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2025

MTSS in Practice: From Life Skills To Learning Strategies

Nix Ren for Education Week

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EDITOR'S NOTE

When effectively implemented, Multi-Tiered Systems of Support offer a framework that helps both students and educators address a wide range of needs across learning environments. From academic growth to behavioral and social-emotional development, MTSS drives both short- and long-term success, creating a path toward responsive and effective education for all. Here we explore how MTSS **builds essential life skills, improves communication strategies, supports students with special learning needs, promotes evidence-based practices across diverse learning environments,** and **motivates and engages neurodiverse learners** in meaningful ways.

Nicole Xu for Education Week

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Principals Are Key to Making Tutoring Work. Here's Why

By Olina Banerji

SDI Productions/E+

Who's the linchpin in making school-based tutoring work? New research suggests it's principals.

High dosage tutoring has become integral in schools as a strategy to recover academic skills that slipped during the pandemic. And there is strong evidence that when tutoring in schools is frequent, predictable, and held in small groups, it works.

But despite the evidence and support at the district level, tutoring interventions are often hobbled by uneven implementation. Students might not get the prescribed 50 hours a year. The school might struggle to find tutors. Teachers may not understand how it complements their own work. There might be conflicts in scheduling these sessions.

This is where principals need to come in, and steer.

"Principals are responsible for creating a positive culture around tutoring in their schools. They promote the idea that you need an extra set of hands to promote learning," said Nakia Towns, the chief operating officer of Accelerate, a nonprofit that funds and promotes effective academic interventions.

Accelerate partnered with the research group Mathematica to detail the key logistical ingredients that can make high dosage tutoring effective in schools. It's based on the experience of eight of its grantees.

Principals create capacity

The research indicates that tutoring providers have to first build relationships with principals.

Accelerate's interventions reached over 300,000 underserved students across 180 districts and 25 states. Seven of the eight organizations included in the research offered the tutoring during the school day.

"Principals helped these organizations align tutoring within interventions that were already running in schools. For instance, the tutoring support needed by some students who are well below grade level is like the Tier-3 support provided by a MTSS plan," said Towns, referring to multi-tiered systems of support, in which students receive progressively more intensive levels of help. (Tier 3 is the most intensive, and usually provided in a one-on-one format.)

When principals prioritize tutoring, it can simplify other logistical problems too, like finding a suitable time and space for it, the report found. "Principals can appoint a coordinator for the school who makes sure things run smoothly. This person can also be an intervention coach which connects it back to the MTSS support," said Towns.

The coordinator does more than logistics. They are in charge of selecting students, developing lesson plans for tutors, and observing tutoring sessions at least twice a week.

Teach For America, one of the grantees in the study, requires a "veteran educator" to fill this role, spending 5 hours in this role beyond their regular duties.

Principals can help "protect" the coordinator's time from being diverted to other activities, Towns said.

Building trust with teachers

When principals open the doors to outside help, the report finds that their staff—assistant principals, department heads, instructional coaches, and, most crucially, teachers—follow their lead. To convince principals of the merit of tutoring, though, the grantees had to show

> **"Principals are responsible for creating a positive culture around tutoring in their schools. They promote the idea that you need an extra set of hands to promote learning."**
>
> **NAKIA TOWNS**
> Chief operating officer, Accelerate

there was alignment between their curriculum and classroom instruction, or the grade level skills that students must master.

The eight grantees highlighted in the report followed different approaches. Four organizations aligned their literacy curriculum with the critical skills that students needed to read, rather than aligning it directly with each school's reading curriculum. In some cases, organizations met with teachers to show them their curriculum and the reading skills they were focused on.

"Teachers were initially skeptical about the quality of instruction that tutors would bring. They had to see the materials, observe the instruction and watch the students respond. That's how tutors built trust with teachers," said Towns.

One provider, TN SCORE, created a toolkit for Tennessee school districts to embed their tutoring into school curricula and the MTSS plan in their schools.

Principals give teachers cover

Student absenteeism remains a major obstacle to a successful tutoring intervention.

"When principals change the perception about tutoring, it can help bring down absenteeism too. Parents feel like they're missing out on something when their kids don't make it to the tutoring session," said Towns.

How parents respond to tutoring is connected to how teachers feel about it, Towns added.

"There needs to be a national conversation about how far kids are behind. Principals can give teachers enough cover to talk to parents about the gaps in their kids' skill levels," said Towns.

Teachers aren't just highlighting a problem: They are also offering support in the form of trained tutors, she said.

"You must make parents believe that this isn't only their problem to solve. But they do have to get their kids to school on time. That's how you can partner with [teachers] to reduce absenteeism," Towns said. ■

How Lexia Curriculum Products Fit Into Systems of Instruction and Intervention

Core5 and PowerUp Adaptive Blended Learning Ensures Students Receive the Instruction They Deserve

Administrators face increasing urgency to deliver literacy outcomes in the wake of persistent achievement gaps and stagnating National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores.

Tiered systems of support, such as Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) and Response to Intervention (RTI), emphasize the essential elements of **high-quality instruction**, **screening**, **progress monitoring**, and **data-based decision-making** in teams (Center on Multi-Tiered Systems of Support).

By providing effective instruction at a universal level and gathering regular, reliable information to understand student needs, any identified gaps in opportunity, knowledge, or skills can be addressed before they grow. However, even within tiered systems of support, a disproportionate amount of time and resources is often required to address individual needs at an intensive level.

Lexia CORE5 READING

Grades pre-K–5

Lexia® Core5® Reading provides a science of reading-aligned solution that supports prevention and intervention efforts across a district, enabling administrators to address needs earlier, more effectively, and with better visibility into student progress.

Core5 is a personalized, adaptive blended learning program that develops foundational reading and advanced literacy skills for pre-K–5 students. Through the pairing of high-quality instruction and continuous Assessment Without Testing® (AWT) data, Core5 allows students to learn and practice skills at their own targeted place and pace, provides educators detailed insight into their students' skills, and links to specialized instructional resources. Core5 accelerates learning for students across a continuum of needs and spans across all tiers of learning to support students of all abilities.

Learn More About Core5

Lexia POWERUP LITERACY

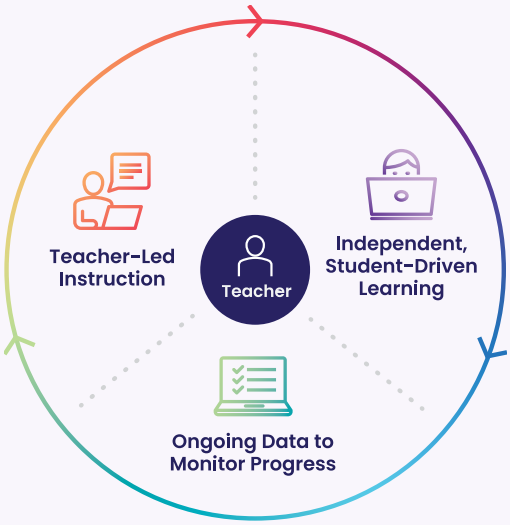
Grades 6–12

Addressing the wide variety of literacy needs of students at the secondary level requires highly effective instruction and intervention systems, at scale. Yet, secondary educators often face the dual challenges of designing instructional programs in the absence of informative assessment data (Hock et al., 2009) while also trying to find adequate time for literacy instruction and intervention in the context of busy middle and high school schedules.

