The Power of Teachers on Teams to Create and Sustain Change

By Denyse Doerries, Ph.D., and Sue Land, M.Ed.

Both the Individuals with Disabilities Act, 2004, and the No Child Left Behind Act, 2002, mandate that schools provide not just equal educational opportunities, but high-quality education for all children. The legislation charges schools with changing their current instructional and behavioral practices to employ effective interventions (based on research) with proven outcomes (Schaughency & Ervin, 2006; Stollar, Poth, Curtis, & Cohen, 2006). Despite efforts to disseminate effective practices, schools are not necessarily adopting them (Schaughency & Ervin, 2006). Thus, there continues to be a gap between research concerning evidenced-based practices and the reality of school practices.

Research suggests that the success of change initiatives often is based not on the characteristics of the innovation but on the culture of the school within which the innovation is implemented (Stollar et al., 2006). Knowledge of evidence-based practices alone is not sufficient to sustain change. The literature suggests that frequently, when the supports for the change are withdrawn, the change initiative fails (Fuchs, Fuchs, Harris, & Roberts, 1996). Successful school change requires ongoing professional development, modeling and on-site coaching, continuous communication with staff, and time for planning and application (Hall & Hord, 2001).

What can teachers do to support the adoption of evidenced-based practices? A pivotal piece of a successful change initiative is the presence of a school-based collaborative-problem solving team (Stollar et al., 2006). Collaborative teams provide the framework for successfully integrating a desired innovation into the culture of a school (Stollar et al., 2006). The teams identify and analyze the schools’ data,
determine if a gap exists between current practices and evidence-based practices, and, in conjunction with faculty input, establish a need and the benefits that will accrue from the change initiative. Further, the team collaborates with administrators and faculty to problem solve, identifies evidenced-based interventions, and creates a climate that supports the interventions.

Teachers can join already existing school-based teams such as School Improvement Teams or start at grade-level teams to examine the gap between current practices and evidenced-based interventions. Teachers can request assignments to school-based planning teams or volunteer for such teams, allowing them to play an essential role in bringing successful innovations to their schools.

The Virginia Department of Education’s Priority Projects provide the structure to support change initiatives at the local level. These projects articulate the state’s priorities and provide, in conjunction with the regional T/TACs, the ongoing technical assistance necessary to sustain change at the local level in priority areas.

The ongoing technical assistance that T/TAC W&M provides to schools involved in various Priority Projects takes place through a team approach. In most cases teams are comprised of general and special education teachers, other support teachers and staff, as well as administrators. These teams meet on a regular basis to examine school data, determine needs, develop action plans, solve problems, and evaluate progress. Individual schools and school divisions in Regions 2 and 3 may wish to seek more information about the VDOE Priority Projects and T/TAC W&M support. A complete listing of these projects and supports may be found at [http://www.wm.edu/ttac](http://www.wm.edu/ttac).

The Priority Projects that require a team approach are as follows:

★ **Effective Schoolwide Discipline (ESD) teams** establish a schoolwide systematic approach to discipline, incorporating positive behavior supports and creating positive school climates.

★ **Strategic Instruction Model (SIM)** focuses on secondary schools, and provides professional development on this model developed by the University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning. This model includes field-tested and validated Content Enhancement (teaching) Routines and Learning Strategies that increase the achievement of all students, including students with disabilities in general education classrooms. Team members determine student need by examining SOL assessment data and pass rates in core content areas. Once specific content areas are targeted, teachers choose routines or strategies that will enhance student learning. Professional development and followup assistance and coaching is provided to teachers.

★ **Virginia Transition Outcomes Project (VTOP)** teams receive professional development in how to develop IEPs that infuse transition planning throughout the process and document. Activities include conducting file reviews and developing and implementing preliminary action plans to include professional development. The VTOP aims to improve postsecondary outcomes for students with disabilities.
Instructional Support Team (IST) Priority Project is designed to develop school-based teams of professionals who support classroom teachers’ efforts to assist struggling learners. The goal is to enhance, improve, and increase student and staff performance. The intended outcome is a more instructionally responsive school for all students and teachers alike.

