In this Issue:

Identifying Students with Disabilities Who Are At Risk for Dropping Out of High School

Jessica Agus, National High School Center

Graduation rates for students with disabilities fall significantly below the national graduation rate for students (74.9%).[1] In 2005–2006, 57 percent of students with disabilities earned a regular school diploma. The percentage of students who received a regular school diploma was particularly low for students with emotional disturbance (43%).[2] Although these rates have been increasing over the last 10 years, they remain far below the national average for all students. Schools and districts are in need of proven methods to identify students with disabilities who are at greatest risk of dropout, provide interventions to keep at-risk students on track to graduate, and monitor their responses to those interventions.

Early Warning Indicators of Dropout for Students with Disabilities

In order to identify students who are at risk for dropout, the Consortium on Chicago School Research (CCSR) has published several studies on student level indicators of dropout. Their seminal publication *What Matters for Staying On-Track and Graduating in Chicago Public High Schools* (2007) was followed by *What Matters for Staying On-Track and Graduating in Chicago Public Schools: A Focus on Students with Disabilities* (2009) to further validate the early warning indicators of dropout for all students, and to specifically validate them for students with disabilities. The latter report was done with the support of the National High School Center. In both publications, CCSR reports that freshman year performance is a strong predictor of five-year graduation rates, both for students with and without disabilities. CCSR identified four predictors of risk during ninth grade: course grades, course failures, absences, and "on-track" status.[3]

MEMBER PROFILE: **Robb Warriner**

Robb Warriner, Director of Special Education for the Indianapolis Public Schools

Robb Warriner is the Director of Special Education for the Indianapolis Public Schools (IPS), an urban school district with an enrollment of just over 32,000 students, approximately 20 percent of which have been identified as students with special needs. Born and raised in Indiana, Mr. Warriner, a graduate of Indiana University, began his career as a speech and language therapist in 1969, later earning a master's degree at Butler University in the area of emotional disorders, along with additional endorsements in the areas of learning disabilities and both mild and significant cognitive disabilities. He has worked in the Indianapolis Public Schools (IPS) since 1971, first as a speech and language therapist and then as a teacher of students with special needs in the areas of emotional, learning, and mild mental handicaps. After serving in several regional and central office special education leadership roles, Mr. Warriner became the Director of Special Education in 2005.

Ron Felton, the Associate Director of the Collaborative, spoke to Robb to obtain his perspectives on the field of special education.

RON: As you think back over your long career, what are some of the significant changes that have occurred since you entered the field?

ROBB: From my perspective, one of the most significant changes has been the way in which our colleagues view special education and, in turn, students with disabilities. Special education is no longer being seen as a separate entity but, rather, as a part of a larger educational enterprise, where all students require instruction that is differentiated based on their needs. We are moving into a more strengths-based perspective rather than one that is deficit-based, with data and documentation driving instructional needs.

We have also come to realize how important early childhood programs are, and how emphasis on early intervention has the potential to reduce the number of students identified as requiring special education, as well as the level and intensity of services they may require if identified.

Many of the artificial boundaries that existed among groups of students, such as

special education and Title I, that dictated to some extent the services and resources they could access, have disappeared. We now look at all our available resources and how they can be used to meet the needs of all students—not just those in particular categories. Educators in the central office and in schools are collaborating and planning together much more, and we are no longer working as much from our individual silos. We still have a ways to go, but great strides have been made in this regard. RtI [Response to Intervention] is playing a big part in this change and is viewed in our school district as a general education initiative.

I'm also very pleased that we are addressing an area of concern that I've had for years— mental health services for our students with emotional handicaps and their families, as well as other students who are struggling emotionally and behaviorally. I have always seen these services as vital, and the IPS has made much improvement in this area.

RON: How have you accomplished that in your school district?

ROBB: We have established collaborative partnerships with many outside agencies to provide needed services, in this case, mental health and mentoring services, to our schools to benefit not only students identified as emotionally handicapped, but all students and their families in need of those types of supports. Twelve of our elementary schools are designated as "Full Purpose Partnerships," which are data driven in their approach to the provision of needed resources to students, their families, and staff in addressing the academic and behavioral needs of all students. We chose to place all of our elementary programs for students with more severe emotional handicaps in those 12 schools. We have also established a comprehensive day treatment program to serve those students who have significant mental health issues and their families. These are students that, in the past, we would not have been able to maintain in a school setting. Additionally, we have created 10 teams, with each team consisting of a social worker and behavioral specialist. The teams address building referrals for students that are in danger of being removed from the school setting due to out-of-control behaviors. The

teams, which we call Kaleidoscope, work collaboratively with the schools, parents, and students to identify student needs and to develop, model, and monitor plans for student success.

RON: How do you reconcile the maintenance of a day treatment program and the clustering of the programs for students with Emotional Handicaps (EH) with the move towards inclusion and serving students in their home schools or schools of choice?

ROBB: I see the day treatment program, our Full Purpose Partnership EH classrooms, and Kaleidoscope program as critical steps for those students who have the most significant mental health needs and who require the most intensive interventions to be able to function in a regular school setting. It is our goal to serve all of our students in the least restrictive environment, but we must provide them with the ability to be successful in those settings. In order to support and maintain students in inclusionary settings, we must have a good handle on each student's needs and provide the supports necessary for staff, students, and their families to successfully maintain them in their inclusionary setting.

RON: What challenges do we now face in educating students with disabilities in urban school districts?

