

A Principal's Guide to **SPECIAL EDUCATION**

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WHAT DOES A PRINCIPAL NEED TO KNOW ABOUT SPECIAL EDUCATION?

01

A principal must understand that special education is a comprehensive system designed to meet the unique educational needs of students with disabilities. This involves not only the legal mandates, such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (see Chapter 2), which guarantees students a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment, but also the individualized education program (IEP) process, the diverse instructional strategies, accommodations, and specialized services necessary for these students to succeed. An effective principal ensures collaboration between general and special education teachers, promotes a culture of inclusion, and advocates for necessary resources and professional development, all while maintaining the vision that every student, regardless of ability, has the right to a quality education.



Quick Points

- It is important to understand how services for students with disabilities have evolved over time.
- Providing appropriate special education is the responsibility of all staff-not just the special education teachers.
- Parents play a vital role in special education services-make sure they are consulted, *listened to*, and involved.

Introduction

A school principal must possess a comprehensive understanding of special education to ensure the growth of all students and lead a community of educators. This encompasses not only the details of legalities and procedures but also the aspects of teaching and interpersonal relationships. Foremost, it's crucial for principals to be well-versed with foundational legal frameworks like the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and any pertinent state-specific regulations. The journey in special education begins with the process of student identification, which encompasses systems like Response to Intervention (RTI), Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) and Child Find. Additionally, early intervention stands out as an important concept, as the teams must distinguish between medical diagnoses and educational classifications.

Central to special education is the Individualized Education Program (IEP) (see

Chapter 6). A principal should not only understand its critical components but also actively participate in and facilitate productive IEP meetings, while upholding the rights and responsibilities of all stakeholders involved. In tandem with this, the emphasis on inclusion and the principle of the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) cannot be overstated (see Chapter 7). The benefits of inclusivity are numerous and are backed by extensive research. This perspective necessitates general education teachers receive ample support in terms of curriculum modifications and accommodations. Furthermore, an inclusive mindset invites strategies such as co-teaching and encourages a collaborative planning environment.

Differentiated instruction recognizes the diversity of student learning needs, championing methods like flexible grouping and diverse assessment techniques. When considering behavioral aspects, it's essential to lean towards proactive strategies like Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and to be equipped with tools like Functional Behavioral Assessments (FBAs) and Behavior Intervention Plans (BIPs) (see Chapter 9). Effective communication serves as the backbone of this intricate system, necessitating collaboration between general and special education staff while fostering strong parent-guardian relationships. To bolster these efforts, principals must ensure professional development for staff, linking best practices in special education with collaborative techniques. Resource allocation is an important part of a thriving special education program, intertwined with a good understanding of the role of federal, state, and local funding.

Finally, transition services designed to prepare students with disabilities for life post-school, be it in college, a career, or community roles, are also important for older students (typically older than 14). It's also necessary to approach special education with a sense of cultural sensitivity and equity, acknowledging the overlapping realms of disability with other socio-cultural factors and addressing any biases. Ultimately, appropriate special education services demand continuous reflection, assessment, and a commitment to each student's equitable, high-quality educational journey.

The History of Special Education

The evolution of special education is a forgotten part of the history of educational services. For school principals, understanding this journey is important; it provides them with the necessary context to respond to their extensive responsibilities effectively and advocate for their students' rights.

In ancient Greece and Rome, societal attitudes were often unsympathetic toward individuals with disabilities, resulting in their marginalization or abandonment. As grim as it may seem, this historical context serves as a reminder to principals of the necessary strides made in ensuring equity and the continuous fight against any remnants of these outdated beliefs.

The Renaissance era, celebrated for its broader intellectual awakening, nudged society closer to a better understanding of disabilities. Yet, the 18th century's asylums, despite offering a refuge, did not provide educational services. They provided care but also isolated their residents, underlining the crucial role of principals today in ensuring students with disabilities are a part of the school-not just housed in a room down the hall.

