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Strategies for Creating Inclusive Schools Considerations Packet

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Strategies for Creating Inclusive Schools

This *Considerations Packet* provides basic information for educational professionals currently engaged in or considering improving inclusive practices in a school. Topics include the following: (a) conducting a self-assessment to determine the school's starting point for action related to inclusive practices; (b) following a change model to move from initiating to sustaining inclusive practices; (c) forming a guiding team to monitor progress; and (d) providing ongoing professional development directly related to educator needs.

Getting Started

As a school moves toward inclusion, it is important for stakeholders to follow a process for change. Figure 1 illustrates Kotter's model for change (1996). Please note: This reference is not included in your reference list. The model is included in *Creating an Inclusive School Environment: A Model for School Leaders,* an online learning module developed by The IRIS Center (2010). The IRIS module provides comprehensive support for leaders preparing to create an inclusive school and is organized around the eight components outlined in Kotter's change model (2012).

Figure 1. Kotter's model for change.

Adapted from Kotter (1996).

Steps 1 through 3 help educators prepare for creating an inclusive school.

1) **Establish a Sense of Urgency for the Change**

Establishing a sense of urgency is crucial for gaining cooperation (Kotter, 1996). School leaders establish a need to change by reviewing current data and identifying learning gaps between all students. Data to be reviewed and disaggregated by subgroup includes office discipline referrals, child study findings, retentions, and district-level benchmark and Standards of Learning (SOL) scores.

2) Form a Guiding Team
In forming a team, it is important to engage the relevant stakeholders in the change process, including those who:

- are on board with the vision to create an inclusive educational environment
- have the authority and expertise to make and implement decisions
- have established credibility among their colleagues
- have demonstrated leadership in the school. (Kotter, 1996)

It is also important for school leadership teams to adopt and follow a group process to ensure effective team work toward desired outcomes. For more information on school teams, refer to the T/TAC W&M Considerations Packet *Strategies for Creating Effective School Leadership Teams*.

3) Create a Vision Statement That Is:
- **Clear and focused on the vision and desired outcomes**
- **Challenging** – future-oriented and includes the outcomes toward which the school is working
- **Specific, achievable, and realistic**
- **Inspiring** – aspirational instead of a check-off list of action steps
- **Measurable** – identifies measures for successful goal attainment
- **Subject to refinement** – leaves room for growth

In short, vision creates a picture of the school's future and why educators should strive to create it (Kotter, 1996).

Steps 4 through 6 provide the guidance to implement the change.
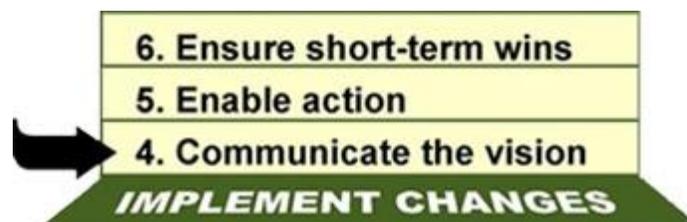
Adapted from Kotter (1996).

4) **Communicate the Vision**

Develop a plan for communicating the vision. Create opportunities with faculty, staff, families, and the community to gain support and buy-in. Establishing a shared sense of the desired future can motivate and coordinate stakeholders toward transformative action (Kotter, 1996).

5) **Enable Action**

School leaders can empower educators to take action by being aware of and removing as many implementation barriers as possible (Kotter, 1996). Leaders begin by using self-assessment tools to evaluate current levels of inclusiveness and identify strengths and opportunities for growth. Once a baseline has been established, the team can identify priorities for action and move on to construct an action plan. The action plan must include:

- measureable objectives
- actionable tasks or steps to achieve each objective
- data collection methods
- criteria for evaluation
- a timeline for achieving each objective
- person(s) responsible for overseeing each objective.

Stetson & Associates, Inc. (2011), developed a free online self-assessment tool to help teams determine the current level of inclusiveness in the school. After completing this instrument, leadership teams can define next steps toward reaching the school's vision for inclusion. This tool, along with additional information related to creating inclusive schools, may be found at the Inclusive Schools Network website, https://blog.inclusiveschools.org/test-quiz-page/

School teams may also use the guiding questions in Table 1 for self-assessment. The questions are adapted from a T/TAC William and Mary tool based on a similar instrument prepared by the [Maryland Coalition for Inclusive Education (2011](#)). "Yes" answers indicate that the inclusive practice is evident. "No" responses indicate areas for growth. Consideration of these quality indicators supports schools in educating ALL students, but especially students with disabilities.

