



10 MISTAKES TO AVOID

How to Improve Special Education by Strengthening Core Instruction

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How to Improve Special Education by Strengthening Core Instruction

The keys to improving special education are strengthening core instruction and removing the often-sharp divide that exists between general education and special education. These moves will help raise achievement for students with mild to moderate disabilities as well as for those without, but here's a reminder of some pitfalls to avoid.

1 Don't keep doing more of the same.

Districts have invested heavily in a variety of improvement efforts that have yielded marginal results. Don't be discouraged, but do take a close, hard look at your current practices.

2 Don't shift responsibility from general education to special education too readily.

The expectation for all students is that they will succeed with the general education curriculum. General education staff need to take greater responsibility for the success of all students.

3 Don't let general education teachers doubt their skills.

General education teachers need to have a strong belief in their ability to teach all their students. Ensure that teachers have proper support and guidelines.

4 Don't allow low expectations for students with disabilities.

No child wants to fail. District leaders, teachers, and staff need to believe and communicate that students with disabilities can be successful in school and career.

Don't leave general education teachers out of the special education process.

General education teachers need to be included in the IEP development process if they are expected to be involved in the success of these students.

Don't assume all students are getting equal access to rigorous instruction.

At the elementary and secondary levels, review the materials and classes being offered and ensure students are receiving rigorous instruction.

Don't let students be pulled from core instruction.

Work with principals and schedulers to ensure all students, including those with mild to moderate disabilities, are receiving core instruction from the general education teacher.

Don't reduce the efficacy of additional interventions.

Students who struggle need extra time with content-strong teachers. Ensuring both extra time and content-strong teachers is critical to have impact.

Don't settle for "sit and get" PD.

Include coaching as a core element of teachers' professional growth and development, and establish conditions that can substantially improve teachers' instructional practice.

Don't wait until 2030 to start.

Implementing best practices will likely require change, and change is hard. But don't wait. Staff need more effective structures and supports, and students' futures are at stake.