Eight Paths to Leadership
A Guide for Special Educators

by

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Unless otherwise stated, examples in this book are composites. Any similarity to actual individuals or circumstances is coincidental, and no implications should be inferred.

Throughout the book, the Voice of a Leader features include excerpts from interviews with special educators and advocates. Interview material has been lightly edited for length and clarity. Interviewees' responses, real names, and identifying details are used by permission.

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About This Book

The eight chapters of this book explore eight different paths to leadership that special education teachers can follow. (Each chapter title focuses on the specific leadership activity addressed therein.) As you read, you might discover one path that suits your experience, skill set, and ambitions particularly well, or you may find you are interested in multiple paths toward leadership. Chapter 1 discusses how to be a leader in the classroom by reading and conducting research and making data-based decisions. Subsequent chapters discuss how to move beyond the boundaries of your own classroom to become a leader within your school, your local community, and the broader community of educators and specialists who work with students with disabilities.

Each chapter begins with a rationale for the leadership path discussed therein, supported by a literature review addressing specific related activities in which you might engage. Key terms are listed at the start of each chapter, bolded and defined within, and compiled in the Glossary. As part of my research, I also conducted interviews with special education teachers who have demonstrated outstanding leadership in each area discussed. Excerpts from these interviews are featured throughout each chapter. (The full transcript of each interview is included in the downloadable materials for this book.) Throughout each chapter, reflection questions are provided to stimulate your thinking about the different principles and practices discussed. Each chapter concludes with guidelines for special education teachers who want to become leaders within that specific area, followed by activities that may help you to reflect on your experiences and learn more about the topic.

Your journey to leadership will transform your role as a special educator and increase your positive impact on the students, families, colleagues, and communities with whom you work. Let's begin.

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Effect Schoolwide Change

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, readers will be able to

- Identify ways in which special education teachers can serve as leaders at the schoolwide level

- Describe and apply strategies for facilitating inclusive school environments

- List and describe models of co-teaching and the steps effective co-teachers should follow

- Identify supports for students with disabilities in natural environments

- Explain ways in which special education teacher leaders can contribute to schoolwide systems of support and put these into practice

Terms to Know

Alternative teaching

Coaching

Collaboration

Co-teaching

Inclusion

Natural supports

Parallel teaching

Primary support

Response to intervention

Schoolwide positive behavior support systems

Secondary support

Service learning

Station teaching

Team teaching

Tertiary support

INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1 described how all special education teachers can begin to become leaders by thoughtfully choosing the practices they use in their classrooms. They should have inquisitive minds that lead them to

- Search for EBPs in the professional literature

- Adapt those practices in working with students with disabilities

- Assess the effectiveness, efficiency, and reliability of their instruction

- Share the results of the practices they have researched in their classrooms with others

By consciously applying this process as a special education teacher, you can build a strong foundation for leadership. Becoming a data-based decision maker in your classroom will increase your confidence, knowledge base, and sense of self-efficacy—important qualities for any educational leader to have. The next step is to extend your leadership skills through schoolwide involvement. Special education teachers have the opportunity to do this when they work in inclusive environments, collaborating with general education teachers and others in the school setting. For example, your involvement can take the form of supporting or providing direct instruction for students with disabilities in inclusive settings, collaborating and engaging in co-teaching with general educators, and preparing paraprofessionals and peers to support students with disabilities. As a special education teacher, you also have the opportunity to work with many school staff across multiple settings in implementing schoolwide levels of support for all students, not just for students with disabilities. Special education teachers can be valuable members of school teams because they have a strong foundation in differentiated instructional strategies; behavior management; physical management; and collaboration with paraprofessionals, peers, and related staff.

As will be discussed further in Chapter 7, special education teachers should be advocates for students with disabilities throughout the school setting. To be an advocate, you need the skills to develop collegial relationships and communicate with colleagues (Whitby, Marx, McIntire, & Weinke, 2013). This chapter provides information on how to be an effective leader at the schoolwide level.

CONNECTION TO PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS

The teacher's role at the schoolwide level is supported by a number of professional standards listed under the Teacher Leader Model Standards (TLEC, 2012) and the

CEC Standards for Professional Practice and Advanced Preparation Standards (CEC, 2015).