Lexia® PowerUp Literacy® is a personalized, adaptive blended literacy program that helps students in grades 6–12 become proficient readers and confident learners. PowerUp accelerates learning for students across a continuum of needs, supporting students who need supplemental or intensive support at the middle school level as well as students in need of intensive support at the high school level. PowerUp links independent learning with teacher-led instruction by gathering continuous Assessment Without Testing® (AWT) data. As students work through their personalized path in the program, they build fundamental literacy skills through relevant and engaging experiences designed specifically for adolescent learners.

Learn More About PowerUp

Any identified gaps in opportunity, knowledge, or skills can be addressed before they grow.



As students work through their personalized path in the program, they build fundamental literacy skills through relevant and engaging experiences.

iStock/Getty

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The Essential Skill Students With Learning Differences Need

By Arianna Prothero

It's not enough for schools to help students with learning differences or disabilities shore up their academic weaknesses. Students also need to learn how to communicate with others—particularly adults—about their unique needs, experts say.

Self-advocacy is a vital skill for future success in college and the workforce for students with dyslexia, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, or other learning challenges. Throughout their lives, neurodivergent students will find themselves in situations where they must explain the particulars of their learning differences or disabilities to teachers, coworkers, and employers as well as what accommodations they need to succeed—whether it's a formal individualized education program, extra time to perform tasks, or simply what they know helps them do their best work.

They won't always have their parents or a school psychologist there to help them, say experts, so it's important that schools start teaching students how to advocate for their needs, starting as early as elementary school.

"I've had to push for IEP accommodations specifically my entire life," said Jacquelyn Taylor, a student at the University of Rhode Island. She is also an advocate for people with learning disabilities, sharing her experiences as a student with dyslexia and dyscalculia.

> **"On the surface level, it seemed like I'm totally fine, I understand the material. But beneath that, I was spending so much time on a specific assignment that probably should have taken kids 30 minutes. I was spending an hour-plus."**
>
> **JACQUELYN TAYLOR**
> Student at the University of Rhode Island

"A lot of students go through this," she said during an Oct. 17 Education Week K-12 Essentials Forum about how to help students with learning differences.

Taylor said convincing high school teachers she was struggling was particularly difficult because she was a straight A student.

"On the surface level, it seemed like I'm totally fine, I understand the material," she said. "But beneath that, I was spending so much time on a specific assignment that probably should have taken kids 30 minutes. I was spending an hour-plus."

She also sought out a lot of additional help from friends and family members to complete her assignments. Taylor said she had to learn to speak up in her IEP meetings and push back against adults in her school who said her grades were an indication that she was doing fine, when she knew she was struggling.

Asking for help can be very difficult for some students

For some students, self-advocacy comes naturally, said Danielle Kovach, an elementary special education teacher based in New Jersey and the past president of the Council for Exceptional Children. But others will need help flexing those muscles, she said.

"A lot of times asking for that help is so difficult—it doesn't happen overnight," she said, speaking on a panel for the Education Week forum. "As educators, we encourage them, move them along, and teach them leading by example on how to advocate for yourself."

That means teachers need to notice when students with learning differences are struggling or getting frustrated in class, she said, as well as asking students if they need help and what could help address what they're struggling with.

It's also important for teachers to develop strong relationships with students and create supportive classroom environments, experts say, where those students feel like they can take risks and voice their challenges and needs without fear of getting shamed.

That starts with educators assessing their own sometimes misguided perceptions of students with learning differences and other neurodivergent conditions, Kovach said.

"I hear sometimes from teachers, 'Well, I can't do this for them. That's not fair. I can't give them extra time when the other kids don't

get extra time,'" she said. "It's important to realize that when we accommodate students, when we differentiate, we're just leveling the playing field. We're making it equally as challenging for that student as it would be for anyone else."

Students should learn how to explain the details of their learning differences

It can also help students better advocate for themselves if they know and can explain some details about the learning difference they have been diagnosed with, experts say. For example, specific areas of their brain related to, say, language or quantity may process information differently.

These skills are especially important when students transition into post-secondary education or the workforce, where professors and bosses may have little to no information about their students' or employees' learning differences.

Edward Hubbard is an associate professor of educational psychology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison who studies dyscalculia. He said during the Education Week forum that he frequently makes changes to his classes based on feedback from students with specific learning needs, and he finds that his other students also benefit from those accommodations. For example, he started providing recordings of his lectures with captioning to all his classes based on the accommodation he was asked to provide to one student.

Because of privacy rules, Hubbard said he receives very little information on his students' learning differences. That's why it's important for students to learn how to advocate for themselves before they get to college, so they feel confident to approach their professors—or bosses—with their needs.

"Your professors can help advocate for you if you are able to go—and willing to go—and talk to them about what you need to be successful," he said. ■

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How Teachers Can Motivate and Engage Neurodiverse Students

The big upsides—and potential risks—of a "strengths-based" approach to teaching students with disabilities

By Elizabeth Heubeck

Not every student learns the same.

This seemingly simple concept lies at the heart of the term neurodiversity, which refers to differences in the brain's form or function that impact how people receive, process, and respond to information.

Diagnoses such as autism, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, or ADHD, dyslexia, developmental language disorder, dyspraxia, and others, which fall under the umbrella term neurodiversity, have affected people throughout the ages. But the term neurodiversity itself has been in existence for less than 30 years and is still not widely understood.

That could explain why there's such a broad range of strategies used to motivate and engage neurodiverse students at school and in the learning process. Experts address some of the more well-known ones, and provide insight into what might work best.

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What is a deficits-based approach to teaching neurodivergent students versus a strengths-based approach?

Teachers historically have taken a "deficits-based" approach to teaching students with learning diagnoses. That means they see and assess neurodivergent students based on their skill gaps as compared to their neurotypical peers, experts say.

This stands in direct contrast to a "strengths-based" approach, which embraces the concept of neurodiversity and acknowledges the positive attributes of all students—including those who struggle to learn in traditional formats.

The increasingly common catchphrase, "disability is a superpower," takes the strengths-based concept a step further by encouraging neurodiverse students to take a favorable view of their learning differences.

Such drastically divergent approaches to neurodiversity can be confusing to classroom teachers aiming to find meaningful ways to support neurodiverse students. Many education experts advise that teachers should take a "middle-of-the-road" stance, espousing the benefits of a strengths-based approach to teaching neurodiverse students while cautioning against referring too readily to neurodiverse diagnoses as "superpowers."

> **"Teachers historically have taken a "deficits-based" approach to teaching students with learning diagnoses.**

Should a learning disability be seen as a 'superpower'?

Emma Cole, a pediatric neuropsychologist in the Kennedy Krieger Institute's department of neuropsychology and school programs, advises adults to use caution when suggesting to children that their disability is a "superpower."

Disabilities, she said, come with traits that can make life more difficult, and require more effort, time, and perseverance; students with dyslexia, for instance, often find reading a painstaking process.

"They [disabilities] require you to do things in a little bit of a non-traditional way," she said.

Ben Shifrin, head of Jemicy School in Owings Mills, Md., a private school that serves students with dyslexia and other related language-based learning differences, also stops short of referring to students' learning disabilities as their superpowers.

"FMRI [functional magnetic resonance

imaging] studies have proven that these kids process information differently; thus, they see the world differently," he told Education Week last year. "We don't deny that reading is hard for these kids. We don't gloss over it."

How can educators present a balanced perspective of neurodiversity?

Cole shares Shifrin's balanced perspective of neurodiversity

"I really prefer to look at these differences in terms of strengths and weaknesses," Cole said, suggesting that when a professional explains the diagnosis of a disability to a child for the first time, the explanation includes a mention of both.

Cole encourages continuing this balanced approach beyond the initial diagnosis.

"We can take a strengths-based perspective and capitalize on those strengths while also helping students to understand what their weaknesses are, and what helps them with their weaknesses," she said.