Academic Review and School Support Teams provide support to schools in need of improvement as determined by the VDOE. By looking at SOL assessment data and other school data, school teams devise action plans to meet the academic needs of students with disabilities. Team members and school staff receive professional development in effective inclusive education practices as well as ongoing support.

Other Priority Projects and VDOE-supported activities to acquire evidenced-based practices include:

- SOL Enhanced Scope and Sequence PLUS project team members differentiated lesson plans and activities aligned to the Standards of Learning with strategies to facilitate differentiated instruction. The lesson plans are posted on T/TAC Online at www.ttaconline.org.

- Reading Priority Project members provided professional development activities throughout the state this past summer. These academies focused on the five major components of reading instruction and were offered to special educators. Future activities include a 2007 Summer Academy.

- Training modules that provide information to support student learning are available through T/TAC Online at www.ttaconline.org. Online training includes self-paced online workshops that are organized into short Webshops or longer workshops. The web-based training is designed to introduce content in an inquiry-based learning method, and training certificates are awarded upon successful completion of the Webshop and workshop requirements.

As schools endeavor to improve the achievement of all students, committing to a team approach is essential. “In this day and age there is simply too much for any one educator to know in order to effectively meet the needs of all his or her students” (Brownell & Walther-Thomas, 2002, p. 224).

References
The ability to create a positive climate that supports student achievement is one of the many characteristics of effective school leaders (e.g., Cotton, 2003; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) has developed six standards that “present a common core of knowledge, dispositions, and performances” (ISLCC, 1996, p. iii) and provide the tools necessary to facilitate the growth of both teachers and students. The ISLCC standards and corresponding actions for administrators and other school leaders to consider are presented below.

ISLLC Standards: A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action of the School Administrator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>... facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school community (Standard 1).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gather a representative team of stakeholders to develop a vision of learning, and guide actions by keeping the vision the focal point of conversations about instruction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>... advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth (Standard 2).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus content of school-based professional development activities on teaching and learning as they relate to improved student achievement; include ample opportunities for coaching and reflection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>... ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment (Standard 3).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop a master schedule that includes established planning time for both grade-level/content teams and co-teaching partners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>... collaborating with families and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources (Standard 4).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establish on-going relationships with community groups. Consider establishing mentorship programs and business partnerships, or hosting informal “coffee hours” to promote communication and collaboration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>... acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner (Standard 5).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrate that fairness is giving individuals what is needed for success, not giving them the same resources or support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>... understanding, responding to, and influencing the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context (Standard 6).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stay informed of current developments in educational research and legislation, and provide relevant and clear updates to parents, teachers, and students.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following websites provide additional information to help ensure success for all students:

References
Check It Out!

The following materials are available on loan from the T/TAC William and Mary lending library. To request materials, please call 1-800-323-4489 and leave a message. The materials will be sent to you along with a postage-paid return mailer. A complete listing of professional resources available through the T/TAC William and Mary lending library may be viewed at http://www.wm.edu/ttac. Simply click on the “Library” link to view holdings, complete an online search, or order materials.

Two recently hired T/TAC William and Mary specialists think the two selections highlighted below would have helped them improve the outcomes of their students with disabilities. We pass on their recommendations.

Steps to Independence: Teaching Everyday Skills to Children with Special Needs (3rd ed.)
By Bruce L. Baker & Alan J. Brightman

Steps to Independence is a tool to assist parents in promoting and teaching independence to their child with disabilities. It provides a step-by-step process for teaching essential life skills such as self-help, toilet training, play skills, chores, and independent living. The authors share sample activities, case examples, and skills inventories for each target area. It is recommended for parents of young children with disabilities. (CPL 28)

Functional Curriculum for Elementary, Middle, and Secondary Age Students with Special Needs (2nd ed.)
By Paul Wehman & John Kregel

This book focuses on preparing students with disabilities for independence and employment. The authors provide a curriculum designed to foster competence and independence. Strong emphasis is placed on linking curriculum from elementary to middle school, from middle to high school, and from high school to adult life. Functional Curriculum for Elementary, Middle, and Secondary Age Students with Special Needs is a comprehensive tool to assist teachers in designing effective instruction for functional skills. Areas addressed include self-determination, functional academics, financial planning, socialization, employment, and mobility training. (TR 151)

The following information packets provide a brief overview of current topics and best practices for serving students with mild/moderate disabilities. These packets may be downloaded or ordered from the T/TAC website at http://www.wm.edu/ttac.