During the 19th century came education pioneers like Jean-Marc Itard and Édouard Séguin, who laid foundational principles in special education. The specialized institutions for the deaf and blind, while revolutionary, highlighted the responsibility of today's principals: ensuring that specialized provisions do not lead to segregation.

There were a number of lawsuits that paved the way for special education, those along with the necessity of states wanting to have an educated population. As special classes began emerging within public schools, it became evident that a leadership role was essential in ensuring their success. The civil rights movement's cascading effect on special education, culminating in the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHA) and later the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), mandates principals to be well-versed in legislative provisions and rights. They must be proactive, ensuring their schools understand the letter as well as the spirit of the law.

Moreover, the concepts of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) and the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) underscored the principal's role as both a facilitator and a leader. They are tasked with ensuring these processes are collaborative, involve key stakeholders, and genuinely work to provide the student an appropriate education.

The shift toward inclusive education, bolstered by the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), redefined school communities. Principals now are not merely administrative heads but are leaders, working with all staff to lead the necessary services. They need ensure teachers receive the training to support all students and that resources, both human and material, are aptly allocated.

As special education has evolved, there are many responsibilities of principals regarding special education. They must foster a culture of inclusion, ensure compliance with legal mandates, facilitate professional development for their staff, and engage actively with parents and guardians. Furthermore, they are instrumental in advocating for resources, championing early intervention, and monitoring the effectiveness of special education programs. All these duties underline important concept: special education has changed over the years and therefore so has the role of the principal in shaping its future.

More History

The journey of special education is, in many ways, a reflection of society's evolving understanding and acceptance of differences. As noted above, children with disabilities were often relegated to the fringes—either isolated from mainstream society or placed in institutions. As time progressed, a noticeable shift began to take shape in the educational arena. The prevailing attitude began to transition from one of isolation to one that not only provides an education but also works to integrate the students to be a part of the school. Central to this transformation were groundbreaking legislative initiatives such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This piece of legislation wasn't merely a statutory change; it represented a pivotal moment, signaling a commitment to ensuring all students, regardless of their challenges, would have received an opportunity for an education.

The change in special education wasn't solely driven by legislation. Over the years, numerous court decisions have changed our understanding of special education, guiding the evolution of appropriate practices. These legal precedents, shaped by advocates and stakeholders, have set the stage for shifts in how schools approach teaching and support. By challenging traditional norms and pushing the boundaries, these legal battles have furthered the cause of educational equity, ensuring that it's not just about accessing education, but about working to ensure appropriate services.

The 2017 U.S. Supreme Court case, *Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District*, stands out prominently in this regard. Through this decision, the court magnified the depth and breadth of what schools' obligations truly entail, emphasizing that a mere nominal

provision is not sufficient. Schools must now ensure an education standard reasonably aligned with each child’s potential and circumstances, reinforcing the importance of the Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) mandate. This Supreme Court case clarified the level of educational benefit that school districts must confer on children with disabilities under the IDEA. The Court ruled that simply offering a minimal educational benefit is insufficient. Instead, school districts must provide an educational program that is “appropriately ambitious” in light of the child’s circumstances. For principals, this emphasizes the importance of setting and pursuing meaningful educational goals for students with disabilities, ensuring their IEPs offer more than just a de minimis, or minimal, benefit, but rather aim for significant progress appropriate to the student’s potential.

The Role of Special Education in Modern Schooling

Today, special education is a key part, promoting inclusivity, fairness, and individualized services. It goes beyond traditional teaching methods to ensure every child gets an education suited to their strengths and needs. School leaders should see this not just as a curriculum change but as a mission to make all students, regardless of their abilities, feel important, seen, and capable.

We will cover more on how students with disabilities are to be educated with their non-disabled peers as much as possible in Chapter 7, but it is important to understand as a part of the role of the total school. This is not mere integration, where students with disabilities are simply placed in general education classrooms. We need to advocate for the restructuring of educational environments to accommodate the diverse learning needs of all students. It’s underpinned by the belief that every student, with the right supports, can learn and thrive in mainstream classrooms. IEPs, in this context, are not just compliance documents. They are dynamic strategies, evolving in response to a student’s progress, ensuring that education remains relevant, engaging, and meaningful (see Chapter 6).

