

Title of Session: Special Education Forum

Moderator: Paul Bohac

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Room: Special Education Forum Group

PaulDB: I am a retired Correctional education administrator with a background in Special Education.

BrendaIG: Rio Grande Valley Elementary Level

BjB: I'm a Tapped In volunteer and a retired alt ed teacher

EsmeraldaL: I am from Edinburg, TX and working on a teaching degree for elementary

MelissaMG: I'm Melissa from Edinburg Texas. I'm a student at UTPA

CynthiaVa: Mcallen, TX...working on bilingual elem. degree

BrendaIG: okay I'm from Pharr, TX majoring in Bilingual Elementary Education

PaulDB: Interesting that there are so many of you with a bi-lingual interest!

CynthiaVa: yes that is great

BrendaIG: we live close to the border... bilingualism is a must

PaulDB: Actually, the elementary level is critical for the identification of special ed students.

PaulDB: With a bi-lingual background, it becomes possible to ensure that the identification is representative of an educational handicap as opposed to a communication difficulty.

BjB agrees

PaulDB: So, does someone have an "issue" they wish to address?

CynthiaVa: yes, I have a class in which we actually did a scenario on identifying special ed. students

PaulDB: Having a problem with a particular student or some of the procedures that are to be implemented or observed?

CynthiaVa: but we were talking about not necessarily physical disabilities...

PaulDB: How did that "scenario" develop?

CynthiaVa: more like learning disabilities and things of that sort

CynthiaVa: well the professor just gave us the details

PaulDB: What kind of details Cynthia?

CynthiaVa: it was a boy I think in 5th grade...and he was tested in different areas regarding academics

BrendaIG: she explained how special education students are sometimes

CynthiaVa: like math computation...oral expression

CynthiaVa: and these scores were compared to his IQ score

CynthiaVa: and there was about two or three areas where the boy scored 16 pts below his IQ...and this made him eligible for special ed. services

PaulDB: What about comparisons between the youth and others of the same age-grade level?

BrendaIG: Oh yea she showed us how they decide if a student should be placed in a special education program

CynthiaVa: oh yea...

MelissaMG: I always wondered about a child who is borderline also

CynthiaVa: apparently this boy seemed to behave like the rest...

PaulDB: Was there a discussion about different types of educational handicaps?

MelissaMG: how does someone distinguish whether or not the kid is considered a special ed child

BrendaIG: YES

CynthiaVa: well we talked about the most common ..

PaulDB: So you were given a kid in 5th grade whose IQ score was low, yet the child had acceptable social skills, but what were the other characteristics identified?

CynthiaVa: learning disabilities...speech impairment...mental retardation...autism...

BrendaIG: she explained LD SI MR OHI AUTISM MD

BrendaIG: among others

CynthiaVa: I really can't remember

EsmeraldaL: why is it that sign language is not taught through all grade levels for handicap students or is it something that just happens in south Texas school districts

PaulDB: Did the professor talk about any of the pre-referral activities that had been completed?

PaulDB: Sign language training is usually provided for the hearing impaired Esmeralda

EsmeraldaL: I know because I have a Down syndrome brother and I remember him signing when he was in elementary and no longer in high school

CynthiaVa: I think she talked about RTI...

CynthiaVa: response to intervention...is that what you mean?

PaulDB: RTI is the "formal" tool for what was previously referred to as "pre-referral" activities but is much more specific.

CynthiaVa: oh ok

PaulDB: Yes, response to intervention places the burden on the regular classroom teacher to implement a series of instructional modifications for a period of 6 weeks and then report the results of those interventions.

CynthiaVa: yea I understood that it was ..trying all the different ways to get the student to respond..and see if the problem could be detected...if nothing worked then the teacher and id would take effect

CynthiaVa: right

PaulDB: Each intervention must be based on some identifiable difficulty the youth has demonstrated during the classroom participation.

BrendaIG: yes she mentioned that

PaulDB: Implementation of RTI requires a level of "diagnostic" competence.

CynthiaVa: so it starts in the elem. level...but does this continue all the way through high

school?

PaulDB: So what were the elements in the scenario about the 5th grade student?

CynthiaVa: yes..

PaulDB: Yes, RTI serves a multitude of purposes beyond identification of possible special education youths, if it is properly implemented.

CynthiaVa: and then she showed us an example of the form that is filled out for the student

BrendaIG: yes it was also in our textbook

PaulDB: And what kind of information was on the form?

CynthiaVa: ..oh the IEP

CynthiaVa: ummm...the members of the ARD committee

CynthiaVa: I think his different test scores

PaulDB: No, before the IEP is written there is a need to convene a staffing committee to review the RTI paperwork and other information as well.