Considerations: Designing Effective Professional Development

This Considerations Packet provides essential information for educators interested in improving professional development practices. Topics include standards for designing professional development activities and programs that lead to improved learning for all students. Basic information about the major models of professional development and their effectiveness is followed by specific strategies for assessing a school or school division as a learning organization. Finally, key questions for identifying indicators of effective professional development are offered.

Considerations: Instructional Assessment: An Essential Tool for Designing Effective Instruction

This Considerations Packet describes an instructional assessment model adapted from the work of Rosenfield (1987), and Gravois and Gickling (2002) that helps teachers match instruction to student needs. Instructional assessment examines the student’s knowledge of the skills needed to master the content, evaluates the difference between what the student knows and what the student is expected to do, and analyzes the kinds of errors that the student makes. This process can be used in all academic areas to provide information needed to create powerful, effective remediation strategies. This packet describes the assessment of reading and writing skills, but the method is applicable to all academic areas.
As school communities become increasingly more interdependent in response to the needs of diverse student populations, the need for trusting relationships between families and schools is crucial. The collaborative nature of shared decision-making within school communities involving parents, school administrators, teachers, and students **begs** for the basic constructs of trust: care for others’ well-being, integrity of word and action, open communication, reliability characterized by commitment, and professional competency (Tschannen-Moran, 2004). Fundamental to school communities is fostering family-school partnerships based on a foundation of trust (Tschannen-Moran, 2004; Walther-Thomas, Korinek, McLaughlin, & Williams, 2000).

Administrators and teachers who create opportunities for families to become involved in their children’s school experiences find that the school community’s educational experience on a whole is enhanced (Friend & Cook, 1996). Specifically, schools report positive outcomes of family involvement on students’ academic achievement, school attendance, and behavior. Further, maintenance of healthy relationships between schools and families raises professional standards in schools cultivating a high level of mutual trust that strengthens the entire school community (Walther-Thomas et al., 2000).

**What activities encourage positive home-school connections that are based on trust?**

- **Fall and spring open houses** and regularly scheduled class meetings serve as a venue for clearly communicating school and classroom goals and expectations. These opportunities set the tone for a trusting learning environment.

- **Parent-teacher conferences** are scheduled early in the school year and periodically throughout the school year. Conferencing can take the form of one-on-one or team meetings, telephone conferences, or email communications. Regular conferencing promotes a meaningful exchange of ideas, provides a venue for discussing student celebrations as well as concerns, and creates a climate of parity.

- **Family volunteer opportunities** extend an invitation to family members to share their resources and skills with the school community making them an important component in student learning and school functioning.

- **Parent advisory groups** open doors for parents to serve as advocates for their children within the schoolwide decision-making process. A school environment based on trust respects these groups as voices of student support rather than factions of parental opposition.

- **Workshops** addressing changing instructional practices to meet the needs of students with achievement gaps invite families to partner with teaching professionals in supporting student learning.

- **Special education tools that foster home-school connections** promote open communication and valued input essential to a trusting school-family partnership for special education students.
  - As members of the IEP team, parents have valuable information necessary to write an appropriate IEP. The **Parental Input form** asks families for their input on their child’s: (a) strengths and needs, (b) social and behavioral concerns, (c) characteristics of learning style, (d) testing accommodations required, and (e) classroom accommodations that bring school success. It is best completed a month before the IEP is written.
  - To ensure that the voice of the student is included in the IEP process, assist him or her in completing a **Student Input form**. Guide the student in identifying strengths and needs. Ask questions that develop specific goals addressing the student’s specific learning needs. It is important to include behavioral as well as academic goals. Students’ confidence will build as progress is made toward achieving their goals.
Have a draft IEP available a week before the IEP team meeting. Encourage parents or guardians to read the draft IEP to ensure that it captures their interests and concerns before the IEP team meeting, and to offer input.

