When given support and the opportunity to work in building-based planning teams, teachers can implement remarkable school reforms.

Building-based Decision-making: A Shared Planning Model for Inclusive Schools

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Since the early 1980s American educators have been involved in a continuous series of school reform and restructuring movements. These efforts have been partly in response to (a) public criticism of educational expectations, curriculum and productivity (Doyle, 1993; Ravitch, 1993); (b) perceived decreases in student outcomes in science, math, and other academics (Blank & Engler, 1992); (c) increases in the numbers of students at-risk and who drop out of school (Hodgekinson, 1993; Waxman & Padron, 1995); and (d) comparison of student outcomes in American schools to other nations (Barton, 1993; English, 1993).

Each cause for concern has generated a set of recommendations for restructuring a school such that it becomes more able to perform to an explicit standard of operation. Cumulatively, the various calls for restructuring have suggested at least one of the following reforms:

1. *Increased Accountability.*

Calls for increased accountability have involved the development and comparison of teacher evaluation systems (Shulman, 1988; Swank, Taylor, Brady & Freiberg, 1989), development of alternate supervision models (Zimpher & Howey, 1987), and various types of experimental programs (e.g., vouchers, smaller schools, charter schools) in some districts (Fossey, 1994; Gregory & Smith, 1987; NEA, 1993).

2. *Increased Attention from State Governments.*

A host of initiatives have come from governors and legislators that affect the legal and fiscal standing, as well as the organizational structures of schools in many states. These initiatives have included increasing the days allocated for student instruction, establishing curriculum mandates, changing the standards for certification and personnel preparation, and a host of changes in the ways in which local schools operate (O'Neil, 1993; Sage & Burrello, 1994).

3. *Improved Instructional Practices.*

Attention to instructional practice has been a hallmark of many school reform efforts. This has included efforts to identify effective teaching behavior (Reith, Polsgrove, & Semmel, 1981; Stallings, 1985), compare teacher-student interactions across different types of students (Brady, Swank, Taylor & Freiberg, 1988), develop various models of cooperative and peer-assisted teaching (Joyce, Weil, & Showers, 1992), and refine student-centered, reflective teaching practices (Colton, & Sparks-Langer, 1993).

4. *Development of Specialized Programs.*

Numerous reform efforts have advocated for the development of specialized programs for students with language, learning, and cultural differences (Harry & Kalyanpur, 1994; Reynolds & Wang, 1983). This has resulted in tremendous growth in special education, Chapter 1, English as a Second Language, migrant education, and other programs. These specialized programs typically have developed as stand-alone or pull-out models, placed within a typical school, but with separate staffing and operations.

5. *Development of Private - Public Coalitions.*

Many of the reform efforts have called for changing the governance and operation of schools by building coalitions within schools and between community groups and educators (Barth, 1990; Sizer, 1992). These coalition-based schools attend to both internal and external educational influences as a means of empowering communities to build schools responsive to local community needs.

The diversity of the reforms has been matched by the diversity of actions designed to implement these reforms. Many of these implementation efforts (e.g., legislative mandates, standardized teacher evaluation instruments) are top-down implementation models. Other efforts (e.g., Sizer's coalition building) are bottom-up in nature.

Inclusive Education and School Reform

A factor common to many of the restructuring efforts has involved rethinking the way instruction and support services are delivered to students with, or at-risk of developing learning problems, particularly those with learning, language and social disabilities. While much of the educational establishment has been involved in extensive debate over the likelihood of typical schools becoming more inclusive (Brady, Hunter, & Campbell, 1997), others have been deeply engaged in developing, implementing and evaluating a pedagogy of inclusive education (Campbell & Campbell, 1995; Giangreco, Cloniger & Iverson, 1993; Salisbury et al., 1993). The emphasis of these efforts has been to create and maintain a general education environment supportive of students who traditionally have been educated outside of (or are at-risk of removal from) regular classes. This includes up to 40% of a school-aged population (Skrtic, 1991) and includes students with disabilities (Reynolds & Wang, 1983), children of migrant workers (Migrant Health Program, 1990), at-risk learners (USED, 1993; Waxman & Padron, 1995) and students from families who do not speak English as their first language (USED, 1991).

