









IRIS CENTER FOR TRAINING ENHANCEMENTS

School Leaders for Inclusive Education: Roles, Responsibilities, and Competencies: Views from the Field


This summary of a much longer report condenses findings culled from structured telephone interviews with five preservice faculty members in school leadership, five school leadership practitioners, five directors or coordinators of state professional development and TA programs that involve school leaders, two preservice students in school leadership, three leaders of Parent Training and Information Centers, and a telephone focus group of seven parents and service providers (N=27 participants). All told, these participants represented fourteen states and the District of Columbia.


Major Roles and Responsibilities of School Leaders for Inclusive Education


-  **Responsibility for all children:** The fundamental responsibility of the school leader is to convey and demonstrate the belief that the adults in the schoolhouse own—that is to say, have an equal responsibility for—all of the students. This sense of ownership involves setting high expectations and giving serious consideration to post-school outcomes—in a culture that strives to accept and value students with disabilities and their families.
-  **Leadership and vision for inclusive education:** To be a leader means to set the tone and the instructional bar and to guide the school as a community. It includes cultivating a vision of teaching and learning to create a schoolwide vision wherein the needs of children and the focus of teaching and learning are clearly articulated and sensibly and effectively implemented. To accomplish these tasks will involve an interweaving of the relevant federal, state, and local requirements in order to create a cohesive and meaningful approach to equity and excellence within the school.
-  **Infrastructure and coordination:** The school leader's responsibility is to create an infrastructure that supports personnel during whatever implementation is taking place in the school (e.g., shared or distributed leadership; mutual communication among general educators, special educators, and related service providers; management of change). School leaders must also strive to establish priorities.
-  **School law:** School leaders must be familiar with the requirements of state and federal rules and regulations and disseminate that information to their staff. Such regulations include understanding the connections between NCLB and IDEA and the flexibility that is there for supporting whole-school programs.
-  **Resource allocation:** The school leader is responsible for overseeing and balancing the fair allocation and spending of often limited resources, deciding what is appropriate on a case-by-case basis.
-  **Data-driven decision making:** School leaders must understand the data-driven school improvement process, ensuring multiple assessment measures, and using outcomes (including


May 2009


state and district assessment data and formative assessment data) to assess the performance of students, staff, and the school. This includes assisting staff with the data collection process.


 **Support for effective instruction:** The role of the school leader is to be the instructional leader of the school, meaning that she is responsible for ensuring that the staff has undergone sufficient *practical* (as opposed to merely *theoretical*) training on instructional strategies, accommodations, and differentiated instruction.

 **Personnel:** The school leader is charged with hiring teachers who possess the skills to meet the needs of the school's population. She must also play a strategic role in FTE (full-time equivalency) assignments and staff evaluations. The school leader must also ensure that the school staff receives the professional development that it will require to realize the school's vision.

 **Behavior, discipline:** The school leader sets expectations in terms of responses to behavior and cultivates dialogues to help teachers to identify effective behavioral strategies. Particularly important is to understand IDEA's discipline language, as well as to establish schoolwide strategies that can serve as alternatives to "zero tolerance," suspension, and expulsion.

 **Working with parents:** The school leader strives to make the school a welcoming place for parents and families and can connect with other relevant agencies and centers that serve or support families. Carrying out this role involves advocating for disadvantaged students and families and making certain that their voices are heard.


 **Community involvement:** The school leader must understand the nature of the surrounding community and its culture in order to ensure that this culture is positively reflected in the daily workings of the school. She must stimulate connections between the school and local community services (e.g., YMCA, YWCA, recreation centers), business leaders, advocacy groups, the faith community, and colleges and universities.


 **Cultural competence:** The school leader is responsible for ensuring that instruction and services are responsive to the cultural and linguistic characteristics of the school's population.


Competencies:

Knowledge and Skills for Carrying Out the Roles and Responsibilities

If a school leader is to successfully carry out all of the roles and responsibilities enumerated above, she will need a grasp of these basic competencies.

 **People skills:** The school leader should understand group processes in general and have a concept of schools as learning communities.

 **Team building:** The school leader should promote interaction between general and special education teachers and related service providers for classroom followup and for the reinforcement of related service interventions.

 **Coordination and distributed leadership:** The school leader should possess knowledge of organization development and time management.



May 2009

Resource allocation: The school leader must understand how funds can best be used, blended, and braided on behalf of good instruction and services (e.g., rethinking the way that funds are allocated from silos).



Professional development: The school leader must stay keep tabs on the professional development that staff receives in order to subsequently support and supervise teachers.



Diversity: The school leader must grasp the importance of the culture of the community where the students live and have an appreciation of social justice.



Parent involvement: The school leader must have a working knowledge of parents' rights and due process under IDEA, as well as an ability to collaborate with, engage, and empower parents.



Community connections: The school leader must be able to connect school teams with community agencies, organizations, higher education, school-business partnerships, and other resources.



Effective practices: The school leader must be grounded in curriculum, pedagogy, and content delivery. She must have knowledge of sources of effective practices and materials.



Inclusive education: The school leader must possess a basic understanding of what *inclusive education* is. She must understand the meaning of the *continuum of services* and *least restrictive environment*.



Identification of disability and the IEP: The school leader must comprehend the process of identifying children for special education services and must be able to take full part in the IEP process.



Data-driven decision making: The school leader must have knowledge of data analysis, trend analysis, and data-driven models. She must also have the ability to use data to monitor progress and make decisions for improvement, as well as the ability to prepare staff for their roles in the data-collection process.



Early intervening services and RTI: The school leader must understand the role these initiatives play in reducing special education referrals, reducing disproportionate minority representation in special education, improving performance on high-stakes assessments, and ameliorating behavioral issues. She must help to create a school environment that supports RTI.



Behavior, discipline: The school leader needs an ability to determine the causes of misbehavior, also skills in developing behavior intervention plans and reinforcements, preventing bullying, and managing the schoolwide mental health program.



School safety: The school leader must know how to establish procedures to ensure school safety and the security of all students, including procedures for students with certain disabilities.



Dropout prevention: The school leader must be able to implement schoolwide dropout prevention programs and practices, including strategies for student engagement in learning.



Secondary schools: The school leader must know how to modify scheduling for the benefit of staff and students, as well as how to promote access to career and technical education and applications of technologies for twenty-first century skills.

May 2009



Transition: The school leader must ensure that the IEP process, self-determination, and schoolwide teamwork prepare students for the transition to postsecondary opportunities, including functional goals (beginning in the early grades).



State performance indicators: The school leader must possess a basic understanding of the fourteen State Performance Plan Indicators (IDEA, Part B) that translate to school performance.