

# **School Leadership for Students with Disabilities**

## **The principal's role in developing effective inclusive schools**

### **Overview for Facilitators**

The CEEDAR Center is pleased to provide this presentation that addresses the principal's role in developing effective inclusive schools. The materials are designed for a preservice course or for professional development. Consistent with the Common Core Standards, this resource is designed to increase school leaders' abilities to improve student readiness for college and careers.

### **Speaker Notes**

The speaker notes are what the facilitator can say, verbatim, to explain each slide and the activities. The notes are provided as a guide that speakers will modify as needed. Directions and notes for the facilitator, not to be said aloud, are in italics.

Handout 1: Teacher concerns about inclusive schools. This handout provides a list of concerns that will be used as the focus of a discussion on this topic, and a list of discussion questions for participants. Logistics for a small group activity and discussion focusing on teacher concerns about inclusive schools are described on Slides 9-13.

Handout 2: Developing inclusive schools: The principal's role. This handout is used to support an activity and discussion. Participants should have read McLeskey, Waldron, and Redd (2014) before class. This activity is then used by groups of 3-4 participants, who identify critical practices from the McLeskey et al. case study of an effective inclusive school, and determine how these critical practices are related to practices that underlie successful leadership for principals (included on Slide 20 from the PPT). This is then followed by debriefing and a discussion of this activity (Slide 21 from the PPT).

### **Objectives**

1. What types of changes are needed to develop an effective inclusive school?
2. What can be learned from teacher beliefs about inclusive schools?
3. What types of principal leadership relate to improving student outcomes?
4. How do these areas of principal leadership relate to the development of effective inclusive schools?

### **Outline of Session with Activities and Approximate Time**

The session is designed for approximately 3 hours

Topic	Slides	Activity	Time in
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			minutes
Introduction	1-3	Discuss objectives	10
School change and effective inclusive schools	4-5		10
Teacher concerns regarding effective inclusive schools	6-8		15
Discussion—teacher concerns regarding effective inclusive schools	9-16	Handout 1	40
BREAK			15
The principal’s role in developing effective inclusive schools	14-18		20
Discussion--The principal’s role in developing effective inclusive schools	22	Handout 2	40
Research on the principal’s role in developing effective inclusive schools	23-28		20
Concluding thoughts	26		10

### **Suggested Follow-Up Professional Learning Opportunities**

In professional learning communities, study a select of the following:

#### **Books & Monographs:**

1. Causton, J., & Theoharis, G. (2014). *The principal’s handbook for leading inclusive schools*. Baltimore: Brookes.
2. Fullan, M. (2010). *Change leader: Learning to do what matters most*. Hoboken, NJ: Jossey-Bass.
3. Hehir, T. & Katzman, L. (2012). *Effective inclusive schools: Designing successful schoolwide programs*. Hoboken, NJ: Jossey-Bass.
4. McLeskey, J., Waldron, N., Spooner, F., & Algozzine, B. (2014). *Effective Inclusive Schools: Research and Practice*. New York: Routledge.

5. Robinson, V., Hohepa, M., & Lloyd, C. (2009). *School leadership and student outcomes: Identifying what works and why*. Wellington, NZ: New Zealand Ministry of Education.
6. Seashore Louis, et al. (2010). *Learning from leadership project: Investigating the links to improved student learning*. Retrieved from <http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/school-leadership/Pages/default.aspx>.

### **Articles & Book Chapters:**

1. Billingsley, B., & McLeskey, J. (2014). Principal leadership for effective inclusive schools. In J. McLeskey, N.L. Waldron, F. Spooner, & B. Algozzine (Eds.). *Effective inclusive schools: Research and practice*. New York: Routledge.
2. Hoppey, D., & McLeskey, J. (2013). A case study of principal leadership in an effective inclusive school. *The Journal of Special Education, 46*, 245-256.
3. McLeskey, J., & Waldron, N. (2015). Effective leadership can make schools truly inclusive. *Phi Delta Kappan, 96*(5), 68-73.
4. McLeskey, J., & Waldron, N. (2006). Comprehensive school reform and inclusive schools: Improving schools for all students. *Theory into Practice, 45*(3), 269-278.
5. McLeskey, J., Waldron, N., & Redd, L. (2014). A case study of a highly effective, inclusive school. *Journal of Special Education, 48*(1), 59-70.
6. Salisbury, C. (2006). Principals' perspectives on inclusive elementary schools. *Research & Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities, 31*(1), 70-82.
7. Waldron, N., & McLeskey, J. (2010). Establishing a collaborative school culture through comprehensive school reform. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation, 20*, 58-74.