A pedagogy of inclusive education rests, in part, on a school community's willingness to participate in restructuring and change (Fullan, 1993; Smith, Hunter, Schrag, 1991), and an expectation that students with learning, language and social differences belong in and benefit from schools where disability is not a criterion for classroom assignment (Goodlad & Lovitt, 1993). In assessing how schools become more inclusive, Catlett (1998) and Salisbury et al. (1993) defined inclusive schools as a logical outcome of school reform. Common to these schools are practices where students (a) attend their home schools (where they would attend if they had no disability); (b) participate in typical school routines, activities, curriculum, and schedules; and (c) are classified only for the purpose becoming eligible for services (not for deciding classroom or program placement). Further, students with disabilities in these schools were regular members of general education classes. They attended classes

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with nondisabled students of similar ages (plus or minus two years), and these students represented the natural proportion of similar students in the district. In summary, inclusive educational experiences were on-going, not sporadic or episodic.

To date only a limited history exists that describes how these schools became more inclusive. For example the Catlett (1998) and Salisbury et al. (1993) studies show a picture of local commitment to school restructuring. In both cases, a bottom-up picture of change has emerged, with parents and teachers as initiators of change in school philosophy and practice. This contrasts with the reports in other states where restructuring initiatives for inclusive education have come from state or local administrators (Sage & Burrello, 1994; Villa & Thousand, 1992). Common to either route to change is the need for local planning. Indeed, Deal and Peterson (1990) and Fullan (1993) note that ultimately the success of a reform initiative depends on active involvement of the leadership and staff at an individual school. Given the magnitude of change required to establish and maintain an inclusive school, establishing a building-based planning model is a critical initial step (Campbell, Campbell, Forbes, & Brady, 1998).

In the rest of this paper we describe a local planning model used in conjunction with an inclusive education initiative in one state. A description of the planning model is delineated, and is followed by a case example of how the model was implemented.

The Building-based Inservice Model: A Case Example

The Building-based Inservice Model (see Campbell et al., 1998) was developed in response to state-wide requests for assistance to build a planning and support system for local schools. The goal of the request-for-assistance was to serve diverse populations of students better within general education environments. To accomplish this, the project was to establish school-based planning teams who would, in turn, develop school improvement plans. In addition, the planning teams were to assist teachers within each participating school to acquire the skills and knowledge needed to support diverse populations of students, thereby making the school a more inclusive educational setting.

The assumption of the Building-based Inservice Model is that a local school can provide an inclusive education if five criteria are met:

1. Constituents within the school (administrators, teachers, related service personnel, parents, students, paraprofessionals) become committed to providing quality inclusive education;
2. Members of the local school gain obtain community and neighborhood involvement and support;
3. Capacity to identify needs and propose solutions to problems is generated from within the school;
4. School constituents acquire knowledge and skills that promote exemplary educational practices; and
5. Technical assistance needed to support implementation and evaluate student outcomes is provided systematically.

Since the project was to restructure schools around the logic of inclusive education, we adopted the assumption that educators can learn to extend and expand their capacity to collaborate with other professional educators (Thousand & Villa, 1992). Because the competencies needed to teach diverse populations of students cross many lines, we adopted operational guidelines that required shared expertise rather than assigned expertise. That is, we operated under the logic that students would benefit from inclusive educational experiences if they could obtain the shared expertise of a school staff, rather than the expertise of only a single teacher or program to which they were assigned.

The School

Horace Mann Elementary School, a building housing grades K-6 in a mid-sized midwestern town of approximately 75,000 people, served as a training site and as an inclusive education demonstration setting. Horace Mann was located in a racially and ethnically diverse, lower to middle SES neighborhood on the edge of the city. Although the school was over 35 years old, it was well maintained and matched the ordered, manicured appearance of the community.

Approximately 400 students attended the school, and 72% percent of them received free breakfast and lunch. The school housed one of the district's English as a Second Language programs, and contained several separate full time classes for students with mild academic disabilities. There were 23 teachers and 15 support staff including a librarian and paraprofessionals for Chapter 1, music and special education. The teachers were generally young with an average teaching experience of 5-6 years; for many, Horace Mann was their first teaching assignment.