ROBB: Of course, there is the constant struggle for high expectations of our students' ability to achieve. We cannot see any of our students as "less than." Also, many of our challenges boil down to issues of time and money. Funding has always been a concern, and it has become even more significant of an issue in our current economy. We are always battling for ways to find the time—and this is a money issue as well—that is needed for collaboration, problem solving, professional development, and monitoring progress. A good example of what professional development and collaboration can do can be found at one of our Montessori Magnet schools, in which we have done a good deal of training in addressing the needs of students with autism. My daughter teaches kindergarten there, and she told me a wonderful story

about a student with autism who was becoming aggressive with other students on the playground. The general education teachers who were supervising the play area, rather than concluding that the child was not capable of being in that type of situation and removing him, joined forces and compared their observations of the child. In essence, they did what was essentially an on-the-spot functional behavior analysis. Afterwards, they met with the student's special education teacher to discuss their observations and develop strategies to correct the inappropriate behaviors necessary for the student to be successful in the unstructured playground setting. Our challenge is to have this type of collaboration and problem solving become the norm, for both academics and behaviors, and to provide teachers and other professionals with the time and professional development needed to do it effectively across the board.

The other challenge we face is the notion that public schools are also "less than," and that charter schools and private school vouchers offer a better alternative. Effective consistent programming is vital for students with special needs. Many of these schools are fine, but it has been my experience that many are not equipped to provide the range of services necessary to meet the needs of identified students with significant academic and behavioral issues. This often results in a number of unnecessary transitions for these students that exacerbate the difficulties they are already experiencing.

RON: What does it take to be a special education leader in an urban school system today?

ROBB: It is important for leaders to be comfortable with the fact that they can't be an expert in everything. It is just not possible. You need to surround yourself with people who have specific expertise in various areas and build a team that collaborates and problem solves effectively. I have been extremely fortunate to be able to do just that and then, in turn, to be supported by a superintendent who encourages discussion among all his cabinet members, including me, to find and implement solutions and then provide the support to make things happen.

"Special Education is no longer being seen as a separate entity but, rather, as a part of a larger educational enterprise, where all students require instruction that is differentiated based on their needs."

Building Capacity in Analyzing Large-Scale Data Sets

By Kristin Ruedel, PhD, Project Coordinator, University of Maryland

Building on the success of the two-day institute "Unlocking the Power of District Data to Improve Outcomes for Students with Disabilities" conducted in September 2009, the Collaborative hosted a second institute in September 2010 with a new cohort of districts. The institute was conducted in collaboration with University of Maryland and funded through a grant from the Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education. As with the first institute, the primary goal was to help school districts build capacity in analyzing large-scale data sets to make real and measureable improvements in outcomes for students with disabilities.

Kay Seale and Robert O'Meara of Brockton Public Schools, Massachusetts

Eleven urban school districts were selected to participate in the hands-on institute. The districts varied in size and region. The participating districts included Anchorage Public Schools (AK), Brockton Public Schools (MA), Chicago Public Schools, Dallas Independent School District, District of Columbia Public Schools, Indian Prairie (IL) 204 Kalamazoo Public Schools (MI), Miami-Dade Public Schools, Milford Public Schools (MA), Rochester (MN) Public Schools, and Waukegan (IL) Public School District #60.

Participating districts were interested in exploring a range of topics, including:
- Inclusive practices and achievement
- Suspension rates and discipline referrals
- Retention and drop out rates
- Eligibility determination meetings and timelines
- Access to standards-driven curriculum, appropriate instruction, and participation in state assessments
- Disproportionality
- Instructional strategies, academic achievement, and outcomes

Day 1

Day 1 of the institute included two presentations by institute faculty and two work sessions. The first presentation, Telling a Story with Data, focused on the importance of translating raw data into appropriate data displays, constructing a storyboard from results, and preparing for a data overview meeting. It was delivered by Robb Geier, Director of Data Services, Center for Resource Management.

The second presentation was entitled Looking at the Bullet Holes: Analyzing Data Sets and Linking Data Together, and its focus was the processes of conducting research and maximizing data to address questions of interest. It was given by Dr. Sean Mulvenon, Professor of Educational Statistics and Research Methods, Director of the National Office for Research on Measurement and Evaluation System, University of Arkansas.

The work sessions gave participants the opportunity to work with each other and institute faculty to explore their research questions. Many of the workgroups dealt with the challenges associated with navigating data sets that were often compiled from multiple sources. They also tackled questions on how to measure certain variables, acquire additional data, develop methods for strengthening data collection protocols, and train field staff to improve data reliability.

Responses to questions posed by faculty at the end of Day 1 revealed that the majority of the participants believed that their most significant learning resulted from applying the information they received from the

presentations and working individually with institute faculty during the work sessions to address their specific questions. For example, one district stated that their most significant learning resulted from identifying what data they would need to answer their question and how to define the needed data set. The majority of the districts believed the biggest challenge would be to narrow their research questions and be specific in identifying questions that could be addressed using their data set. As with cohort 1, members of this group commented repeatedly on the value of being able to have uninterrupted time for special education leaders and data specialists to work together to address research questions and the challenges of finding such opportunities when back in their school districts.