Teacher Leader Model Standards

While not specific to special education, the Teacher Leader Model Standards (TLEC, 2012) list several standards under *Domain 1: Fostering a Collaborative Culture to Support Educator Development and Student Learning* that support teachers having the skills to work collaboratively with others. These include

- "Helping colleagues work collaboratively to solve problems, make decisions, manage conflict, and promote meaningful change"

- "Model[ing] effective skills" in working with others

- Facilitating trust among colleagues

- Working to "create an inclusive culture"

- "Promot[ing] effective interactions among colleagues" across diverse backgrounds

Collaboration is also apparent in standards under *Domain 4: Facilitating Improvements in Instruction and Student Learning*, which call upon the teacher to "serve as a team leader" in working with colleagues to "meet student learning needs" and under *Domain 5: Promoting the Use of Assessments and Data for School and District Improvement*, which address working with colleagues to design assessments and analyze data.

Council for Exceptional Children Program Standards

The Standards for Professional Practice developed by CEC (2015) state that teachers should be professional colleagues (4.0) who recognize and respect the expertise of their professional colleagues (4.1), strive to have positive and respectful attitudes toward colleagues (4.2), and collaborate with general and special education colleagues to improve services (4.4). The CEC Special Education Advanced Preparation Standards also focus on collaboration in Standard 5 (Leadership and Policy) by stating that teachers should be able to create and maintain a collegial and productive work environment (5.3) and advocate for policies to improve programs (5.4). In addition, Standard 7 (Collaboration) states that special educators should enhance collaboration by using culturally responsive practices (7.1) and use collaborative skills to improve (7.2) and promote consensus across (7.3) programs, services, and learning outcomes.

Sara Stout Heinrich is an example of a special education teacher leader with skills to effect schoolwide change. She began this process as a classroom teacher by working for inclusion of the students that were on her caseload, and she now works with other teachers in a large urban school district to do the same. Recently she completed a research study on including students with disabilities in core content classes that was published in a refereed journal (Heinrich, Collins, Knight, & Spriggs, 2016). (The full text of the interview is available in the downloadable materials for this book.)

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Voice of a Leader

Working Toward Full Inclusion

> *Sara Stout Heinrich is in her 8th year working as a special education teacher. She spent her first 5 years as a high school teacher for students with moderate and severe disabilities; currently she is in her 3rd year as a Low Incidence Resource Teacher for her district. In this role she provides programming support to students from preschool through high school who have been labeled with a low incidence disability. This support includes behavioral support, academic support, IEP development and implementation, attending ARC (admission and release committee) meetings, assisting with classroom set-up, scheduling for students and staff, assisting in determining the least restrictive environment for students, preparing and presenting professional development, and more. Here, Ms. Heinrich describes how she has worked toward fostering full inclusion and effecting schoolwide change throughout her career.*

Q: *Special education teachers can be an influence on the schools in which they work. How have you worked to make changes in schools? Who have you worked with?*

A: When I taught in a high school classroom, I worked really hard to make my students a more integral part of the school. Before I came, my students were never included in general education classrooms. This was really important for me because I knew how much my students would benefit from interactions with their nondisabled peers, as well as having access to the content presented in those classes. I worked with my counselor, as well as the regular education teachers, in order to have my students participating more in the general education classrooms. By the end of my 5 years there, I had several students that spent more than 40% of their day in the regular classroom environment. This was achieved through a great deal of collaboration between the general education teacher and me, as well as training for my staff and peer tutors that accompanied the students to class.

Q: *What benefits have you found that collaboration with general education teachers has provided for the students with disabilities with whom you work?*

A: By collaborating with the general education teachers, I was able to make them more informed on various disabilities and learning styles. They became more open to having my students in their classes and would actually seek me out to include my students. I also felt that I gained a better knowledge of the core content material, allowing me to better instruct my students in it. My students also became more socially accepted by their nondisabled peers, as they were around them more.

YOUR ROLE AT THE SCHOOLWIDE LEVEL

As a special education teacher, you can have a role in creating an inclusive learning environment for all students through involvement in schoolwide systems of support. The following sections discuss how to achieve this.