There were four special education teachers assigned to the school; three of the teachers had full-time assignments and one rotated to another school. While most of the students who received special education had mild disabilities, the district had initiated a plan to return all students with disabilities to their home schools. In anticipation of this, school personnel had begun to prepare for several students with more complex disabilities (including those with mental retardation, emotional and behavior disorders, and students who are deaf and have no speech).

Horace Mann was selected for participation after a first year, fifth grade teacher read a brochure describing the school-based change project and the technical assistance that was available for participating schools. We then contacted the principal who was eager to arrange for the project to be located in his school and to participate actively in it.

Developing Building-based Planning Teams

Three problem solving teams were developed as the initial activity in establishing a building-based school change process. The problem solving was centered around grade level teams; the early primary team consisted of grades K-1. The primary team included grades 2-3, and intermediate team targeted grades 4-6. Membership on the teams included representatives from each of the grades and any other teacher or support person who would likely provide services to any of the students returning to the home school. A different special education teacher was assigned to each team. This reflected a decision by the teachers to assign students with disabilities to grade levels rather than by special education categories.

Project staff provided the training and technical assistance to prepare the teams to function as instructional problem solvers. The project objective was for the teams to meet whenever there was a student experiencing substantial difficulty with academic performance, personal or social behavior, or school attendance. The team thus was to serve as a problem solving mechanism for students at-risk for school failure or referral to special education. In addition, the teams were to begin planning for the students in other special education programs who were to return to Horace Mann Elementary as their home school. Any teacher who requested assistance could call for a planning team

meeting, and thus became a part of that team for discussions about the student in question. Each team was made up of a meeting facilitator, a recorder and the teacher(s) with specific student concerns.

Inservice and technical assistance

All planning team members received inservice and technical assistance during a year-long project. This included 6 inservice training sessions, on-site supervision and follow-up, telephone consultation, and materials development and dissemination.

The inservice content was the centerpiece of the technical assistance. Six information modules were developed by project staff (Campbell & Campbell, 1995) and delivered in approximately two-month intervals. Topics for the inservice included (a) collaborative teaming, (b) curriculum matrixing, (c) two modules on instructional delivery, (d) peer involvement, and (e) planning school change.

Each module was delivered in a separate inservice session; each session was approximately 6 hours long. A common format was used for all sessions. The format included:

1. Evaluation of knowledge of the topic to be covered;
2. Identification of objectives of the inservice;
3. Delivery and integration of the new skill and practice activities;
5. Summary of the activities;
6. Evaluation of the session; and
7. Assignment of specific implementation activities for the following session.

In addition to the inservices, on-site assistance included coaching, simulated problem solving, and team cohesion activities. These team activities were delivered after school and never exceeded 30 minutes in duration.

The teams were taught to use a 7-Step problem solving strategy (adapted from Graden & Bauer, 1992). This strategy used a focal, student centered problem specified prior to the meeting. Thus all team members arrived at the meeting with specific knowledge of the student concern. The 7-Step problem solving strategy included:

1. Define the student's instructional, personal, social, or attendance problem;
2. Clarify the problem. Turn the problem into a question in anticipation of finding instructional alternatives;
3. Use brainstorming to explore and identify alternatives. Use consensus to rank order the top alternatives;
4. Select a strategy you will use to implement the top alternative;
5. Clarify the strategy. Identify the steps needed to implement the strategy. Identify who will do what, when and where;
6. Implement the plan. Collect the type and amount of data to allow for evaluation of the activity.
7. Evaluate the outcomes.

Changes in school practices

Throughout the project year, a number of observable changes occurred in the school. The most obvious change to project staff was that more "structure" was added– by the participating teachers– to the way in which they solved problems related to students. Prior to participating in the project each special education teacher had her own "caseload" of students. They acted as "managers" of cases and assumed nearly all responsibility for students' instructional progress (including development of separate objectives, lesson plans, lesson adaptations, etc.). These teachers typically pulled students out of general education classes for instruction, even when the instruction was similar to that provided by the regular teachers. While this was the typical method of operation, it was not entirely satisfactory to the teachers. Special education teachers were expected to act as solution providers whenever a grade level teacher had a concern with a student with a disability. Special education teachers reported that they often felt inadequate unless they "knew all the answers." Grade level teachers reported similar frustrations if a "solution" provided by the special educators did not work. These teachers typically reported that their next action should be to refer the student for separate special education class placement.