Students' eventual ability to identify their academic weaknesses independently and know how to ask for support puts them on a path toward self-advocacy, an important strategy throughout their education, Cole explained.

What keeps more teachers and schools from using a strengths-based approach to teaching neurodivergent students?

As a former elementary teacher who is now an assistant professor of teacher education and elementary education at Saint Louis University, Sheldon C. McAfee believes in the value of a strengths-based approach to learning. He experienced it firsthand.

As a student with dyslexia, he had a teacher in elementary school who encouraged him to give oral reports because he was a strong storyteller but a weak reader and writer. It helped him become better at both reading and writing.

Claire O'Connor and Anthony Warren, both 12th graders at Jemicy School, share similar experiences.

Bringing interactive components into a lesson, as opposed to reading from a text, has helped him engage in school work, Anthony said. Claire agrees, listing collaborative hands-on projects and oral presentations as classroom strategies that have allowed her to demonstrate her knowledge of a subject.

Several obstacles keep teachers from implementing a strengths-based approach with neurodiverse students, McAfee said. The method requires teachers to know their students individually and be aware of their weaknesses and strengths. But with often large class sizes, rigid requirements related to standardized assessments, growing safety concerns, and other challenges, most teachers now don't have the time or training to provide the individualized attention to students that a strengths-based approach to teaching requires, he said.

He also believes that too few educators receive training on strengths-based learning, during teacher-prep programs or while on the job.

"I think we need to give teachers and other related staff more training on how to work with these students," McAfee said. "There's a lot of professional development now around [diversity, equity, and inclusion] as well as culture building, but we've got to add strengths-based education to the fray."

How can teachers better support neurodiverse students, even with limited resources?

Kennedy Krieger's Cole suggests that schools lean on existing district resources, such as access to speech and occupational therapists, to support classroom teachers in meeting students' individual needs.

"As we push for greater inclusion, we need to provide our teachers with more support, and that includes collaboration among the related service providers," Cole said.

Cole also recommends that teachers model the strengths-based approach for students by sharing a little about themselves.

"We need to really keep our empathy skills in tip-top shape, and to show students [this strength-based approach] through modeling," Cole said. "Tell students: These are the things that I do well. These are the things that I have difficulty with, and this is how I work with it." ■

Nicole Xu for Education Week

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What Happens for High Schoolers Who Need More Than 4 Years?

By Sarah D. Sparks

The class of 2024 started high school during the pandemic, but schools are finding that more and more students with disabilities need extended education support, sometimes as much as twice as long as the typical four-year high school allots.

That can make planning difficult for students and families, according to Erin Rosensteel, the transitions coordinator for the Hershey, Pa., public schools.

"Sometimes, you have to have hard conversations, especially with the kids who are thinking they want to be a nurse or a doctor and they're not really cognitively equipped for that kind of academic rigor," Rosensteel said. "You need to dig a little deeper: 'What is it about being a doctor that you're into? Is it the helping component? Is it just working in a hospital?' You need to break it down to the elements of that type of work and maybe pursue that."

While students across the board lost academic traction in the last four years, studies find the pandemic-related disruptions have been particularly hard and long-lasting for secondary students with disabilities.

Even at a time of historic drops in overall national reading and math performance, 8th grade students with disabilities trailed well behind their general education peers in math and reading on the National Assessment of Educational Progress. Among 8th graders with disabilities (not counting those with 504 plans) 69 percent performed below basic achievement in reading, 1 percentage point worse than in 2019, and 77 percent performed below basic in math, 4 percentage points worse than in 2019. (By contrast, about a quarter of 8th grader general education students in reading and about a third in math scored below basic. That left secondary students with little time to recover within the standard four years of high school.

According to the U.S. Education Department's most recent report to Congress, about 3 out of 4 students with disabilities graduate from high school with a regular diploma. While students with intellectual or multiple disabilities are least likely to earn a standard diploma—less than half for both—federal data also show 65 percent or fewer students with emotional disturbances or hearing impairment earn regular diplomas.

In a nationally representative survey in April, a majority of district leaders told the EdWeek Research Center they are providing ongoing academic support for students older than 18, with more than 70 percent of those respondents providing social-emotional support and postsecondary transition help.

"I think the transition side was the hardest part," said John Eisenberg, the executive director of the National Association of State Directors of Special Education. "A lot of those programs weren't designed to be virtual, like in their career and tech-ed programs, because a lot of it requires face-to-face skill sets. For a lot of those kids, transition really did not happen."

One nationwide study in 2020 found little more than half of eligible secondary students received transition support, and they were more frequently focused on the students with the most severe disabilities.

In the April survey, 47 percent of district leaders told the EdWeek Research Center that they serve more 18 and older students with disabilities now than in 2019, and 52 percent of respondents in districts serving students ages 18 and older said they have been offering a wider array of services to older students in special education.

Kimberly Caputo, a senior counsel for special education at the McAndrews Law firm in Philadelphia, said she has seen increasing numbers of students with underdeveloped transition plans in their individualized edu-

> **"Sometimes, you have to have hard conversations, especially with the kids who are thinking they want to be a nurse or a doctor and they're not really cognitively equipped for that kind of academic rigor."**
>
> **ERIN ROSENSTEEL**
> Transitions coordinator,
> Hershey, Pa. public schools

cation programs who will need special education past a four-year high school track. "Now, if you're in 5th grade or 8th grade, there's time to fix it," Caputo said. "But even as early as middle school, most kids have already set their eyes on the turning 18 graduation prize. So if you haven't had the pathway discussions and preparation, ... to try to then jam that work into a 19-year-old's IEP, good luck."

Kirsten Scheurich, Hershey's special education director, agreed, noting that older students can choose to walk in graduation ceremonies in either their current 12th grade year or the year in which they earn a diploma.

"Regardless of how severe their disability is, our students are often very socially aware," Scheurich said. "So if they walk [for graduation] in their 12th grade year with their cohort of peers, and then they come back and all their peers are gone, for a lot of them, that's a hard pill to swallow. If you're not careful, they feel like failures. We have to be really careful about how we approach those years after 12th grade, to make sure that we're honoring the students' well-being and self-confidence."

This year, partly in response to academic and social-emotional-learning loss, Pennsylvania permanently extended its age for special education services to 22, joining Alaska, Illinois, and Utah. Michigan provides support the longest, to 25, with other states ranging from 18 to 21.

For example, Monique Braxton, a spokeswoman for the Philadelphia schools, said the district serves 2,118 special education students 18-22, but only 36 get an extra year of services under the age extension.

Transition programs are more effective when students are actively involved in planning early on; studies find while students with cognitive impairments had more challenges during transition, student engagement was more linked to successful transitions across disabilities.

"People have been trying to partner with a lot of community entities and try to double down the number of offerings that they do have" for older students, Eisenberg said.

In Hershey, for example, the district works with community partners including the Hershey Medical Center to provide multiple internships over the course of the year. So, for example, a student who is interested in the medical field but wouldn't make it into medical school can explore related jobs like technicians and patient transportation.