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Inclusion

Inclusion is defined as all students with disabilities being educated with their same-age peers without disabilities. Inclusion consists of more than physical placement in a general education setting. To be included, a student must be considered an integral part of the general education setting. Available research literature is full of reasons that students with disabilities should be included in classes with same-age peers without disabilities. In brief, inclusion benefits students by preparing them for a postschool transition to a life where they live and work in a community of people with and without disabilities. The idea is that friendships made in school will carry over outside of the school environment and to future environments, that students with disabilities will have role models (e.g., for social behavior, communication) who can support in both school and non-school environments, and that students with disabilities will have access to and participate in age-appropriate activities with same-age peers, which includes having access to the general curriculum taught to peers without disabilities (Westling et al., 2015). Studies have shown that students with disabilities who are in inclusive school settings can acquire academic content taught to their same-age peers without disabilities (e.g., Heinrich et al., 2016; Tekin-Iftar, Collins, Spooner, & Olcay-Gul, 2017).

However, despite these benefits of inclusion for all students, it is not the practice across all schools. While data reported from 1990–1991 through 2007–2008 found an increase in general education placements for students with disabilities, the degree of inclusion was related to the type of disability. Students with learning disabilities were included the most, whereas students with emotional and behavioral disorders and students with IDs were included the least (McLeskey, Landers, Williamson, & Hoppey, 2012). In addition, Ryndak et al. (2014) reported that, although there has been an increase in access to the general curriculum for students with severe disabilities, this has not resulted in more general education placements. Specifically, Kleinert et al. (2015) reported that, across a sample of 15 states, only 7% of students with significant IDs were served in regular education (3%) or resource room (4%) placements. Also, there is evidence that students with developmental disabilities in urban or suburban areas spend more time in segregated placements than their rural counterparts (Brock & Schaefer, 2015); the larger the school or the district, the less likely that inclusion is implemented.

In some studies, the school principal has been credited as being the driving force behind the successful implementation of inclusion within a school (Kozleski, Yu, Satter, Francis, & Haines, 2015). However, the principal cannot do this alone; teachers must be willing to work with the principal and have a similar philosophy to create a truly inclusive school culture. A principal in a case study of an effective inclusive school stated that he relied on "everyone on the faculty to be a leader as all have talents or something to offer to the school" (Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013, p. 253); in addition, the principal stated that "the leader's job is not to develop followers, but more leaders" (p. 253). In this case study, the school evolved to become a model wherein all teachers were responsible for creating and sustaining a collaborative school culture. In a second case study (McLeskey et al., 2014), a principal closed all special education classes, assigning special education teachers and paraprofessionals to work collaboratively with general education teachers in their classrooms. This principal stated a belief "in creating experts in your building and encouraging them to coach others. It's the same way with inclusion, if we've got some people who are leaders, they can share [effective practices] with other people" (McLeskey et al.,

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What is your reaction to the idea that all teachers should be leaders or to the idea that leaders train leaders? Is there a point at which the line between special and general education begins to blur? If so, what is your reaction to this?

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2014, p. 65). In a study of six inclusive schools, Shogren, McCart, Lyon, and Sailor (2015) found that special education teachers in segregated settings had become co-teachers in inclusive settings. While the principals of these schools exercised strong leadership, they also encouraged teachers to be leaders in the transformation: "Interventionists [special education teachers] are connected with grade level teams and their schedules allow them to be at planning times with [general educators] and help facilitate collaboration and planning" (Shogren, McCart et al., 2015, p. 183). They also noted that a school "leader must train and support a cadre of leaders who believe in inclusion" (p. 188).

Recall that, for students with disabilities to be truly included in the same environment as their peers, they must be an integral part of this environment—not just physically present, but fully present and involved. Successful implementation of this goal relies on successful collaboration between special and general education teachers (Watt, Therrien, Kaldenberg, & Taylor, 2013), wherein all teachers share the responsibility for all students. Friend and Cook (1992) defined **collaboration** as "a style of direct interaction between at least two co-equal parties voluntarily engaged in shared decision making as they work toward a common goal" (p. 5). Collaboration can include "co-teaching, peer coaching, collaborative consultation, and collaborative problem-solving" (Lingo, Barton-Arwood, & Jolivette, 2011, p. 6).

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What has been your experience with inclusion? Have you observed or been a participant in a model that includes all students in all classroom activities? What has worked well and not so well?