CynthiaVa: oh, ok

BrendaIG: really?

PaulDB: For example, there has to be a medical review to rule out any possible medical, physical or other non-education reason for the child's difficulties.

CynthiaVa: oh I did not know that

BrendaIG: me 2

PaulDB: Parents must be contacted and asked permission to conduct psychological evaluations and to agree to allow the child to be evaluated in general.

CynthiaVa: what if the parent says no?

MelissaMG: what if the parents don't allow it but the child needs special attention?

EsmeraldaL: that is true

PaulDB: RTI starts the process and is implemented after the regular classroom teacher

determines that a problem may exist. Before the RTI process is implemented, the parents must be contacted and the issues discussed with them.

CynthiaVa: but we talked about parents who when you bring to their attention that their child may need to be tested or special services...they automatically say no

PaulDB: According to the federal law, parental approval must be obtained both at the beginning and throughout the process.

BrendaIG: teacher must have a parent teacher conference in order to start RTI?

CynthiaVa: oh ok

MelissaMG: I know one of my friends aunts was contacted by her cousins teacher because they thought her cousin had a disability...but she was determined that her little boy didn't and she didn't allow them to anything until the following year

MelissaMG: what if she had continued to say no?

PaulDB: The teacher contacts the parents, advises them that their child is having a problem in the classroom and asks to meet with them to discuss possible actions to be taken.

PaulDB: The RTI program includes activities that the parents can provide at home, such as working with the child on homework, maybe reading to the child, that sort of thing.

PaulDB: Purpose of the RTI process is to assist the parents to see that there is a problem but that the school and the family can help overcome the difficulty.

BrendaIG: but what if the parent doesn't like the idea after all?

PaulDB: Brenda, that can be a problem.

CynthiaVa: yea...I think what happens sometimes is that the home teacher may say it in a way that sounds offensive to the parent and so the parent immediately declines..

MelissaMG: I think that it is vital for parents to work with there students outside of the school environment as well because they need the reinforcement constantly...

BrendaIG . o O (exactly)

MelissaMG: so they can learn

CynthiaVa: it would be much better if the parent is well aware of their child's needs...and what exactly is entailed in the process

PaulDB: Emphasis must be on encouraging participation between the parents and the school.

BjB . o O (in an ideal world!)

PaulDB: It is not an Us versus them, but rather a we are all in this together.

DavidW . o O (in an ideal world)

DavidW smiles

MelissaMG: a lot of times, even with kids that are not disabled, the classroom and home are two different worlds...in school, there is discipline and rules to follow and sometimes at home its the complete opposite

MelissaMG: so it's a lot harder for them to learn what's right and wrong

PaulDB: Melissa, your job as a teacher is to help kids learn how to learn.

CynthiaVa: right

MelissaMG: and part of that process is showing them right from wrong and if it's not enforced outside of school...the job becomes much more difficult

PaulDB: Remember, you are likely dealing with a diverse student population in your class, each child is different and each child will have different needs, educationally, socially, and experientially.

MelissaMG: exactly

PaulDB: May I suggest that you obtain a copy of John Dewey's Democracy in Education and read it?

MelissaMG: absolutely...what is it about

PaulDB: Written in 1916, it is an excellent tool for understanding the role of the school in helping kids learn how to learn from their environment.

CynthiaVa: I'm sorry but going back to id of a special ed. student....does this continue all the way through high school?

PaulDB: More importantly, it will help you develop an educational philosophy that will enable you to look at your kids differently.

PaulDB: Cynthia, the special education designation is subject to an annual review and a three-year re-evaluation. If the need for special education services continue to exist, then

yes the services can continue through high school and potentially on into college until the child's 22 birthday.

CynthiaVa: wow I did not know that

MelissaMG: neither did I

PaulDB: However, also remember that a child may be eligible for services under Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

BrendaIG: me neither!

EsmeraldaL: that is true

PaulDB: The early identification of a child is critical for the early initiation of special education services.

CynthiaVa: yup

EsmeraldaL: are there any specific programs for sp. ed. student for after high school without having to send them to adult day cares

PaulDB: But a child who is truly "educationally handicapped" will forever be educationally handicapped.

BrendaIG: but a teacher could ALWAYS help

BrendaIG: right?

PaulDB: Esmeralda, it depends on the nature of the child's handicap.

EsmeraldaL: Down syndrome

MelissaMG: Have there ever been cases where a special education child is diagnosed very late...like at a young adult age?

EsmeraldaL: just asking since my brother will be aging out in two years

PaulDB: Downs syndrome children may require life-long assistance, depending upon level of severity.

