

Pull out: the contradiction to collaboration
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Rationale

Special education teachers are responsible for every student on their caseloads. The responsibilities include implementing accommodations for students as well as ensuring students achieve their goals. These individual education goals are made easier through general education collaboration and curriculum alignment. Even though the special education teacher is responsible for maintaining students' paperwork, collaboration with the general education teacher is extremely important in providing effective services to students. Most people would agree that for inclusion to work, the general education and special education team have to collaborate. Working as a team to develop a plan for students and keeping an open line of communication are ways to collaborate for students' individual success. This is not present within the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS). My research explores that there is no uniformity to inclusion collaboration time within the DCPS system. To support this belief, "DC Public Schools aspires be a model district for special education. Our goal is to provide high quality inclusion and special education services, and to dramatically improve academic outcomes for students with disabilities." (District of Columbia Public Schools (n.d). *Division of Specialized Instruction Resource Guide*. Available from <https://dcps.dc.gov/node/994272>) Based upon the description provided from the DCPS website there is no focus on collaboration.

Literature Review

Literature states that inclusion is the practice of effective collaboration between co-teachers in the general education setting. Collaboration is not limited to one type of practice. It manifests in various forms: formal meetings, informal meetings, integrated services delivery, co-planning, and co-teaching. "Collaboration, though often represented as synonymous with co-teaching, rather includes co-teaching as one subset of skills needed to effectively and jointly educate students with disabilities in twenty-first century schools" (Hamilton-Jones & Vail, 2014, p. 77). Collaboration, as a practice in schools, has been heavily reviewed and the research repeatedly states the need for more effective collaboration to take place in schools (Friend, 2000).

Since the creation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act or IDEA, students with disabilities have been increasingly included with their general education peers. Morgan, 2016 gathered data to explore key components to reshape the term "special education teacher" to "collaborative learning specialist". To meet the complex needs of students you need all perspectives to make a rich program. Research demonstrates that the benefits to co-teaching include not only academic achievement but also a reduction in stigma associated with pull out services as well as opportunities for positive social interactions (Friend & Cook, 2013)

Data/Tools/Process

Data was gathered from an online teacher survey of thirty special education and general education teachers in elementary, middle, and high school. All teachers were from District of Columbia Public Schools. The survey was conducted the last two weeks in April of 2018. The survey consisted of five questions.

1. How many years have you been teaching?

2. What service setting is indicated on your students' Individual Education Plans (IEP)?
3. How many hours of collaboration do you have with your general education or special education teacher throughout the week?
4. What does the service setting look like for your special education students?
5. If you are willing to answer additional questions, please add your email for interviews.

Questions were designed to determine teacher collaboration hours if they share students within the classroom who possess an IEP. Are collaborations hours sufficient to adequately suit the student's needs?

Data Analysis

Data was sent to multiple public schools within the District of Columbia. Most of the schools consisted of over forty staff members. Only thirty responses were collected through the survey monkey link. Data was analyzed in various forms; written personal reflections, anonymous surveys, and interviews. The results showed that 46% of teachers had ten or more years of teaching. 56% of teachers indicated that their students have both in and out of service (pull out) settings. 81% of those interviewed indicated that they have 0-3 official hours of collaboration with their general education or special education teacher weekly. The anonymous surveys explored one written question in depth of what the special education setting looks like for students. A few of the responses consisted of "Typically students are pulled out and taught by their special education teacher;" "A teacher comes and helps my student;" and "Outside general education setting-- Students work in small groups of no more than 5 or receive one on one instruction from me in a general education setting-- I support as the teacher instructs. Sometimes I teach small groups of students that include the students on my caseload as well as other students in that class that could benefit from additional instruction. I am part of the first-grade reading block rotations and I run and monitor reading centers while the teacher does guided reading." Of all my responses, the last one was the most in depth and included actual collaboration with the teacher and students.

Recommendations

As education collaboration moves forward, this research encourages educators to be mindful of effective collaboration and inclusion in the professional setting. When educators participate in effective collaboration then shared goals, agenda, and common purposes are accomplished. This is shown through:

- School culture for an inclusive environment should be set at the beginning of the year;
- Flexibility and accountability that bring change to improve collaboration;
- Weekly planning times and professional development activities that support inclusion within the school setting and the district;
- Communication via face-to-face conversations, technology, and individualized education planning meetings; and
- Curriculum and IEP goals alignment if push-out sessions are present.

References

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