The dialogue on inclusion necessitates a discussion of what ‘appropriate education’ truly means. The *Endrew F.* case mentioned earlier provides a good start. It is no longer sufficient to provide access; the quality, depth, and breadth of that access are equally crucial. An inclusive approach demands we go beyond mere academic benchmarks. It challenges us to nurture students, equipping them with important life skills, fostering socio-emotional resilience, and preparing them for a world where diversity is part of life.

For principals to be a leader of inclusion is to also recognize its challenges. It calls for a collaboration among educators, ongoing professional development, flexible curriculum design, and parental and community involvement. Above all, it requires a shift in mindset: from viewing students solely as having a disability, but to one where we are reminded that they are people first and have potential and unique perspectives to bring to the community.

Special education is more than a classroom down the hall that where we have to provide services. It is changing how we provide education to students who may need more assistance. By emphasizing inclusion, it not only reshapes classrooms but also reinforces the fundamental truth that every child, regardless of their abilities, deserves an education that is enriching, empowering, and tailored to their individual needs.

Who Can Deliver Supports?

As noted above, special education is not an isolated endeavor but a collaborative process, with each piece necessary for the child to receive an appropriate education. The true success of this in an individual school relies on the leadership of the school principal. As the leader, the principal's role cannot be just administrative but also needs to be visionary. They must foster an environment where collaboration is not just encouraged but is the norm. They need to provide the resources, support, and professional development necessary for both general and special education teachers to effectively do their jobs. Furthermore, they ensure open lines of communication, making it possible for all to come together, share concerns, strategize, and move these students forward.

Most students eligible for special education start in general education without services. Therefore, general education teachers, as frontline educators, play a pivotal role in this process. While their primary responsibility might be imparting the necessary curriculum, classroom dynamics have evolved. Classrooms are increasingly diverse, often comprising students with varying needs, from mild learning challenges to more pronounced disabilities. Their role goes beyond traditional teaching; it's about differentiation, making lessons accessible, and fostering an environment where student's feels valued and understood. This demands they have not just subject matter expertise, but also a deep understanding of how to address needs, making their continuous collaboration with special education professionals essential.

However, the support system extends beyond the classroom. Related service providers add layers of depth and specialization to the collective effort (see Chapter 13). Speech language pathologists, for instance, play a crucial role in enhancing communication skills, ensuring students can articulate thoughts, participate in class discussions, and engage with peers. Occupational therapists bridge the gap between academic learning and daily living, ensuring students can navigate both school and life with confidence. School psychologists (see Chapter 5) bring insights into the cognitive and emotional realms, helping educators understand the unique challenges and strengths of each student, offering strategies to support mental well-being, and ensuring that academic pursuits do not come at the cost of emotional health.

All these roles, however, must function in order to provide appropriate services. This is where the school principal's role is vital to the process. Beyond providing resources and creating a good working environment, principals need to ensure these diverse professionals have consistent platforms to collaborate, share insights, and build unified strategies. Regular team meetings, interdisciplinary training sessions, and open forums become crucial.

In the end, the special education does not lie in silos of excellence but the collaborative effort of all. Every professional, from the principal to the general education teacher, to the array of specialized service providers, brings important information and supports for the student. When done right, working together can provide an appropriate education for students who need more assistance than others.

Percentage of Eligible Students

It is important to understand how many students are actually receiving special education services. Approximately 14% of all public-school students in the United States were receiving special education services under the IDEA. This roughly translates to over seven million students. Moreover, the types of disabilities these students presented with varied, including specific learning disabilities, speech or language impairments, autism, and more. Additionally, there is a significant number of students who do not qualify for IDEA but are covered under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (see Chapter 3). These students, estimated to be about 2.5% of the school population, have disabilities requiring accommodations even if they do not need specialized instruction.