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One barrier to inclusion is that general educators may not feel prepared to serve students with disabilities (Able, Sreckovic, Schultz, Garwood, & Sherman, 2015; Klein & Hollingshead, 2015); yet the professional literature has numerous examples of effective inclusive programs. For example, Spaulding and Flanagan (2013), a general education teacher and a special education teacher, described their framework for conducting effective science instruction for students with and without disabilities through Project DIS$_2$ECT: 1) *design* (backwards) by getting to know all learners, 2) address *individualization* during planning, 3) use *scaffolding* to provide the level of needed support for students, 4) use effective teaching *strategies*, 5) engage students through *experiential learning*, 6) use *cooperative learning* groups so students can learn together, and 7) implement inclusive instruction using *teamwork*. In another example for science instruction, Rye et al. (2013) created an inclusive elementary program by having students learn together in a school garden. The following section offers strategies for special education teachers working to create more inclusive schoolwide environments.

Strategies for Creating Inclusive Environments

It bears repeating that simply placing students with disabilities in general education classrooms physically does not guarantee inclusion. A scenario in which a special education teacher or paraprofessional sits in the back of a general education classroom and provides individual instruction for a student with a disability, without that students being involved in whole-classroom instruction or with peers without disabilities, is not an example of inclusion. To be included, a student with a disability must be considered part of ongoing instruction delivered to all students in the classroom and must be engaged with same-age peers without disabilities. You can use the following strategies, discussed in the next sections, to facilitate an appropriate model of inclusion: find time to plan, model effective practices, use coaching, collaborate across shared personnel, practice co-teaching and co-assessing, and facilitate inclusion across school environments.

Find Time to Plan   The first strategy for creating an inclusive school environment is to ensure that teachers find time to plan together. In describing their effective framework for inclusive science instruction, Spaulding and Flanagan stated that inclusion "involves intentional planning to meet the varied and individualized needs of each student in the classroom" (2013, p. 14) and that "administrative support for inclusion is integral" (2013, p. 14). They noted that special education and general education teachers must have time allotted for planning and analyzing data together. This means that they need coordinated schedules. As a special education teacher, you can make an appointment with the school principal or other administrator to garner support for inclusion and create an overall matrix wherein schedules can be coordinated to allow for adequate planning time.

Model Effective Practices   The second strategy is to provide a way for general educators to feel more comfortable with including and providing instruction for all students; thus, you can and should be a model for working with students with disabilities within the general education setting. Unlike using a pull-out model to deliver individualized services, embedding services within the general education classroom allows general educators the opportunity to observe how to implement interventions or to benefit from the support or advice a special educator can provide (Able et al., 2015). For example, a review of the professional literature by Hudson, Browder, and Wood (2013) found that the constant time delay procedure, an EBP for teaching students with disabilities, has been effective in teaching academic content to students with moderate to severe IDs in inclusive settings; however, the constant time delay procedure may not be familiar to general educators, so it is beneficial to model it for them.

Use Coaching   As will be described in more detail in Chapters 3 and 4, you may need to go beyond sharing knowledge and modeling procedures to using a third strategy: coaching (Shogren, McCart, et al., 2015). **Coaching** allows you to provide support and feedback to general education teachers who work directly with students with disabilities. For example, Able and colleagues stated that general education teachers may find "suggestions from a skilled special education professional who understands autism [are] so important while he or she is working in the

classroom with the target student" (2015, p. 51). It should be noted that you will also benefit from learning the strategies that general education teachers use to teach content. Scheeler, Congdon, and Stansberry (2010) found that when special and general education teachers provided coaching to each other via bug-in-the-ear technology (i.e., technology that allows one-way or two-way communication by wearing an electronic device [Bluetooth] in the ear), the practices they acquired increased, maintained, and generalized.

Collaborate Across School Personnel   A fourth strategy for facilitating inclusion is to address it across all school personnel, not just those involved in delivering academic content. In addition to general education teachers, this may include collaboration with "therapists, nurses, social workers, psychologists and counselors, and rehabilitation specialists" (Ludlow, 2011, p. 4). For example, you may need to collaborate with school counselors and school psychologists in working with students with ASD (Able et al., 2015). Physical education teachers may benefit from information you can provide regarding medical and health information, safety, the role of paraprofessionals, IEP goals and objectives, modifications, and physical needs (Klein & Hollingshead, 2015).