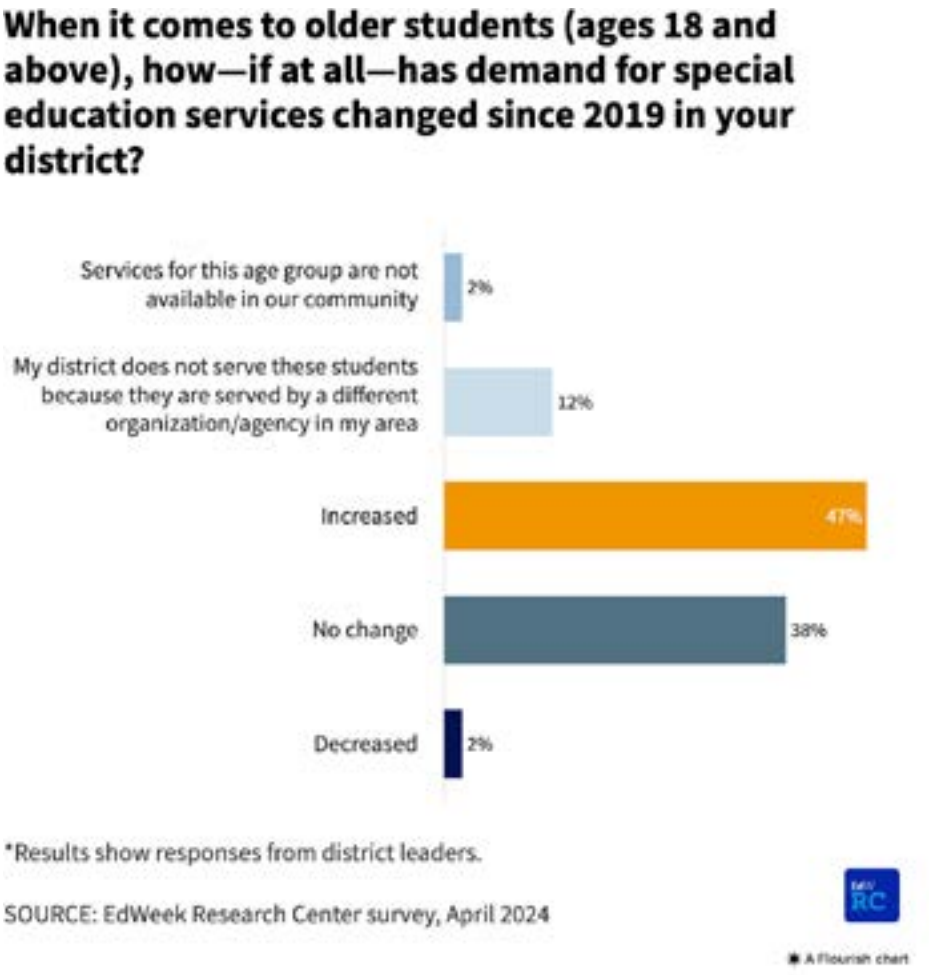
Hershey is also working to get students an earlier start in planning career options. For 90 minutes a day, nine district students travel from their schools to the PAES lab (short for Practical Assessment Exploration System) in the district's central office. The lab, launched last year, simulates real workplaces, where, with peer colleagues, students work through some 260 work tasks related to computing, sewing, woodworking, commercial restaurants, and other industries. Teachers act as supervisors while gauging students' effectiveness and interest in careers.

"They're learning not only hard skills that employers are looking for but soft skills like being on time, communicating with your employer, conflict resolution, and problem-solving," Rosensteel said. "Those are areas where we're seeing a lot of deficits."

The district also hired a social-emotional-learning coach to help students whose social development has been delayed. Over time, older students also learn to understand their own needs and advocate disability accommodations that they could qualify for in work or higher education.

Preparing to advocate on their own behalf is one of the most crucial skills, both for students going into college or into work, Eisenberg said.

"There're a lot of unique programs tied to state and federal funding for transition that people with the most significant disabilities can tap into," Eisenberg said, "But for our higher-functioning kids who did not get that standard diploma, who then don't go on to additional training, what are they doing in terms of employment? I'm worried it's paycheck-to-paycheck sort of living, which is not what we want for all our kids." ■



Additional Resource
View this article's charts

Published September 26, 2023

Educators Share Advice on Supporting Students With Learning Differences

By Hayley Hardison & Evie Blad

Students with learning differences may need extra support to thrive in school, engage in classroom discussions, and complete tasks.

But all students bring unique strengths and needs to the classroom—whether or not they have diagnosed challenges with executive functioning or a learning disability like dyslexia—educators said.

Education Week asked teachers on social media to share the best advice they've received for supporting students with learning differences.

They spotlighted flexibility, inclusivity, and clear communication as keys to success.

1. Provide flexibility and choices in the classroom

Many educators responding to our query cited the importance of flexibility, choice, or differentiation to best support students with learning differences.

Differentiated instruction—defined as "identifying students' individual learning strengths, needs, and interests and adapting lessons to match them"—is a teaching approach that intends to help diverse groups of students learn together.

Critiques of differentiated instruction largely center around logistical concerns—including a lack of time or training for teachers to effectively implement the approach in the classroom. Check out this series of videos by veteran educators Larry Ferlazzo and Katie Hull to explore low-lift strategies to make activities "accessible for students with all types of gifts and challenges."

In general, advocates of increased student agency in class say that it improves students' motivation and academic performance. Here's why these educators incorporate opportunities for student choice or differentiation to support students with learning differences.

"Recognize that each student has unique needs and abilities. Tailor your teaching methods, materials, and activities to accommodate their learning style, pace, and preferences. This personalized approach can greatly enhance their understanding, engagement, confidence and set them up for success in your classroom."
— Stephanie R.


E+

"Choice! Give students choice on how to best showcase their learning and it's a win for all."
— Jessica B.C.

"Easy! Self-paced learning! I never differentiated any better than when I moved to a model of self-paced, blended, mastery-based instruction where I was legitimately able to work with small groups and one on one most of my time in the classroom. My students were more engaged and I was able to better support each of them along their learning journey, whether through extra support or extension activities."
— Dustin T.

"Letting students choose things for themselves gives them the ability to do something they are comfortable with, however sometimes we have to encourage them to choose something new. Choice is the key for all learners."
— Tiffany N. E.

2. Ensure effective communication

Students with learning differences need to feel the confidence that they are being heard at school and the security that comes with clear expectations and feedback, educators said.

In a 2021 opinion essay on supporting students with learning differences, educator Elizabeth Stein wrote: "The best thing we can do to support students with disabilities is to hear what they have to say—and notice how they are perceiving and participating in learning experiences. We must ... create experiences that embrace and embed student voice and perspective. And when in doubt of how best to support students—just ask them!"

Educators on social media agreed.

"Feedback is crucial. Build their confidence!"
— @MasonDillard_

"Voice and choice help students feel a sense of control."
— Lisa M.

"Talk to them about their data. Put it in terms that students can understand and form goals together.Help students gain ownership and (eventually) pride in their progress."
— @MissStreetSmart

3. Cultivate inclusive environments

Educators and advocates have long championed the value of inclusive classroom environments for students with disabilities, including deliberate strategies to include all learners in play, discussions, and activities.

"Research has shown that students with disabilities tend to perform better academically when integrated into general education classrooms, and their peers also gain an understanding and develop acceptance of people who are different from them," wrote EdWeek reporter Caitlynn Peetz in a recent story about creating inclusive classrooms for blind students.

Educators on social media echoed the importance of welcoming classrooms.

"Have patience and most importantly GRACE"
— Dustin R.

"Accept them for who they are and meet them where they are."
— Celeste G.

"This goes without saying, but patience, acceptance, and empathy goes a long way."
— Johnson J. ■

Jaclyn Borowski/Education Week

Published June 14, 2023

Schools for Students With Dyslexia Also Promote Social Emotional Resilience. Here's How

By Elizabeth Heubeck

The research on how students with dyslexia and other language-based learning differences learn to read is well-documented. Evidence-based approaches, such as structured literacy, are increasingly making their way into a growing number of schools—especially those designed expressly to serve dyslexic students. But they're not the only way that these specially designed schools are preparing students for future success.