Although building trusting school-family partnerships takes “time, effort, and leadership, the investment will bring lasting returns” (Tschannen-Moran, 2004, p.188).

References

Meet Our New T/TAC Staff Members

Donna Bayly, Strategic Instruction Model Specialist
(757) 221-1708, dibayl@wm.edu

Donna joined the T/TAC staff in July 2006. She brings with her 25 years of experience in special education, teaching in both self-contained and inclusion settings and administering a high school’s special education program. Donna received her B.A. in Elementary Education/Special Education from Southeastern Louisiana University and her M.Ed. from the College of William and Mary.

Fritz Geissler, Inclusion/Instructional Support Team Specialist
(757) 221-7736, fdgeis@wm.edu

Fritz joined the T/TAC staff in July 2006, bringing with him 10 years of experience in special education and technology integration. He earned his B.S. in Psychology from James Madison University and his M.Ed. in Special Education from Virginia Commonwealth University.

Debbie Grosser, Transition Specialist
(757) 221-7822, dagro2@wm.edu

Debbie joined the T/TAC staff in July 2006. She brings with her 19 years of experience in special education as a vocational evaluator, special education teacher, and transition specialist. She earned her B.S. in Rehabilitation Education from Indiana University of Pennsylvania and her M.Ed. in Special Education from the College of William and Mary.

Butler Knight, Behavior Specialist
(757) 221-1708, bsknig@wm.edu

Butler joined the T/TAC staff in August 2006, bringing with her 19 years of experience working with students and professionals at the elementary, middle, and high school levels in both general and special education settings. She earned her B.A. in Sociology and Elementary Education from Hollins University and her M.Ed. and Ed.S. in Counseling from the College of William and Mary.
Teachers throughout the nation are mandated to use research-based instructional strategies. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2004), No Child Left Behind (NCLB) emphasizes the implementation of educational programs and practices that have been scientifically researched and clearly yield high results. NCLB requires that educators use these research-based strategies as they are shown to aid students in learning and accessing the curriculum. Selecting the appropriate strategy to address each student concern is a crucial component to ensure student progress.

The first step in choosing an appropriate strategy is to clarify the student’s needs through assessment. Pretests identify the student’s prior knowledge and mastery of the necessary sub-skills in the curriculum. Classroom-based instructional assessments identify what students know, what they can do, and how they approach new material (Gravois & Gickling, 2002). A common mistake is to implement a research-based strategy that does not correctly match the student’s need. An example would be using a strategy to increase a student’s fluency by rereading passages and timing improvement (Instructional Consultation Teams: Training Manual, 2006, p. F8). However, if the underlying cause for poor fluency is a decoding deficit, the mistake could result in limited achievement gains for the student. This example highlights the importance of using assessments that will accurately inform instruction, target interventions, and monitor progress. Teachers effectively meet their students’ needs through high-quality instruction that includes ongoing embedded assessment (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Assess and Instruct Cycle

- Curriculum (Virginia Standards of Learning)
  - Pretest for prior knowledge
  - High quality instruction with embedded formative assessment
    - Mastery of content
      - Instructional assessment (determines what students know, what they can do, how they think and approach new material)
        - Implement research based instructional strategy/strategies and monitor progress
  - Partial mastery of content

After teachers have clarified the student concern and implemented an instructional strategy, the next step is to analyze the student’s progress. When done correctly, this analysis provides the information necessary to determine the success of the strategy being used. Progress monitoring begins with
collecting baseline data that shows where the student is performing prior to the intervention. Then short-term, intermediate, and long-term goals are developed. Data continues to be collected frequently to monitor student progress and to determine if the intervention is successful. An important component of this continuous assessment is providing the student with specific, corrective, and timely feedback regarding progress toward the goals (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001). If the student makes expected gains, the strategy is continued until the goal is attained. However, if the student is not reaching goals, the teacher must determine if the instructional strategy has been implemented with fidelity. Next, the educator decides if additional assessment is required to ensure that the student concern has been correctly identified. If additional assessment concludes that the strategy does match the student concern, then the teacher may add additional strategies or increase the frequency with which the current strategy is being used. On the other hand, if assessment indicates a different student concern, then a new research-based strategy needs to be implemented. This continuous cycle of assessment, data collection, and analysis is crucial to determining proper instructional strategies and ensuring student success.