As the project year progressed, several events occurred that resulted in better integrating the general and special education teachers. First, the decision to base the planning teams around grade levels resulted in distributing special education teachers among the teams. Second, the technical assistance package stressed that problem solving should be student-based, and should occur within a collaborative team-mediated context. As the year progressed, the teams gained experience with collaborative, student-driven problem solving. Team members reported that they shifted their expectations regarding students with (or at risk of developing) learning problems. Rather than referring students for assistance, team members reported that they developed the expectation that they should request team assistance to help solve instructional problems. That is, the team problem solving helped teachers to "pull together all of their expertise" and develop active student-based solutions. As one teacher reported they "got more for their buck" by having team-oriented solutions.

Changes in the way students at-risk for failure and those with disabilities were taught were not limited to the single project year. For two years after the project moved out of Horace Mann, the planning model continued to operate, albeit with participant generated metamorphoses. For example, one year after the project the planning teams began to rotate personnel on and off the teams. Planning teams started to meet during the summers to review the previous year and to make recommendations for the coming school year. The principal arranged for planning team members to receive stipends for their summer work, and release time during the academic year. Since its inception, this process has been evaluated and modified each year by the planning teams. While the teachers were the central players in creating this school's process, the principal used his position to arrange for teachers to have the opportunity and to develop the process.

As teachers' expectations regarding "ownership" of students' problems changed, several operational changes also occurred. First, the principal reported that the number of referrals to special education decreased during the project and two subsequent years, although the frequency of staffing meetings increased. The reason for the increase was that the staffings are called to solve and prevent instructional problems. Second, for those students who were referred and became eligible for special education, fewer students received their instruction in pull out or separate settings. While there has been no change in the nature of the student body at Horace Mann, there has been a substantial change in the students' places of learning. Special education teachers continue to provide direct instruction but to fewer numbers of students; increasingly these teachers work as co-teachers in general education classes. Finally, as the students with more complex disabilities have begun to return to Horace Mann Elementary as their home school, the standard operational procedure is now to

plan the transition well in advance of placement. For example, students now make several visits to the school to learn about its layout prior to permanent placement; teachers become familiar with the students and their idiosyncrasies during these visits.

Conclusion

The case of Horace Mann Elementary School demonstrates that when given support and the opportunity to work in building-based planning teams, teachers can implement remarkable school reforms that include many students who traditionally have remained at the edge of the educational mainstream. Much of Horace Mann's success in becoming a more inclusive school rests, we believe, with the willingness of the staff to participate in serious efforts to restructure the way they did business. Fullan (1993) noted that educational restructuring will remain elusive unless the goals and methods are embraced by the community of professionals within a school. The specific team strategies developed in this project are consistent with Fullan's logic. Teachers were engaged in local planning of activities and processes that would occur within their own schools. The emphasis of all activities was student-based, and the primary skill supported by project activities was problem solving over problem referral.

Much of the professional literature surrounding inclusive education pits logic against reason and philosophy against preference, often with a level of invective uncommon among professional educators. While many debate inclusive education as a concept, Brady et al. (1997) noted that many educators are actively engaged in developing a pedagogy of inclusive education, linked with a restructuring of the ways schools do business. Like most examples of restructuring, change at Horace Mann was progressive. Even while the staff altered the typical expectations and practices for teaching students with learning problems, some teachers remained skeptical. Although the planning teams were still operational three years after the project activities, three teachers had not participated in any of these activities; these teachers reported that they still believed that students with disabilities should receive their instruction away from the typical classroom settings. As one of these teachers reported, "I've decided that I cannot work with this student - she needs special ed."

We expect that the process of planning for school change will evolve during the upcoming years. What the Horace Mann experience shows, however, is that building-based planning teams can operate-with a principal's support- within the context of problem solving rather than problem referral. In schools where this occurs, we expect that observers of inclusive education will continue to learn about changing school practices by practicing school change.

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http://www.valdosta.peachnet.edu/coe/coed/sped/camp/proj/main.html