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Curriculum Map

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Statement of Purpose

According to the Ohio Department of Education, 10.4% of students in the Margaretta School District qualify for special education services as students with disabilities. This is lower than the average across the state of 13% of students being identified as having a disability and receiving special education services. Though 100% of the district’s teachers are reported to be “highly qualified teachers”, the district is currently receiving a rating of effective and has not met annual yearly progress for the 2007-08 school year due in part largely to the low performance on state assessments by special education students (Ohio Department of Education, 2009). The Margaretta School District went to a full inclusion model based on recommendations made by the Ohio Department of Education during the Focused Monitoring process in the 2006-07 and 2007-08 school years.

Margaretta services special education students primarily in an inclusive education model, meaning that special education students are with general education students for most of the school day, with some specialized instruction occurring in a pull-out setting during individual work time. This requires that all teachers in the school district have a working knowledge of special education in order to best service all of the students in their classroom. However, whether a veteran teacher or a new teacher fresh from college, there are typically no mandated courses for general education teachers to take which teach them a basic knowledge of special education.

Teachers working with students with disabilities must have a basic understanding of special education laws, categorical identification, procedures, services, and legal mandates in order to provide students the opportunity to learn and develop to their fullest potential. It is also vital that all members within the school district comply with local, state, and federal laws while working with special education students. As a result of this unit, teachers will learn the basic knowledge necessary to work within the confines of the law to best educate students who have disabilities.

Units & Unit Outcomes

**Subunit One: Special Education Law**

* Teachers will demonstrate an understanding of federal and state laws.
* Teachers will recognize why inclusion is important for special education students based on the Free & Appropriate Public Education & Least Restrictive Environment laws.
* Teachers will define what laws affect the way they teach students in the classroom and be able to teach students within the confines of procedural safeguard requirements.

**Subunit Two: Identification Process**

* Teachers will recognize that the evaluation process is holistic and does not rely on the opinion or data of one person on the evaluation team.
* Teachers will demonstrate understanding of the intervention process and importance of data collection in identification of students with disabilities.
* Teachers will identify the basic criteria required for students to qualify for special education services.

**Subunit Three: Special Education Categories**

* Teachers will identify the thirteen special education categories for which students can qualify for special education services.
* Teachers will demonstrate the ability to refer students with a suspected disability to the evaluation team and be specific as to the disability which is suspected.

**Subunit Four: Least Restrictive Environment & Related Services**

* Teachers will describe the continuum of placement options for special education students and what their role is within that continuum.
* Teachers will identify supplementary aides and related services in order to refer students in their classroom as necessary.

**Subunit Five: Complaint Procedures**

* Teachers will recognize the importance of adhering to special education laws, rules, and regulations for special education students based on their own personal liability and the liability of the school district in which they work for.

Sequencing Rationale

The special education units are organized based on basic foundational principals, working their way up to applicability to the classroom teacher. All classroom teachers should be aware of special education law which drives the special education processes and procedures. Special education students must first be evaluated based on teacher referral, then determined to qualify in a special education category by the evaluation team, with final placement and related service options made by the educational team. Finally, once a student is identified as a student with special needs, the laws must be adhered to in order to best service students and avoid any negative legal ramifications.

The first subunit, “Special Education Law” is the most logical starting point because very few college preparation programs discuss the laws that teachers must follow in working with special education students. Therefore, teachers can be in non-compliance of the law and not even realize it when working with special education students. Many times, general education teachers think that the brunt of the responsibility for special education students falls on intervention specialists, when in fact it falls on every teacher. If the teacher is unaware of the laws, they may not adhere to them in their classroom. However, ignorance of the law is not acceptable and can put the school district at risk legally and financially.

The second subunit, “Identification Process” is appropriate because it is the starting point in the special education process. Almost every classroom teacher, at some point in their career, will seek out the identification of a suspected student with a disability. They must be aware of the process for identification, particularly with the importance of response to intervention data. For years, the process included a simple referral to a school psychologist for testing to determine eligibility, with limited or no input by classroom teachers. However, this process has evolved to include input from teachers, classroom data, a thorough review of student records, classroom observations, other direct assessments, and interviews of teachers and parents. Most importantly, the state of Ohio now requires that teachers provide documentation of implementation of research based interventions and data in regards to student progress from those interventions. This is a time consuming process that many teachers don’t understand or don’t follow, and without this vital data a student can’t be identified as a student with special needs. The role of the teacher in student identification has dramatically increased and teachers need to understand their role in the identification process.

The third subunit, “Special Education Categories” makes sense because many teachers do not understand what they are referring students for and simply indicate that they need special education assistance. Typically when a referral comes to the evaluation or intervention team, the teacher simply indicates that the student would benefit from working with the intervention specialist or receiving related services, without an explanation of why this may be. Teachers need to understand that there are thirteen categories for which a student may qualify for special education services and without meeting the criteria to qualify in any one of those areas, a child can’t receive special education or related services. This is especially true with “difficult to motivate” students; lack of motivation to complete academic work is different from lack of the ability to complete academic work due to a disability.

The fourth subunit, “Least Restrictive Environment and Related Services” is important because once a student is identified, it is up to the evaluation and placement team (including the general education teacher) to decide where the student should receive their special education services and what supports are required for student success. There was a time when identification drove educational placement – for example, if it were determined that you were multiple handicapped, visually impaired, hearing impaired, autistic, or emotionally disturbed you automatically went to a separate school and could not be educated with general education peers. However, this is no longer the case.

The fifth and final subunit, “Complaint Procedures” is appropriate because teachers need to understand that it is important to be aware of and understand all of the basic knowledge they learned about special education and apply it to their classrooms and daily teaching. They need to know that they can be held personally liable for not implementing the rules and procedures that they learned in previous units.

Evaluation Strategy

Both formative and summative evaluation methods will be incorporated into the curriculum. First, formative evaluation methods will include the school psychologist collecting information from teaching staff in regards to what they currently know about special education and what they would like to know more about. The school psychologist will also incorporate feedback about special education and inclusion practices from teacher evaluations completed by building administrators. During each subunit, pre and post assessments containing essential questions for each of the five subunits will be administered. Upon completion of each subunit, a survey will be completed by the teacher participants to obtain data in regards to special education knowledge for the specific realm discussed to determine what growth has taken place. Second, summative evaluation methods will be incorporated for the next several years. This would include continued monitoring of report card data from the Ohio Department of Education for state assessment performance of students with disabilities. This would also include continued monitoring of teacher evaluations for inclusive practices, specifically for the teachers which had participated in the special education course compared to the teachers who had not participated in the special education course.

References

Ohio Department of Education (2009). Accountability: State and local report card. Retrieved

February 8, 2009 from www.ode.state.oh.us