Practice Co-Teaching and Co-Assessing   A fifth strategy that has gained a lot of attention in recent years is **co-teaching** (e.g., Moorehead & Grillo, 2013; Morningstar, Shogren, Lee, & Born, 2015; Shogren, McCart, et al.; 2015). Co-teaching is a specific form of collaboration in which both the special education and general education teacher have an "active role in planning, delivering, and assessing instruction" (Fenty, McDuffie-Landrum, & Fisher, 2013, p. 29). According to Murawski, "the premise of co-teaching rests on the shared expertise that special educator and classroom teacher collaboration brings to the instruction, not merely on having two adults in the classroom" (2012, p. 8). Sileo noted that general education teachers may be considered "masters of content" whereas special education teachers may be considered "masters of access" (2011, p. 34), making the co-teaching model one in which each co-teacher has specific roles and areas of expertise. Sileo also compared the co-teaching relationship to dating and marriage, because teachers may need time to get to know each other and work out philosophical differences before embarking on a permanent relationship. Sileo suggested that co-teachers identify issues, develop alternative courses of actions, analyze associated risks and benefits before determining a course of action, and then analyze the results of the action once it has been implemented.

There are several models for engaging in co-teaching (Murawski, 2012; Spaulding & Flanagan, 2013). Murawski lists team teaching, parallel teaching, alternative teaching, and station teaching. These models can be described as follows:

- **Team teaching**—the general and special education teachers deliver content together

- **Parallel teaching**—the two teachers deliver content at the same time to two groups of students within the classroom

- **Alternative teaching**—one teacher leads a lesson while the other focuses on specific components of the lesson (e.g., vocabulary)

- **Station teaching**—both teachers develop and circulate among learning centers to provide support and facilitate learning

The type of co-teaching model selected may depend on the type of content being delivered. For example, station teaching may be the most effective model for co-teaching science and mathematics (Moorehead & Grillo, 2013) because it allows the opportunity for hands-on learning activities in which students can engage individually or in cooperative groups.

Murawski (2012) provided tips for co-teachers who are engaged in planning co-taught lessons. These include

- Establishing a regular planning time without disruptions

- Staying on topic using a premade agenda

- Determining individual roles and assignments that are equal but separate

- Maintaining a list of concerns

- Building time for assessment and feedback

- Using a what/how/who framework (i.e., *What* standards, objective, and ideas/questions will be addressed within a specific timeframe? *How* will co-teaching occur? *Who* will need individualized supports?)

Those teachers who engage in co-teaching also should remember that co-assessing is part of the process. Conderman and Hedin (2012) noted that co-teachers should discuss their assessment philosophies when they first begin working together and should continue to co-assess prior to instruction (e.g., prerequisite data), during instruction (formative data), and following instruction (summative data).

Voice of a Leader

Collaborating With General Education Teachers

Co-teaching and collaboration present new challenges but can be rewarding for everyone involved. Sara Stout Heinrich describes her own experiences collaborating with general education teachers.

Q: You completed a research study in collaboration with general education teachers in a high school. Can you tell how you worked with these teachers? What kinds of supports did you facilitate for the students who were included in their classrooms?

A: I met with each teacher prior to mainstreaming my students to their classes. We discussed their curriculum maps for the semester and how they corresponded to the alternate assessment standards for the students I wanted to include. I explained to the teachers that I would adapt all of the student work and that I would be sending a trained instructional assistant or peer tutor with the student. Each student who was included had a folder to take with them to the class. The folder included any adapted materials for classroom assignments that day, data sheets, and materials needed to instruct the student on two predetermined alternate assessment standards. I provided training for the instructional assistants and peer tutors on simultaneous prompting (the procedure they would be using to teach the alternate assessment standards). I also collected procedural fidelity data at least once per week on each assistant and peer tutor.