Also, although progress had made throughout the day in addressing research questions, many unanswered questions still remained at the end. Participants were not only addressing content area questions but also questions related to data collection and analyses. For example:

- How can data collection efforts be made more manageable and strategically focused?
- How can data analyses results be transformed into action?
- How can specific data collection activities be designed to identify areas of need and turn those into action plans for change?
- What additional variables must be considered in the analyses?
- How will the data affect a district's process of special education identification, service, and evaluation?

Day 2

During Day 2 of the institute, participants worked individually, with institute faculty, and in small groups as they refined their research questions, defined data sets and variables, identified methods for analyses, and overcame challenges in their study. At the end of the day, to facilitate continued progress after the institute, participants were asked to develop a three-month plan of action, such as the formation of work groups, data collection activities, and presentations of results.

Cohort 1 Recommendations

In November 2010, the Collaborative contacted cohort 1 participants to learn what progress they had made in their research activities during the year following their institute experience and to ask what advice they could offer to cohort 2 participants in overcoming the challenges of accomplishing their intended goals. The majority of cohort 1 participants reported that they had successfully continued to work on their research and share their results through presentations. While the challenges of finding time to work together still remained, cohort 1 participants offered the following advice:

- Ensure that research questions are specific and well defined.
- Focus on projects that can be accomplished in a shorter period of time to increase the likelihood of completion.
- Integrate the research with existing initiatives as much as possible.
- Involve people from a variety of departments to build more productive relationships and greater awareness of data analysis as it relates to students with disabilities.
- Make sure that leadership is vested in the research questions.
- Use virtual meetings when a face-to-face meeting is not possible.
- Set goals to work independently on aspects of the project to ensure that progress continues between meetings.
- Keep pressing forward, believe in the importance of your work, and look for opportunities to continue, even if the work must be done on a smaller scale or over a longer period of time.

Cohort 3

The Collaborative and its University of Maryland partner plan to host another institute with a third cohort of member school districts. Information on how to apply for participation will be e-mailed to Collaborative member districts and published in the CollabNews. For more information on the initiative, or for copies of the presentations, contact Ron Felton at rfelton@edc.org.

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"...believe in the importance of your work, and look for opportunities to continue, even if the work must be done on a smaller scale or over a longer period of time."

Course Grades

According to the CCSR report, students with a 2.0 GPA or higher are likely or highly likely to graduate, but every half point lower indicates a more serious risk of dropout. Only one-quarter to one-third of students with an average GPA of 1.0 graduated within five years. Students with disabilities often have lower GPAs and therefore have higher risk of dropout. In Chicago, students with physical/sensory disabilities (including hearing impairments), and students with speech/language disabilities had an average GPA of 2.0. Students with learning disabilities and mild cognitive disabilities had an average of 1.6, and students with emotional disturbances had an average of about 1.1. Schools and districts can use data about student GPAs to identify students with disabilities who may be at risk for dropout.

Course Failures

Course failures were also found to be a strong predictor of graduation. In Chicago, 86 percent of students with disabilities who had no course failures graduated within five years, but with only one or two course failures, the percentage of students that graduated was reduced by 20 percent. Course failure is a particularly strong indicator of dropout for students with emotional disturbance, as the graduation rate for students with emotional disturbance who had failed one to two courses was only 33 percent. Students with disabilities who fail even one course may be at risk of dropout.

Absences

Absences are also a strong indicator of graduation for students with and without disabilities. Students with learning disabilities and mild cognitive disabilities who had been absent between 0 and 4 days had graduation rates of 90 percent or higher. Graduation rates dropped to 55 percent or below for students with these disabilities who had 10 to 14 absences. Higher absence rates may be an important factor for explaining why students with disabilities fail more classes and have lower grades than students without identified disabilities.

On-Track Status

Students who fail no more than one core course and accumulate at least five full course credits during freshman year are considered on track. These students are at least four times more likely to graduate than students who have failed two or more courses or have not accumulated five course credits during ninth grade. CCSR found the on-track status to be equally or more predictive of graduation for students with disabilities. Students with emotional disturbance who were on track were almost six times more likely to graduate than off-track students.
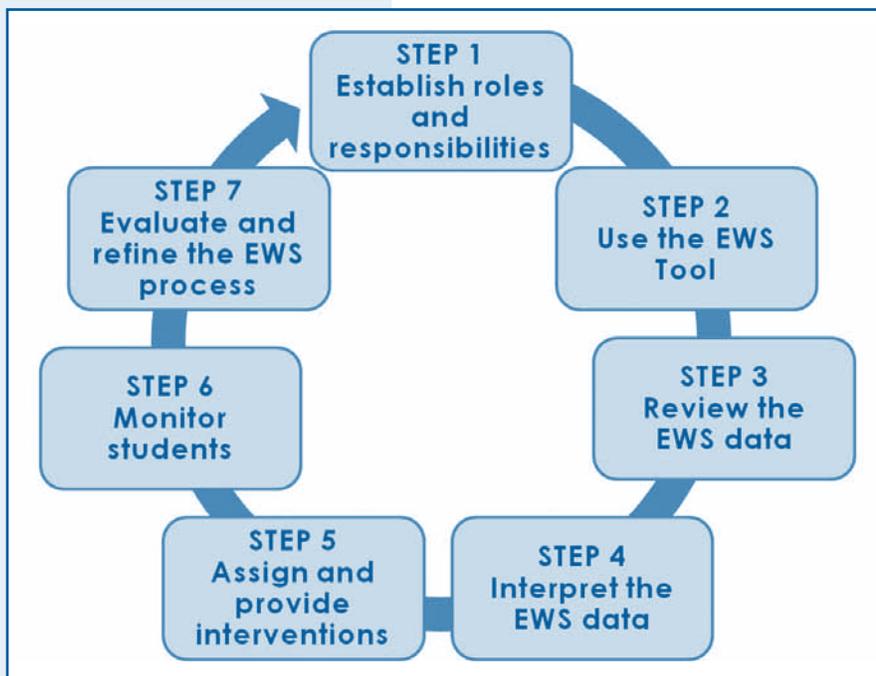
Recommendations

