

ALABAMA SPECIAL EDUCATION PARTICIPANT'S ENGAGEMENT GUIDE

Addressing Problems of Practice in
Special Education

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Session Objectives

Participants will engage in the following:

- Identify current problems of practice that districts are facing in special education.
- Understand how to create a theory of action and action plan.
- Collaborate to generate ideas and solutions to resolve these challenges.

Engagement Tools



**Engagement
Guide**

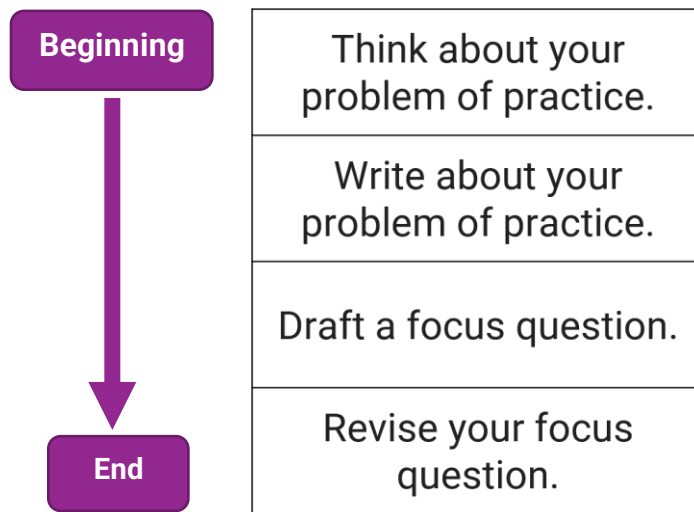


Discussion



Poll

Framing Problems of Practice (Slide 10)



Developed by Faith Dunne, Paula Evans, and Gene Thompson-Grove as part of their work at the Coalition of Essential Schools and the Annenberg Institute for School Reform.

Poll: What problems are you facing in your district? (Slide 15)

In just a few words, list topics that are current concerns. Examples may include the following:

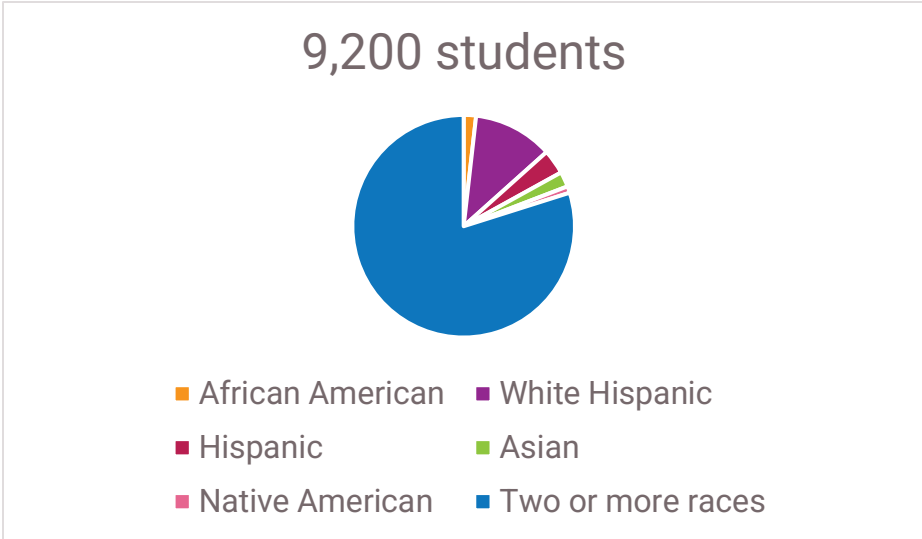
- Teacher shortages.
- Math scores.
- Student behavior.

Meet Valley School District (Slide 18)

- A large school district has a student population of 9,200 students.
- The district has 16 schools and 1,746 employees.