Facilitate Inclusion Across School Environments   The final strategy for facilitating inclusion is to remember that the school environment consists of more than classrooms. It is important that students with disabilities be included in the same types of activities in which their peers without disabilities engage. Traditionally, paraprofessionals have provided the primary support for students across school environments, but recent research has shown that this can have the unwanted side effect of less direct instruction from the general education teacher, physical separation within the classroom or school setting, and less interactions with peers without disabilities (Carter, Moss, et al., 2015). Robinson (2011) was successful in decreasing the "hovering" and uninvolved behavior of paraprofessionals by training them with a video package on how to use a pivotal response strategy with students with ASD, but research has consistently shown that peers without disabilities also can be trained to implement effective strategies with the added benefit of forming friendships (e.g., Collins, Branson, Hall, & Rankin, 2001). As illustrated in the following sections, the involvement of peers without disabilities across school environments can be beneficial for all students, allowing a less direct role for paraprofessionals in inclusive environments.

Provide Appropriate Supports   As a special education teacher, you likely often have the responsibility of identifying appropriate supports for students who are in inclusive environments. Some supports may be added by the teacher, such as visual aids (e.g., iPad) or auditory aids (e.g., iPod) that provide directions and prompts. For example, special education teachers who assist students with disabilities in designing daily schedules may note that transitions need attention. Leadership can include facilitating smooth transitions between classes and activities by identifying transitions that may be challenging, selecting supports (e.g., auditory, visual) to enable students with disabilities to negotiate those transitions, and collecting data to use in determining if the selected supports are effective (Hume, Sreckovic, Snyder, & Carnahan, 2014).

> What is the role of a paraprofessional in an inclusive school environment? What are the benefits of paraprofessional classroom support? What are the possible unintended barriers that can be created?

Supports may include **natural supports,** which are those that can be found in the natural environment for a student with a disability without being added. This can take the form of materials or people already present within the environment. Peers without disabilities can serve an important role as natural supports as all students learn together. To facilitate peer involvement, Carter, Moss, et al. (2015) recommended that the special education teacher work with the IEP team to develop a peer support plan and identify and meet with potential peer partners. Once peer partners are selected, the role and physical proximity of special education teachers and paraprofessionals can be systematically faded while they continue to monitor the peers, making adjustments as needed.

Engage Students in Activities Outside of the Traditional Classroom   One activity in which all students engage in the school setting is lunchtime, which is an ideal time to facilitate both communication and social interactions between students with and

without disabilities. Hochman, Carter, Bottema-Ceite, Harvey, and Gustafson (2015) found that they could facilitate social interactions with students with ASD in a secondary school by recruiting and orienting peers without disabilities to be involved in a peer network during lunchtime. Special education teachers can develop a formal peer network for students with disabilities by offering academic credit for participating or by recruiting volunteers who are willing or who need to engage in service activities as part of an extracurricular club. During lunch (or other activities), peers can be assigned to support specific students or may rotate on a daily basis. Communication books used by peers without disabilities have been effective in increasing conversations between students with ASD or IDs and their peers without disabilities (Hughes, Bernstein, et al., 2013; Hughes et al., 2011) and can be easily used within a lunchtime setting as well as in other environments. Communication books may exist in hard copy or be available through technology (e.g., on an iPad) and can consist of words, symbols, or pictures that can be used as an impetus for having a conversation (e.g., school sports) or as a support in conversational turn-taking (e.g., prewritten or preprogrammed responses).

Another way to facilitate peer interactions across community environments is to involve students with and without disabilities in service learning (Carter, Swedeen, & Moss, 2012). Service learning can be a part of both academic and elective classes as well as a part of extracurricular clubs (Carter, Swedeen, & Moss, 2012). It is a strategy that allows instructional objectives to be addressed while students engage in community projects. This is especially valuable to students with disabilities, for several reasons. First, both functional (e.g., life skill) and academic objectives can be embedded in these projects. Second, students with disabilities are more likely to generalize skills when they are taught in settings where these skills will be needed. Third, students with and without disabilities may be more likely to form relationships when involved in fun activities. As a special education teacher, you can provide general education teachers with input on this type of learning as you plan together.

Elective classes and extracurricular activities provide still more opportunities for same-age peers with and without disabilities to interact. Even if students with disabilities are not included in academic classes, they often are included in elective classes. For example, Hughes, Harvey, et al. (2013) taught secondary peers without disabilities to interact with their peers with disabilities across elective classes that included guitar, art, and physical education.

In what way(s) can peers without disabilities serve a role in an inclusive environment? Are there ways to provide specific training or materials that might increase the effectiveness of the role they play?