To increase the graduation rate of students with disabilities, the National High School Center suggests the following recommendations:

1. Focus on ninth-grade achievement: To increase the graduation rate for students with disabilities, CCSR recommends that educators support students with disabilities in passing ninth-grade courses and getting higher grades, prioritize efforts

"It is not enough to know who is at risk – schools must use their data to provide targeted support to get at-risk students on track to graduate."

STEP 1 Establish roles and responsibilities

STEP 2 Use the EWS Tool

STEP 3 Review the EWS data

STEP 4 Interpret the EWS data

STEP 5 Assign and provide interventions

STEP 6 Monitor students

STEP 7 Evaluate and refine the EWS process

to increase attendance among students with disabilities, and instruct students with disabilities on how to get more benefit from their study time. Results showed that students with disabilities who spent the same time studying as their non-disabled peers got less benefit from their study time. The ability to increase the benefit of study time could help students with disabilities pass more courses and get higher grades.

2. Foster a Comprehensive Approach:

To decrease drop-out rates, high performing high schools often implement comprehensive school reform. Rather than implementing a few isolated initiatives, schools should strive to align and draw connections between elements of improvement. The National High School Center has identified the following eight key elements of high school improvement that high schools should incorporate in their school improvement framework:

- Rigorous curriculum and instruction
- Assessment and accountability
- Teacher quality and professional development
- Student and family supports
- Stakeholder engagement
- Leadership and governance
- Organization and structure
- Resources for sustainability

Learn more about these eight elements in the National High School Center's publication *Eight Elements of High School Improvement: A Mapping Framework*. Assess progress towards implementing these elements with the National High School Center's *A Coherent Approach to High School Improvement: A District and School Self-Assessment Tool*.

3. Implement an Early Warning System:

The National High School Center recommends using an early warning system (EWS). An EWS allows educators to identify students at risk of dropout, use data to make decisions about appropriate interventions, and monitor students' responses to those interventions. The National High School Center used the indicators identified by CCSR to develop

their Early Warning System Tool v2.0 and accompanying user guides. This Microsoft Excel-based tool is available free of charge for schools and districts who wish to identify students at risk of dropout.

It is not enough to know who is at risk— schools must use their data to provide targeted support to get at-risk students on track to graduate. The National High School Center's EWS Tool v2.0 is designed to monitor and track students' assignments to interventions. These features will help schools and districts coordinate services and closely track the participation of individual students in intervention programs and their responses to those interventions.

A seven-step process is recommended in the *Early Warning System Implementation Guide* that creates school-based teams to set up the program and use the EWS tool, analyze and review the data initially and at periodic intervals, assign interventions and monitor student progress and effectiveness of the interventions, and evaluate and refine the process.

To learn more about the EWS Tool v2.0 and the implementation guide, visit the National High School Center's website: www.betterhighschools.org.

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[2] U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), Data Analysis System (DANS). *Children with disabilities exiting special education,* 2005–06 (OMB #1820-0521). Retrieved from http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/2008/section3/table.asp?tableID=898.

[3] Gwynne, J., Lesnick, J., Hart, H. M., & Allensworth, E. M. (2009, December). What matters for staying on-track and graduating in Chicago Public Schools: A focus on students with disabilities. Chicago, IL: Consortium on Chicago School Research, University of Chicago.

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National High School Center
at the American Institutes for Research

Fall 2010 Meeting Focused on Raising Graduation Rates for Students with Disabilities

Ronald Felton, Claudia Rinaldi, Alexa Posny, and David Riley at the Fall 2010 Meeting in Charlotte, NC

Charlotte, North Carolina, the wonderful cosmopolitan city with a southern charm, welcomed more than 150 education leaders from 47 school districts across the country for the Collaborative's Fall 2010 Meeting entitled "Clearing the Path to Graduation for Students with Disabilities in Urban Schools." The goal for this meeting was to learn and share information on policies and practices that support graduation for students with disabilities in urban schools.

As in years past, this meeting had critical representation from our field. In addition to our keynote speaker Dr. Alexa Posny, Assistant Secretary for Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, U.S. Department of Education, six member districts gave presentations on programs and strategies to support graduation rates for students with disabilities, including the use of collaborative district strategies, early warning systems for identification, and alternative pathways for secondary students.

The meeting kicked off on October 28, 2010, with two engaging consultancy sessions. Participants benefited from a facilitated discussion pertaining to two challenges facing the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, the host school district: (1) providing preschool students with disabilities more inclusive opportunities and (2) sustaining and generalizing support for students with autism

in general education settings. The outcomes of these consultancy sessions set the stage for the next two days, impelling participants to candidly discuss the policies and strategies that would support the goal to have all learners reach their highest potential.

