

Special Education Expert Panel Group
NNER Conference
October 16, 17, 2009
Facilitator, Elizabeth Kozleski

This summarizes the conversation that Bonnie Utley, Gene Edgar, Bob Stodden, and Elizabeth Kozleski had at the NNER meeting. Kathy Cambra and Tonda Potts were unable to attend the meeting. Jennifer Robinson attended a different group, although she sent her comments.

Our task was to “include making recommendations, creating exemplars, and proposing cross-setting goals and activities that advance the Agenda for Education in a Democracy (AED) for NNER schools and colleges. Our recommendations will provide support to the NNER and its ongoing development of professors and teachers working with special education students as well as how such educators can help the NNER in accomplishing its mission. “We began by identifying the challenges that Special Education faces about what the field is and what the professionals who practice it should be doing and how they should enter the field. The major movements within the field – Response to Intervention and School-wide Positive Behavior Supports - are converging in many settings to define a new framework for thinking about addressing the needs of students with disabilities. Beginning with a robust general education environment that offers universal assessment, differentiated instruction, multiple approaches to teaching learning to learn skills like literacy and mathematics, frequent progress monitoring, collaborative teaching designs, and language acquisition strategies, the array of skills, dispositions, and critical views of the purpose of public education, teachers’ roles and knowledge bases have become extremely complex and nuanced.

NNER’s partner sites offer an extraordinary opportunity to reframe the collaborative relationship between general and special education given the need for special educators to work alongside their general education peers in classrooms. The equity conversation paves the way to focus the work on notions of access, participation, and opportunities to learn since special education exists to ensure that students with disabilities have access to the curriculum, benefit from opportunities to learn alongside their peers, and graduate prepared to live productive lives as citizens in democratic communities.

We believe that we need to establish and maintain an NNER network dedicated to embedding tiered approaches to whole school renewal, developing apprenticeship systems that produce teachers who are highly skilled in developing and implementing universal designs for learning, supporting mental health, infusing technology, and creating feedback systems that engage student voices in assessing what works in schools. An important vehicle for this trajectory could be a year-long leadership symposium for teacher educators to study and develop the curriculum for this kind of venture. Further, technical assistance teams from the NNER partner sites could offer support around blending programs for special and general education.

This summarizes a rich and invigorating conversation.