### **Speaker Notes**

#### **Slide 1—School Leadership for Students with Disabilities**

This is the second CEM PowerPoint about leadership for inclusion. In the last PowerPoint, we focused on what is inclusion and why it is important. In this PowerPoint we address the principal's role in developing effective inclusive schools by inclusion and why it is important.

#### **Slide 2—The principal's role in developing effective inclusive schools**

Today we will examine the critical role that the principal plays as effective inclusive schools are developed. As you know, principals are in a pivotal position to influence all major activities in a school. Today we'll discuss the many changes that must occur as a school becomes effective and inclusion, and how important the active involvement of the principal is to ensuring that these changes occur.

### **Slide 3—A beginning thought...**

Before this session, all participants should read McLeskey, J., Waldron, N., & Redd, L. (2014). A case study of a highly effective, inclusive elementary school. *The Journal of Special Education* 48(1), 59-70. This article provides background for a discussion and an activity during this class session.

Christine Salisbury has studied many effective inclusive schools. She wrote an article in 2006 that describes the role the principal played in developing eight effective inclusive elementary schools. Her conclusion about the importance of the principal in this change is reflected in her comment that "Schools that function inclusively do so for a reason...principals in these schools were the reason." We can't generalize from these schools to all schools, but would you anticipate that principals would be important in developing and sustaining inclusive schools in other settings? Why?

### **Slide 4—Objectives**

We'll begin with a discussion of the major changes that are required to develop an effective inclusive school—changes in instruction, curriculum, teacher roles, and teacher and administrator beliefs—virtually every part of a school must change. This will be followed by a review of the importance of paying attention to teacher beliefs about inclusive schools as these changes occur. Next, we'll talk about the different types of leadership principals can provide, with a special emphasis on leadership that leads to improved student outcomes. We will then conclude with a discussion of the particular areas of principal leadership that are most important for developing and sustaining effective inclusive schools.

### **Slide 5—School change and effective inclusive schools**

Why are major changes required to develop effective inclusive schools? *Check to see if participants have been in one of the following types of schools.*

*--A school that is inclusive, but not particularly effective.*

*--A school that is effective for some groups of students, but not for others (often including students with disabilities and those who struggle to learn).*

*Select a type of school for discussion, and address the following topics.*

What types of changes are needed to make this school more effective?

Changes related to teacher beliefs? Instruction? Curriculum? Teacher roles?

Classroom organization for delivering instruction? Can the school become more

effective with minor changes, or are major changes required? Why is this the case?

*Or consider another 'type' of school.*

*--A school that has been called 'inclusive,' but that isn't doing 'inclusion' very well, leading the complaints from parents and teachers?*

What types of changes are needed to make this school more inclusive (i.e., doing inclusion that works for teachers and students)? Changes related to teacher beliefs? Instruction? Curriculum? Teacher roles? Classroom organization for delivering instruction? Can the school become more inclusive with minor changes, or are major changes required? Why is this the case?

Finally, are there schools that don't need to become more effective? Or more inclusive? Or is this a continuing process of becoming more effective and inclusive? Michael Fullan (2007) contends that change needs to be on-going, otherwise the changes will not be sustained. More pointedly, one of the major reasons school change is not sustained is that the needs of teachers and students change over time (especially from year to year, but at times during a school year), and programs that result from change remain static. Change must be on-going, as administrators and teachers evaluate how well the change is working, and make additional changes to meet the evolving needs of both students and teachers.

*For more information related to the major changes that are required, see Fullan (2007); McLeskey and Waldron (2006); Salisbury (2006). Note that Fullan (2007) suggests that it takes 3-5 years to ensure that a major school change will be sustained over time.*

### **Slide 6—School change and effective inclusive schools (continued)**

So to reiterate, substantial changes must occur in schools that become effective and inclusive, and these changes must address teacher beliefs, instructional practices, curriculum, teacher roles, and classroom organization for delivering instruction. The most substantial of these changes occur in classrooms and have a significant impact on what teachers do in these settings. Will major changes of this sort cause concern among teachers? Why does this occur? *On to the next slide as discussion proceeds.*

### **Slide 7—Teacher concerns regarding school change**

Fullan (2007) says that all school change results in loss, anxiety, and frustration. Why are teachers anxious about school change as effective inclusive programs are being proposed and developed? Is it reasonable, and perfectly rational for teachers to be concerned about these changes? Why does this occur? Does this mean that teachers oppose change, or that they are just concerned that the changes might not work? Or be worth the effort? Does inclusion (in particular) raise any red flags for teachers? Research on teacher beliefs and attitudes toward inclusion is useful in thinking about these questions, and understanding why teachers often react strongly about developing inclusive programs.

