**Special Education Program Evaluation and Action Plan**

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To effect social change, first, [an educator] must understand the perspectives of those involved. Not only those impacted negatively by existing social structures but also those who possess the power to alter a social problem. Thus, the Social Constructivism framework allows [educators] to understand [stakeholders’] perspectives, develop a baseline, and find out where they are. Once [educators] know where [stakeholders] stand, they can meet them where they are and work on their terms to alter and evolve perspectives, beliefs, biases, assumptions, and fears, the focus of a Postmodern Perspectives framework. Finally, when perspectives and beliefs have evolved and biases and assumptions confronted, a Transformative Framework can lead [educators] to find effective methods for [educational] transformation.

In a hierarchical power structure, individuals' perspectives, experiences, and desires on higher tiers impact the socially-constructed reality of those on lower tiers. Disability and Critical Theories interact through developmental Systems Theories, like Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007). Trauma of all types, particularly interacting on multiple levels (as in systems theories), affects children's ability to learn and behave in a classroom. Moreover, teachers and administrators are unprepared, ill-equipped, and lack training or support. Furthermore, the bulk of our teaching force is [comprised of] white, upper-middle-class females who seldom possess the ability to understand their students’ backgrounds and perspectives.

Moreover, schools add to the traumatization of students, some of whom are identified with various disabilities and segregated from their peers. Special education teachers provide interventions that do not address students' authentic learning and behavioral challenges that stem from trauma. [As a result, many] students drop out or get expelled and end up incarcerated, addicted to substances, in gangs, homeless, mentally ill, or dead (Bacher-Hicks et al., 2021; Cuellar & Markowitz, 2015; Dutil, 2020; Winder, 2015). (De Lapp, 2022, pp. 6-7)

Systemic change is possible but educational leaders must direct pedagogical transformation simultaneously from bottom-up and a top-down approaches (Avery et al., 2021; Bishop, 2023; Espelage et al., 2022; Fergus, 2016; Portilla, 2022; Ruyle et al., 2019; Wilcox & Lawson, 2022; Wilson, 2018)*.* Districts cannot alter personal and professional bias or assumptions based on erroneous beliefs with policies (Alexander, 2019; Avery et al., 2021; Eakins, 2022; Espelage et al., 2022; Fergus, 2016; Jennings, 2019; LaFrance & Rakes, 2022; Portilla, 2022; Venet, 2021; Wilcox & Lawson, 2022). However, establishing a central vision and mission with clear intentions, combined with effective education, training, and support, can alter the teaching and learning narrative, install transformative pedagogies, and implement effective practices, thereby positively impacting student outcomes (Avery et al., 2021; Espelage et al., 2022; Fan et al., 2019; Kurian, 2022; Lassiter et al., 2022; Portilla, 2022; Ruyle et al., 2019; Wilcox & Lawson, 2022). An intersectional pedagogy combining active equity and social justice interventions, restorative justice practices, Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT), trauma-sensitive approaches, and an inclusive, strengths-based philosophy must be at the heart of any program for educators to enrich the teaching and learning process, increase their sense of self-efficacy and wellbeing, to advance positive student outcomes (Avery et al., 2021; Council for Exceptional Children [CEC], 2021; Davis et al., 2022; De Lapp, 2023a; Dutil, 2020; Edyburn et al., 2022; Espelage et al., 2022; Fergus, 2016; Halloun, 2020; Kurian, 2022; Markowitz & Bouffard, 2020; Morton et al., 2023; Portilla, 2022; Venet, 2021; Wilcox & Lawson, 2022).

**The Prereferral Process**

The preferral process is designed purposefully to prevent unnecessary referrals and provide evidence-based interventions and supports to students in general education settings (Fergus, 2016; Taylor et al., 2014; The IRIS Center, 2020). During the preferral process, student-centered teams that include students’ parents or caregivers assist general education teachers in data collection, analysis, intervention, and evaluation. The team’s primary responsibility is to provide general education teachers with effective, evidence-based strategies to address academic, social, emotional, behavioral, and functional student needs (Fergus, 2016; The IRIS Center, 2020). During this time, the team and the educators must adjust their assumptions regarding academic and behavioral difficulties: they are likely not disabilities (Fergus, 2016; Texas Council of Developmental Disabilities [TCDD], 2013). A tangible benefit of ensuring that the prereferral process is strictly adhered to is that the school’s communication with students’ parents or caregivers generally improves (Fergus, 2016; The IRIS Center, 2020).

The IRIS Center (2020) identifies six stages to the preferral process:

1. The school or parents report concerns regarding one or more of the following: (a) failing grades, (b) comprehension difficulty, (c) lack of motivation, (d) social-emotional-behavioral or physical problems, (e) noncompliance, or (f) significant life changes. During this first stage, the students-centered team must assess if the issues are new, recurrent, or constant and if the concern is a developmentally-appropriate expression (The IRIS Center, 2020).
2. The team members gather different types of data from multiple sources, including: (a) instructional methods used by general educators, (b) strategies and materials used in instruction and interventions, (c) behavior management techniques used in general education, (d) the student’s skill level and ability, (e) the team’s knowledge and experience with the student, (f) discrepancies between behaviors at school and home, (g) behavioral and academic expectations at home and school, (h) the nature, extent, and severity of the student’s difficulties, (i) the student’s portfolios and work samples, (j) classroom observations, (k) attendance and discipline records, (l) cumulative school files, (m) formal assessment data, (n) any criterion-referenced assessments, and (o) error analysis (Taylor et al., 2014; The IRIS Center, 2020).
3. The team seeks additional data from the student and those who know them, such as their strengths, talents, and interests. In addition, the team should evaluate the settings and situations in which the difficulties are most likely to occur and evaluate the student's developmentally-appropriate skills. The team must examine any previous strategies teachers utilized for type, intensity, and duration (The IRIS Center, 2020).
4. The student team discusses and analyzes the gathered data and any external circumstances impacting the student and brainstorm evidence-based strategies (The IRIS Center, 2020).
5. The team assists the general educators in implementing interventions and evaluating the efficacy of the interventions by monitoring both the fidelity of the implementation and the student’s progress. The team must do their utmost to keep the parents included, informed, and involved and respect what knowledge parents and caregivers have to offer (The IRIS Center, 2020).
6. After a predetermined time of monitoring the student's progress, the team may modify or continue the interventions as is, identify alternative strategies, or make a special education referral.

An essential aspect of this process is not to make a special education referral unless educators have made sufficient and best-effort attempts in general education settings using evidence-based practices in accordance with the possible etiologies of the student’s difficulties (De Lapp, 2021b; The IRIS Center, 2020). Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), such as Response to Intervention (RTI), offer an alternative method to preferral by building the process into the educational program for all students. With sufficient and relevant education, training, coaching, and support to ensure implementation with fidelity, educators can conduct universal screenings, use the three-tiered model to implement evidence-based strategies and monitor progress, and ensure that the school and its educators make good faith efforts to provide appropriate and effective instruction, interventions, and support in the general education setting (De Lapp, 2021b; Fergus, 2016; Taylor et al., 2014; TCDD, 2013).