Pence and Dymond (2015) noted that, due to challenges in communication and social skills, lack of support outside of the classroom, and lack of parent and teacher involvement, students with severe disabilities may have low levels of participation in extracurricular activities. Yet extracurricular activities, such as service learning, provide the opportunity for embedded learning in natural settings that may generalize to other settings. You can provide leadership in facilitating the inclusion of students with disabilities in extracurricular activities in several ways: by conducting an assessment of student interests and needs, by investigating and selecting appropriate extracurricular activities, and by collaborating to ensure that students receive

the appropriate natural supports to participate. Once students with disabilities become involved, IEP objectives can be embedded in extracurricular activities (e.g., using a calculator during a bake sale).

Schoolwide Systems of Support

In addition to sharing your knowledge and skills to create inclusive school environments for all children, you and other special education teachers have the knowledge and skills to be valuable contributors to establishing other schoolwide initiatives. For example, **response to intervention** (RTI) is a general education initiative to provide specialized intervention for students at risk of being identified for special education services (Heward, 2013). While these students have yet to be identified for services from a special education teacher, the special education teacher can nonetheless be a valuable resource for sharing instructional and behavior management strategies that may be effective in a general education setting. The following sections list schoolwide initiatives in which you can play an important role.

Positive Behavior Support Systems   Shogren, McCart, et al. (2015) found that a sample of effective inclusive schools also had an emphasis on multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) and positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS). Schools that use MTSS provide a wide tier of support for all students (e.g., stated expectations and consequences for all students within a given classroom), a small tier of support for specific groups of students (e.g., moderate interventions for students with behavior disorders), and individual supports for specific students, as needed (e.g., intense intervention to manage the most challenging behaviors). PBIS is a system that focuses on using positive proactive procedures that may decrease the likelihood that an inappropriate behavior will occur (Leach, 2010). In general, **schoolwide positive behavior support systems** (SWPBSs) provide a "proactive, system-level approach that provides tools and practices to help support students and staff and promote positive social and learning environments" (Good, McIntoch, & Gietz, 2012, p. 50). SWPBSs consist of three levels of support (Swain-Bradway, Pinkney, & Flannery, 2015):

> How involved should a special education teacher be in the implementation of initiatives such as RTI or PBIS? How involved should a special education teacher be in providing instruction or support to all students, regardless of ability? Why?

- **Primary support** for 80%–90% of the school population

- **Secondary support** for 10%–13% of the school population

- **Tertiary support** for 1%–5% of the school population

In other words, most students in a school can benefit from a basic support system, but a small percentage will need more intense, graduated levels of support.

Again, these are systems in which special education teachers can exercise leadership. Due to their background in behavior management, special education teachers can play a valuable role on school teams. For example, special education

teachers have received training in how to assess the function of a behavior, how to identify appropriate reinforcers for behaviors, and how to implement strategies to increase or decrease behaviors. Thus, special education teachers can provide professional development, consultations, or coaching in addition to serving as members of school teams. It may take from 2 to 4 years to establish an SWPBS, and staff buy-in is crucial to sustained implementation (McIntosh et al., 2013).

Anti-Bullying Programs   In recent years, a good deal of attention has been devoted to establishing schoolwide programs focused on bullying. A schoolwide program to address bullying can be integrated into an SWPBS. For example, Good et al. described the Bully Prevention in Positive Behavior Support program, which was designed to 1) decrease bullying incidents and 2) teach potential victims how to respond to bullies using a "Stop, Walk, and Talk" strategy in which they are "to stop what they are doing, take a deep breath, count to three, and then go on with their day" in response to a stop signal (2012, p. 51) and, if necessary, seek assistance from an adult. Good et al. stated that "because of their specialized training and collaboration across the school faculty, special educators are in a strong position to guide SWPBS and bullying prevention efforts" (2012, p. 53).

In addition, it is important to note that data have shown that "children with disabilities are harassed by peers at higher rates than their peers without disabilities" (Raskauskas & Modell, 2012, p. 60). Special education teachers may be called on to show leadership in modifying schoolwide bullying programs for students with disabilities, especially those with moderate to severe ID (Raskauskas & Modell) or ASD (Chen & Schwartz, 2012). This may include adapting and individualizing materials to provide concrete examples for students with disabilities that they can comprehend, and then intentionally and systematically increasing their ability to respond to bullies in an appropriate way.