The day continued with size-alike roundtable discussions that addressed the educational policy changes going on at the federal level, the economic challenges impacting states and districts, and the ability to ensure the rights of special education students in a high-stakes environment. Dr. Leonard Burello, from the University of South Florida, briefly discussed a section of his forthcoming paper "A Critical Leadership Perspective: Re-framing Public Policy for Students with Special Needs." He guided participants in addressing two questions: (1) If the federal government continues on its path to blend IDEA and ESEA in new ways, what will you continue to advocate? and (2) As the leader in advocating for students with special learning needs in your district, what discretion do you need to maintain under the law?

After a dynamic discussion, the participants reported their recommendations in six areas that addressed several questions. Some examples are presented below:

1. Funding: How do we still designate funds to address costs, such as those of low incidence disabilities, specialized equipment, and progress monitoring?
2. Accountability: How can the district office be as equally accountable as schools? How is shared accountability going to guide changes? What still happens with children who are significantly below their peers?
3. Protections for special education students and families: How do we safeguard the children and family protections under the potential integration of the laws?
4. Integration of services: How do we ensure a better level of services with the goal of shared ownership?
5. Teacher preparation: How is the law going to engage teacher preparation in relevant ways that are responsive to changing demographics and the needs of the students? How do we increase the diversity of teachers and leaders to be responsive to the growing

diversity of schools? Do we want to recruit more educators with multiple certifications?

6. Certification structures: How do we ensure a redefinition of highly qualified? How do we ensure that pre-service teachers and in-service teachers come prepared to address the needs of English language learners and special education students?

The result of the size-alike roundtables was clear and precise guidance on how to move the conversation on the merging of ESEA and IDEA in meaningful ways that respond to the needs of students with disabilities and their families. Further discussion with Dr. Burello is available by visiting the Collaborative's website: www.urbancollaborative.org.

Meeting participants were formally welcomed by Dr. Peter C. Gorman, Superintendent, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, and Dr. Jane Rhyne, Assistant Superintendent for Exceptional Children, as they showcased the great progress that students in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools have made, including students with disabilities. They further restated their commitment to the students and families as they shared the difficulties the district faces with school closings as a result of the political and economic climates.

Beginning with a quote from President Obama, "… few issues that speak more directly to our long term success as a nation than issues concerning the education we provide our children," Dr. Posny presented an eloquent and impactful address. She examined the core areas of ESEA authorization as well as how the new accountability system possesses the potential to more closely link assessment and instruction, with the goal of having students who are ready for college or careers. She re-energized the participants with her description of the great teachers and great leaders who are currently impacting the programs that mentor new teachers to support all students, including students from diverse backgrounds and students with disabilities. As she continued, Dr. Posny emphasized the importance of multi-tiered systems of support that braid response to intervention models and positive behavioral interventions and supports, as well as the critical roles that

core instruction and universal design play in addressing the needs of all learners. She further discussed the role of families, and presented the importance of the "Table Referendum." The Table Referendum refers to the need to engage parents as well as students, by getting to a place where if a son or daughter was asked about their school day, they could respond, "Mom/Dad, I had a great day, I was held to high standards and I was supported to reach them!" Dr. Posny finished her address by describing effective leaders as focused, passionate, wise, courageous, and sincere! The address was followed by a question and answer session with Dr. Posny that allowed participants to understand better the changes in the education of students with disabilities and the reauthorization of IDEA, and ESEA. After an informative and stimulating day, participants enjoyed a wonderful reception at the Charlotte City Club with good conversation, fine food, and a lively atmosphere.

Friday's Concurrent Sessions focused on member districts, highlighting their initiatives and accomplishments. Topics ranged from algebra, reading, and differentiated instruction, to building system-wide structures and early warning systems to identifying students at risk of dropping out of high school, as well as Response to Intervention (RtI) models at the middle and high school levels. The day's presentations were full of successful and evidenced-based practices in many member districts across the United States.

It was clear that the Fall 2010 Meeting in Charlotte impacted everyone who attended—sending everyone with thought-provoking action steps that detailed how to clear the path to graduation for students with disabilities! Some shared by participants included: RtI models of implementation at the high school level, core instruction using E-learning for algebra, and professional development with coaching for differentiated instruction were some of the action steps. Charlotte-Mecklenburg, as the host district, provided great hospitality to the Collaborative by supporting yet another highly successful and invigorating meeting for member districts across the United States. Look forward to the next meeting in Los Angeles, California, in May 2011 that will focus on the effective implementation of multi-tier system of support (MTSS).

Dr. Jane Rhyne
Assistant Superintendent for
Exceptional Children
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools

A Focus on Reentry Programs:
Characteristics of Reentry Programs for Out-of-School Youth with Disabilities

The need for significantly increased school completion rates is widely acknowledged by community members, school district officials, and policymakers. Individual benefits of completing high school include additional lifetime personal income, reduced reliance on various public services, and reduced costly behaviors such as crime. Society in turn stands to benefit from added tax revenues and decreased expenditures for public services. High rates of unemployment, poverty, incarceration, and poor health are well-documented problems disproportionately experienced by high school dropouts. When high school dropouts have children, these children are at an increased risk of dropping out of school themselves, and thus the cycle continues. In other words, the lack of a high school diploma keeps certain segments of the population on the margins of society, whereas obtaining a high school diploma opens doors to postsecondary education and gainful employment in the labor market.