For school principals, these students are not just numbers—these students represent a substantial portion of the student body. It is an indicator that a significant proportion of their school requires specialized interventions, accommodations, or modifications in order to receive an education. This understanding must be included into the broader school strategy, from resource allocation and teacher training to curriculum development and parent engagement.

Using data to inform decisions is important as it can help us understand changes over time. It also means continually analyzing and reassessing. How many of the students eligible for special education achieve proficiency in state tests? What's the graduation rate among students with disabilities compared to the general population? How effective are the interventions in place, and how often are they reassessed for relevance and efficacy?

Furthermore, for school leaders, early identification is of paramount importance. While numbers provide a snapshot, they also reveal trends. Are there increasing numbers of students being identified in certain disability categories? If so, what proactive measures are in place to offer early support even before formal identification? With early intervention proven to significantly improve long-term outcomes, it's important for school leaders to build systems that flag potential concerns, be it in literacy, numeracy, or socio-emotional domains.

Principals must be adept at intertwining qualitative understanding with quantitative data. While numbers provide clarity, the stories behind them offer direction. By focusing on proactive identification, informed intervention, and continuous monitoring, school leaders can ensure an inclusive environment where every student, regardless of their challenges, receives an appropriate education.

Working with Parents

Working with parents is important as a part of the educational services for all students, but for students with disabilities it is vital. We need to be more proactive in our working with parents and the special education process. For school principals, understanding this dynamic and nurturing it becomes an imperative. This isn't just about regular interactions; it's about truly integrating parents into the fabric of the special education process. Why? Because parents offer a unique perspective that cannot be replicated within the walls of a school. They are attuned to their child's nuances—those small, often overlooked details that can significantly influence educational strategies.

Their involvement ensures educators get a comprehensive picture of the student, stretching beyond academics to encompass home life, social interactions, and

extracurricular pursuits. By working closely with parents, principals and educators can craft interventions that are not just tailored but deeply personalized. However, this partnership extends beyond data sharing. It's about open and collaborative communication. Special education can sometimes feel difficult for parents, filled with unfamiliar jargon, myriad assessments, and an overwhelming array of strategies. By encouraging open communication, principals reassure parents, ensuring they feel anchored amidst all the changes, confident in the knowledge that the school is working to provide their child an appropriate education.

When parents are genuinely engaged, they become partners in learning, reinforcing classroom strategies at home, advocating for their children, and understanding the roles of all that are involved. This partnership is not a mere supplement to classroom instruction; it amplifies it. Research consistently underscores the positive impact of parental involvement, from improved academic outcomes and higher attendance rates to a more positive disposition towards schooling.

The collaborative effort shines especially bright during the creation of IEPs. Here, parents transition from being stakeholders to collaborative team members, ensuring the IEP is not just a document but a reflection of their child's aspirations, strengths, and needs. This collaboration does not stop just with what the student receives at school. Parents, with their community ties and networks, can augment a school's resources, from introducing mentors to facilitating connections with local organizations that can offer additional support.

However, a true partnership works both ways. Just as schools offer parents a window into the educational world, parents provide schools with feedback, describing their perception of the effectiveness of implemented strategies. As children advance through K-12 schooling, from grade to grade or transitioning to post-school environments, the insights from this alliance guide decision-making, ensuring continuity, and consistency.

In sum, for principals, working closely with parents is not an optional extra. It's foundational. It's about realizing that while schools might be centers of academic expertise, parents are, and will always be, the foremost experts on their children. In uniting these two worlds, schools can craft a holistic, inclusive, and deeply effective special education ecosystem, one where every child, regardless of their challenges, is primed for success.

Falsehoods About Special Education

Special education, like many fields, is subject to myths and misconceptions. For school principals, recognizing and addressing these falsehoods is essential to ensure that students receive the most appropriate and effective services. Here are some common misconceptions about special education and clarifications to help principals make informed decisions:

- **All Students in Special Education Have Intellectual Disabilities:** While some students in special education programs may have intellectual disabilities, many others have specific learning disabilities, emotional or behavioral disorders, physical disabilities, or other conditions. Special education encompasses a wide range of needs.
- **Special Education is a Place:** Special education is not a specific location in a school but rather a set of services tailored to meet individual student needs. A student with an IEP might spend the majority of their day in general education classrooms, receiving some services or accommodations there.

