



Special Needs Students in Career and Technical Education

Data confirms that many career and technical centers/schools have a large population of special needs students, some as high as 50% of their total population. While problems associated with this population can be challenging, there are strategies that can provide effective interventions and supports for struggling students.

One such program is the Strategies for High School Students with Disabilities in the General Education Curriculum from the International Center for Leadership in Education, which is part of the training being offered to career and technical centers/schools by the Bureau of Career and Technical Education. This program was designed to assist high schools and their districts in improving the performance of special education students by highlighting the strategies that successful high schools have used to bring about positive results.

This manual defines the problem, how to develop effective intervention systems and provides strategies for success. This ...*in brief* will provide a short overview of the recommended components of this program.

Challenge of High School Performance

In conducting extensive needs assessments, data analysis and strategic planning in districts across the country; the International Center's Special Education Institute has revealed this critical finding: "Schools that focus first on their struggling learners usually out perform other schools. In other words, when educators implement strategies that work with the most challenging students, they have great results with all their students."

Their studies have found that the greatest predictors of student achievement gains are:

- Focus on rigor and relevance;
- A collaborative climate; and
- A culture of high expectations.

Action Plan for an Intervention System

According to Alan Blankstein, *Failure is not an Option*, "timely identification of a student's needs is what distinguishes intervention from remediation." For students who struggle in the classroom, it's important to have a process in place that identifies a student's academic or behavior needs, aligns those needs to research-based intervention strategies, monitors the results and refines the strategies as necessary.

Carthage R9 School District in Missouri identified seven steps to follow in establishing an effective intervention system. These steps are:

- Recognize the need for change
- Establish a committee of stakeholders
- Use data to describe the problems

- Understand the key components of an effective intervention system
- Build consensus and develop a plan
- Provide adequate professional development to support the intervention system
- Evaluate results and correct the course of action.

Strategies for Success

This manual provides examples from four high schools in various parts of the country: the Carthage R9 School District; MO, Brockton High School, MA; Caprock High School, TX; and the A.J. Moore Academy, TX.

We're going to look at the components Carthage, identified for effective intervention.

Those components are:

- A culture of high expectations for all students
- Collaborative systems (school based intervention team and professional learning community)
- A screening process
- A problem-solving approach
- Data driven decision-making

Schools that are successful in improving student achievement are those that identify struggling learners early and intervene before the student has a chance to fail.

Co-Teaching

There are different models for co-teaching. For our purposes, however, we're focusing on a co-teaching team consisting of a general and special education teacher. Both teachers teach content, modify instruction and facilitate instructional activities. Together they plan, present, evaluate instruction and student progress, and share equally in classroom and behavior management. Research has proven co-teaching provides benefits such as improved academic performance for students with disabilities and other students, increases in self-esteem and social skills, professional growth of teachers, reduction of unnecessary referrals to special education, shared responsibility and accountability and increased acceptance of students with disabilities by other students.

We've shared a very limited amount of the information contained in this manual. For more in-depth information on this and other manuals being used by BCTE (Reading Strategies for Career Academies and Career-Technical Education and Academic Excellence Through Career and Technical Education) you can contact the International Center for Leadership in Education at:

<http://store.leadered.com/index.asp?PageAction=VIEWPROD&ProdID=63>