Intentionally built into the day at many of these private and public schools for dyslexic students are opportunities to grow "soft skills" like self-awareness, competence, and confidence. At first glance, such opportunities may seem to have nothing to do with literacy per se. But they but are often integrated into the school day with as much intent as the most systematic and intensive reading instruction, and some school leaders argue that they are critical students' long-term success.

"People think it's all about instruction," said Timothy Castanza, co-founder and executive director of The Bridge Preparatory Charter School in the Staten Island borough of New York city. "Kids who come here have had a really bad experience in school. They've experienced sadness, anger, frustration ... We spend a lot of time on culture, and on building a culture of acceptance, and elevating students' voices."

Castanza and other leaders of schools for students with dyslexia and literacy challenges share some of these strategies—unique, sometimes fun, and always deliberate—that promote self-awareness, build confidence, and support literacy competence.

Students in a hiking club take an early morning walk around the Odyssey School grounds in Lutherville, Md., with Outreach Program Coordinator Kate McElderry, before the start of the school day.

Building self-awareness, self-esteem

"Students' self-awareness and self-esteem are every bit as important as literacy," said Martha H. Sweeney, head of The Odyssey School, a private school in a Baltimore, Md., suburb for students with dyslexia and other language-learning differences.

Many of these students, prior to enrolling at such specialized schools, developed little to no self-esteem because they struggled academically. Now, they participate in activities designed to build students' awareness of their natural capabilities and passions—and in turn, boost their self-esteem.

Students at Odyssey join special-interest clubs that take place before the academic day begins. This means they find themselves hiking through their sprawling wooded campus, knitting, building robots with classmates, or exploring any number of other interests.

Pursuing individual passions takes an even more focused turn in 7th grade, when each student participates in "genius hour," where for the entirety of the academic year they pursue a chosen area of study, create a project related to that passion, and eventually showcase what they've learned in an event open to faculty, families, and classmates.

"We've had students learn how to make sushi, make a dunking booth, or learn a new approach to [constructing] a ballet shoe," said Sweeney.

At the Pittsburgh-based Provident Charter School, which serves 330 students with dyslexia and other language-based disorders in 2nd through 8th grades, every student takes taekwondo, a form of martial arts, as a "special"—just like art, music, or physical education.

"The school founder wrote taekwondo into the charter [as part of the curriculum]. He is dyslexic, as are his two children, and he recognized the benefits," said Maria Paluselli, the school's chief executive officer, who explained that the practice instills self-control, discipline, and a sense of accomplishment in participants.

It also shares unique similarities to literacy, explained Paluselli, in that it teaches patterns and sequences.

Creating awareness of positive traits and possibilities

"We talk a lot about the 'dyslexic advantage'," said Rebecca Thompson, director of academic services at ALLIES Elementary (which stands for Academy for Literacy, Learning, and Innovation Excellence), a public school in Colorado Springs, Colo., serving students with dyslexia in grades 2 to 5.

There are plenty such advantages, some of which include a strong propensity toward spatial reasoning, critical thinking, problem-solving, and empathizing, according to educational researchers at the University of Michigan.

Introducing students to adults with dyslexia who have harnessed such strengths and subsequently achieved great success can inspire children who have experienced intense feelings of defeat when unable to learn to read alongside their general education classmates.

At Bridge Preparatory, classrooms are named after famous people with dyslexia so that students are constantly reminded of what's possible. Odyssey routinely brings to campus dyslexic guests, some of whom have achieved fame, to talk with students about their personal and professional journeys. This year, they welcomed Mark Stoddart, an internationally reputed sculptor from Scotland who has severe dyslexia. Students also recently enjoyed a virtual visit from Bryan Perla, the 23-year-old founder and CEO of Little ELF Products, Inc., an e-commerce and retail gift wrap solutions company, and a graduate of Stanford with an engineering degree. He, too, has dyslexia.

Sweeney noted that the school also makes an effort to bring alumni back to school to talk with students. "It's really valuable to our students to see previous students who have taken what they learned from Odyssey and moved forward," she said.

The school also works hard to ensure that students are ready to move on at the end of 8th grade. Most graduates attend mainstream high schools.

"When they come here, they wonder why they're more challenged by reading than their peers," Sweeney said. "We help them understand that they think a little differently, but that they are perfect just the way they are. Every child here hears that many times over. When they develop competence [in reading], they know it." ■

OPINION

Published August 21, 2024

Equity and Equality Aren't the Same Thing. What Does That Look Like in Education?

By Larry Ferlazzo

Today's post is another in a series helping educators distinguish the differences between "equity" and "equality."

'Striving for Equity'

Jamie Wallace and Elaine V. Howes are co-editors of the book Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Science Teaching: Teacher Research and Investigation from Today's Classrooms:

The terms "equity" and "equality" are often conflated. There are nuances and complexities in their interpretations and uses, further complicated by historical socio-cultural-racial inequities and structures of power and privilege in the United States. In our imperfect understanding of these ambiguous concepts, equality can be interpreted as "sameness," particularly regarding opportunities and resources for students (Brayboy et al., 2007). This sameness or uniformity requires an eradication of all kinds of discrimination for equality to truly exist; thus, while equality is ideal, it is unlikely given long-standing histories of oppression and racism (Banks, 2021).

Equity refers to "fairness" and "justice" at a systemic level, regarding how individuals are seen and treated. In education, inequities are often viewed as unequal access to resources and opportunities. Yet, this interpretation omits the systems and processes that sustain inequities (Cochran-Smith & Keefe, 2022).

Thus, what is equal (same or uniform) differs from what is equitable (fair or just). In using an equality perspective, we would attempt to provide all students with identical opportunities. In striving for equity, we celebrate the multiple aspects of diversity in our pluralistic society and use these to center all students, especially those who have historically been poorly served by our education system.

Considering these terms, we highlight insights from our professional learning group (PLG) of teacher researchers exploring the equity pedagogy of culturally responsive and sustaining education (CRSE) in science. We draw on research by Ladson-Billings, Gay, Paris and Alim, and others to describe CRSE as valuing and connecting to students' cultures and communities as assets; integrating them as resources; holding high expectations for learning; and adopting and supporting developing a critical stance (Howes & Wallace, 2022; Wallace et al., 2022). In our PLG, teachers research their own science teaching through a CRSE lens, working toward transforming teaching while addressing complex educational and social-cultural problems.

In our current climate with book bans and political attacks on discussing race, ethnicity, gender, power, and privilege in schools, equity-oriented, assets-based work like CRSE is critical. Below, we share examples from our work to help illuminate equity-focused approaches.

Imagine you are teaching in an urban high-need school and are responsible for preparing students for a standardized exam. Your students are recent immigrants and multilingual learners from numerous countries. You are teaching a lesson on natural hazards (earthquakes, tsunamis).

One option might be to take an equality-based perspective: Use a textbook outlining types of disasters, lectures about plate boundaries, and videos of volcanoes erupting. Alternatively, you could modify your teaching to support the students in your class, drawing on their diverse backgrounds, and meeting them where they are.

For instance, a teacher in our PLG developed a group research project in which students chose a natural hazard about which to design pamphlets detailing preparation and safety procedures. Students developed pamphlets in their primary language and English to support science and language learning.

This project incorporated students' language assets and connected to their lived experiences, as students related firsthand interactions with natural disasters in their native countries and thought critically about the sociopolitical processes in places where hazards hit. This project communicated to students the importance of using their languages, experiences, and multiple identities as assets to support their learning. Modifying teaching in this way illustrates an equity-based approach to support all students' learning.