**Special Education Referral Process and Timelines**

To evaluate a child for eligibility, the child must meet the requirements for classification in one of the categories of disability, and the disability must negatively affect educational achievement. Once a parent consents to an evaluation, the assessment must occur within 60 days. This assessment must include multiple evaluation strategies and employ more than one measure or test. Assessment tests must be valid, reliable, and given in the appropriate language and form, without racial or cultural bias. The staff who perform assessments must receive training to use a specific test and possess knowledge regarding the authors' instructions for that test. Through this process, a multi-disciplinary team will determine the student's eligibility. Should eligibility be denied, a parent or teacher may request a re-evaluation once a year unless the LEA agrees otherwise (De Lapp, 2020, p. 4-5)

Special Education referrals are generally initiated by teachers, counselors, administrators, parents, or other service providers for a child (TCDD, 2013). Evaluations for special education eligibility require parental consent. Once the district obtains parental consent, the evaluation process must begin within 60 days from the date consent is granted. The multi-disciplinary evaluation team should ensure the assessment process is nondiscriminatory, comprehensive, and multi-factored. (Taylor et al., 2014; TCDD, 2013). To establish eligibility, the team must determine that there is a disability present, that the disability negatively impacts educational progress, and that the student requires special education services to benefit from their educational experience. If the evaluation determines that the student does not meet these three criteria, the school is responsible for establishing services to support the student in general education settings (Taylor et al., 2014; TCDD, 2013). Once eligibility is determined, an Individualized Education Program (IEP) team meets to determine the special education services that guarantee a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) (De Lapp, 2021b; TCDD, 2013).

**Reducing Bias in Assessment**

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA, 2004) legislation establishes many procedural safeguards to reduce bias in the evaluation process. Since then, amendments and litigation consistently increase the protections against bias in the identification process to prevent overrepresentation. In addition, advocacy organizations provide ethical guidelines that districts should follow in any evaluative effort. These procedural safeguards are summarized below.

1. Districts must ensure that multi-disciplinary teams participate in any evaluative effort of a student for any reason. This procedural safeguard provides some protection against one or two individuals' subjective judgments becoming the sole determinant of referral or eligibility for special education services (Assistance to States for the Education of Children with Disabilities [Assistance to States], 2004; Gargiulo & Bouck, 2021; Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act [IDEA], 2004; Rodriguez & Murawski, 2022).
2. The team must assess the quality and fidelity of the preferral processes and interventions (Assistance to States, 2004; Gargiulo & Bouck, 2021; IDEA, 2004; The IRIS Center, 2020).
3. The team must consider the impact of contextual factors on the students, the assessment results, and the evaluation process, as a whole, including but not limited to: (a) multi-layered trauma, (b) previous interactions with, and the quality of instruction delivered by, educators and administrators, (c) economic disadvantage, (d) living conditions or insecure home status, (e) family culture, (f) challenges and inequities faced by students' families, neighborhoods, communities, and groups with which they identify, and (g) social injustices at every level of society and in the educational system (Assistance to States, 2004; Gargiulo & Bouck, 2021; IDEA, 2004; Rodriguez & Murawski, 2022).
4. The team must focus its evaluations on assessing students' strengths and avoid pathologizing areas where students experience challenges. Instead, the team must task themselves with determining the best methods for building up the students' strengths and utilizing them to develop abilities and skills in the domains necessary for academic, social-emotional, and functional progress (CEC, 2021b; Gargiulo & Bouck, 2021; Pierangelo & Giuliani, 2015; Rodriguez & Murawski, 2022).
5. The team must ensure that a complete and comprehensive battery of evaluation methods is employed. These may include: (a) student records: cumulative files, academic achievement, test scores, standardized tests, attendance, teacher reports, discipline referrals, SST referrals, medical history, progress reports, program changes, and CPS referrals, (b) student and parent collaboration, (c) naturalistic observations, (d) data collected and analyzed from MTSS, (e) medical, hearing, and vision exams, (f) classroom management, instructional, behavioral, and ecological assessments, (g) norm and criterion-referenced tests, (h) curriculum-based measures and assessments, (i) authentic assessments, (j) task and work sample analyses, (k) learning styles assessments, (l) intelligence and aptitude tests, when appropriately used for diagnostic purposes, (m) assessments of language and perceptual abilities, (n) evaluations of social-emotional skills, (o) portfolio assessments, (p) progress monitoring, and (q) rating scales and checklists (De Lapp, 2023b; Pierangelo & Giuliani, 2015; Rodriguez & Murawski, 2022).
6. The team should allow those who are fully trained to conduct specific assessments to ensure reliable and valid test results (Couch, 2021; Pierangelo & Giuliani, 2015).
7. The team must corroborate that staff utilizes assessments only for the purpose for which they are intended and with appropriate student populations (Pierangelo & Giuliani, 2015; Rodriguez & Murawski, 2022).
8. All educators and administrators must increase their knowledge of research in disciplines that impact educational practice. For example, neuroscientific research established that many commonly utilized assessments to establish discrepancies, like intelligence and aptitude tests, are inaccurate determinations of an individual's ability to perform. Neither intelligence nor aptitude are static traits, either through time or genetic predetermination (Cathomas et al., 2019; Cross et al., 2017; Holmes et al., 2018; Kira et al., 2012; Luthar, 1991; MedlinePlus, 2020; Merritt, 2017; Thomason & Marusak, 2017: Werner, 1993) In addition, epigenetics research discovered that life experiences can alter an individual’s genetic expression, or phenotypes, children can inherit those alterations, and new life experiences can alter inherited phenotypes or the determination of which genes express themselves (Krippner & Barrett, 2019; Thumfart et al., 2022).
9. The team must enact ethical identification decision-making processes, regardless of any personal demands or preferences of general or special educators, parents, or administrators. The team and all administrators are responsible for ensuring that evaluations do not result in inaccurate or illegal identifications or placements by following both procedural law and applying substantive standards and ethical guidelines (Assistance to States, 2004; Bryant et al., 2020; Delahunty & Chiu, 2020; Gargiulo & Bouck, 2021; IDEA, 2004; Morgan, 2020; Nario-Redmond, 2020; National Center for Learning Disabilities [NCLD], 2020; Rodriguez & Murawski, 2022; Sullivan & Osher, 2019; Wilcox & Lawson, 2022; Yell et al., 2021).
10. The team should always consider the potential harm to the student if they allow inaccurate eligibility determinations. When making the final decision regarding identification for special education services, the team must consistently assess the negative impacts of assigning deficit labels to children, inappropriate placements, and ineffective interventions based on inaccurate assumptions of the etiology of student challenges (Adiche, 2009; Bello et al., 2023; Causey-Konaté, 2023; Darling-Hammond & Cook, 2023; Delahunty & Chiu, 2020; Fergus, 2016; Grande, 1988; Klehm, 2014; Kurian, 2022; Learning Forward, 2022; Miller et al., 2022; Morgan, 2020; Nario-Redmond, 2020; NCLD, 2020; Sebastian Cherng, 2017; Sullivan & Osher, 2019; Wilcox & Lawson, 2022; Yell et al., 2021).

In *Alexander v. Choate* (1985), the U.S. Supreme Court reminded the court of Congress’ perception that discrimination towards individuals with disabilities is “most often the product, not of invidious animus, but rather of thoughtlessness and indifference-of benign neglect” (p. 469). Other federal agencies and advocacy organizations have found similar evidence pointing to discrimination as "primarily the result of apathetic attitudes rather than affirmative animus” (*Alexander v. Choate,* 1985, p. 469). Thus, an evaluation team must actively engage with all moral, ethical, and legal considerations and the consequences of decisions regarding eligibility for, placements in, and services provided by special education.

**Procedural Safeguards**

Once a special education referral is made, IDEA (2004) provides procedural safeguards to ensure that parents’ rights are protected and, through them, the student. Despite well-laid out legislation, the safeguards work only if the parents or guardians have complete knowledge and understanding of their rights and the ability and the means to exercise those rights, if necessary. They include the right to: (a) receive a notice regarding an evaluation request, (b) examine all their student's records, (c) participate in all meetings regarding their student, (d) obtain an independent educational evaluation or private assessment, (e) receive written prior notice before the district takes any action to alter their student's education, placement, or services, (f) request an impartial due process hearing, (g) request mediation and resolution sessions, and (h) appeal any final administrative decision through civil action within the two-year statute of limitations (Rodriguez & Murawski, 2022).