Voice of a Leader

Leading at the Schoolwide Level

Creating a truly inclusive environment for all students involves addressing every aspect of school life—not just academic classes but also elective classes, extracurricular activities, service learning, and day-to-day social interaction. Each of these areas provides opportunities for students with disabilities to connect to same-age peers who do not have disabilities. Each area also provides special education teachers with an opportunity to lead. Here, Sara Stout Heinrich discusses how working to effect schoolwide change helped her become a leader.

Q: How did the collaboration you had within your school transform you into a teacher leader? What is your current position and how do you continue to work to influence positive schoolwide changes for students with disabilities?

A: The collaboration within my school allowed the other teachers to see what I do every day and value my knowledge on disabilities and different learning styles. The summer following the end of my study, I was offered a position working as a low-incidence resource teacher for the entire district, providing programming

support for students with moderate and severe disabilities enrolled in Jefferson County Public Schools. The first ARC [admission and release committee] meeting that I attended for a high school student in my new position gave me the opportunity to teach the school about inclusion of their students with moderate and severe disabilities. The school did not practice inclusion of students with disabilities at that time, other than for electives. I talked with the counselor and special education teachers about ways that I included my students into core content classes. They were resistant at first, but now inclusion is a regular part of their programming. I have been given the opportunity to provide professional development to staff across the district to support programming for our students with moderate and severe disabilities.

BE A LEADER: EFFECT SCHOOLWIDE CHANGE

There is much you can do as a special education teacher to effect schoolwide change and help to create a truly inclusive environment that benefits all students. You likely have experience and expertise in multiple areas: making academic content accessible, teaching nonacademic skills, managing behavior, fostering positive social interactions, collecting and analyzing academic and behavioral data, and more. This experience and expertise can be immensely helpful to other teachers, administrators, and support staff. The following guidelines are offered to special education teachers who want to expand their leadership skills at the schoolwide level:

1. Do not be shy in approaching school administrators or other school personnel to offer to share your expertise as a special educator.

2. Realize that planning with others is crucial to effective collaboration, and build time for this into your daily schedule.

3. Remember that assessment and data analysis are not only integral to effective classroom instruction but also to successful programming at the schoolwide level, and a special education teacher has the skills to assist with schoolwide data analysis and decision making across both behavioral and academic strategies.

4. Consider the role that peers without disabilities can play as natural supports in successful inclusion.

5. Note that schoolwide intervention is more than working with academic classes and should extend to elective classes, extracurricular activities, and free time (e.g., lunch, transitions).

6. Be open in discussing philosophical differences with others and recognize that all involved personnel have a valuable role to contribute.

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

In Chapter 2, you have learned about ways to be a leader outside of the boundaries of your own classroom. Special education teachers can be an invaluable resource to general education teachers, administrators, and students with and without disabilities. The connections you make with others and the guidance you provide can effect schoolwide changes and help to build a truly inclusive environment for all.

The suggested activities that follow are intended to help you build connections with other schools and with families and begin thinking about how to extend your leadership beyond the classroom. Time to take action!

1. **Explore inclusion in another school.** Either visit a school known to be fully inclusive or interview personnel who work in that school. How does the model differ from traditional models of service in the past? Do you note practices that could be improved or practices that should be changed? Note whether students with the most significant IDs, the most challenging behaviors, or the most intense health-related or physical needs are included and to what extent.

2. **Interview families of students in different phases of schooling.** First, interview the parent of a young child with disabilities about his or her attitude toward inclusion and the expectations of schools. Then, interview the parent of an older student with disabilities who is nearing transition from school about his or her attitude toward inclusion and experiences in schools. Are there notable differences in the two interviews? If so, how do they differ and to what do you attribute the difference?

3. **Explore SWPBS in another school.** Either visit a school that is known to have an SWPBS or interview personnel who work in that school. What do you note about the school atmosphere or the attitudes of personnel and students? Find out what role the special educators in the school have played in the development of the model or what roles they currently play. How are the roles of special educators perceived?

4. **Research anti-bullying programs.** Do an Internet search for incidents of school bullying and programs that address school bullying. Note whether you find any references to students with disabilities. If you do, are the students with disabilities identified as the instigators or victims of bullying? Are the programs adapted in any way to meet their needs, and if so, how?