The members of society who have traditionally occupied the margins include ethnic/racial minorities and individuals with disabilities. These are populations that also have high rates of school dropout. In 2006–2007, only 60% of African American students, 61% of American Indian/Alaska Native students, and 62% of Hispanic students graduated on time, compared to 80% of White students and 91% of Asian/Pacific Islander students (Stillwell, 2009, Table 2). Graduation rates are even more dismal for African American and Hispanic/Latino students with disabilities—40% and 48%, respectively (U.S. Department of Education, 2009, Table 1-20).

The reasons students drop out of school are multifaceted and include everything from poor relationships with teachers, getting poor grades, becoming pregnant, or needing to get a job. Once youth drop out of school, the overwhelming majority regrets their decision. The difficulties they face in trying to obtain work without a high school diploma force many youth to reexamine their chances of leading a satisfying adult life without this credential.

By and large, the main school-completion strategy is *preventing* students from dropping out in the first place through targeted evidence-based interventions as well as through general efforts to make schools more effective, inviting and engaging. Only recently has the emphasis expanded to include efforts in *recovering* the millions of students who have already dropped out. Dropout *recovery* refers to efforts that encourage adolescents who have left school without a diploma to re-engage in formal education and graduate from high school.

Educators, community stakeholders and policy makers alike recognize that both dropouts and society will benefit if dropouts subsequently find ways to earn high school diplomas. A testament to this situation is the large number of dropout reentry programs operating in districts and communities across the nation. These programs aim to give out-of-school youth an opportunity to obtain a high school credential—a critical minimum requirement for success in adult life. While youth who dropped out of school may wish to return to obtain a diploma, they are often reluctant to return to the same situations that caused them to drop out in the first place. Many students face additional barriers that prevent them from returning, such as parenting or holding down a job.

Reentry programs are different from typical school environments in that they specifically attempt to address the barriers students face in returning to and remaining in school. For example, parenting students are typically provided child care and working students often have the option of taking self-paced classes or partial-day classes. A common reason students cite for their dropping out of school is that classes were not interesting. Reentry programs address this problem by placing learning in real-world contexts and by providing work experience and service-learning opportunities. Unlike many urban high schools, most reentry programs are small and provide personalized environments that help students connect to others in the school

setting. The additional support students receive from teachers and mentors in these close-knit environments, is often critical to students' perseverance and success. Most reentry programs also help students who are homeless, substance abusers, have mental health needs, or other specific needs by partnering with community agencies.

Reentry programs are hosted by a variety of schools, colleges, and community-based organizations, and vary in format, content, and course delivery methods. Despite their differences, reentry programs share many common characteristics designed to increase the chances of success for youth who dropped out of high school. A thorough review of the literature revealed six common characteristics of reentry programs, which are as follows: (a) Flexible Programming, which refers to programs that are provided in non-school settings and offer alternative timetables, such as shortened school days and evening classes, as well as programs that offer alternative instructional formats and ways to earn credits; (b) Options for Credit Recovery, Credit Accrual, and Dual Credits, which refers to programs that give students opportunities to recover credits online and earn credits through alternative means, as well as programs that allow dual enrollment so that students can simultaneously earn high school and college credits; (c) Meaningful Curricula, which refers to programs that attempt to engage students through instructional activities that have an obvious purpose for students, such as onsite work experience; (d) Additional Services and Supports, which refers to the provision, at school or through referral to community-based resources, of services that help to reduce students' barriers to school success. Such services include onsite childcare and community-based mental health counseling; (e) Staff Involvement, which refers to the role that teachers play in building relationships with students, mentoring them, monitoring their behavior and progress, and providing ongoing support while students transition into postsecondary education or employment; and (f) Partnerships, which refers to schools working collaboratively with other institutions of education, community-based organizations, and local businesses to provide students with a wide-range of opportunities surrounding their diploma completion.

Partnerships also underlie the delivery of the other program components. For example, flexibility in program locations is often made possible through partnerships with community-based education providers; credit recovery and dual credits are enabled through partnerships with online education providers and community colleges, respectively; meaningful curricula are enhanced through partnerships with local businesses at which students can get hands-on work experience; additional services and supports are made possible through partnerships with social services and other community-based agencies; and staff involvement is often enhanced by partnerships with other institutions, such as local colleges or businesses that provide mentors for students.

While each of these program characteristics is important in its own right, partnerships do not function independently, but rather support each of the other program components. However, it should not be assumed that a reentry program that adopts all six characteristics outlined in this report will be successful by virtue of incorporating these characteristics. It is more important to match the needs of out-of-school youth in the local district to the design of the reentry program.

Because there are no empirical studies assessing the effectiveness of the program characteristics, most interventions have been adopted based on common sense approaches. If students dropped out because they could not attend school due to the need to get a job or take care of their children, a logical response is to provide the option of a more flexible schedule. However, while this may be a necessary measure for some students, it may not meet the needs of students who dropped out after years of failing courses and becoming disengaged. For these students, the program characteristics that may have the biggest draw might be the role of involved staff to reconnect them to the school environment and the meaningful curriculum, through which they can experience success while participating in activities that seem relevant to their lives. In other words, when designing a new reentry program, program characteristics should be selected based on their particular benefits to students in a particular district so that a unique reentry program can be

Six Common Characteristics of Reentry Programs:

- *Flexible Programming*

- *Options for Credit Recovery, Credit Accrual, and Dual Credits*

- *Meaningful Curricula*

- *Additional Services and Supports*

- *Staff Involvement*

- *Partnerships*

Spring 2011 Meeting to Focus on Critical Challenges and Opportunities

2011 SPRING MEETING
Wednesday May 11th – Saturday May 14th, 2011

"Systemic Implementation of Multi–Tier Academic and Behavioral Supports"

Omni Los Angeles Hotel
at California Plaza
Los Angeles, California

THE COLLABORATIVE
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The Collaborative's Spring 2011 meeting, May 11–14, in Los Angeles, CA, promises to be professionally energizing and enriching. While the primary focus of the meeting will be Systemic Implementation of Multi-Tier Academic and Behavioral Supports, participants will also have the opportunity to share and discuss some of the most challenging issues confronting urban school district leaders today, including school choice and how school districts are responding to the pressures resulting from the economic crisis.