- **Special Education Means Lowered Academic Expectations:** This misconception can lead to underestimating a student’s potential. In reality, the goal is to provide students with the support they need to access and succeed in the general curriculum to the greatest extent possible.
- **Once a Student is in Special Education, They’re Always in It:** This is not true. Students are re-evaluated regularly, and if they no longer need special education services, they can exit the program. The goal is to provide necessary supports, and when those supports are no longer needed, to transition students accordingly.
- **General Education Teachers Don’t Need to Be Concerned with Special Education:** All teachers play a vital role in supporting students with disabilities, especially as inclusive practices become more common. General and special educators often collaborate to best serve students
- **Parents Have Little Say in Their Child’s Special Education Plan:** In reality, parents are integral members of the IEP team. Their insights, concerns, and suggestions are vital in creating and modifying the educational plan for their child.
- **Only Special Educators Can Implement IEPs:** An IEP is a collaborative document, and its implementation often involves general education teachers, related service providers, and even school administrators. Everyone involved with the student should be familiar with relevant parts of the IEP.
- **Special Education is Expensive, and Schools Can’t Afford It:** While some special education services might be costly, federal law mandates that students with disabilities receive a FAPE. Schools receive funding and grants to support these programs.

For principals, dispelling these myths is not only about ensuring compliance with the law but also about fostering a school culture where all students, regardless of their abilities or challenges, are valued and provided with the best possible education.

Summary

Principals are the leaders of change and inclusivity in schools. Their understanding of special education’s history, current practices, and the ever-evolving landscape is crucial. This chapter lays the groundwork, with subsequent sections diving deeper into the nuances, challenges, and strategies pivotal for providing appropriate education.

Top Tips for Principals about Special Education

1. **Individualized Approach:** Every student with an IEP has a tailored plan that addresses their unique needs. It's not a one-size-fits-all approach.
2. **Legal Mandates:** Special education isn't optional. Federal laws, including the IDEA, ensure students with disabilities receive a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE).
3. **Collaboration is Key:** Effective special education requires seamless collaboration among general and special education teachers, related service providers, parents, and school leaders.
4. **Inclusion Benefits Everyone:** Inclusive practices, where students with disabilities learn alongside their peers without disabilities, often result in academic and social benefits for all students.
5. **Parents as Partners:** Parents of children with special needs are vital collaborators. Their insights are invaluable in crafting and refining their child's IEP.

Basics of Special Education:

1. **What It Is:** Special education refers to a range of services provided to students with disabilities to ensure they benefit from a public education.
2. **Eligibility:** Not every student with a disability qualifies for special education. Eligibility is determined through a comprehensive evaluation process assessing the child's unique needs and how they impact their educational performance.
3. **IEP:** The Individualized Education Program is a legal document outlining the specific educational services, modifications, and accommodations a student will receive to ensure they have access to, and benefit from, public education.
4. **LRE:** The Least Restrictive Environment principle ensures students with disabilities are educated with non-disabled peers to the greatest extent appropriate.
5. **Re-evaluation:** Special education is not static. Students are re-evaluated at regular intervals to determine if services are still necessary and if they are effective.

For principals, understanding these top insights and basics ensures that they can provide effective leadership in delivering an inclusive, equitable, and quality education to all students.

WHAT DOES A PRINCIPAL NEED TO KNOW ABOUT SPECIAL EDUCATION LAW?

02

This chapter discusses the main law affecting special education. It provides an overview of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This law provides guidance for educating students with disabilities and is important for principals to understand.