According to a report by the Center on Online Learning and Students with Disabilities (2016), "few states have procedures for monitoring student outcomes," and "approximately 75% of all states and territories have no clear policies and procedures around…[the] IDEA principles: (1) FAPE, (2) LRE, (3) zero reject, (4) nondiscriminatory identification and evaluation, (5) due process safeguards, and (6) parent participation” (Rodriguez & Murawski, 2022, p. 518). Despite the Family Education Rights and Privacy Protection section in the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, and the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act of 1988, most recently amended in January of 2023, many children from families marginalized by society because of their race, ethnicity, culture, language, refugee or immigrant status, home or food insecurity, or socioeconomic status are continually denied their rights to an unbiased, comprehensive evaluation, FAPE, and LRE. These students’ parents or caregivers are often unable to fight for their children’s rights, leading to disproportionate identifications and overrepresentation in special education, placement in segregated settings, and lack of access to high-quality education and effective, evidence-based instructions and interventions (Delahunty & Chiu, 2020; Kurian, 2022; Nario-Redmond, 2020; NCLD, 2020; Sullivan & Osher, 2019; Yell et al., 2021). In addition, seriously disparate disciplinary practices often drive low-performing, students, especially those with externalizing behaviors, out of comprehensive educational settings (Carrero et al., 2019; Delahunty & Chiu, 2020; Fergus, 2016; Franklin et al., 2022; Long & Clark, 2023; Morgan, 2020; Nario-Redmond, 2020; NCLD, 2020; Ohio Department of Education, 2019; Osher et al., 2023; Perry et al., 2022; Ruyle et al., 2019; Skiba et al., 2023).

**Special Educator Retention**

Districts must carefully examine the ideological and educational vision, mission, and message they communicate to all their schools and ensure its clarity and cohesiveness to improve special educator retention. Districts should closely examine their recruitment practices to ensure there is clarity regarding the qualities special educators in their district will require to remain in alignment with the vision and mission of that district (Bettini et al., 2017; Billingsley et al., 2020; Boscardin, 2019; Cobb, 2015; Council of Administrators of Special Education, 2022; De Matthews, 2020; DiPaola & Walter-Thomas, 2003; EAU Claire Area School District, 2017; Hood River County School District, 2006; Lamar County Schools, n.d.; Lassiter et al., 2022; Leithwood et al., 2020; Thompson & O’Brian, 2007; Wilcox & Lawson, 2022). The district should provide consistent and relevant professional development, mentoring, coaching, and support to those they hire and opportunities for continued collaboration and support among colleagues. Building-level administrators must receive training so they can learn to make the necessary structural and organizational changes that will support all educators, including special educators (Allen & Harriott, 2011; Allensworth et al., 2021; Avery et al., 2021; Bateman et al., 2017; Bettini et al., 2017; Billingsley et al., 2020; Boscardin, 2019; Brown, 2023a; Cobb, 2015; Council of Administrators of Special Education, 2022; Darling-Hammond & Cook, 2023; DeMatthews et al., 2020; Elreda et al., 2021; Hochbein et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2021; Landrum et al., 2019; Lassiter et al., 2022; Leithwood et al., 2020; Perrone, 2021; Price, 2021; Rubin et al., 2021; Smith, 2023; Stark, 2021; Summers, 2023; VanGronigen et al., 2021; Wilcox & Lawson, 2022).

Building-level administrators have an unequalled impact on their school’s culture and climate. They must learn how to create a positive, inclusive, collaborative, safe, and supportive school climate and culture (Avery et al., 2021; Bateman et al., 2017; Bettini et al., 2017; Causton & Theoharis, 2014; Cobb, 2015; CEC, 2021; Council of Administrators of Special Education, 2022; Darling-Hammond & Cook, 2023; De Matthews, 2020; DiPaola & Walter-Thomas, 2003; Kurian, 2022; Lassiter et al., 2022; Leithwood et al., 2020; Ohio Department of Education, 2019; Perry et al., 2022; Rose et al., 2019; Wilcox & Lawson, 2022). Building-level administrators’ must increase their knowledge about special education law, policy, and procedure (Bateman et al., 2017; Billingsley et al., 2020; Boscardin, 2019; Cobb, 2015; Council of Administrators of Special Education, 2022; De Matthews, 2020; DiPaola & Walter-Thomas, 2003). Finally, districts should provide professional development and support for their administrators to acquire knowledge and the ability to apply evidence-based instructional and intervention practices so they can supervise, monitor, and support special and general educators (Bateman et al., 2017; Bettini et al., 2017; Billingsley et al., 2020; Boscardin, 2019; Boscardin et al., 2018; Cobb, 2015; CEC, 2021; Council of Administrators of Special Education, 2022; DeMatthews, 2020; DeMatthews et al., 2020; DiPaola & Walter-Thomas, 2003; Lassiter et al., 2022; Leithwood et al., 2020; Wilcox & Lawson, 2022).

**Stakeholder Engagement**

The key to all stakeholders’ engagement is trusting relationships among administrators, school staff, students, parents, and communities. Districts must provide professional development that educates and trains administrators and educators in the social-emotional and diversity required for self- and other awareness that can guide them in building trusting, mutually respectful relationships with all stakeholders. Authentic relationships among all stakeholders will assure continued engagement in the collaboration for student success (Aguilar & Cohen, 2022; Alexander, 2019; Allen & Harriott, 2011; Allensworth et al., 2021; Avery et al., 2021; Bateman et al., 2017; Beecher et al., 2022; Billingsley et al., 2020; Boscardin, 2019; Boscardin et al., 2018; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007; Brown, 2023b; Brown, 2023c; Brummer & Thorsborne, 2021; Cobb, 2015; CEC, 2021; Council of Administrators of Special Education, 2022; Darling-Hammond & Cook, 2023; DeMatthews, 2020; DeMatthews et al., 2020; Hammond, 2015; Hardy, 2023; Hochbein et al., 2021; Jennings, 2019; Kurian, 2022; Lassiter et al., 2022; Learning Forward, 2022; Leithwood et al., 2020; Markowitz & Bouffard, 2020; Ohio Department of Education, 2019; Perry et al., 2022; Price, 2021; Rubin et al., 2021; Venet, 2021; Wilcox & Lawson, 2022).

**Ethical Dilemma Decision Process**

A best-fit process for deciding ethical dilemmas is unique to the specific needs of a population and the context in which educators apply such a process. A multidimensional approach may result in the most effective decision-making process when dealing with diverse populations and contexts. An ethical dilemma exists when choosing between options poses ethical concerns regardless of the action taken (Standish, 2014). Gabriel and Casemore (2009) outline a process for a decision-making process when faced with an ethical dilemma. Although they authored the process for clinical settings, the steps are equally valid in an educational setting, particularly within special education services. The 10-step process Gabriel and Casemore (2009) outlined in their counseling book are adapted for this discussion as follows:

1. Identify the situation or problem considering the facts and any feelings and thoughts surrounding the situation and discuss the dilemma with colleagues and relevant administrators.
2. Outline and describe the situation and the contextual factors of the individuals involved and the situation itself to create clarity.
3. Determine all the stakeholders involved, their personal and professional values, assumptions, beliefs, perceptions, roles and responsibilities, relevant legal obligations, and the main points of conflict or paradox.
4. Consider actions prohibited or required by law, professional ethics, practice guidance, and actions required by the specific working context; determine potential conflicts between ethical principles and laws, and discuss with colleagues and qualified administrators.
5. Consider the moral principles and values that affect the ethical dilemma from each involved stakeholder’s perspective.
6. Identify sources of support and guidance, other types of assistance, and any other available resources.
7. Determine all possible courses of action and involve all stakeholders in this process while considering the impact and consequences of each action.
8. Decide on the best course of action based on legal obligations, contextual and relational factors, moral and ethical dimensions, and potential consequences of the action or inaction; document justification for the decision after collaborating with stakeholders and qualified administrators.
9. Evaluate the outcome of taking the determined course of action based on if it led to a positive result, new factors emerged not previously considered, and whether the stakeholders would make the same decision again; if the evaluation is unfavorable, collaborate with stakeholders on how to proceed in an alternative manner in the future.
10. Consistently ascertain the impact of the decision on each involved stakeholder and determine if there are stakeholders who would benefit from education, skill development, mentoring, or coaching.

