented well, RJ shifts the focus of discipline from punishment to learning and from the individual to the community. However, it is often misperceived and misapplied. Given the national push to reduce suspensions, some leaders may perceive restorative justice as a way to improve their discipline data rather than a holistic approach to behavior. Seeing RJ through this narrow lens leads to two problems. First, we stop suspending students but fail to deal with the root causes of behavior issues, including the absence of strong relationships and emotional safety at school. Second, operating under intense pressure, leaders may start to unconsciously rig their suspension data rather than invest in the deeper work of building a community.

Effective Collaborative Support for At Risk Students Checklist

I can't do all of these at once; but I will work towards completing this checklist.

I have researched and analyzed:

_____ 1. Collective Bargaining Agreement

Notes, plan:

_____ 2. Job Description

Notes, plan:

_____ 3. Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA)

Notes, plan:

_____ 4. California Education Code

Notes, plan:

_____ 5. Site general education instructional strategies and materials

Notes, plan:

_____ 6. My specialized instructional strategies and materials

Notes, plan:

_____ 7. I have observed in all classrooms (general and special education)

Notes, plan:

_____ 8. Site behavior and student discipline plan

Notes, plan:

_____ 9. Site assessment data and student demographic database

Notes, plan:

_____ 10. Site at risk student monitor and support system

Notes, plan: