

A VOLUME IN CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

LEADERSHIP MATTERS

in the

EDUCATION *of* STUDENTS

with SPECIAL NEEDS

in the 21ST CENTURY



edited by

Festus E. Obiakor | Tachelle Banks
Anthony F. Rotatori | Cheryl Utley

Leadership Matters in the Education of Students With Special Needs in the 21st Century

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PREFACE

Educators are philosophically committed to student diversity. In fact, the majority of them appreciate the fact that learning differences are natural, positive, and focus on identifying and capitalizing on individual students' interests and strengths. For students with exceptionalities, meeting their needs requires both classroom and systemic level supports. *Leadership Matters in the Education of Students with Special Needs in the 21st Century* focuses on this perspective and provides more innovative strategies for leaders willing to shift their paradigms in this age of change.

School leadership is second only to teacher quality in terms of importance—and higher needs schools and districts require a greater need for strong leadership. As a result, more emphasis must be placed on the importance of school leadership in improving outcomes for schools and students. In this regard, it is a school leader who is capable of transforming a school environment so that students and teachers can flourish. The term school leader extends beyond the role of superintendent or principal and includes school personnel who are willing to help themselves and others to do the right things. School leaders set direction, build an inspiring vision, and foster innovation in practice. While leaders set the direction, they must also use management skills to bring together a group of professionals and guide them toward the greater goal of better meeting the needs of students with exceptionalities in an efficient and effective manner.

In our times as leaders in various capacities, we found leadership to encompass ability. This means that a leader has to develop the capacity to do something using his or her talents and skills. Talent is a natural ability, and

skill is a proficiency gained through training and experience. From our perspectives as leaders and from the perspectives espoused by this book, certain leadership characteristics are associated with effective leadership. They include, but are not limited to the following.

- Leadership is *adaptive*. An effective leader makes necessary adjustments to get the job done.
- Leadership acts on a *setting*. An effective leader carefully observes the context and looks for ways to solve problems.
- Leadership *empowers*. An effective leader inspires confidence and self-esteem in others. Inspiration comes in different forms. Some leaders inspire by bold talk, some by soft talk, and others by their example.
- Leadership acts on people's *feelings*. An effective leader finds ways to link to people's instincts or intuition. Leaders help everyone feel empowered.
- Leadership creates *contribution*. An effective leader identifies strengths and understands that every member has something to share. Sometimes that may be sharing an idea, holding an idea in reserve, allowing someone else to arrive at the same idea and share it.
- Leadership is about *problem solving*. An effective leader understands the importance of closing the gap between things desired and things perceived. Everyone works on the solution to mitigate concerns while keeping in mind the ultimate problem: closing a gap between theory and practice.
- Leadership fosters *creativity*. An effective leader enables people to use their imagination as a step closer to solving problems faster, better, and more efficiently.

On the whole, this text focuses on best preparation approaches for school leaders to meet the needs of students identified as having disabilities. Chapter 1 discusses the various commitments of being an instructional leader and the importance of examining different styles of leadership to determine which particular style, if any, meets the goals of the instructional leader. Chapter 2 provides a practical perspective in examining the role of district leadership in establishing intensive and individualized academic, social, and emotional problem-solving systems essential for successful school multitiered systems of support. Chapter 3 defines teacher leadership and offers concrete ways teachers can step forward, sometimes out of their comfort zones, into leadership roles. In addition, it discusses how leaders can be prepared to work with children and youth with diverse learning needs in high-need schools and districts. Chapter 4 addresses

the significant role general educators fulfill when teaching students with special needs. It also examines the leadership roles that general educators play in educating learners with special needs. Chapter 5 provides an overview of problematic behaviors, students who typically engage in these behaviors, the effects of these behaviors when not addressed properly, and the very important role of school leaders in supporting faculty and systems for managing behavior problems. Chapter 6 introduces the notion of the comprehensive support model (CSM) and the innovative leadership method that has proven to be successful in school completion and graduation. Clearly, the use of such a model provides school leaders with collaborative energies that can help children and youth stay in school, graduate from school, and become productive citizens. Chapter 7 describes the role of school psychologists and how these professionals as members of the special education leadership team fulfill significant roles in special education processes. Chapter 8 reminds us that a key component of quality programming is a culturally competent, ethnically and linguistically diverse workforce who is well-prepared to foster the healthy development of an increasingly diverse population of children and families. In addition, it discusses the critical importance of having culturally responsive leaders and practitioners to maximize the fullest potential of all students in general and special education programs. Chapter 9 emphasizes the importance of school leaders being well-informed about learners with physical and health impairments, given that they are likely to face legal liability as administrators in the districts they represent. Chapter 10 summarizes that leaders must have knowledge and understanding of the change process for systems, organizations, and individuals to be effective in today's urban or rural schools. Chapter 11 views technology as ever-present in everyone's life whether one is writing with a pencil or dictating a text on a smartphone. It also views assistive technologies as tools to help students with disabilities maximize their fullest potential as the IEPs (individualized educational programs) are fulfilled. Chapter 12 explores how leadership in general and special education positively creates a climate where educational transformation occurs. In addition, it explains the roles played by general and special education leaders in fostering global perspectives. Finally, Chapter 13 utilizes an organizational change model to provide future perspectives for leadership in special education.

This book contains “big” ideas that integrate special education and general education and equips leaders in special education and related professionals with innovative ideas and insights. These ideas represent a focal point for bridging the gap between theory and practice and the present and the future for professionals willing to advance creative leadership practices for all learners. Finally, this book fosters the

realistic thinking that leaders are part of the multidisciplinary or assessment teams of all students, particularly those with “special” needs. Simply put, an effective leader must have and develop the knowledge and skillsets needed in both general and special education.

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