If adhered to with fidelity, the design of this ethical dilemma decision process ensures a thorough examination of ethical conflicts and contextual factors, individual factors that contribute to the conflict, the involvement of all stakeholders, and consultation and collaboration with qualified colleagues and administrators prior to taking specific action. The process instructs those involved to evaluate the impacts of the action and make recommendations for future actions as necessary to improve outcomes. Leadership must remember that ethical practices are equally critical in following legal procedures. Without ethical action, the legal procedure alone can potentially miss significant factors in educating students with and without disabilities (Bon, 2012).

**District Plan for Program Improvement**

When Congress passed the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act (2020) and offered the option to the Secretary of Education to waive portions of the IDEA legislation (2004) and Section 504 of the Americans with Disabilities Act as authorized by an amendment to the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, the Secretary chose not to waive any rights and listed several reasons, one of which was, “The needs and best interests of the individual student, not any system, should guide decisions and expenditures” (Rodriguez & Murawski, 2022, p. 515). Districts must improve their approaches to educating *all* students to improve special education programs. The district should assign educational leaders who express interest in domains where they desire to implement evidence-based pedagogies and practices to determine best-fit practices for specific schools (Rodriguez et al., 2021; Tang et al., 2021).

**Identifying Evidence-Based Practices**

Districts can assign experts or educational leaders interested in increasing their knowledge in specific domains to identify evidence-based practices, interventions, and technologies. These collaborative leadership groups can determine the needs of their school and specific student populations and locate studies, data analyses, meta-analyses, and reports supporting the efficacy of specific practices, interventions, or technologies relevant to the school’s needs (DeMartino et al., 2023; Drago-Severson & Joswick-O’Connor, 2023; Nelson et al., 2022; Smith, 2023; Wilcox & Lawson, 2022). An expert team must utilize methods to ensure supporting evidence is sufficient to warrant implementation of any practice, intervention, or technology in their schools, such as: (a) identifying more than one study or circumstance in which researchers or practitioners found the practice, intervention, or technology effective, (b) finding indications that the researchers or practitioners identified and evaluated the efficacy of the essential elements of the practice, intervention, or technology, (c) checking the validity, reliability, credibility, and veracity of the study, analysis, or report that supports the efficacy of the practice, intervention, or technology, and (d) carefully considering the sample population and context in which the researchers’ or practitioners’ found the practice, intervention, or technology effective (Bloomberg, 2023; Cook & Farley, 2021; Fink Chorzempa et al., 2019; Konrad et al., 2019; Leko et al., 2019; Montrosse-Moorhead & Kern, 2017; Mutch et al., 2022; Nelson et al., 2022). If there is a discrepancy between the population and context described in the study or report and the population and context in the school in which the team plans to implement the practice or intervention, or technology, the evidence may not support efficacy in that setting (Bloomberg, 2023; Cresswell & Poth, 2018; Espelage et al., 2022; Mutch et al., 2022). If this is the case, teams must use care in their recommendations and explore modifications that could make practices or technologies a better fit and, as a result, lead to greater efficacy with their students in their school context (Bloomberg, 2023; Espelage et al., 2022; Mutch et al., 2022).

The district must provide appropriate, consistent, longitudinal, and relevant education, training, coaching, practice, and support to both teachers and administrators (Aguilar & Cohen, 2022; Bateman & Cline, 2021; Boscardin, 2021; Cofino, 2023; CEC, 2021; Darling-Hammond & Cook, 2023; Drago-Severson & Joswick-O’Connor, 2023; Katnik, 2023; Landrum et al., 2021; Lassiter et al., 2022; Learning Forward, 2022; Luthar & Peterson-Ahmad, 2022). Building-level administrators must have the freedom to structure the school days to provide their staff with guided reflection time to determine and make any necessary adjustments to new interventions or practices, or in how they make use of technology through collaboration with colleagues and the expert team (Aguilar & Cohen, 2022; Avery et al., 2021; Boscardin, 2021; CEC, 2021; Darling-Hammond & Cook, 2023; Espelage et al., 2022; Kurian, 2022; Landrum et al., 2021; Lassiter et al., 2022; Learning Forward, 2022; Portilla, 2022). The administration should also receive education and training in new technology, interventions, and practices so they can supervise and monitor their staff to ensure fidelity of implementation. The district must provide sufficient and relevant support to ensure the sustainability of new pedagogies and practices (Avery et al., 2021; Boscardin, 2021; CEC, 2021; Darling-Hammond & Cook, 2023; Drago-Severson & Joswick-O’Connor, 2023; Landrum et al., 2021; Lassiter et al., 2022; Learning Forward, 2022; Portilla, 2022).

**The Teaching and Learning Process and Special Educators**

General education is the key to all educational transformation and improving special education pedagogy and practice (Bateman & Cline, 2019; Bishop, 2023; Darling-Hammond & Cook, 2023; Kurian, 2022; Lesley, 2023; Portilla, 2022). In this philosophy, Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) are an essential pedagogical guide (Darling-Hammond & Cook, 2023; Espelage et al., 2022; Lane et al., 2019; Miller et al., 2022). However, successful implementation of MTSS requires appropriate, relevant, ongoing education, training, coaching, practice, and support for all administrators and educators (Darling-Hammond & Cook, 2023; Lane et al., 2019; Miller et al., 2022).Effective MTSS pedagogy demands early universal screening for the impacts of trauma and academic, social-emotional, and functional skill challenges that do not lead to labeling and categorizing but targeted, effective interventions (Avery et al., 2021; Darling-Hammond & Cook, 2023; Dever et al., 2016; Espelage et al., 2022; Ganias, 2023; Kurian, 2022; Lesley, 2023; Miller et al., 2022; Portilla, 2022).

The MTSS model requires frequent and consistent data collection, employing multiple methods, and gathering information from multiple sources (Darling-Hammond & Cook, 2023; Espelage et al., 2022; Lane et al., 2023; Miller et al., 2022). Educators must regularly reflect on their practices and conduct data analyses from multiple perspectives to improve their instruction and interventions. The district must implement any MTSS model with complete fidelity and fully commit to supporting MTSS to make it viable and sustainable (Cook & Farley, 2019; Darling-Hammond & Cook, 2023; Espelage et al., 2022; Ganias, 2023; Lane et al., 2023; Miller et al., 2022). Finally, all stakeholders must ethically implement MTSS and refrain from using the model as an alternative method to fast-track students into special education or out of comprehensive high school settings (Darling-Hammond & Cook, 2023; Espelage et al., 2022; Fergus, 2016; Lane et al., 2019; Miller et al., 2022; Ruyle et al., 2019).

