Tabletop Session Summary

July 8, 2021

Serving Students with Moderate and Severe Disabilities in Summer Programs

Presenters: Dr. Julie Durando, National Center on Deaf-Blindness (NCDB); Dr. Jessica Bowman, Time, Instructional Effectiveness, Engagement, and State and District Support for Inclusive Practices (TIES) Center

This tabletop discussion offered strategies to assist summer and out-of-school programs in becoming more inclusive.

Session Highlights

» The National Center on Deaf-Blindness provides technical assistance and disseminates information to help improve services, educational results, and the quality of life for children who have a combination of hearing and visual losses.

» The TIES Center aims to create sustainable changes in K-8 educational systems so that students with significant cognitive disabilities can fully engage in the same instructional and non-instructional activities as their general education peers, while also being instructed in a way that meets individual learning needs.

» Inclusion centers on a commitment to providing structures, practices, and supports so that students can be valued members, actively participate, and learn with their grade-level peers.

» Building trust is an essential component when working with emergent communicators. Speaking at a slower pace and using respectful techniques when interacting (e.g., hand-under-hand) are important practices. Having predictable environments for students is also critical.

» Other key practices include holding high expectations for students (e.g., through academic achievement standards). Also, provide flexible formats for students to understand the content (i.e., multiple ways to see and hear information). For example, allow students to change the size and contrast of text, or represent text with graphs and pictures. Likewise, support students in interacting and using the language and vocabulary in a lesson (e.g., construct word walls). Additionally, offer flexible forms of communication (e.g., flexible media), and provide options for physical manipulation (e.g., flexible options for seating and accessible options on keyboards).

Shared Resources

» Building Trusting Relationships - NCDB Practice Guide
» National Center on Deaf-Blindness - Deaf-Blindness Overview Page
» National Center on Deaf-Blindness - Home Page
» National Center on Deaf-Blindness - State Deaf-Blind Projects

» [Office of Special Education Programs Technical Assistance Network](#)
» [Preparing the Learning Environment - NCDB Practice Guide](#)

Questions and Answers on Serving Students with Moderate and Severe Disabilities in Summer Programs

What are the panelists' experiences with the language aspect of the disability versus difference discourse? How could this surface in summer programming (e.g., students learning about each other's preferred terms)?

It's important to respect students' different perspectives in how they identify. Terminology is important and not agreed upon, as some students may choose to identify as having differences, having a disability, or choose not to identify as disabled at all. Summer programs provide a good opportunity for individuals to express their perspectives. Some children may elect to utilize some accommodations but not others. Having these conversations about how children identify and what their perspectives are helps to ensure each child feels included and not isolated.

What are some tips to get summer programs to consider full inclusion of children with disabilities?

There are different approaches based on each child's disability and needs. Some families may choose not to disclose their child's disability. Families may work with the program to accommodate them. They may choose to collaborate with program managers and educate them on their child's disability and what types of accommodations are needed. Outside agencies can provide support with a child's needs as well. There's also an approach called the buddy system which allows for a person that the disabled child knows to be hired to assist and provide accommodations for the child while in a particular program.

What advice or experience can you share about how mask-wearing may impact children with disabilities?

There was a scenario in which a child's speech therapist was required to wear a mask, but the parent felt it didn't compliment the purpose of the therapy. Some educators have used a clear face shield so facial expressions can be seen better, but that is a local decision.