Frequently Asked Questions

1. In my district, special education and general education teachers are resisting collaboration and seem to have a fixed mindset. Any advice to move forward?

   Identify a small pilot group of special education and general education teachers who would be willing to engage in collaborative work, then provide them with support and opportunities for partnership. Sharing challenges, solutions, and results cultivates relationships. This also builds culture which ensures the unified mission, vision, and goals of the district and school sites. With that understanding, the collaboration can focus on analyzing data and determining practices for improved student learning. Evidence of student learning and growth has great potential to change fixed mindsets.

2. How long are the cycles of continuous improvement?

   The cycle timeline is typically aligned with your district’s benchmark assessment system, which is usually between 4-8 weeks. The process of continuous improvement requires consistent reflection on progress and adjustment to strategies for growth and sustainability. If there are a lack of results, the plan should be altered or modified according to the data collection analysis.

3. How is the continuous improvement data aggregated and shared?

   A data system for collection, analysis, and decision making should exist at the district and school levels. The system outlines the protocols, timelines, and actions for developing and implementing an action plan that is shared with all relevant stakeholders.

4. How can my district ensure that an adequate number of general education and special education teachers are highly qualified to provide evidence-based, structured literacy instruction in the earliest years, and throughout a K-12 student career?

   A continuous professional learning system provides a framework to ensure and implement evidence-based reading and writing instructional strategies. General education and special education teachers can collaborate to deepen their knowledge and skills of reading, writing, and language instruction. Working with school leaders to help them implement consistent processes to develop teachers’ reading, writing, and language practices creates a professional learning culture for high achievement. A robust induction program for new general education and special education teachers can
also provide ongoing job-embedded learning and coaching to promote the success of new teachers and their students.

5. **How can we promote and define inclusion for our special and general educators to improve their understanding on what it is and what it looks like in action?**

Identify places where successful inclusion is happening in academic settings. Special education and general education teachers can then develop a deeper understanding of inclusion through observing and visiting these programs in other classrooms or schools. Site visits can be conducted in teams to ensure collaborative reflection, lesson planning, and testing of strategies.

6. **My district’s special education teachers have different beliefs around work load and compatibility. How do districts partner special education and general education teachers besides the induction years?**

Special education and general education teachers working in professional learning communities (PLCs) at the school-level can collaboratively analyze data, identify evidence-based best practices, and design lessons. The district can also provide support by establishing district-level PLCs to develop effective, integrated practices and policies across general education and special education systems.

7. **It seems many general education and special education teachers need a deeper understanding of the foundational skills in both literacy and math and then also ongoing support for instruction. How would you approach this work?**

Our approach builds foundational knowledge and skills through well-structured courses and site-based coaching, modeling, and mentoring. This facilitates both general education and special education teachers to implement rigorous reading, writing, language, and mathematics instructional practices. We can help build the systems and organizational structures that enable teachers to collaborate as they refine their lessons, use effective teaching pedagogy, analyze their data, and meet student needs.
8. What is the Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District Supreme Court Decision?

The Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District Court Decision (March 2017) held that schools must offer students an IEP which is “reasonably calculated to enable a child to make progress appropriate in light of the child’s circumstances.” This interpretation of the IDEA requirement for a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) overturned a lower court’s ruling that students were only entitled to “merely more than de minimis,” or minor, benefit.

This decision speaks to the importance of individual student goals which are crucial to the success of the student and the IEP. Goals must be developed based on specific student need, be fully implemented, and regularly monitored for progress.

9. How does a small district manage co-teaching? We don’t have enough special education teachers to co-teach classes. Any ideas?

Successful co-teaching models depend on the district’s capacity and resources available to ensure the model benefits student learning. Co-teaching does not require a one-to-one match and flexible schedules can be developed for a specific timeframe or content area.

10. What strategies do you recommend for teachers to build their capacity to meet the varying needs of each individual student in the room?

All teachers need foundational knowledge and to know how to teach the relevant content areas. Teachers should also have access to research-based programs and assessment tools and resources, so they are not expected to teach, be experts, and be curriculum writers all at once. Lastly, teachers need training to understand content, pedagogy, and implementation. Implementation support should be ongoing and reach into the classroom, so teachers can see solutions implemented with their students.

For more information on how Pivot Learning and CORE can support your special education team to promote instructional leadership and excellence, contact us at arun@pivotlearning.org or learnmore@pivotlearning.org.