Altering the roles of special educators will benefit the teaching and learning process for all educators and students. If freed from teaching in segregated classrooms, special educators can become instruction and intervention experts for the school as a whole. Special educators can educate, train, coach, and support administrators and general educators in facilitating learning for all students (Bryant et al., 2020; California Association of Professors of Special Education, 2022; Jung et al., 2019; Landrum et al., 2019; Learning Forward, 2022; Mason, 2022; Office of Education Technology, 2017; Rodriguez & Murawski, 2022; Schuh et al., 2022). If they are not teaching content courses or providing remedial educational interventions in alternative settings, special educators can:

1. Model effective practices in general education settings through co-teaching.
2. Improve educator instructional practices with Universal Design for Learning, eliminating the need for most enumerated content access and mastery demonstration accommodations.
3. Collaborate on developing curriculum for learning stations that employ multiple modalities for accessing content and demonstrating mastery.
4. Institute student-driven service learning opportunities.
5. Model how to explicitly teach students to collaborate and cooperate in groups for task completion.
6. Model how to form student groups purposefully to make task completion efforts more effective.
7. Train educators to conduct error analyses for diagnostic purposes.
8. Guide educator and administrator reflective practices for instructional and intervention improvement.
9. Train educators in assessing student engagement and how to involve and empower students in their learning process.
10. Help reframe teachers’ and administrators’ understanding about the relational, bidirectional nature of learning.
11. Model and guide educator and administrator reflection to facilitate building trusting relationships with students.
12. Guide educators in recognizing the impacts of multi-layered trauma and hierarchical power structures on themselves and their students.
13. Train educators to recognize the brain region from which students are operating and efficiently assist students to move into the brain region where they can learn.
14. Assist with data collection and analysis in general education settings to improve practices.
15. Provide resources to general educators to assist in developing role clarity and setting healthy boundaries with administrators, colleagues, and students.
16. Provide resources to general educators so they can establish a consistent self-care practice.
17. Model recognizing and interrupting microaggressions and correcting for status issues in the power topography of the classroom.
18. Train and assist educators in how to engage in social justice and equity practices and implement restorative justice approaches.
19. Model and train educators in Culturally Responsive Teaching.
20. Model and train educators in trauma-sensitive approaches and inclusive practices (CEC, 2021; Delahunty & Chiu, 2020; De Lapp, 2021a; Learning Forward, 2022; Mason, 2022; Nario-Redmond, 2020; Safir & Dugan, 2021; Schuh et al., 2022).

**Evidence-Based Practices for Instruction and Intervention**

Studies have established substantial evidence of the efficacy of specific pedagogies, instructional practices, and interventions that have either not yet bridged the research-to-practice gap or suffer from lack of implementation fidelity when districts adopt them, such as:

* Learning is relational, dynamic, and bidirectional (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007; Cantor et al., 2019; Darling-Hammond & Cook, 2023; Kurian, 2022; Learning Forward, 2022; LaFrance & Rakes, 2022; Milner et al., 2019; Ruyle et al., 2019; Safir & Dugan, 2021).
* Universal Design for Learning is the most effective instructional practice to ensure equity and inclusion (Bateman & Cline, 2019; Chardin & Novak, 2021; Cook & Rao, 2018; NCLD, 2020; Rodriguez & Murawski, 2022).
* Trusting relationships are the foundation of the teaching and learning process (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007; Brummer & Thorsborne, 2021; Cantor et al., 2019; Connor & Cavendish, 2020; Craig, 2017; Hammond, 2015; Izard, 2016; Jennings, 2019; Jensen, 2019; Lopez, 2017; Ettekal & Shi, 2020; Learning Forward, 2022; Levine & Kline, 2007; Liang et al., 2019; Markowitz & Bouffard, 2020; Milner et al., 2019; Mutch et al., 2022; O’Drobinak & Kelley, 2020; Osher et al., 2020; The Australian Society for Evidence-Based Teaching, 2020; Venet, 2021; Zacarian et al., 2017; Zee et al., 2020).
* Behavior etiology is often related to contextual factors outside the student's control but co-regulating teachers can provide instruction in emotion regulation, distress tolerance healthy coping mechanisms, and social-emotional skills that empower students to alter their responses (Alexander, 2019; Brummer & Thorsborne, 2021; Craig, 2017; Hardy, 2023; Jennings, 2019; Jensen, 2019; Kline, 2020; Levine & Kline, 2007; Maté & Maté, 2022; O’Drobinak & Kelley, 2020; Powell & Kusuma-Powell, 2010; Venet, 2021).
* Restorative justice practices are the most effective disciplinary approach and generalize to contexts outside the school setting (Alexander, 2019; Avery et al., 2021; Brummer & Thorsborne, 2021; Carrero et al., 2019; Darling-Hammond & Cook, 2023; Espelage et al., 2022; Evans & Vaandering, 2016; Garrett Holbert & Boddie, 2022; Long & Clark, 2023; Maynard & Weinstein, 2020; Milner et al., 2019; NCLD, 2020; Perry et al., 2022; Ohio Department of Education, 2019; Smith et al., 2015; Smith et al., 2022; Venet, 2021; Winn, 2018).
* Collaboration with students to establish expectations for interactions in the classroom is more effective than demanding compliance to a predetermined set of rules (Alexander, 2019; Avery et al., 2021; Bateman & Cline, 2019; Brummer & Thorsborne, 2021; Craig, 2017; Espelage et al., 2022; Evans & Vaandering, 2016; Foreman & Bates, 2022; Jennings, 2019; Jensen, 2019; Maynard & Weinstein, 2020; Milner et al., 2019; Powell & Kusuma-Powell, 2010; Ruyle et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2022; Venet, 2021; Winn, 2018)
* Understanding student perspectives is the most significant factor in determining the impact of teacher behavior on students (Alexander, 2019; Avery et al., 2021; Eakins, 2022; Hammond, 2015; Jennings, 2019; O’Drobinak & Kelley, 2020; Powell & Kusuma-Powell, 2010; Smith et al., 2015; Venet, 2021).
* Equitable practices and Culturally Responsive Teaching methods increase instructional efficacy (Alexander, 2019; Avery et al., 2021; Brummer & Thorsborne, 2021; Christle et al., 2019; Craig, 2017; Eakins, 2022; Foreman & Bates, 2022; Hammond, 2015; Hardy, 2023; Jennings, 2019; Jensen, 2019; Kurian, 2022; Markowitz & Bouffard, 2020; Nario-Redmond, 2020; O’Drobinak & Kelley, 2020; Perry et al., 2022; Powell & Kusuma-Powell, 2010; Smith et al., 2015; Smith et al., 2022; Venet, 2021).
* The ability to recognize when a student is not operating from the prefrontal cortex where executive functioning occurs and know how to move them into that brain region so they can learn increases instructional time (Alexander, 2019; Brummer & Thorsborne, 2021; Craig, 2017; Hardy, 2023; Keels, 2023; Kline, 2020; Kurian, 2022; Levine & Kline, 2007; Mutch et al., 2022; O’Drobinak & Kelley, 2020; Perry, 2009; Portilla, 2022; Venet, 2021)
* The ability to acknowledge and recognize the challenges inherent in building trust when there is a significant power differential leads to higher efficacy in relationship-building (Alexander, 2019; Avery et al., 2021; Espelage et al., 2022; Hardy, 2023; Jennings, 2019; Keels, 2023; Kurian, 2022; Nario-Redmond, 2020; Nobel, 2022; Perry et al., 2022; Powell & Kusuma-Powell, 2010; Venet, 2021).