According to a study by Black and William (1998), low achievers benefit from the use of improved formative assessments more than other students. This reduces the range of achievement while raising achievement overall. Using formative assessments to guide classroom instruction has direct implications for districts seeking to reduce achievement gaps by students with disabilities and other subgroups targeted by NCLB (Chappuis, Stiggins, Arter & Chappuis, 2004). Assessment is no longer viewed as the narrow measurement process of aggregating scores for grading purposes, or for comparing one student to another across different intellectual and achievement domains. Instead, it is viewed as a means of determining how a student is actually learning and thinking about what is being taught. Assessment is about asking relevant questions and gathering relevant data to identify what a student knows and needs, and about matching and managing curriculum and instruction to ensure ongoing student success (Instructional Consultation Teams: Training Manual, 2006, p. 12).

References

Additional Resources
Instructional Assessment: An Essential Tool for Designing Effective Instruction (Considerations Packet) may be requested from the T/TAC website at http://www.wm.edu/ttac/packets/consideration.html.
Avoid Being Lost in Space, or Teaching Students Behavior Expectations Through a Classwide Incentive System
By Kristin Holst, M.Ed.

“Danger, Will Robinson! Danger!” No matter how many times that warning was given, Will always managed to find himself in trouble on television’s Lost In Space. Many students are also apparently “lost in space” as they are continually “on red” with behavior management systems commonly found in today’s classrooms (e.g., color card or yardstick systems).

Sprague and Golly (2005) note that teachers who are less effective at classroom management tend to rely on punitive measures, including loss of privileges and removing students from the classroom for misbehavior. The authors contend that a consistently reactive approach does not remedy behavior problems, but actually makes them worse because the teacher focuses most of his or her attention on inappropriate rather than responsible behaviors.

Teachers traditionally review posted classroom behavior expectations the first day of school. Students then settle into a honeymoon period that typically lasts until the second week of school. Walker and his colleagues (1996) believe that simply posting behavior expectations on the wall has no impact on student misbehavior. However, problem behaviors decrease significantly when educators teach expectations through modeling, role play, and ample practice with feedback, and consistently reinforce students for demonstrating appropriate behaviors.

Sprague and Golly (2005) outline key considerations for teachers to be mindful of when teaching expected behaviors. Teachers define what behavior is expected, model the behavior (show students what it is, what it looks and sounds like), and lead students through a behavior sequence. Then students practice the behavior and are rewarded or retaught, depending on the success of the practice. Finally, students’ mastery of the behaviors is tested (e.g., “Show me the right way”).

Many teachers are familiar with the highly effective Mystery Motivator strategy, an incentive system designed to deliver random rewards for appropriate behavior (Jenson, Rhode, & Reavis, 1995). Often, finding out what the reward is may be just as reinforcing as earning the reward itself. Rather than using reinforcement as the mystery, teachers might utilize a Mystery Behavior strategy, which uses the pre-taught behavior expectations. When implementing this strategy during the first few weeks of school, teachers should:

- Teach and review the expected behaviors during the first week of school according to Sprague and Golly’s (2005) aforementioned guidelines.
- Select a pretaught target behavior (e.g., asking for assistance properly, assisting a peer in need) and write it on a piece of paper.
- Place the paper in an envelope and display it in front of the class.
- Tell students the criteria for earning the reward (e.g., “Today I am looking for the first two students who show me a great example of the behavior listed in this envelope.”), but not the focus behavior(s) or the reward for demonstrating the behavior(s), hence the “mystery.”
- Look for the first student who displays or models the mystery behavior.
- Reveal the behavior(s) and the student(s), if any, who earned the reward at the end of the school day.
- Cite specifically what the students’ behavior looked like and sounded like.
- Recognize that there were other students who displayed the mystery behavior, citing their examples and offering praise.
- Vary the criteria for earning the reward, the mystery behavior, and reinforcement to continue to motivate students and reduce satiation.