Quick Points

- The main law governing special education is IDEA. It covers identification, placement, and services.
- Students with disabilities are entitled to an appropriate education.
- Students eligible for special education are general education students first.
- Students with disabilities are to be educated in the least restrictive environment.
- Not all students with disabilities are eligible for special education services under IDEA.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA): An Overview

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, or IDEA, is a cornerstone piece of legislation designed to protect the educational rights of students with disabilities in the United States. Rooted in a history of advocating for more inclusive education, IDEA's guiding principles revolve around the belief that all students, regardless of their disabilities, have a right to a quality education that addresses their unique needs.

History and Origin

The origins of IDEA can be traced back to the Education for All Handicapped Children's Act (EHA) of 1975, which was later renamed IDEA. Before the enactment of EHA, many children with disabilities were routinely excluded from public schools, based on prejudicial beliefs about their capacities and rights. This law was passed with a clear message: no child, regardless of disability, should be left behind or excluded from the benefits of public education.

WHAT ARE THE BASICS OF SECTION 504 AND ADA?

03

In the history of educational legislation, two important laws—Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)—are important for inclusivity and equity for individuals with disabilities. Their specifics, especially when considered alongside Section 508 and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), can seem intricate. This chapter provides practical implications for both educators and students. From understanding the distinction between accommodations and modifications to appreciating the broader impacts of the ADA and the importance of digital accessibility with Section 508, to finally grasping the protections offered by FERPA, this chapter explores the important points of these laws. Crucially, it discusses the fact that their reach extends beyond just students, encompassing the rights and needs of educational staff as well.



Quick Points

- Not all students with disabilities are eligible for special education services under IDEA; Section 504 plans provide education accommodations and modifications for these students.
- Section 508 governs accessibility to technology and online programs for students with disabilities.
- FERPA governs who can see documents relating to a student.

WHAT DOES A PRINCIPAL NEED TO KNOW ABOUT STAFFING?

04

Good quality staff can make or break a program. Principals need to know what questions to ask when hiring, and how to support new and veteran special education staff. Other chapters in this book highlight the role of the principals as instructional leader and how to monitor special education teachers and provide accountability. This chapter highlights the importance of choosing and supporting effective special and general education staff.



Quick Points

- Take time to hire staff. They will carry your program.
- Learn the requirements of the special education jobs in your building and work to match staff credentials as much as possible.
- Try to find staff who can work with general education teachers.

Addressing Teacher Shortages in Special Education

Let's address the most talked about topic related to special education teachers—shortages of staff. Addressing the shortage of teachers, especially within the special education sector, is vital to ensuring all students receive an equitable education. The depth of this issue necessitates an exploration of its roots, impacts, and potential solutions. There are multiple reasons why this is occurring. Understanding all of them is important as one thinks about possible solutions.

Roots of the Shortage

1. **Demanding Work Environment:** Special education teachers often work with students who have a wide range of needs, from physical disabilities to learning and emotional challenges. The demands of individualized instruction, paperwork, and frequent communication with families can be overwhelming.
2. **Inadequate Compensation:** Despite the specialized training required and the high demands of the job, special education teachers often don't receive commensurate compensation.
3. **Burnout:** The intense nature of the role, coupled with large caseloads and the emotional toll of working with students who may progress slowly, can lead to early burnout and attrition.

WHAT DOES A PRINCIPAL NEED TO KNOW ABOUT SPECIAL EDUCATION ELIGIBILITY?

05

For students to receive special education services, they must first be determined eligible according to guidelines set by federal law. This chapter delves into the process starting from pre-referral and culminating at the assessment phase. Principals play an important role throughout this journey, ensuring the consistent adherence to appropriate procedures and set timelines. Additionally, they are instrumental in strategizing ways to address the student's needs within the classroom setup. If there are discrepancies or inaccuracies in the procedures applied in determining a child's eligibility, it puts at risk the integrity of the services that the student receives. Hence, given the IDEA outlines explicit procedures for ascertaining eligibility, it is important for principals to understand this legislation.