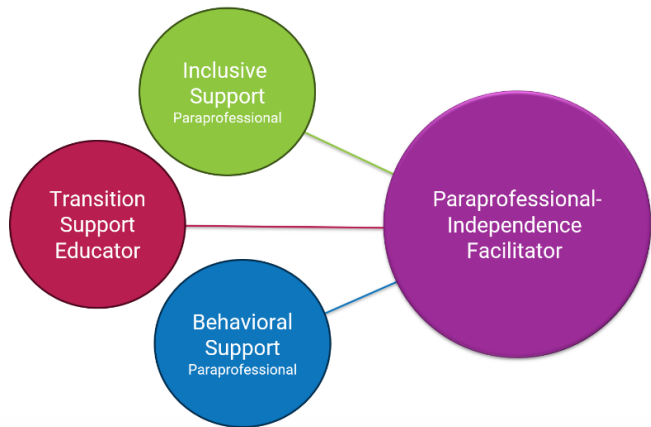
The District's Student Body (Slide 19)

- 589 of the students enrolled are English Learners.
- 1,463 of the students enrolled in the district receive special education services.

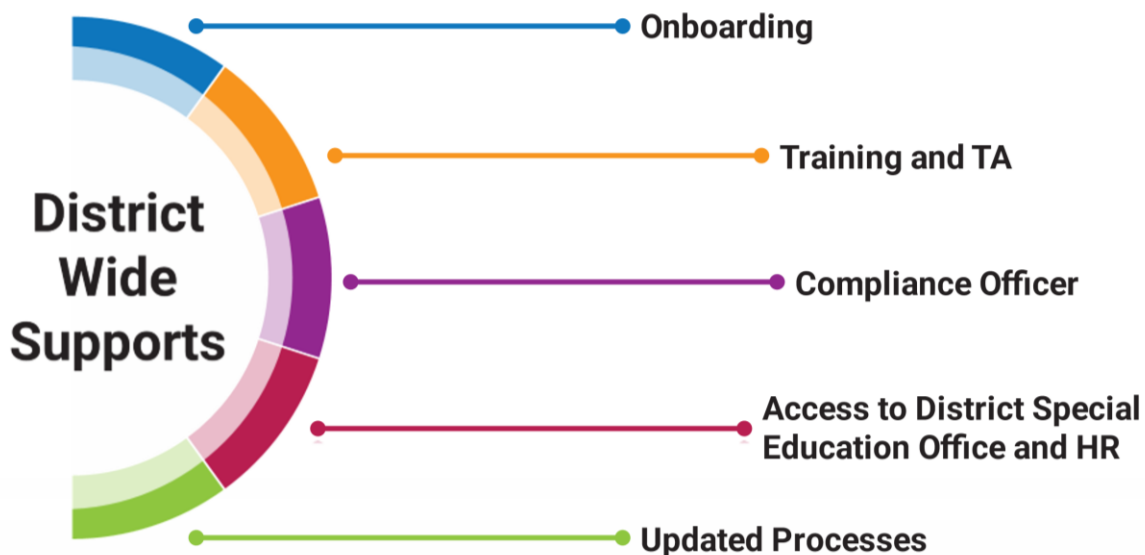


Paraprofessional Key Points (Slides 20–21)

- The district has approximately 260 paraprofessional positions and 753 teachers.
- About 57 paraprofessional vacancies exist to start the 2023–2024 school year.
- Paraprofessionals can have one of the following titles:
 - Behavioral Support Paraprofessionals.
 - Inclusive Support Paraprofessionals.
 - Transition Support Educator.



District Wide Supports (Slide 22)



Dilemma (Slide 23)

Although our data indicate that the number of students receiving special education services each year remains static (about 15%), our enrollment is down, and we continue to have ongoing requests from schools for more paraeducator allocations each year. On average, over the past two years, we have been adding 10–15 paraeducators per year to support our students and schools, and it still seems not enough.

