

POTENTIAL STEPS TO DECREASE TEACHER RESISTANCE TO IMPLEMENTING IEP TEAM DERIVED ACCOMMODATIONS

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When either reluctance, refusal or intermittent, inconsistent implementation of accommodations for students with either IEP or 504 plans occurs, educators observe that one or more of four variables are missing:

- **Clear step by step communication procedures** are in place, demonstrating district general education support for using accommodations including each teacher educating a student with a disability
- **A systematic on-going in service program**, with specifically designated personnel, to provide continuing education about appropriate accommodations for individuals with exceptional needs
- **Methods to address teacher concerns** about the effects of accommodations on standards and course competencies are in place
- **Involvement of both site-based and district-wide administration** in any accountability process.

The need to maintain on-going supportive and collaborative working relationships between all site staff cannot be overly stressed. Relying on a site's support staff to "talk the teacher into making accommodations", in the context of limited site-based and district-wide support, has not been found to be successful. Support staff who have sole responsibility for monitoring or coercing frustrated teachers have difficulty developing necessary collegial relationships. In contrast, if support staff are viewed as helpful colleagues assigned to assist the entire staff in adhering to district-supported expectations and to demonstrate methods that are minimally intrusive, resistance is minimized. To achieve this outcome, system-wide attention must be given to overcoming barriers.

The following roadblocks, with ideas for developing effective district policy and procedures that communicate district-wide support, may be helpful in overcoming resistance:

1. Roadblock: Lack of Visible District-Wide Commitment

Ideally, a written procedural plan would be developed collaboratively by Special Education Administrators, the Superintendent, and Site Principals in the district endorsing district commitment to accommodations. This plan should clearly delineate the roles and responsibilities of all parties in developing, implementing and monitoring acceptable, effective accommodations for individuals with special education needs, with guidelines for grading options specified. This plan would then be disseminated to all school sites.

2. Roadblock: Lack of Legal Knowledge

All educators at every site should be informed at least once per year on students' legal rights and teachers' available options should differences of options develop in implementing IEP accommodation plans. Both written and oral opportunities for faculty questions and dialogue is suggested. This information session should convey both the site and district level administrators' support for resolving differences and implementing collaboratively developed accommodations. This meeting may be best chaired by the site administrator to convey full support, with special educators in attendance to answer any questions or arrange individual problem solving sessions.

This legal knowledge has been further strengthened. I.D.E.A. 1997 Reauthorization specifies (300.342(b)(3)) that the public agency shall ensure... each teacher and provider is informed of his or her specific responsibilities related to implementing the child's IEP and the specific accommodations, modifications and supports that must be provided for the child in accordance with the IEP.

3. Roadblock:

Lack of Two-way Communication On Content of a Student's IEP/504 Plan, Rationale for Elements In the Plan, How to Change IEP Plan Content.

It is critical to develop effective methods of assuring each and every teacher (not just the special educator) who serves an identified student receives the IEP/504 Plan as soon as it is written, and that new receiving teachers in September receive previously written plans immediately. This is especially true now that I.D.E.A. specifically mandates informing teachers of their responsibilities.

- Provide opportunities for dialogue and clarification with any teacher that has questions about the plans when he or she receives them.
- Assign a specific person to contact each teacher and document that he or she has received the plan. The site principal might keep a log of who has received the plans and any issues which need addressing.
- At the secondary level, consider a system of bi-annual (or more frequently occurring) time efficient methods to provide in servicing and troubleshooting on specific students who have multiple teachers.

Example: Rotating In-Service: A period-by-period review of student needs and current progress, teacher concerns and developing issues can be conducted in one daylong session. All teachers educating a student with an IEP/504 plan would attend the first part of their prep period on that day. Special educators have student files available and can quickly troubleshoot and review in small groups, clarifying grading practices, reviewing accommodations, and so forth. (Note: This system is a clarification of the IEP plan and does not result in new interventions without the IEP process.)

4. Roadblock:

Lack of Clarity in Writing, Assigning Implementers, Establishing Accountability and Explaining Plans Immediately

Make sure that necessary accommodations to be implemented are clearly delineated on the IEP/504 plan. To avoid accountability ambiguity, the person accountable for implementation the accommodations as designated on the IEP/504 plan may be the actual named teacher of each class, not a generic designation such as "Special Education/General Education Teacher". If both special and general educators will be involved, specify exactly who will be accountable and for what. Whenever possible, involve all educators serving the student in the IEP/504 team meeting. If all educators are not present, consider assigning a specific person to personally review the accommodations and explain their rationale to all missing parties.