Another teacher in our group taught about maps in a Manhattan high-need high school. She began with students developing memory maps of their neighborhoods and experiences. Using their memory maps, students learned about topographic changes accommodating modern infrastructure (including water sources), science specific to their communities, and inequities such as higher rates of asthma in cities. This place-based activity centered students' identities by valuing and affirming their experiences and infusing them in learning.

Activities like these provide opportunities for students to integrate their lived experiences and communities into learning, creating spaces to uplift students' stories and address social-justice issues. These approaches are customized to the individual students in the room, rather than an imaginary "every student," setting high expectations and providing multiple entry points and worldviews. As Gorski (2016) argues, equity pedagogies must center students and their individual cultures, along with all students' rights to equitable and just educational opportunities.

'Equitable Access'

Courtney Rose, Ed.D., is a professor, educational consultant, culturally relevant/responsive educator, founder of Ivy Rose Consulting, and author of the upcoming book, Woven Together: How Unpacking Your Teacher Identity Creates a Stronger Learning Community. *She currently serves as a visiting assistant teaching professor in the Educational Policy Studies department at Florida International University:*

Much like "schooling" and "education, " "equality" and "equity" get used interchangeably. In fact, in both cases, folks often actually lean into using one more often than the other. In the case of schooling/education, everything learning-related often gets lumped under education, and when it comes to equality/equity

there is a far greater use of the word "equality," with many pinpointing it as THE goal.

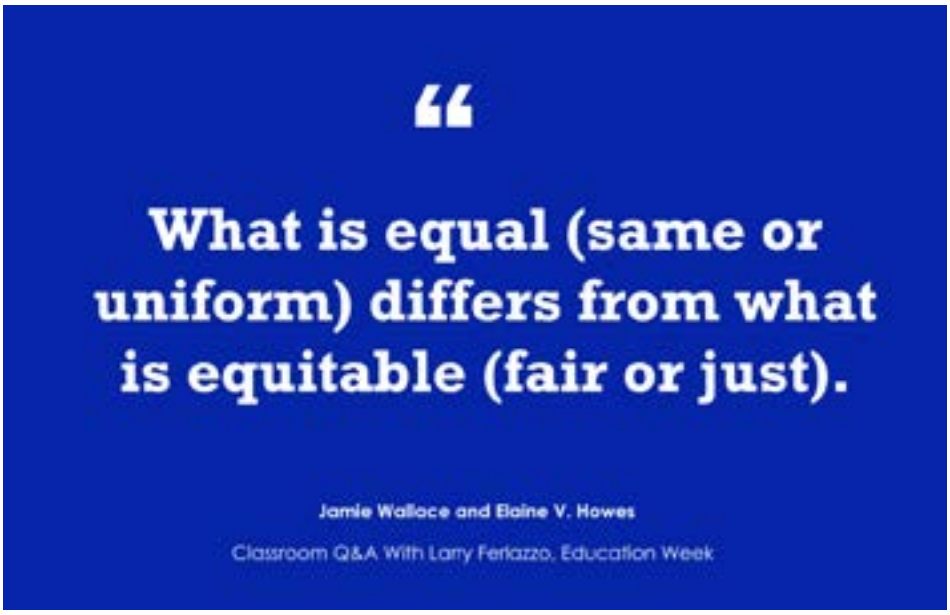
But as two of my favorite podcasters often say, words mean things, and understanding the definitions and distinctions between terms is the first step in aligning our goals with the policies and practices designed to attain them.

A clear, and highly discussed, example of the potential misalignments that can occur when one isn't clear on whether they are working toward equality or equity is baked into the New York City public schools' admissions process. For those who aren't familiar, every 5th grade student in the district gets an application with a list of middle schools across the city they are eligible to attend, and they apply by ranking the schools in order of preference. Students then repeat this process in the fall semester of their 8th grade year to apply to high schools. The process was designed to address the N.Y.C. school system's long-standing position as one of the most segregated districts in the country. In fact, according to one 2018 study, New York City's is the most segregated district for Black students and the second most segregated district for Latino students.

The admissions process is designed to level that playing field, opening up doors for students beyond their neighborhood school and utilizing "unbiased" programs that assess students' eligibility based on attendance, grades, test scores, location/distance from schools, and availability of seats. However, with families spending years hiring tutors and touring schools in order to secure seats at the top schools in the district, many feel as though the system still prioritizes a wealthy and predominantly white subset of the population and maintaining educational inequities.

In the wake of the impact of COVID-19, which only exacerbated disparities and inequities, the district has partnered with organizations like IntegrateNYC to more accurately assess the disproportionate impact COVID-19 had across the district. Although it is not fully functioning as of yet, the new algorithm would use additional location-based and individual student circumstances to generate an admissions "priority score." The higher the score, the more schools the student becomes eligible for.

While there are certainly many more questions to be answered, most of which won't be determined until the new algorithm has been fully functioning for some time, the attempt to shift and redesign the algorithm shows the district's acknowledgement that applying the same metrics across the board may create a system that seems to give students an equal shot at attending the best school for them but not equitable access or opportunity to secure a seat.



'Differentiation Is a First Step'

Angela M. Ward, Ph.D., is an anti-racist educator with over 25 years of experience in education. She is a professional learning connoisseur focused on creating identity-safe schools and workplaces. Follow her @2WardEquity on Instagram and X and visit http://2wardequity.com/blog/ to subscribe to the 2Ward Equity newsletter:

The root word for equality is equal. If two students have different needs, yet the school provides the same or equal amounts of support, they are focused on equality for both students. One student will not receive support if another student does not receive the same support, otherwise known as fairness. Laws like the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Title IX, and Title VI, for example, were passed to assist districts and other educational institutions with equity, not equality or fairness.

Equity acknowledges that every learner is not the same; that each learner's lived experience is not the same; that location, space, and place is different for each; and, therefore, each learner will need something to support their learning that may differ from the needs of other learners. Special education students receive the most support with laws that ensure they receive equitable access to an education that directly meets their learning needs.

Differentiation is a first step to providing equitable access to a high-quality education to all students in a general education setting. Teachers differentiate strategies and engagement with students to provide each student the best chance at success with academic content. The Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) is focused at the general education student who has not been labeled with an identified learning need. The MTSS provides educators with a process to learn more about supporting the learning needs of students, thereby offering students equitable access to a high-quality educational experience.

Public schools are required to educate all students. In addition to following the law and engaging in a successful MTSS, an equity-centered school district focuses budgets, staffing, buildings, and all resources on equitable distribution to ensure all students receive what they need to succeed in school regardless of social or cultural identity. ■

Larry Ferlazzo is an English and social studies teacher at Luther Burbank High School in Sacramento, Calif.