### **Slide 8—Teacher concerns and inclusion**

Are you surprised that most teachers support the concept of inclusion, and believe that inclusion is a desirable practice? Why or why not? Have you experienced any of the concerns that teachers raise related to implementing inclusive programs in their classrooms? Why the difference between support for the concept, and concern with implementation?

### **Slide 9—Teacher concerns and inclusion (continued)**

Fortunately, extensive research has been conducted related to teacher attitudes and beliefs related to inclusion. Keep in mind as we talk about this research that teachers who have had positive experiences with inclusion in their classrooms are much more supportive of these programs in practice, while teachers who have had no experience, or negative experiences tend to be much less supportive. Let's look at questions teachers often have about their role, and how inclusion will impact their students. *An activity is described on the following slides (9-12), and also described on Handout 1.*

### **Slide 10—Discussion: Teacher concerns**

*Provide copies of Handout 1-Questions teachers ask about developing effective inclusive programs to all participants. Slides are provided to guide the description of this activity. Slide 9 provides an overview of the activity. Slide 10 then includes a list of teacher concerns related to their role, while Slide 11 provides a list of teacher concerns regarding the impact inclusion will have on their students. Slide 12 then provides questions for debriefing—how did the groups respond to each of these questions? A final question about this activity is included on Slide 13. Have participants work in pairs or small groups of no more than 3-4 as they consider each question raised by teachers, and address the questions that are included on the handout/Slide 12.*

### **Slide 11—Discussion: Teacher concerns**

A list of questions teachers often have about their role in supporting students with disabilities in an inclusive program.

Questions adapted from McLeskey, Rosenberg, and Westling (2013).

### **Slide 12—Discussion: Teacher concerns**

A list of questions teachers often have about how an inclusive program will impact their students.

Questions adapted from McLeskey, Rosenberg, and Westling (2013).

### **Slide 13—Discussion: Teacher concerns**

A list of questions that the groups have discussed, which may be used for debriefing/discussion.

#### **Slide 14—Discussion: Teacher concerns**

One more question to ponder. Many characterize teachers who ask ‘too many questions’ as school change proceeds as resistant to change. Or at the very least, as resistant to developing inclusive programs. Do the questions that you’ve just reviewed reflect resistance? Consider this in light of Michael Fullan’s comment that “problems are our friends” as we engage in school change. What do you think he meant by this? How is this relevant to this discussion? *Michael Fullan has said that as school change proceeds, “problems are our friends.” This suggests that problems (in the form of teacher questions/concerns) provide direction related to issues that must be addressed before there can be teacher buy-in and support for change. More pointedly, responses to these questions can motivate teachers to improve their practice and improve student outcomes. Problems/questions provide direction for deeper, more meaningful change. This leads to the conclusion that problems/conflict/disagreements are an inevitable part of change, and must be addressed for change to be successful. In effect, teachers are pointing out problems that must be addressed, and they probably aren’t alone in their concern.*

#### **Slide 15—The principal’s role in developing effective inclusive schools**

A research review by Seashore Louis and colleagues (2010) has shown that there are certain core principal practices that underlie successful leadership, and often produce improved student outcomes. *Four general practices are listed here. These categories will be further described in Slides 15-18, and this will be followed by an activity related to these core leadership practices that is described on Slides 19-21 and in Handout 2—Developing inclusive schools: Examining the principal’s role.*

Source—Seashore Louis et al. (2010)

#### **Slide 16—The principal’s role in developing effective schools: Setting Direction**

With any change, the principal is in a pivotal role in setting the direction for the change, developing a vision that is shared by teachers and other stakeholders within the school, building a commitment to the direction the school is taking, and creating high expectations as the vision is enacted. Seashore Louis and colleagues (2010) have identified the following principal practices as instructionally helpful relative to setting direction. Focusing the school professional staff and other stakeholders on goals and high expectations for student achievement. Ensuring that all stay current regarding the school’s direction and goals (e.g., when new teachers or other professional staff join the school).