Educator and administrator skills that optimize student outcomes and are well-supported by research include: (a) listening without judgment, (b) respecting, honoring, and learning about the realities of students’ lives that differ from theirs, (c) reframing the concept of “failure” for all stakeholders, (d) assuming the role of advocate and learner, in addition to teacher or administrator, (e) providing learning centers before and after school with adults available to competently assist students for every subject, (f) teaching developmentally appropriate neuroscience to students to promote self-regulation and understanding about one’s ability to rewire the brain, (g) empowering students and educators with voice and choice in all aspects of the teaching and learning process, (h) making students equal stakeholders in their education by presenting them with the standards they must learn through developmentally appropriate means and collaborating with them to build a plan to learn them, and (i) building missing academic skills into age-appropriate curriculum using evidence-based instructional practices (Agorastos et al., 2019; Alexander, 2019; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007; Brown, 2017; Brummer & Thorsborne, 2021; Cantor et al., 2019; Chardin & Novak, 2021; Craig, 2017; Eakins, 2022; Hammond, 2015; Hardy, 2023; Immordino-Yang et al., 2019; Jennings, 2019; Jensen, 2019; Jitendra et al., 2017; Keels, 2023; Kline, 2020; Lahousen et al., 2019; Levine & Kline, 2007; O’Drobinak & Kelley, 2020; Powell & Kusuma-Powell, 2010; Rodriguez & Murawski, 2022; Siegal, 2018; Siegal & Bryson, 2011; Smith et al., 2015; Smith et al., 2022; van der Kolk, 2014; Venet, 2021; Zacarian et al., 2017; Zacarian & Silverstone, 2020).

Research has shown that extrinsic reward systems that involve bribery and conditional acceptance and approval are not only ineffective in altering behavior beyond the immediate time frame but if relied on for too long, can inhibit students' ability to develop intrinsic motivation and personal accountability (Anderson, 2021; Maynard & Weinstein, 2020; Murayama et al., 2010; Smith et al., 2015; Smith et al., 2022) Exclusionary consequences for behaviors that make educators and administrators feel uncomfortable or threatened can lead to an increase in frequency and severity of that behavior. Students who exhibit noncompliant, hostile, or aggressive behaviors that push helping adults away need connection more than any other students. Adults must persist in their attempts to connect when students are pushing them away the hardest because that is when a breakthrough in building trust can occur (Alexander, 2019; Avery et al., 2021; Brummer & Thorsborne, 2021; Christle et al., 2019; Craig, 2017; Darling-Hammond & Cook, 2023; Espelage et al., 2022; Jennings, 2019; Jensen, 2019; Keels, 2023; Kurian, 2022; Milner et al., 2019; Mutch et al., 2022; Nario-Redmond, 2020; NCLD, 2020; O’Drobinak & Kelley, 2020; Portilla, 2022; Schuh et al., 2022; Smith et al., 2015; Venet, 2021; Zacarian et al., 2017). Finally, educators and administrators must recognize when their negative beliefs and biases lead to assumptions that limit and stigmatize students so that they can alter their words and behaviors to boost students’ belief in themselves and their ability to succeed (Alexander, 2019; Avery et al., 2021; Brummer & Thorsborne, 2021; Christle et al., 2019; Craig, 2017; Darling-Hammond & Cook, 2023; Espelage et al., 2022; Fergus, 2016; Jennings, 2019; Jensen, 2019; Keels, 2023; Kurian, 2022; Milner et al., 2019; Mutch et al., 2022; Nario-Redmond, 2020; NCLD, 2020; O’Drobinak & Kelley, 2020; Portilla, 2022; Schuh et al., 2022; Sebastian Cherng, 2017; Smith et al., 2015; Venet, 2021; Zacarian et al., 2017).

**Data Collection and Analysis**

Districts can use the data gathered by schools to better organize and improve the quality and efficacy of all practices and interventions, or a program design. Administrators and educators must learn how to systematically collect and analyze data collection and analysis in the methods chosen by the leadership team through consistent, regular professional development, mentoring, coaching, and practice. The administration at both the district and building levels must provide sufficient and relevant supervision and support to educators to ensure that they implement every element of a program with fidelity and so the school can sustain the program over time. Without organizational, structural, financial, and supervisory support and the necessary training, coaching, and resources, any data collection and analysis program, no matter how well supported by evidence, will fail to produce the positive outcomes desired by districts (Billingsley et al., 2020; Espelage et al., 2022; NCLD, 2020; Portilla, 2022). When educators collaborate to collect and analyze data, there is less of a task burden for each staff member.

When special educators become experts in instruction and intervention, they can mentor, coach, and support general educators in the domains of data collection and collaborative analyses to improve classroom practices (Bryant et al., 2020; California Association of Professors of Special Education, 2022; Jung et al., 2019; Landrum et al., 2019; Learning Forward, 2022; Mason, 2022; Office of Education Technology, 2017; Rodriguez & Murawski, 2022; Schuh et al., 2022). Hybrid models for education and training using interactive online learning modules may provide more flexibility in training administrators and educators (Juarez & Purper, 2018; Montrosse-Moorhead & Kern, 2017; Office of Education Technology, 2017; Rodriguez et al., 2021; Smith & Bryant, 2014). However, online learning modules cannot replace in-person mentoring and collaborative reflection or the process of real-time application and practice.

Educators and administrators can employ many methods for data collection and gather information from many sources to evaluate the effectiveness and viability of the program the district or school implements. These sources and methods include (a) assessing student progress through ePortfolio methods, Curriculum-Based Measurements and Assessments (CBMs/CBAs), (b) gaining student feedback through student response surveys, individual dialogue, and focus group discussions, (c) gaining parent input through surveys, feedback through dialogue, and focus groups, (c) gaining school staff input through surveys of teachers, support staff, and other providers, and staff focus groups, (d) gaining input from building-level administrator surveys and focus groups, and (e) gaining input from community members and organizations through surveys, dialogues, and focus groups (Avery et al., 2021; CEC, 2021; Darling-Hammond & Cook, 2023; Espelage et al., 2022; Luther & Peterson-Ahmad, 2022; NCLD, 2020; Portilla, 2022; Wilcox & Lawson, 2022).

Technology can assist in the process of measuring progress. For example, staff may use interactive software as one method of basic assessment of concept mastery or application that complements supplemental interactive learning modules with which students engaged (Montrosse-Moorhead & Kern, 2017; Oakes et al., 2018; Sayeski et al., 2015; Smith & Bryant, 2014; The IRIS Center, 2014). However, educators should only rely on software for a foundational analysis rather than as a final mastery measure. Supplementing data collection and analysis with interactive software allows educators to focus more time on task analysis to increase instructional efficacy and error analysis for diagnostic purposes.

Data collection and analysis can assist in identifying student engagement measures and interventions. Districts can provide professional development for all administrators, educators, and support staff to train them to recognize and check for student disengagement, analyze plausible etiologies, and adjust their instruction or interactions accordingly. In addition, administrators and educators can learn effective methods for collaborating with students on the standards for each grade through adopting developmentally appropriate methodology, and ascertain their thoughts on the best methods for them to learn and master the concepts (Avery et al., 2021; Espelage et al., 2022; Ohio Department of Education, 2019; Portilla, 2022; Wilcox & Lawson, 2022).

Educators can seek student feedback regarding ideas for improving the classroom climate, culture, instructional content, delivery, and methods for demonstrating mastery. During student feedback discussions, educators can guide the dialogue toward ideas for decreasing disruptions, increasing instructional time, improving everyone's wellbeing, and decreasing everyone's stress and anxiety levels. Also, students have a multitude of ideas regarding how to make learning more engaging, collaborative, and cooperative. The district must educate their staff so educators can teach students about rewiring their brains for more efficient and effective learning (Avery et al., 2021; CEC, 2021; Espelage et al., 2022; Mason, 2022; Milner et al., 2019; Ohio Department of Education, 2019; Portilla, 2022; Wilcox & Lawson, 2022).