5. Roadblock:

Lack of Addressing The Five Key Reasons Educators Typically Are Reluctant To Accommodate

A. *Grading*

All general educators must understand and collaborate on the grading system to be used for a specific student receiving accommodations that meets district guidelines. Having special educators solely responsible for grading and evaluating progress of a student's performance in a general education class does not result in teacher "ownership" of the student's learning to the same degree as occurs for his or her classmates. Additionally, if an outsider evaluates, the peers and teachers may develop a sense that the student is a "visitor" in the class, without equal status. *See appendix on grading.*

B. *Responding to "Unfair!"*

Consider providing model verbal and written responses for teachers to use to address the issue of "fairness", even if they have not yet voiced this concern. Most teachers feel other students or parents will ask, "Why does he/she get..... and I don't!" Teachers are concerned about the potential of being labeled "unfair" by students when they are trying to reinforce, modify assignments or accommodate an individual. *See attached dialogue samples.*

C. *Change of Incompatible Educational Philosophy*

Information should be provided to all staff on changing educational philosophy and national trends that support accommodation to individual differences. These trends are conveyed in contemporary literature on constructivist education, Vygotsky and Piaget's theories, Howard Gardner and Mel Levine's work, as well as some literature on the inclusion movement. A change in teacher behaviors (accepting accommodations) requires an underpinning in a compatible educational philosophy. Otherwise the inconsistency will likely result in lack of commitment because the belief system about the purpose of teaching has not changed. To accept diversity of potential lesson outcomes and diversity of student methods of demonstrating mastery, one must have a supporting belief system about what it means to "teach." The philosophy that supports accommodations is illustrated by these statements:

"A teachers' primary commitment is to challenge students and to guide, direct, and inspire every student's individual pursuit of knowledge. This approach proceeds from each student's unique current skill and interest base; teachers' do not focus on dispensing invariant rote information and then test and evaluate based on one method alone". Also, "I teach 9th graders English, not I teach English."

This constructivist view of teaching is in stark contrast to the position that "there is a set body of specific facts I must present and then measure who has attained mastery of those facts and to what degree." If teacher-leaders come to vocally support an alternative philosophy, other staff members are more likely to shift viewpoints to adhere to the admired teachers' position and accommodations will become easier for all to embrace.

D. *Addressing Instructional Methods/Contexts*

Provide information on how to conduct collaborative work groups, manage projects and learning centers, utilize thematic instruction, derive alternative methods of reaching goals, adhere to new paradigms such as teaching to multiple intelligences, and other innovative methods which provide a broader and more easily accommodating instructional context. Just as incongruent philosophy makes teachers reluctant to adopt an attitudinal shift towards using accommodations, it will be difficult for a teacher to continue making accommodations in an instructional context of invariant methods of instruction (e.g., everyone in their seats, on page 6 in the workbook), and limited student opportunities to: demonstrate mastery in alternative, flexible ways; utilize one's strengths; exert any choice in how and what one learns, and how skills are demonstrated.

E. *It Takes Too Much Time*

Teachers have innumerable tasks and procedures interfering with instruction and evaluation. To suggest an intrusive, time consuming accommodation plan without brainstorming with the teacher on how to streamline this process and utilize time efficient methods often meets with resistance. Resources available in the classroom should be explored, such as: the student's own ability to modify assignments with instruction; helpful classmates assigned to assist; older student volunteers; parents and paraprofessionals; technological supports such as tape recorders and computer programs. In discussing the accommodations, consider the teacher's viewpoint, elicit time estimates and collaboratively develop streamlined processes.

There are many workshops and instructional materials on accommodations and interventions which focus on structuring seatwork and task phases, utilizing the entire school community and reducing the teacher's need to direct every phase of the instructional/evaluation process.

Conclusion

Developing quality programs and schools for today's diverse learners, who may or may not have a federal handicapping conditions, requires systemic planning and reform efforts. Consider coordinated planning that assigns specific district personnel to perform the duties discussed above. This may involve multiple resources across general and special education divisions, systematic inservice development within the district or county, and so forth. The resulting ability to effectively reach and teach a greater variety of learners will be enhanced by addressing these barriers.