Quick Points

- All students requiring classroom supports or accommodations don't automatically qualify for special education services.
- It's vital for school staff to diligently document pre-referral interventions, ensuring a record of the strategies used and their respective outcomes.
- Staying committed to set timelines is essential when responding to referrals and subsequent decision-making processes.
- Involvement of parents or guardians is imperative at every juncture of the eligibility determination process, ensuring transparency and collaboration.
- While some students may not qualify for services under IDEA, they might be eligible under Section 504. It's crucial to understand that the evaluation and eligibility criteria differ between the two, necessitating distinct approaches.

WHAT IS AN IEP AND WHAT IS THE PRINCIPAL'S ROLE?

06

The Individualized Education Program, commonly referred to as the IEP, stands as an important component in the education of students with disabilities. This essential document bridges the student's needs with tailored educational interventions and services. When one thinks about the IEP, it should be seen not just as a mere document but as a contract between the district and the student's parents or guardians. A reflection of this importance can be seen in instances where courts have ruled against the mis-development or flawed implementation of an IEP, rendering the educational program invalid.

Though the IDEA doesn't mandate the principal's involvement in IEP teams, it's noteworthy that the IEP team should have a representative from the local education agency (LEA), which could be the district or school. This representative must possess the authority to allocate funds. Given this clause, principals often find themselves actively participating in IEP teams, underscoring the imperative nature of their understanding of the IEP process.



Quick Points

- Know the parts of an IEP.
- Ensure the developers of the IEP have the necessary information.
- Ensure the developers of the IEP have enough time.
- Ensure that parents or guardians are notified in a timely fashion and strongly encouraged to participate.
- Ensure the IEP is implemented in a timely fashion.
- Ensure the necessary services and supports delineated in the IEP are provided.
- Ensure the IEP is evaluated at least annually.

WHAT DOES A PRINCIPAL NEED TO KNOW ABOUT PLACEMENT?

07

Federal law and regulations mandate that students with disabilities receive their education, to the greatest extent possible, alongside their peers without disabilities. While this doesn't necessarily imply that every student with a disability should be in a general education classroom all the time, it emphasizes the importance of an inclusive approach in education, a goal which is commendable and worth our collective efforts. This chapter delves into the historical evolution of the concept of inclusion, how placement decisions are determined, the implications of the standards-based reforms witnessed in the 1990s and 2000s, and the legal parameters that guide placement decisions. It also takes a closer look at the different models of inclusion that can be employed in classrooms. While the initial text touched upon Response to Intervention (RTI), we have chosen to dedicate focused attention to this area in subsequent chapters due to its intricate nature and depth.

For an in-depth understanding, Appendix F, titled "Placement Checklist," serves as an adjunct to this chapter. Crafted to align with Appendix E's IEP checklists, it aims to provide school principals with a structured pathway to ensure students with disabilities participate as much as possible in school activities and environments.



Quick Points

- **Inclusive Education:** Students with disabilities ought to be educated in conjunction with their typically developing counterparts whenever possible.
- **Student-Centered Placement:** Decisions regarding the placement of students should pivot around the individual needs of the student rather than the convenience of existing services.
- **Support for Teachers:** In order to create an inclusive environment, general education and subject-specific teachers will necessitate training and support to effectively accommodate and teach students with disabilities.
- **Individualized Placement Decisions:** Every placement decision for a student with a disability should be tailored to that individual's unique needs, capacities, and potential.

WHAT IS THE PRINCIPAL'S ROLE AS INSTRUCTIONAL LEADER?

08

As the demands for education continue to change, principals play a pivotal role as instructional leaders who champion effective teaching and optimal learning outcomes for all students. The essence of instructional leadership is deeply rooted in both its historical and in present day schools. Visionary thinking, student-centeredness, continuous improvement, and collaboration emerge as the hallmark attributes of successful instructional leadership.

An important element to understand is the interconnectedness of teaching methodologies, learning processes, and curriculum design. As education continues to change, there's a need for a flexible curriculum that caters to diverse learner needs. This includes the critical role of ongoing assessments and feedback mechanisms to keep the teaching-learning process effective and relevant.