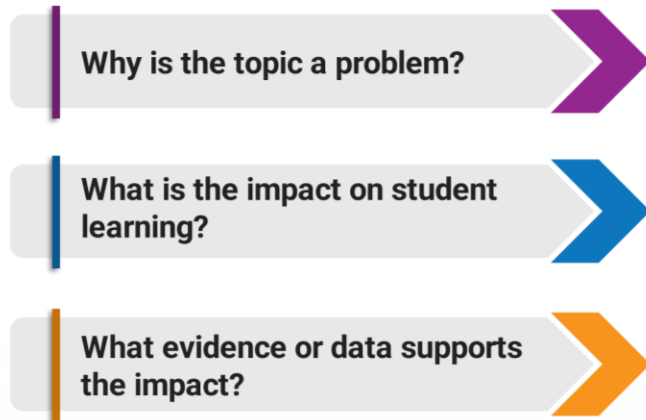
This overreliance on paraeducators to serve students is a systemic issue that we have yet to solve. Despite ongoing training around co-teaching, strategic scheduling, and messaging from our district team around student and staff collective ownership for all students, we continue to see increased requests for paraeducators. Once given paraeducator allocations, we continue to see challenges with paraeducators not believing they can serve all students and feeling unprepared to deliver and support specialized instruction. Furthermore, our current vacancies indicate that we cannot fill our current openings with qualified staff, so allocating additional support is not feasible.

Problem of Practice (Slide 25)

- How do we effectively build universal support systems in our schools so that when students are included in the general education environment, there is no belief that increased paraeducator support is the only way to meet the needs of students receiving special education services?
- Once paraeducator support is given, how are we ensuring they are engaging in the teaching and learning process in a way that meaningfully impacts students?

1. Define the Problem of Practice (Slide 29)

In your action learning group, discuss the following questions, and draft a problem of practice.



2. Analyze the Problem of Practice (Slide 31)

In your action learning group, discuss the following:

- Who are the stakeholders? What are the perspectives of each stakeholder?
- After considering the evidence and stakeholder perspectives, what data or research do you need to understand the current reality and best practices?
- Imagine what a positive outcome would be for the school and district. What is the impact on student outcomes?
- What challenges and roadblocks might get in the way of developing a solution? Will they look different for each stakeholder group? List challenges and roadblocks that must be considered during the planning process.
- What short-term, immediate actions should be taken to help resolve the issues facing the various stakeholders? Brainstorm the actions.
- What longer-term policy and practice changes and adjustments must be made? Brainstorm the policy and practice changes.

3. Develop a Theory of Action (Slide 33)

- List barriers and assumptions.
- Brainstorm inputs and outputs.
- Draft short- and long-term goals.
- Focus on impact.

Theory of Action Template (Slide 34)

- **Problem of Practice (PoP):** Clear problem of practice that is grounded in evidence-based data and dialogue.
- **Inputs:** Resources (funding, staffing, equipment, curriculum materials, etc.) and the required activities. State activities using verbs (market, provide, facilitate, deliver, etc.).
- **Outputs:** Tangible products that will be the result of the inputs.
- **Short-term outcomes:** Short-term behavioral or physical changes resulting from the outputs.
- **Long-term outcomes:** Long-term behavioral or physical changes resulting from the outputs.
- **Barriers:** Potential impacts of the inputs or outputs that may undermine outcomes.
- **Assumptions:** Necessary conditions for change.
- **Impact:** Long-term changes are the results that derive from an accumulation of outcomes.

4. Create an Action Plan (Slide 35)

- What evidence-based strategies support the implementation of the theory of action?
- Who will support action steps?
- What resources are needed?
- What is the timeline for the implementation of each strategy?
- How will you know if the strategy is working?

Appendix A: Theory of Action Template (Slide 33)

Problem of Practice (PoP) Theory of Action						
					Potential Barriers	
Inputs (All actions and resources needed to address PoP)						
Outputs (All activities conducted to address PoP)						
Short-Term Outcomes						
					Assumptions	
Long-Term Outcomes						
Impact of Addressing Problem of Practice						

Appendix B: Action Plan Template (Slide 36)

Short Term Outcome:						
Action Steps	Success Criteria	Status	Targeted Completion Date	Person(s) Responsible	Resources Needed/ General Notes	Updates