PaulDB: In response to you Melissa, yes, I have been involved in the identification of needed special education services for an inmate in an adult prison who was 20 years old at the time.

BrendaIG: Really?

CynthiaVa : wow

MelissaMG: and they never knew?

BrendaIG: how could that have gone so far with out anyone recognizing it

BjB : correctional facilities are full of people like that, Brenda

PaulDB: His behavior was such that he was not in school for very long. Frequent suspensions, and two expulsions.

CynthiaVa : oh ok

MelissaMG: oh wow

BjB : or the students learn how to compensate

BjB : in a crowded classroom, these kids fall through the cracks

BrendaIG: ohh but I thought that when they kick you out of school I thought they send students to a charter school or boot camp

MelissaMG: that's interesting...

PaulDB: Downs syndrome is a specific category of educable mentally handicapped. It usually refers to a child who has certain physical characteristics, and is usually accompanied by a limited mental capacity.

PaulDB : Some children who are identified as educable mentally handicapped (EMH) are higher functioning and can be trained to live independently.

BrendaIG: Yes I have heard of that .. that's why I mentioned that a teacher could always help

EsmeraldaL: yes, beyond his physical and mental problems he is a great helping hand at home and in school

MelissaMG: can someone who is diagnosed as down syndrome live on their own?

CynthiaVa : that's great

BrendaIG: My aunt is blind and has friends that are disabled and are independent

PaulDB: Federal law would require some type of educational placement of a special education student, but if the child is not identified as special education, no such

placement requirement exists.

MelissaMG: ohh I see

EsmeraldaL: could I create a business that will help MR people be productive?

EsmeraldaL: as in giving them a job

PaulDB: Folks, remember, special education services serve an academic function, other parts of the special education service delivery system addresses other elements of adulthood. Also, remember that a child who benefits from special education services also is likely to benefit from 504 services (job training and related employment services) and also from Adults with Disabilities Act.

CynthiaVa: oh ok

BjB: there are businesses that already exist like that, Esmeralda. There are always people who will benefit from such a service

EsmeraldaL: k

CynthiaVa: I was not aware of that

BrendaIG: they had an issue at Burger King in McAllen

MelissaMG: I heard of it too!

BrendaIG: where the manager didn't want to hire a disabled person

PaulDB: Esmeralda, I would suggest that you talk with your local Vocational Rehabilitation services staff about helping EMH individuals learn how to live independently.

MelissaMG: yeah

BrendaIG: but they did end up hiring them !

BrendaIG: but they accommodated to them

BrendaIG: whatever they could do was good =)

EsmeraldaL: thx

PaulDB: That is an example of either the effects of 504 or ADA, depending upon the age of the individual denied employment.

BrendaIG: OH I can't remember but it happened! =)

CynthiaVa: I didn't know that...

PaulDB: The point to all of this is the special education is not a panacea but rather a tool to help kids learn how to learn by building upon their individual strengths and minimizing their weaknesses.

EsmeraldaL: right

CynthiaVa: that's a very good description!

PaulDB: If you will be teaching such a population, look at what each child can do rather than what the child cannot do. It will lead to a more positive experience for both you and the child.

MelissaMG: I've learned a lot

BrendaIG: we always hear that in the education classes! =)

CynthiaVa: oh yes!!!

CynthiaVa: lots of times

BjB: the next Special Ed Forum will be on September 15

CynthiaVa smiles

BjB . o O (one week later because of the Labor Day holiday)

BrendaIG: positive attitude is needed ALWAYS

CynthiaVa: this forum was great

BrendaIG smiles

MelissaMG: I agree. Thanks Paul

BjB: Thank you so much, Paul.

DavidW: teacher as advocate is a powerful model

BrendaIG: thank you Paul

DavidW: Good discussion, Paul

BrendaIG: and KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

PaulDB: The only time "special education" is important is when the child is in school. Once the child leaves school, what is important is how well the child can get along with others, how successful the child is at finding, keeping and moving ahead on the job.

BrendaIG smiles

CynthiaVa: thanks

EsmeraldaL: thx for the pointers

PaulDB: It has been a good learning experience for all of us I hope!

BjB . o O (and living independently or as independently as possible.)

CynthiaVa: yes it has

PaulDB: I have enjoyed it and look forward to the next session.

CynthiaVa: thank you

CynthiaVa: bye everyone

BrendaIG: thank you!

BjB: I always appreciate the reminder to be positive and focus on strengths

BrendaIG: adios everyone!

MelissaMG: bye :)

BjB waves goodnight. See you next month

DavidW waves

EsmeraldaL: adios