### **Slide 17—The principal's role in developing effective schools: Developing People**

The principal also plays a key role in ensuring that all teachers and other professional staff are well prepared for addressing student needs. This includes providing professional development opportunities for teachers that are tailored to their individual needs, and that provide sufficiently intensive support so that teachers can develop new skills that may be used in the classroom. The principal also ensures that teachers have opportunities to work with others and explore opportunities for professional development and change in their classrooms, and models appropriate values and practices (e.g., participates in professional development to improve the principal's practice, and models support for high expectations and improved outcomes for all students). Seashore Louis and colleagues (2010) have identified the following practices as instructionally helpful related to developing people. Keeping track of teachers' professional development needs, providing general support, being easily accessible (i.e., open door), providing backup for teachers for student discipline and with parents, and providing mentoring opportunities for new teachers. Other research (Robinson, Hohepa, & Lloyd, 2009) has shown that it is important for principal's to actively participate in professional development whenever possible.

### **Slide 18—The principal's role in developing effective schools: Redesigning the Organization**

Given the managerial or administrative role that principal's are in, they have more control over resources of every sort (personnel, time, funding for curricular materials and other resources, and so forth), and thus are naturally in an influential position when it comes to redesigning or restructuring the school as change occurs. However, successful school change requires much more than 'restructuring' the school, and the principal is very influential in these areas as well. For example, to support the professional learning needs of teachers and other professionals as schools change and new knowledge and skills are needed, the principal is often very influential in developing a collaborative culture that supports a professional learning community. In addition, the principal is in a key position to support the school community in building productive relationships with families, and with connecting the school to the wider community. Seashore Louis and colleagues (2010) have identified redesigning the organization and creating structures and opportunities for teachers to collaborate as practices that are instructionally helpful related to this area.

### **Slide 19—The principal's role in developing effective schools: Managing the Instructional Program**

Research from many sources has shown that the principal plays a critical role in providing instructional leadership that improves student achievement. This includes engagement in a range of activities from selecting teachers and other



professionals and aligning resources that are used to support instruction with identified instructional needs, to providing instructional support, monitoring school activities, and buffering staff from anything that distracts them from their work. Seashore Louis and colleagues (2010) have identified the following practices as instructionally helpful related to managing the instructional program. Monitoring teachers' work in the classroom, and providing instructional resources and materials to support instruction.

### **Slide 20—Examining the principal's role in developing effective inclusive schools**

*Provide copies of Handout 2—developing inclusive schools: Examining the principal's role to all participants. You've all read an article for today's class that describes a case study of an effective inclusive school (McLeskey, Waldron, & Redd, 2014). The article details the changes that occurred as this effective inclusive school was developed, and describes in some detail the principal's role in relation to these changes. What I'd like you to do is to work in pairs or groups of no more than 4, and identify practices that were critical for the development and support of this effective inclusive school. Then I'd like you to discuss how these practices align with the four critical roles for principals (that were just discussed) as they work to improve schools. As you're organizing, you should select someone who will report out for your group.*

Source—McLeskey, Waldron, & Redd (2014)

### **Slide 21—Examining the principal's role in developing effective inclusive schools**

*This handout provides a list of the four principal core practices, and may be used as the groups are working on the alignment task, and as well as when the groups debrief regarding the practices from the case study that fit into each of the core practices.*

### **Slide 22—Examining the principal's role in developing effective inclusive schools: Discussion**

*This slide includes discussion questions that may be used when debriefing regarding this activity.*

Source—McLeskey, Waldron, and Redd (2014)

### **Slide 23—Research on the principal's role and effective inclusive schools**

The principal's role in school change as effective inclusive schools are developed is much like the principal's role in any school change endeavor. The principal is involved in setting direction, developing people, redesigning the organization, and managing the instructional program. However, there are certain principal roles that

are ‘must haves’ when developing effective inclusive schools. These roles have emerged from several case studies of the principal’s role in effective inclusive schools.

Sources—Hehir & Katzman (2012); Hoppey & McLeskey (2013); McLeskey & Waldron (2015); McLeskey, Waldron, & Redd (2014), and Waldron, McLeskey, & Redd (2011).

**Slide 24—Research on the principal’s role and effective inclusive schools:  
Setting direction**

The first of these ‘must haves’ relates to setting direction. Principals in effective inclusive schools have been found to have core values that are non-negotiable. These values relate to valuing and including all students as part of the school community, and improving the achievement of all students. In one school, the principal was described as “adamant and uncompromising” about her core values, which included “meeting the needs of all students in her school, not just a particular group,” and “ensuring that students with disabilities were included as a natural part of this vision and were educated as much as possible with their typical peers.” In another report of three effective inclusive schools, the principals “were clear about their schools’ fundamental mission...to them, inclusion was a non-negotiable grounded in civil rights.” While the principals felt strongly about these core values, they realized that they could not mandate a vision and ensure teacher commitment. To gain this commitment, they had to develop a trusting, supportive relationship with teachers. In one school in which the principal had developed supportive, trusting relationships with teachers, she engaged teachers to determine how the school would be changed to enact her core values. Through this school change process, she “shared decision-making power, and remained flexible, open-minded, and ready to learn from others.” This combination of pressure and support led to the development of a very successful effective inclusive school that was sustained over time.