Another important aspect is the school climate, which, though often confused with school culture, holds its unique place in shaping the educational environment. Effective instructional leaders prioritize fostering a positive school climate, understanding that it entails engaging all stakeholders—teachers, students, parents, and the community at large. On the topic of collaboration, this chapter highlights the transformative potential of co-teaching. By delving into various models, best practices, and addressing potential challenges, the emphasis is on how co-teaching partnerships can amplify student success.

Special education is an area demanding careful attention from principals. From ensuring seamless integration and inclusion of special education students in mainstream classrooms to promoting collaborative planning between general and special education teachers, there are many different considerations. Moreover, maintaining the delicate balance of meeting the rights and needs of special education students without compromising on education quality stands as an ethical imperative.

To further support educators, Appendix A offers an enhanced digital toolkit. This collection comprises online resources, articles, videos, and tools—all designed to deepen understanding and provide actionable insights for both aspiring and seasoned instructional leaders.

POSITIVE BEHAVIOR INTERVENTIONS AND SUPPORT AND STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES?

09

Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (PBIS) is a comprehensive, proactive strategy designed to improve the behavioral and social outcomes of students. Basically, PBIS pivots from the traditional reactionary models of discipline to a proactive model emphasizing preventing undesirable behaviors by fostering positive learning environments and reinforcing commendable behaviors.

In special education, PBIS is very important. Students eligible for special education services often exhibit unique behavioral patterns, sometimes as manifestations of their disabilities. Therefore, a one-size-fits-all disciplinary approach not only falls short but can exacerbate behavioral challenges. PBIS, with its emphasis on individualized, preventive, and positive strategies, aligns seamlessly with the ethos of special education: to offer individualized and appropriate educational experiences.



Quick Points

- **PBIS in Special Education:** Emphasizes a proactive approach in special education, shifting from traditional discipline to fostering positive environments and behaviors, crucial for addressing the unique needs of students with disabilities.
- **Role of Principals in PBIS:** Highlights the importance of principals in implementing PBIS. It involves creating a positive school culture, using data-driven decisions, and understanding the proactive nature of PBIS over traditional reactive methods.
- **Individualized and Tiered Support:** Focuses on personalized behavior plans and a tiered support system in PBIS. This approach caters to the specific behavioral needs of each student, particularly in special education, through collaborative and adaptable strategies.

For principals, understanding and championing PBIS is very important. It's not merely a program or a policy; it's a shift in how to perceive and respond to student behavior. Implementing PBIS means creating a school environment where positive behaviors are explicitly taught, recognized, and rewarded. This not only benefits students in special education but promotes a more positive, inclusive, and effective learning environment for all students.

WORKING WITH STUDENTS WITH MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS

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Lately the role of a school principal has expanded to encompass a wide array of responsibilities, including the vital task of supporting students with mental health issues. Recognizing the diverse and increased needs of these students, principals are tasked with fostering a school environment that not only promotes academic excellence but also prioritizes the mental and emotional well-being of every individual. In this chapter, we delve into the core principles and strategies that principals must know and employ to effectively support students with mental health needs. From recognizing signs and symptoms to creating a peer support system and engaging parents, this chapter equips principals with the knowledge and tools necessary to champion mental health within their school communities. In an era where the well-being of our students is more critical than ever, this is a roadmap for principals to create inclusive, supportive, and nurturing educational environments where every student has the opportunity to thrive.



Quick Points

- **Identify Mental Health Signs:** Principals need to spot mental health issues in students by observing changes in behavior, mood, attendance, and academics, including physical and social indicators, and signs of self-harm or substance misuse.
- **Foster Supportive Culture:** Principals should cultivate a stigma-free environment promoting mental health discussions, educate staff, implement mental health programs, form support groups, set clear policies, and engage parents.
- **Work with School Counselors:** Principals must work collaboratively with counselors, ensuring they have necessary resources and training, and advocate for counseling's role in the school.
- **Ensure Ongoing Evaluation:** Principals need to continually assess and adapt mental health initiatives based on feedback and outcomes, ensuring the school's approach remains effective and relevant.