Humans are born with a natural curiosity that can get buried by events out of children’s control but educators can rekindle that natural desire to learn, empowering students to become agents of their own change. Educators can also acquire students’ assistance in data gathering and assessing the efficacy of instruction and interventions. Empowering students to become experts and advocates in their educational experience and to place them in control of finding what works best for them will ultimately assist educators in becoming better teachers. When educators involve students in the entire process of their learning, giving them choice and voice, students become more invested in the process (Avery et al., 2021; Espelage et al., 2022; Mason, 2022; Milner et al., 2019; Ohio Department of Education, 2019; Portilla, 2022; Wilcox & Lawson, 2022).

Districts must train all stakeholders on how to reframe their thinking regarding new data collection and analysis practices so that they consider every approach experimental. While utilizing a methodical trial and error procedure to find the best methods for specific classes and students, administrators and educators must implement the practices with fidelity and sufficient and relevant support, and document the process. The school must provide time in the schedule and a safe space for educator collaboration, coaching, and support for colleagues to reflect and examine the efficacy of their instruction and intervention practices, to optimize those practices (CEC, 2021; Hoffer, 2020; Hollingsworth & Clarke, 2017; Lyons et al., 2022; Mason, 2022; Montrosse-Moorhead & Kern, 2017; White, 2022).

**Technology Plan**

An educational leadership technology team must first determine bound skills and types of knowledge that educators and administrators can effectively acquire through technology alone and differentiate those from other domains that require personal interaction. The team must also identify content and skills that educators and students can acquire through hybrid methods (Childre & Van Rie, 2015; Montrosse-Moorhead & Kern, 2017; Rodriguez et al., 2021). The technology leadership team can acquire mastery with the various types of technology and become coaches and mentors to train other administrators and educators in technology that the team determines is the best fit for their schools.

Helpful technology for educators supplies basic knowledge acquisition in such areas as law and policy. Software programs that can streamline paperwork and the process of data collection are also valuable (Juarez & Purper, 2018; Montrosse-Moorhead & Kern, 2017; Office of Education Technology, 2017; Smith & Bryant, 2014). An example of beneficial technology for educators is the digital portfolio, for which districts can provide training so that educators can simultaneously broaden and streamline the content mastery assessment process (Eynon & Gambino, 2017).

For students who must compensate for reading or writing disabilities, there are many assistive technology programs such as speech-to-text software, text analysis software operated by voice search cues to locate evidentiary “support” for written work, text editing software that responds to speech input, and scanning technology with text to speech software (Conderman et al., 2017; CEC, 2021; Mason et al., 2017; Morin, n.d.; Wexler et al., 2019). To supplement in-person instruction, UDL interactive learning modules aligned with in-person UDL instruction can provide additional knowledge acquisition, practice, and application time (Chardin & Novak, 2021; Cook & Rao, 2018; Courey et al., 2012; Juarez & Purper, 2018). Mathematics interactive online learning modules can provide the extra practice and application time many students require to master concepts as long as the learning module instruction matches the in-person instruction received from the student’s teacher (Foegen et al., 2017; Vaughn et al., 2012).

**Unique Services Provided**

**Why Service Learning**

For many students who have difficulties connecting their educational experiences to their lived experiences, service learning provides the “why” of education. Service learning can create the belonging that students require to continue attending school. In addition, service learning connects the school context to real life for many students instead of cementing the surreal nature of the school environment as the education process continues. Many students have difficulties connecting with people in positions of authority who demand respect but offer none in return and know very little, if anything, about their lives. Educators too often refuse to acknowledge the differences between their reality and their students’ and fail to express that they understand or care that there is a difference. When educators engage with students in their self-determined service learning projects, students feel seen, heard, and valued for who they are, the foundation of any trusting relationship (Alexander, 2019; Ayscue & Frankenberg, 2023; Brummer & Thorsborne, 2021; Darling-Hammond & Cook, 2023; Franklin et al., 2022; Hammond, 2015; Howard, 2023; Jennings, 2019; Jensen, 2019; Lesley, 2023; Milner et al., 2019; Perry et al., 2022; Venet, 2021).

Service learning builds student empowerment and social responsibility and helps them understand that they can make the changes *they* identify as needed in their communities. In addition, service learning allows students to try, "fail," and learn from their mistakes while still in a supportive environment, and this leads to future, more successful attempts. The more they work in the real world, the better students understand the barriers to change, as well as the available resources. Through this process, students learn they have the strength, resilience, and perseverance to become change agents rather than victims of their circumstances (Fullmer et al., 2022; Jensen, 2019; Ohio Department of Education, 2019; Perry et al., 2022).

**Why Teach Students to Navigate Hierarchical Power Structures**

Many students face marginalization in the larger society and the hierarchical systems in which they must learn to function. School is a microcosm of the same hierarchical power structure and has the potential to provide a safe space from which students can learn to navigate such a system from the bottom rung and still get their needs met. Educators can assist students in developing the necessary skills to succeed in such a power structure without students feeling that they must give up their identity or risk injuring themselves. While supported within the school, students can learn how to acquire what they need from people placed on higher rungs within the system. The heightened awareness, learning experiences, and the skill acquisition will serve students in the future in every other societal hierarchical power structure (Borrego et al., 2022; Powell & Kusuma Powell, 2010; Jennings, 2019).

**Why Teach Educators Self-Care and Boundary-Setting**

Along with self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-reflection, educators require self-compassion to engage with students exposed to trauma. Implementing trauma-sensitive practices requires appropriate training, tools, and support…. Educators must commit to self-care [and learn to set healthy boundaries] to continue to be present for their students and aware of their emotions and needs (De Lapp, 2023c, Slide 17).

Implementing intersectional, equity-driven, trauma-sensitive practices is realistic with sufficient and consistent self-care practices and boundary setting. Districts must provide professional development and support that targets self-care and boundary-setting skills for educators so that implementation of evidence-based, intersectional pedagogies is viable (De Lapp, 2023c).

**Conclusion**

Although Einstein never said, “Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid,” and that quote is difficult to source, the current educational system is founded on a deficit-model, and consistently compared to the pathological model of medical practice (Bernard & Mondale, 2001; Dufresne, 2018; Kaestle, 1983; Tyack, 1974). In 1908, one of the oldest scholarly journals of education received permission from Dolbear, an educator and physicist at Tufts College, to print the allegory on the educational system he presented during one of his many public appearances.

In antediluvian times, while the animal kingdom was being differentiated into swimmers, climbers, fliers, and runners, there was a school for the development of the animals. The theory of the school was that the best animals should be able to do one thing as well as another.

If there was, in a given animal, an apparent aptitude for doing one thing and an apparent inaptitude for doing other things, the time and effort should be spent upon the latter instead of the former.

If an animal had short legs and good wings, attention should be devoted to running so as to even up the qualities as far as possible.

So the duck was kept waddling instead of swimming. The pelican was kept wagging his short wings in the attempt to fly. The eagle was made to run and allowed to fly only for recreation, while maturing tadpoles were unmercifully guyed for being neither one thing nor another.

All this in the name of education. Nature was not to be trusted in her make-up of individuals, for individuals should be symmetrically developed and similar, for their own welfare as well as for the welfare of the community.

The animals that would not submit to such training, but persisted in developing the best gifts they had, were dishonored, and humiliated in many ways. They were stigmatized as being narrow-minded and specialists, and special difficulties were placed in their way when they attempted to ignore the theory of education recognized by the school.

