National Center on Deaf-Blindness

TEAMING

Many state deaf-blind projects (SDBPs) find that the success of TA frequently hinges on how well the members of a team are able to work together to address their student's needs (and their own professional development). Some SDBPs consider teaming and collaboration skills a reasonable target for TA. Others limit TA to teams that already have a good structure and effective processes in place.

There is a wealth of literature about the features of effective teams and how to develop them. The following list, drawn from this literature, consists of attributes of teams, team meetings, and school environments that indicate a team is likely to function successfully. Determining the extent to which these attributes are present can be part of measuring readiness for TA.

Characteristics of Effective Teams

Membership

- The team consists of 6 to 8 core members.
- The team includes members with expertise in the student's areas of need (e.g., teacher of the visually impaired, orientation and mobility specialist, speech language pathologist, occupational therapist).
- Parents are included as equal team members.
- Paraprofessionals and interveners are included as equal team members.

Values and Goals

- Team members have shared expectations and standards and a shared set of beliefs about how to work as a team.
- The team has an agreed-upon decision-making process (e.g., negotiating to reach consensus or deciding based on a vote).
- There is a shared set of goals for the student that is expressed in the IEP.
- Members have shared goals for themselves as a team (e.g., attainment of specific professional skills to better serve the student or group management skills such as conflict resolution).

Communication and Technology

- Important decisions are made by the full team (rather than smaller groups of team members in isolation).
- The team has an agreed-upon way to communicate and archive information (e.g., email, online group spaces) that includes those who are absent from meetings or are not core members.
- There is agreement from all members on how technology will be used to facilitate team functions and a plan for tech support needs is in place. Members use technology consistently.
- Team members use conflict resolution strategies to recognize, identify, discuss, and resolve problems.

School Environment

- The school's administration is supportive of the team and its work.
- The school uses common planning, block scheduling, or other strategies to guarantee regular meeting times for staff.
- Meeting space that is free from distractions and private enough for teams to discuss confidential matters freely (not a classroom or staff lounge occupied by others) is available.

Team Meetings

- There is an established meeting schedule that takes precedence over other job duties. Meetings start and end on time.
- Clear roles are assigned prior to each meeting (e.g., facilitator, time keeper, recorder).
- A structured agenda is developed prior to each meeting, and all team members are given the opportunity to submit items for inclusion.
- There is a system in place for recording and disseminating meeting minutes.
- Extended members (such as principals or other administrators) are invited to meetings when support or decision-making authority is needed.
- Strategies such as clarification, confirmation, refocusing, and summarizing are used during meetings to strengthen comprehension and follow-through by team members.
- Sufficient time is allowed at the end of meetings for summarizing and processing.
- The team has meeting rituals that establish cohesion and build rapport such as bringing food or telling a joke.

Responsibilities

- The team distributes work assignments fairly and appropriately among members.
- Team members are expected to
  - share expertise,
  - participate in technical assistance and attempt to implement practices (or share why they are struggling), and
  - come prepared for meetings.
- Individuals are responsible for supporting fellow members and holding them accountable for working towards group and individual goals.
- Team members acknowledge group and individual accomplishments and attempt to build strong working relationships.

Skills

- Team members engage in creative problem solving in regard to both the student and the team itself. Three examples of problem solving models are:
  - **CPS process**: 1. Clarify, 2. Ideate, 3. Develop, 4. Implement.
  - **SODAS**: 1. Situation, 2. Options, 3. Disadvantages, 4. Advantages, 5. Solution.
  - **Five-component process**: 1. Define the problem, 2. Gather information about the problem (focusing on context-specific capacities and barriers), 3. Generate and consider alternative strategies, 4. Decide on and implement a strategy, 5. Evaluate the success of the strategy.
- Team members share knowledge and train each other in new skills to ensure that interventions recommended by one team member are implemented consistently by everyone working with the student. The following strategies can be used:
  - A co-teaching/co-treatment model. *Co-teaching* refers to general and special education teachers teaching together in an inclusive setting. *Co-treatment* refers to therapists of different disciplines working together to integrate and teach each other specific interventions (e.g., a physical therapist demonstrates positioning to a speech therapist while they work together on feeding).
  - Role release. A professional trains other team members in a particular intervention so they can use it with the student when the professional is not present (e.g., an orientation and mobility specialist trains staff on route travel in school). The professional remains responsible for making decisions about how the intervention should be implemented and for ensuring that staff are performing it correctly.

- Team members provide resources, consultation, modeling, and support to each other on a continuous basis.
- Related services are integrated into students' educational environments and functional routines rather than being provided at separate locations or in isolated routines (e.g., a speech therapist provides services during circle time in the student's class).

References

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