Table 1

Guiding Questions: Quality Indicators for Inclusive Practices

Administrative Support for Inclusion	Yes	No
1. Does our school communicate a vision that values the contributions of all learners as members of the school community?		
2. Does our school improvement plan include inclusive practices with action steps to support implementation?		
3. Is person-first language used and modeled by administrators, teachers, paraprofessionals, and other school staff?		
4. Do school administrators communicate that general educators are responsible for teaching students with disabilities with the support of special educators?		

	Yes	No
5. Does the administrative team create balanced classroom rosters (number and degree of severity of students with disabilities vs. the total number of students in each class)?		
6. Are school-wide supports in place to develop social skills and relationships?		
Collaborative Planning and Teaching Structures	**Yes**	**No**
7. Is there adequate, regularly scheduled, ongoing planning time for general and special education teachers and other staff to collaborate?		
8. Is a variety of models for the delivery of special education services used to meet the needs of all students, such as collaborative consultation and co-teaching, plus instructional practices such as universal design for learning (UDL) and flexible groupings?		
9. Do teachers clarify and share roles and responsibilities so that distinctions between "specialist" and "classroom teacher" are not obvious?		
10. When co-teaching, do teachers select and utilize structures based on the needs of the students?		
11. Do teachers engage students by providing multiple opportunities and modes for responding?		
12. Do teachers use tiered planning that reflects UDL and student readiness as well as interests, learning profiles, and opportunities for choice?		
13. Are there professional development opportunities for staff regarding instructional strategies and supports for UDL?		
14. Are paraprofessionals skilled and responsible contributors to the classroom?		
Individual Student Supports	**Yes**	**No**
15. Do pre-referral strategies include a wide range of accommodations and modifications that are clearly documented?		
16. Is data-based decision-making used to identify and plan for meeting students' academic and behavioral challenges?		
17. Do teachers use, and do students have access to, technology that supports student learning and communication?		

	Yes	No
18. Is there an official planning process for students with disabilities who are transitioning between grades/schools to ensure educational supports are accurately implemented?		
19. Are families fully involved in and regularly consulted about their children's educational programs?		
20. Do students with disabilities have access to, and are they encouraged to participate in, the same extracurricular activities as their peers?		
Individual Education Program Development	**Yes**	**No**
21. Do students with disabilities, regardless of severity of disability, receive all or most of their education with age-/grade-appropriate peers and do they have similar schedules as their peers without disabilities?		
22. Are all supplementary services and necessary accommodations considered and implemented collaboratively?		
23. Are IEP goals and objectives aligned with the Standards of Learning and focused on literacy, writing, mathematics, communication skills, and social skills?		
24. Do special education teachers and other specialists routinely provide consultation and deliver services in the general education classroom to the maximum extent possible?		
25. Are families regarded as full members of the IEP team and do they participate in the planning process?		

6) Ensure Short-Term Wins

Short-term wins that are consistent with the vision of creating an inclusive school environment can be stepping-stones to greater opportunities and success. Short-term wins validate educators' efforts and maintain a level of urgency to attain goals. By monitoring progress and making success visible, teams focus on goals that can be accomplished in three to six months. Producing short-term wins helps the guiding team to test its vision against concrete conditions and undermines the efforts of cynics and resisters of the team's efforts (Kotter, 1996).

Steps 7 through 8 focus on sustaining an inclusive school.
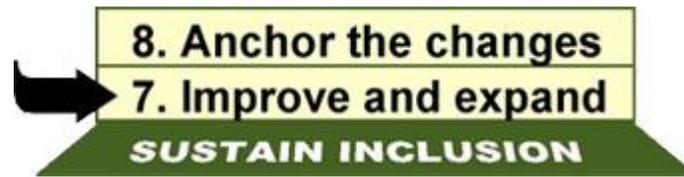
Adapted from Kotter (1996).