No one was allowed to graduate from that school unless he could climb, swim, run, and fly at certain prescribed rates; so it happened that the time wasted by the duck in the attempt to run had so hindered him from swimming that his swimming muscles had atrophied and he was hardly able to swim at all; and, in addition, he had been scolded, punished, and ill-treated in many ways so as to make his life a burden. He left school humiliated, and the ornithorhynchus could beat him both running or swimming. Indeed, the latter was awarded a prize in two departments.

The eagle could make no headway in climbing to the top of a tree, and although he showed he could get there just the same, the performance was counted a demerit, since it had not been done in the prescribed way.

An abnormal eel with large pectoral fins proved he could run, swim, climb trees, and fly a little. He was made valedictorian (Dolbear, 1908).

An educational system designed in this manner is harmful to any who do not fit inside a small box, whose parameters are defined by a limited number of people with one perspective and a desire for compliance and submission. For this reason, educators must ensure that a multi-disciplinary team is involved in any evaluative effort for any student. All team members must focus on students' strengths rather than pathologizing students' areas of challenge. If educators succeed in altering their deficit-model thinking and broaden their perspectives and knowledge of life experiences, they will gain superior capacities to actualize positive outcomes for all students (Gargiulo & Bouck, 2021; Pierangelo & Giuliani, 2015; Rodriguez & Murawski, 2022).

**Potential Benefits of Implementing an Intersectional Pedagogical Program**

**Benefits for the District, Schools, and Administration**

* Improvement of all stakeholders’ wellbeing.
* Continued independent and collaborative staff growth and learning.
* Increased teacher retention due to decreased risk of teacher burnout.
* Welcoming, inclusive, supportive, and positive school climate and culture.
* Improved relationships among administrators, staff, students, parents, and the community.
* Interruption of the school-to-prison pipeline.
* Improved student academic performance, social-emotional skills, and outcomes.
* Increased administrator self-efficacy, job competency, and job satisfaction.
* Decreased administrator stress.
* Increased data regarding effective methodologies for staff training and support.

**Benefits for Teachers**

* Improved social-emotional skills and relationships with ***all*** students.
* Effective, viable practices to prevent and de-escalate potential conflicts in the classroom.
* Effective, viable practices to create an inclusive classroom culture conducive to learning.
* Improved Social Justice & Equity and Culturally Responsive Teaching.
* Welcoming, inclusive, supportive, and positive school climate and culture.
* Decreased student disruptions in class, work stress, compassion fatigue, and risk of burnout.
* Increased instruction time, self-efficacy, and wellbeing.

**Benefits for Students**

* Positive, supportive, trusting relationships with teachers and administrators.
* Welcoming, inclusive, supportive, and positive school climate and culture.
* Improved academic performance, self-regulation, social-emotional skills, and outcomes (Aguilar & Cohen, 2022; Alam & Ahmad, 2018; Alexander, 2019; Allensworth et al., 2021; Anderson, 2021; Arao & Clemens, 2013; Ashraf, 2022; Avery et al., 2021; Ayscue & Frankenberg, 2023; Bateman & Cline, 2019; Bauer & McCarthy, 2023; Bear et al., 2015; Beecher et al., 2022; Bettini et al., 2017; Billingsley et al., 2020; Boscardin, 2019; Boscardin et al., 2018; Brackett, 2018; Brown, 2017; Brummer & Thorsborne, 2021; Burns, 2020; Callicott & Baker, 2023; Campbell Jones et al., 2020; Cantor et al., 2019; Carrero et al., 2019; Causton & MacLeod, 2020; Chardin & Novak, 2021; Christle et al., 2019; Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2021; Connor & Cavendish, 2020; Craig, 2017; deCastro & Pereira, 2019; Darling-Hammond & Cook, 2023; Davis et al., 2022; Delahooke, 2019; Delahunty & Chiu, 2020; DeMatthews, 2020; DeMatthews et al., 2020; Donahue-Keegan et al., 2019; Dutil, 2020; Eakins, 2022; Edyburn et al., 2022; Eller & Hierck, 2021; Elreda et al., 2021; Espelage et al., 2022; Ettikal & Shi, 2020; Fan et al., 2019; Foreman & Bates, 2022; Franklin et al., 2022; Frey et al., 2022; Fullmer et al., 2022; Gaines et al., 2023; Garcia-Moya, 2020; Garrett Holbert & Boddie, 2022; Gerald, 2019; Haggis, 2017; Halloun, 2020; Hammond, 2015; Hardy, 2023; Harper, 2020; Hen & Goroshit, 2016; Hochbein et al., 2021; Hoffer, 2020; Hollingsworth & Clarke, 2017; Howard, 2023; Ibrahim & Zaatari, 2020; Jackson, 2019; Jennings, 2021; Jennings, 2019; Jensen, 2019; Joseph & George Carri, 2018; Jung et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2021; Kline, 2020; Kurian, 2022; LaFrance & Rakes, 2022; Lahousen et al., 2019; Lambert & McCarthy, 2023; Landrum et al., 2019; Lane et al., 2023; Lassiter et al., 2022; Leggio & Terras, 2019; Leithwood et al., 2020; Lesley, 2023; Levine & Kline, 2007; Liang et al., 2020; Long & Clark, 2023; Longobardi et al., 2021; Lopez, 2017; Lucas, 2018; Luther & Peterson-Ahmad, 2022; Lyons et al., 2022; Markowitz & Bouffard, 2020; Markowitz & Thowdis, 2021; Martin & Collie, 2019; Mason, 2022; Maté & Maté, 2022; Maynard & Weinstein, 2020; Miller et al., 2022; Morton et al., 2023; Mutch et al., 2022; NCLD, 2020; O’Drobinak & Kelley, 2020; Osher et al., 2020; Perrone, 2021; Perry, 2009; Perry et al., 2022; Phifer & Hull, 2016; Portilla, 2022; Poulou, 2020; Powell & Kusuma-Powell, 2010; Price, 2021; Quin, 2017; Reynolds & Astor, 2023; Romero et al., 2018; Rose et al., 2019; Rubin et al., 2021; Ruyle et al., 2019; Safir & Dugan, 2021; Sanders et al., 2016; Schuh et al., 2022; Siegal, 2018; Siegal & Bryson, 2011; Skiba et al., 2023; Smith et al., 2015; Smith et al., 2022; Souers & Hall, 2016; Stark, 2021; Sullivan & Osher, 2019; Tian et al., 2022; Tonich, 2021; van der Kolk, 2014; VanGronigen et al., 2021; Venet, 2021; Walker & Graham, 2021; Wang, 2022; Weissberg et al., 2015; White, 2022; Wilcox & Lawson, 2022; Winn, 2018; Zacarian et al., 2017; Zacarian & Silverstone, 2020; Zee et al., 2020).

Educators are responsible for two jobs: facilitating the teaching and learning process and creating opportunities for students…. tasks requiring specific knowledge and skill sets. The requisite knowledge and the relevant skill sets have evolved as the current student population faces a reality for which the educational system and those within it are unprepared.

The education system still pushes out the same students it has historically, and their numbers are growing. Many students the system "erases" are still strong, resilient fighters and survivors until they are removed. If teacher education programs can provide the skills and abilities educators truly need to facilitate these students' learning and empower them through all available opportunities, our society will follow these students' lead as they affect positive changes in communities nationwide.

Strong, effective leadership comes from academic knowledge and overcoming personal struggle, fighting for empowerment, and building the resilience to thrive. When educators succeed in teaching our fighters, these students gain the ability to enhance society's awareness of viable methods to address challenges, unite separate factions working to ensure equal rights for all people and inspire and lead the transformation of society *and* education (De Lapp, 2023c, Slide 18).

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