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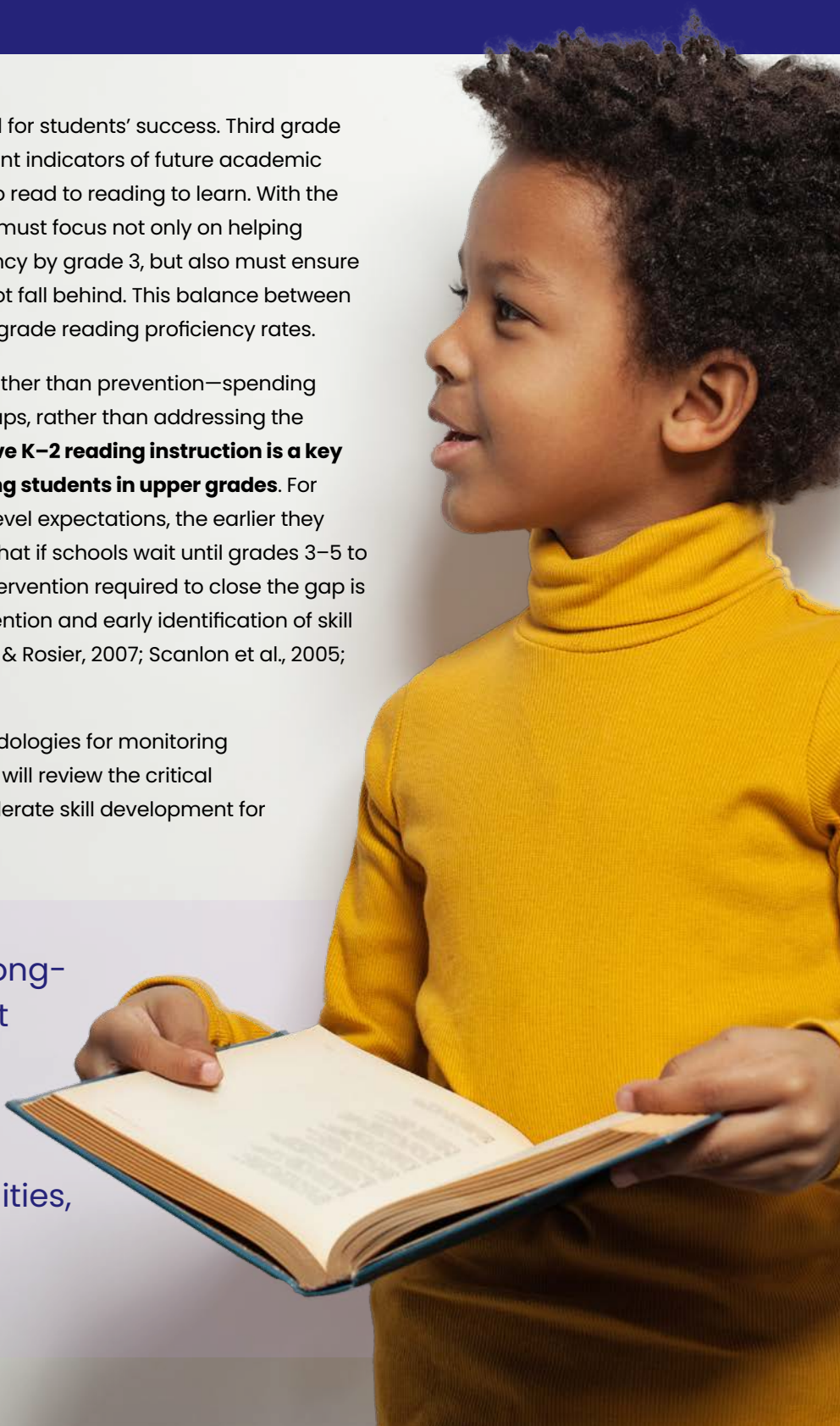
Critical Success Factors for Reading Intervention and Effective Prevention



Strong fundamental literacy skills are essential for students' success. Third grade reading proficiency is one of the most important indicators of future academic success as students transition from learning to read to reading to learn. With the ongoing emphasis on accountability, schools must focus not only on helping struggling students reach grade level proficiency by grade 3, but also must ensure that students considered to be on target do not fall behind. This balance between prevention and intervention is critical for third grade reading proficiency rates.

Many educators focus more on intervention rather than prevention—spending the time chasing the effects of instructional gaps, rather than addressing the root causes. However, an emphasis on **effective K–2 reading instruction is a key strategy for reducing the number of struggling students in upper grades**. For those K–2 students who struggle with grade-level expectations, the earlier they can be identified, the better. Research shows that if schools wait until grades 3–5 to identify struggling students, the intensity of intervention required to close the gap is significant and seemingly unachievable. Prevention and early identification of skill gaps for all students are crucial (Fielding, Kerr, & Rosier, 2007; Scanlon et al., 2005; Torgesen, 2002).

In this white paper, we will examine the methodologies for monitoring student progress and targeting skill gaps, and will review the critical elements of high-quality instruction that accelerate skill development for on-level and struggling students.

Literacy is a crucial life skill. Long-term studies have shown that student third grade reading proficiency is indicative not only of future academic success, but career opportunities, wage earning, and overall well-being (Zakariya, 2015).

Prevention Means Not "Waiting to Fail"

It has been said that the best intervention is prevention. However, many schools often overemphasize Tier II and Tier III students, and do not provide their students who are working at grade level with targeted instruction to meet skill gaps that arise throughout the year. As a result, those schools may see a spike in Special Education referrals in grades 3 and 4 due to underlying, undetected skill gaps with students who were considered "on target" in earlier grades. Sometimes students with strong comprehension and sight word vocabulary can appear as though they are reading because they recognize enough of the words or they have essentially memorized the stories. However, when these students enter third and fourth grades and encounter multisyllabic words in social studies and science, they struggle with these non-sight words and cannot decode them. Later, as adolescent readers, they may struggle with fluency skills because they have done far less reading than their peers.

The Response to Intervention (RTI) and Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) methodologies have been more widely adopted because they are focused on the concept of identifying students before they begin to significantly struggle. **Frequent progress-monitoring can help identify skill gaps in students who appear to be good readers**, allowing teachers to prevent reading failure by intervening as soon as the student begins to struggle (Justice, 2006).

RTI and MTSS methodologies help identify students before they begin to significantly struggle—helping teachers prevent reading failure.

Download Full White Paper

OPINION

Published November 02, 2023

How Do Restorative Practices Work? Educators Share Implementation Tips

By Larry Ferlazzo

More and more schools are using restorative practices instead of punitive policies to deal with conflicts.

This multipart series will share practical suggestions from educators who have actually been using restorative practices "on the ground." You can read a previous series on this same topic here.

Today's contributors were also guests on my 10-minute BAM! Radio Show. You can also find a list of, and links to, previous shows here.

Restorative Circles

Marie Moreno, Ed.D., is an educator and administrator with over 20 years of experience specializing in newcomer and second-language acquisition. She is passionate about refugee and immigrant education, focusing on social and emotional needs and newcomer programming:

Restorative practices—also known as restorative school discipline practices—are procedures or structures that foster a sense of community to prevent conflict, that act on misconduct, or that mend the harm caused by another student by accepting responsibility and restoring relationships.

The traditional student-discipline model does not teach students how to resolve problems and is typically punitive toward students. Take an altercation with another student. Principals or assistant principals usually separate the students and suspend them for one to three days. This separation only provides a "break," but the issues are evident and will continue to be a problem unless they are addressed.

Using the restorative approach, students will participate in a staff-led "restorative circle" to discuss the fight and be required to do community service instead of getting suspended. The restorative circle focuses on repairing the harm done during a specific incident to ensure that all involved are respected within our school community.

As a school principal, keeping students in classrooms is essential for student success. Training counselors, teachers, and administrators to utilize restorative practices must occur for this approach to be effective. I recall reviewing my discipline data and noticed over 700 students were sent to in-school or out-of-school suspension throughout the year. In just one year, I reduced the number of suspensions the following year to only 200!

Below is the outline we used. Restorative circles take practice, patience, and flexibility. I can tell you when done effectively, students will ask for "a circle" because they want to be responsible. Yes, even my most challenging students would ask—even if they wanted to be secretive about it. Find a way to convene one without "squealing" on the person asking for the circle. It made a huge difference in our school culture.

Circle Conference Script

1. **The moderator welcomes the group** and states why a circle is being convened. What harm are the participants trying to repair?

2. **Introductions** of each person using a talking piece.