This technique can also be used to review behavior expectations, especially during difficult times (e.g., holidays, vacations, tests). So, the next time your students are heading toward trouble, resist the urge to wave your arms and yell, “Danger! Danger!” Instead, reteach the behavior expectations and try out the Mystery Behavior envelope. It will help educators and students make it through the school year happier, saner, and a little less “lost in space.”

References
Traditional models of secondary education that focus largely on academic skill attainment have proven to be inadequate for preparing most students with disabilities for the demands of adult life (Zigmond & Miller, 1992). Secondary students with disabilities need a blend of academic and functional skills instruction (Brolin, 1997) because both are critical for successful functioning in the adult world (Brolin, 1995). A functional skills curriculum emphasizes skills and abilities that generalize to the community, such as personal-social skills, independent living, occupational skills, recreation and leisure, health and grooming, and communication skills (Clark, 1991, 1994).

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA 2004) requires that transition planning begin as soon as students are found eligible for special education services. Specifically, Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams must address functional and academic achievement in each IEP component listed below.

- Present Level of Performance – A statement of the child’s present levels of academic achievement and functional performance (20 U.S.C. §1414)
- Annual Goals – A statement of measurable annual goals, including academic and functional goals (20 U.S.C. §1414)
- Accommodations – A statement of any individual appropriate accommodations that are necessary to measure the academic achievement and functional performance of the child on state and district-wide assessments (20 U.S.C. §1414)

While transition planning begins from the time students’ initial IEPs are written, IDEA 2004 includes one additional transition planning requirement referenced below for secondary students with disabilities.

- Transition Services – A coordinated set of activities focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child with a disability to facilitate the child’s movement from school to postschool activities (20 U.S.C. §1401)

Effective transition planning is accomplished as a result of attention to functional as well as academic skill development throughout students’ elementary and middle school years. The addition in secondary school of transition services that incorporate activities and linkages to adult agencies is the final component in this long-term transition planning process.

References
Please share this newsletter with others. It may be copied. Call 1-800-323-4489 to be added to our mailing list or visit our website.

1-800-323-4489  FAX: (757) 221-5053  http://www.wm.edu/ttac

Dr. Denyse Doerries, Co-Director  
(757) 221-1927, dbdoer@wm.edu

Sue Land, Co-Director  
(757) 221-1925, saland@wm.edu

Donna Bayly  
Strategic Instruction Model Specialist  
(757) 221-1708, dbayl@wm.edu

Fritz Geissler  
Inclusion/Instructional Support Team Specialist  
(757) 221-7736, fdgeis@wm.edu

Debbie Grosser  
Transition Specialist  
(757) 221-7822, dagro2@wm.edu

Kristin Holst  
Behavior/Transition Specialist  
(757) 221-1708, kjhols@wm.edu

Butler Knight  
Behavior Specialist  
(757) 221-1708, bsknig@wm.edu

Louise LeBron  
Inclusion/Instructional Support Team Specialist  
(757) 221-7821, llebr@wm.edu

Dale Pennell  
Transition Specialist  
(757) 221-1708, dpenn@wm.edu

Tina Spencer  
Behavior/Instructional Specialist  
(757) 221-1708, clspen@wm.edu

Donni Stickney  
Instructional Support Team Specialist  
(757) 221-1708, dlstic@wm.edu

Lee Anne Sulzberger  
Inclusion Specialist  
(757) 221-2313, lasulz@wm.edu

---

Old Dominion University T/TAC
Old Dominion University is responsible for training and technical assistance for Regions 2 and 3 in early childhood special education/primary developmental delay (through age 9) and severe disabilities. You may contact T/TAC ODU at (757) 683-4333, or 1-888-249-5529, or visit their website at http://www.ttac.odu.edu.