**Slide 25—Research on the principal’s role and effective inclusive schools:  
Developing people**

As we previously discussed, many teachers do not feel that they are well prepared to address the needs of students with disabilities in their classrooms. Principals in effective inclusive schools must find a way to address this need, so that teachers learn new skills that they can be used in their classrooms to support program changes. Typically, district level professional development does not address this need, as this professional development is most often not tailored to individual teacher needs, and lacks the intensity and support (e.g., coaching) over time to support teachers in gaining classroom ready skills. To address this need, principals in several of the school developed school-based professional development activities to support their teachers. This professional development was learner centered (i.e., it is teacher directed and job-embedded, often involved the collective participation

of teachers, actively engaged teachers in learning (e.g., observing in other classrooms, and receiving feedback and coaching), and is sufficiently intensive (i.e., lasting 20 hours or more) to support teachers in developing and using new skills in their classrooms). This professional development required that the principals develop experts in their schools to provide some of this support, which was also often supported by teachers working collaboratively in professional learning communities. Professional development became a central focus for principals in these schools. As one principal noted, his role had been “redefined...to be more a mentor or a coach” who “spends the majority of my time growing people.”

**Slide 26—Research on the principal’s role and effective inclusive schools:  
Managing the instructional program**

As we’ve discussed previously, during any school change, the principal plays a key role as an instructional leader who guides and supports changes in the instructional program. In effective inclusive schools, a crucial part of this work is making sure that teachers have readily available data that can be used for instructional decision-making. These data let teachers know whether instruction is working well, who is making sufficient progress in a content area and who is not, and who should be provided different and/or more intensive instruction. Unfortunately, data provided by the state rarely serves this purpose, and is most often not available in a timely fashion so that it can be used to help guide changes in school practices. Data provided by the local district often has similar shortcomings. As a principal in one school said, he and his teachers developed their own measures of accountability that were intended to “describe and define what is important to us so we are doing a good job.” Of course, these measures should be related (or correlated) with state accountability measures, and should be directly connected to the curriculum and standards used in a school district. They also should be perceived by teachers as useful for instructional decision-making. Once this data system was in place in this school, the principal and teachers used this information to sustain the effective inclusive program, as the data were used to adjust the instructional program over time to better meet student needs. For example, during one school year the use of student outcome data led to more frequent use of evidence-based practices to meet the needs of students who were struggling to learn particular content, and the reorganization of the school day to provide time for more co-taught classes. A principal in another school pointed out another use of this type of data system when she said “How can I have conversations with teachers about their students, how they’re progressing, how well they’re teaching without individual data on students?” In her school these data were used to create high expectations for all students, guide decisions about use of resources (e.g., co-teachers, paraprofessionals), determine how instruction was delivered to students (e.g., use of a mult-tiered instructional model), and inform decisions about areas of professional development for teachers.

**Slide 27—Concluding thoughts...**

As we've reviewed information regarding the principal's role in developing effective inclusive schools, I'm sure you've recognized that the major school change that is required to become an effective inclusive school takes a substantial amount of time. Planning may take a full semester (spring semester before implementing a new program in the fall), or an entire school year. This planning time is needed to ensure teacher input, buy-in, and support for the changes, allow teachers and other school professionals time to plan for the needed changes, and also to allow time for the professional development that is needed so that teachers are prepared with new skills to meet student needs. For a range of reasons, these changes will not occur without strong, active support of the principal. In particular, the principal's roles in these changes relate to providing direction, developing people, redesigning the organization, and managing the organization. Finally, if the effective inclusive program is to be sustained, changes must continue as the needs of teachers (including new teachers) and students change. This results in a continuous improvement mindset in effective inclusive schools, as teachers and other school professionals continue to seek ways to improve their practice and student outcomes.

## References

- Fullan, M. (2007). *The new meaning of educational change* 4th ed. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Hehir, T. & Katzman, L. (2012). *Effective inclusive schools: Designing successful schoolwide programs*. Hoboken, NJ: Jossey-Bass.
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- Waldron, N., McLeskey, J., & Redd, L. (2011). Setting the direction: The role of the principal in developing an effective, inclusive school. *Journal of Special Education Leadership*, 24, 51-60.