Multi-Tier System of Supports (MTSS)

MTSS braids what has been learned from Response to Intervention (RtI) and PBIS (Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports) research into a coherent system of evidence-based, system-wide practices that support a rapid response to students' academic and behavioral needs. MTSS calls for the adoption of research-based interventions, universal screening and progress monitoring, and a problem-solving process to inform decisions at each tier of service delivery. When implemented as a systems change initiative, RtI, PBIS, and/or MTSS hold great promise for revolutionizing (1) supports for all students and (2) special

education eligibility determination for those with suspected disabilities.

Collaborative member school districts across the country are at different stages of implementing the academic and behavioral components of MTSS on a systemic basis. Several of our member districts will be presenting their implementation models, results, and lessons learned at the spring meeting. Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), the nation's second largest school district, is currently rolling out its system-wide implementation of RtI, and LAUSD will be sharing the design and implementation strategy with other member district leaders.

Dr. Judy Elliott, LAUSD's Chief Academic Officer, will provide the keynote address. Prior to taking the LAUSD position, Dr. Elliott was the Chief of Teaching and Learning in the Portland Oregon Public Schools, and previous to that position, an Assistant Superintendent of Long Beach Unified School District in Long Beach, CA—both Collaborative member districts. Throughout her career, Dr. Elliott has emphasized integrated service delivery systems, effective use of data, and inclusive schooling practices, which includes linking assessment to classroom instruction and intervention, the use of formative assessments and progress monitoring to increase instruction and behavior outcomes, and the role of leadership in systems change. Among her book publications are three that have contributed greatly to systems thinking about RtI and MTSS:

- *Response to Intervention: Policy Considerations and Implementation (NASDSE, 2004)*
- *Response to Intervention Blueprint: District Level Edition (NASDSE, 2008)*
- *Response to Intervention Blueprint: State Level Edition (NASDSE, in press).*

Finding Efficiencies in Special Education Programs and Services

The U.S. Congress, financially strapped states, as well as local municipalities and schools districts are all examining their education budgets to determine what cuts must be made due to the nation's current economic woes. One area under scrutiny is special education. Increasingly, special education leaders in urban districts are feeling the pressure to identify savings while also maintaining program integrity, quality, and legal compliance. In the size-alike group sessions, leaders from Members and Associates from will have the opportunity to discuss how they are responding, thus far, to this challenge.

School Choice and Students with Disabilities

In the ongoing discussion on how best to reform public education, much attention has been paid to the concept of school choice. School choice involves the practice of allowing parents and students to choose among a variety of schools—both public (e.g., academy/theme schools, magnet programs, charter schools, open enrollment) and private (e.g., vouchers). One of the purported benefits of school choice is that it can lead to a wider range of creative and high-quality school offerings that, in turn, can result in better matches with student interests. However, a major concern has arisen regarding equitable access to these various schools and programs by students with disabilities, and whether these options actually result in restricted choices for those students.

Our host school district, LAUSD, has implemented steps to improve access to, and participation in, choice programs. Using a rubric and matrix developed by LAUSD, every school that applies to be a public school choice program must submit a plan that shows how students with disabilities will be served. LAUSD leaders will present details on the rubric and matrix, and their impact on improving access to more quality schooling options. More information about the meeting agenda may be found on the Collaborative's website – www.urbancollaborative.org

Judy Elliott, Ph.D., Chief Academic Officer of the Los Angeles Unified School District, will be our keynote speaker this spring!

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created to meet the needs of out-of-school youth in that district.

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Awareness to Action: Celebrating 10 Years of *Inclusive Schools Week*

INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS
Network
www.inclusiveschools.org

Ten years ago, *during his daily commute to work, David Riley, Executive Director of the Collaborative, tuned into NPR (National Public Radio) and heard the announcement that it was "**National Free Trade Dialogue Day.**" He thought, "If a day could be dedicated to a cause such as that, then inclusive education certainly deserves a week of it's own." A few months later, Inclusive Schools Week was born.*

History

Inclusive Schools Week (ISW)) has been celebrated annually the first week in December since 2001. It was originally developed under a five-year grant from the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs. It was conceived as a vehicle through which the federally funded National Institute for Urban School Reform (NIUSI) and the National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools and Teaching (NCREST) could disseminate materials concerning inclusive education. As a partner to NIUSI and NCREST, the Urban Special Education Leadership Collaborative (Collaborative) at Education Development Center, Inc. (EDC), played a strategic role in this initiative, providing vision for *ISW*, managing outreach efforts, and tracking results throughout the course of the five-year project.