3. **Discussion of norms.** The moderator (counselor/teacher/administrator) states the following:
   - The circle is a sacred space.
   - Refrain from speaking unless holding the talking piece.
   - Hold reactions/comments until the talking piece is received.
   - Be respectful in body language and speech.
   - Keep conversation confined to within the group unless you discuss hurting yourself or others.
   - Speak the truth as you see it.
   - Everyone will get the same respect and be equals in the circle.

   "Can we agree to these norms?"
   - [**Action**] Pass the talking piece to hear responses.

4. **Round One:** Each person will describe the incident. What happened?

5. **Round Two:** What were the individuals thinking when it happened?

6. **Round Three:** Discuss impacts. Who was harmed? What impact has the effect had on each person?

7. **Round Four:** What can be done to repair the harm? (commitments)

8. **The moderator restates commitments** (responsibilities) and gets buy-in to reach a consensus.
   - The moderator will pass the talking piece around and ask circle participants to share one word that they would use to describe the circle.
   - The moderator closes out the circle with words of encouragement.

9. **Circle information and agreements** will be typed, and all participants should sign to show agreement. A template/contract can be created to insert outcomes into the document easily.

'Apologies of Action'

Chandra Shaw is a seasoned educator with more than 25 years of experience in literacy instruction. As a literacy consultant at one of her state's regional service centers, Chandra specializes in designing and implementing effective, evidence-based literacy programs that meet the needs of diverse learners:

The most basic definition of restorative practices in schools is a process of using specific protocols and/or strategies to intentionally restore relationships between individuals and strengthen or facilitate connections within the school community as a whole. The focus is more on proactively repairing and building relationships as a way to prevent problems rather than strictly utilizing punitive reactive measures.

Before the term "restorative practices" became a popular buzzword, as a classroom

teacher, I utilized apologies of action with students as ways for them to fix the relationships with their classmates when they'd done harm. The goal of an apology of action is to teach students that making amends is more than simply giving a verbal apology. Genuine apologies require that students take responsibility for their actions and take steps to repair the relationship.

What I loved so much about this strategy was that it taught students how to both ask for and make an apology that is a realistic and logical consequence of a hurtful situation.

For example, I once had a boy tease another student about their name, causing the student to cry. After speaking with both students, I learned that the real reason behind the teasing was that the boy actually wanted attention from the other student. We brainstormed together and came to the agreement that he would create an acrostic poem of the student's name, which included the qualities about the student he admired. He took such care creating the poem and even asking another student to help him illustrate the poem. Not only was the student whose name had been made fun of extremely happy with the poem they received, as evidenced by them keeping it in their notebook cover for the entire year, the young boy learned that it felt much better to build someone else up rather than to hurt their feelings.

He went on to create several other poems for students in the class that year. Not because he teased them, but because they were so impressed by the poem he'd made, that they asked him to create ones for them.

Throughout my years of teaching, I often asked for apologies of action from students. I never "forced" students to apologize. A disingenuous apology isn't something I'd ever want from a student. I'd simply say, "I think you owe me an apology, when you genuinely feel it in your heart." Sometimes those apologies would come immediately, sometimes a few days later in the hallways for older students, but they always came. That's the important part because the student and I repaired our relationship.

There were times when I gave apologies of action to students when I was the one who'd done something wrong. Perhaps, I'd mistakenly accused a student of cheating or being involved in a conflict when they weren't. My rule was that my teacher's apology had to be as big and as public as the accusation had been and was usually followed by a hug or high-five. Some students asked me for songs or poems, and I was happy to oblige.

Utilizing something like an apology of action or any other restorative type of practice in schools such as restorative circles can be effective in changing students' harmful behavior and building healthy relationships between students and teachers. Ideas like this can show students that there is always room for improvement and perhaps a chance to redeem and restore important relationships.

'Thousands of Years Old'

Angela M. Ward, Ph.D., is an anti-racist educator with over 25 years of experience in education. She is a professional learning connoisseur focused on creating identity-safe schools and workplaces. Follow her @2WardEquity on Instagram & Twitter and visit http://2wardequity.com/blog/ to subscribe to the 2Ward Equity newsletter:

Restorative practices are thousands of years old. Often, the practices are mistakenly thought to have originated in the criminal-justice system. Actually, restorative practices originated in the cultures of Indigenous peoples in the Americas and on other continents as a means to build community, repair harm, and maintain harmony in the community.

In schools, restorative practices are a crucial part of a successful Multitiered System of Supports (MTSS).

o **Tier 1** – All students and adults engage in building community, trust, and rapport to support the development of a strong classroom and school community. At this tier, social-emotional skill development is important and is nurtured as staff and students spend time together in circle conversations, small-group conversations, and one on one. This is the tier through which all other tiers ebb and flow, where community is built through a concentrated effort to build trusting relationships.

This tier has to be the tier of focus for restorative practices to support student success. As I worked to support successful implementation of restorative practices in schools, this foundational tier was the one to which we reintroduced students when conflict occurred. Our goal was not to push students out of school but to provide intervention, support, and services to get them back to tier 1.

o **Tier 2** – A percentage of students who have engaged at Tier 1 need additional supports academically, socially, emotionally, and behaviorally. At this tier, students engage with adults and their peers in small impromptu conversations to support a student's ability to remain connected to the classroom. Here, students may engage in small-group circles, classroom dialogue, etc. The goal is to provide support that enables a student to return to tier 1 engaging with all students and adults.

o **Tier 3** – Schools that focus "restorative practices" strictly on repair of harm between victims and offenders at Tier 3 erase the roots of the practice using it strictly as an alternative to discipline. At this tier in a school focused on the indigenous roots of the practice, adults recognize they need a little more help engaging the student's family more than the typical call home or report on their progress. The adults in the school collaborate and partner with families and organizations to fulfill an intervention need providing the student with the support they need to return to tier 2.

The ultimate goal in a restorative-practices-focused school is to return students to tier 1 where general education supports are available. The adults work with the student to build the skills to be able to monitor their own needs and advocate for themselves.

'Restoring Any Damages Caused'

David Upegui is a Latino immigrant who found his way out of poverty through science. He currently serves as a science teacher at his alma mater, Central Falls High School in Rhode Island and as an adjunct professor of education. He is the co-author of the upcoming book: Integrating Racial Justice Into Your High-School Biology Classroom: Using Evolution to Understand Diversity*:*

As a trained biologist, when I think of restoration, I think of the concept of ecosystem restoration, a process in which people assist in the recovery of ecosystems that have been degraded or destroyed by human actions. As teachers in our classrooms, we know that human actions, similar to ecosystems, can cause damages that must be restored. In our school, we have moved away from exclusively punitive approaches and now use restorative practices to address situations that require remediation.

For us, the key is communication and transparency. As a classroom teacher, I have to nurture and help students to appreciate how their behaviors are affecting our learning community. Subsequently, if some of these behaviors degrade or damage our learning environment, then students (and teachers) must participate in actively restoring any damages caused.

For example, if a student refuses to comply with a request for putting away their cellphone, and this leads to removal from our

classroom, I will follow up with them and have a conversation about why their behavior matters and ask for suggestions on how my lessons can be more engaging. Similarly, if we as a class have a difficult day, we will come together to discuss ways in which we can do better and prepare ourselves for the future.

I often remind students that knowledge is power, and if they don't know something (like how water is treated after it leaves their homes or how climate change is affecting humans), then someone (or groups of "someones") have power over them. Therefore, education is about empowerment, and if there are actions that are getting in the way of that empowerment, these must be addressed, and restoration must be created. Part of our jobs is to help students to navigate the challenging and ever-changing world and guide them as they mature into the people who will solve humanity's problems. ■

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