7) Improve and Expand

At predetermined intervals, the leadership team reflects on what is and is not working and uses this information to adjust the plan for improvement. At this stage, the team also begins to expand by providing professional learning opportunities to stakeholders and staff. It is critical to design targeted development activities for each stakeholder group. The Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM) tool (Hall & Hord, 2006) identifies an individual's professional development needs from awareness to the refocusing stages. Use of this model helps identify and deliver the most appropriate professional learning activities.

The stages of concern from the CBAM are listed below. Stakeholders first identify their stage of concern for creating an inclusive school environment. Then, using the chart in Table 2, they match appropriate professional learning sessions to their needs (Beninghof & Singer, 1998).

☐ **Stage 0/Awareness** – Very low level of involvement. This level includes staff members who possess minimal knowledge of *inclusion*.

☐ **Stage 1/Informational** – General awareness and interest, but still relatively uninvolved. Staff members at this level recognize that inclusive practices are occurring in the building or district, but they are unaware that inclusion will impact their environment or practices.

☐ **Stage 2/Personal** – Beginning to consider the personal impact of the innovation. Staff member are beginning to recognize that students with disabilities will be assigned to their classrooms**.**

☐ **Stage 3/Management** – Concern focuses on efficient and effective methodologies. Staff members' class lists include several students with disabilities. As a result, they are committed to learning the most effective practices for teaching exceptional learners.

☐ **Stage 4/Consequence** – Attention to student outcomes and accountability. At this level, staff members have included students with disabilities for a short period of time. They begin to advocate for students by raising questions related to student outcomes, fairness, progress, evaluation, and success.

☐ **Stage 5/Collaboration** – Focus on working with others involved with the change. Staff members at this level recognize that colleagues, especially those with inclusion experience, are valuable resources for improving their own practice.

☐ **Stage 6/Refocusing** – Interest in refinement, improvement, and innovation. Staff members at this level have experienced success with inclusion and regularly take action to improve their practice.

Table 2 lists targeted activities for professional development that is aligned with the staff members' level in the stages of concern and that promotes inclusive practices.

Table 2

Stages of Concern and Staff Development Activities

Stage of Concern	Staff Development Activity
Awareness	• Brief overview workshop • Awareness-level videos • Ongoing updates at faculty meetings • Brief professional journal or newspaper articles on inclusion
Informational	• Full-day workshops on general inclusion issues • Presentations by parents of students with disabilities • Brief presentations by practitioners of inclusion • Brief professional articles on inclusion
Personal	• Group discussions around specific inclusion issues • Presentations by inclusion practitioners followed by a question-and-answer session • Conference attendance • Reading and discussion groups • Visits to inclusive classrooms

Management	• Practical books and articles • Problem-solving sessions with a group or consultant • Videos showing practical strategies • Visits to inclusive classrooms with opportunities for dialogue with teacher • Library/resource investigation
Consequence	• Research articles on outcomes • Discussion with colleagues about outcomes • Research projects within own settings • Highly focused skill-building workshops • Study groups • Video recordings of lessons followed by self-analysis
Collaboration	• Problem-solving meetings • Peer coaching • Staff meeting updates • Curriculum development committees
Refocusing	• Reading club ("Teachers as Readers") • Peer coaching • Conferences • Presenting own experiences to others • Discussions with advocates for inclusion • Independent study plans

(Adapted from Beninghof & Singer, 1998).

8) **Anchor the Change**
   Teams ensure changes are incorporated into documents that guide the school's processes and procedures (e.g., school improvement plans, teacher and principal evaluations, school, parent, and student handbooks, websites, brochures). Cultural change is more likely to occur when positive results are achieved. "New approaches usually sink into a culture only after it's very clear that they work and are superior to old methods" (Kotter, 1996, p. 166).

As a school becomes more inclusive, administrative involvement and support is critical to sustaining the change process. Kotter (2012) suggests that "outstanding leaders are willing to think long term" (p.150). The recommendations outlined in this packet and described in the IRIS online learning module equip school leaders to create concrete plans for leading the implementation and sustainability of an inclusive school environment.

References

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This *Considerations Packet* was prepared by Sue Land, June 2000, and revised by Donni Davis-Perry, July 2015.