From the outset, it was clear that *ISW* had struck a chord with educators and families around the world. The grassroots support and ownership of the program was immediate and verified the need to support students, parents, and educators in their efforts to create more inclusive schools and communities on the local level. The publications, tools, and resources made available through this initiative have been well received. Participant feedback has continuously informed and directed the refinement of existing materials and the development of new resources. This practitioner-based, grassroots support for *ISW* has remained consistent throughout its existence and is a hallmark of the initiative.

Inclusive Schools Week is no longer funded by the U.S. Department of Education. The Collaborative, however, recognized that the initiative had only just begun to deliver results. The need and desire for the information and support to implement inclusive practices was only increasing. For this reason, the Collaborative chose to take on the sole responsibility of Inclusive Schools Week by underwriting the project and providing staff time and resources to the effort.

In 2007, the Inclusive Schools Network (ISN) was formed in the spirit of continuing the dialogue started during ISW throughout the year. ISN is a Web-based resource for families, schools, and communities that promotes inclusive educational practices. ISN's mission is "to encourage, embolden, and empower people to design and implement effective inclusive schools, by sharing insights and best practices and by providing opportunities for connection." ISN provides year-round opportunities for families and educators around the world to network and build their knowledge of inclusive education.

Impact

Over and over again, research has shown that inclusive instructional strategies not only benefit students with disabilities, but more often than not, those instructional strategies also have a positive impact on the academic achievement of general education students, resulting in a positive experience for ALL. *Inclusive Schools Week (ISW)* has historically offered a unique opportunity for administrators, practitioners, paraprofessionals, parents, and students to come together, discuss, and share instructional strategies, tips, and lesson plans that have been shown to meet the educational needs of the diverse learner. Time and time again, these discussions have led to positive changes for students with disabilities in schools around the world.

Over the past 10 years, *Inclusive Schools*

Week has received hundreds of e-mails, phone calls, and letters from across the world describing the impact of the event.

Families have depended on *ISW* to bring awareness of inclusive practices to their schools and communities. A parent from Norwood, PA, wrote "It *[ISW]* has inspired me to know that I am doing the best thing possible for my son and other children. I have started an inclusion committee in our building with the principal."

Teachers across the world are using *ISW* to enhance their knowledge of inclusive practices and incorporate new skills into their classrooms. For example, this year in Pakistan, the Rural Inclusive Education Program of Ghazali Education Trust held an awareness seminar at LUMS, a local university in Lahore, Pakistan, in celebration of Inclusive Schools Week and used the 2010 Celebration Kit as a resource for strategies and ideas.

State, district, and school administrators are using *ISW* as an opportunity to spread the word about the benefits of inclusive practices to school boards, families, teachers, students, and the community at large. The Michigan State Board of Education again passed a resolution recognizing December 6–10, 2010, as Inclusive Schools Week.

The reach of *ISW* has gone beyond individual districts and schools. Entire communities, cities, and states have chosen to participate in *ISW,* contributing to the development of a more inclusive society. This year, Mayor Gavin Newsom of San Francisco will proclaim the first week of December as the annual "San Francisco Inclusive Schools Week."

Widespread Recognition and Support

Inclusive Schools Week has evolved into an international event celebrated in countries around the world, such as Canada, the UK, the Philippines, Pakistan, Turkey, and Afghanistan. The *ISW* website has had visitors from more than 50 countries.

Nationally, *ISW* has been recognized by prominent news agencies, including *The*

Washington Post, US State News, Orlando Sentinel, The Gloucester County Times (NJ), *Omaha World Herald, Concord Monitor* (NH), *The News-Star* (LA), *Pensacola News Journal* (FL), *St. Paul Pioneer Press* (MN), *The Times* (Shreveport, LA), *The Birmingham News, The Daily Item* (Lynn, MA), and News 14 in Charlotte, NC. And in 2010, Inclusive Schools Week received celebrity support. International pop icon Clay Aiken participated in Inclusive Schools Week through the organization National Inclusion Project.

Since its inception, *Inclusive Schools Week* has benefited from the support of influential professional, educational, parental, and community groups, as well as state and local governments. There have been official proclamations from the state governments of Alabama and New Jersey. The cities of San Francisco, Boston, Newark and Montclair (NJ), Philadelphia, and Roswell (GA) also issued proclamations recognizing ISW, as did the Michigan and Massachusetts State Boards of Education. The White House has acknowledged *ISW* in several official letters throughout its 10-year history.

The Future

Inclusive Schools Week continues to grow each year in terms of the breadth and depth of its outreach efforts, content coverage, participation, and media response. Its place in history may be marked by the simple reality that *ISW* allows us all to take a moment to applaud the progress we've made toward building more inclusive school communities while pledging to continue our work toward becoming a more inclusive society. Being an inclusive school is not always easy. But schools and classrooms that have made the decision and taken the steps to become more inclusive are reaping the benefits and rewards—for all of their students.

For more information about Inclusive Schools Week and to sign up for the monthly e-newsletter Inclusive Network News, visit www.inclusiveschools.org.

"ISN products are available for purchase online! https://fcsn.org/inclusiveschools/ orderform.html

"The grassroots support and ownership of the program was immediate and verified the need to support students, parents, and educators in their efforts to create more inclusive schools and communities on the local level."

NEW COLLABORATIVE MEMBERS

The Collaborative currently links 98 schools districts in 33 states.

Two school districts have joined since October 2010.

Malden Public Schools, MA

Newburgh Enlarged City School District, NY

For a complete list of Collaborative members and enrollment information, please visit our website at
www.urbancollaborative.org

Urban Special Education Leadership Collaborative
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