Structures, Processes, and Skills for Teaming

that Promote Learning of General Education Curriculum Content for Students with the Most Significant Disabilities

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Meeting Structures

Meeting Purposes

Effective teams have different meetings to accomplish different goals. Effective teams have clearly defined purposes for different meetings. When there is a shared understanding of the purpose of the meeting, time is more efficiently utilized doing the work of the meeting.

Indicators

❑ Team members define and agree on the purposes of meetings, such as meetings for case management, unit/lesson planning, and IEP development.

❑ Team members define and agree on the desired outcomes (products) for the meeting for each topic on the agenda.

❑ Meeting time is utilized to develop action steps that will be taken outside of meeting time.

Agendas

A clearly defined agenda and the use of the appropriate agenda format based on the purpose of the meeting support the overall effectiveness and efficiency of the meeting.

Indicators

❑ An agenda format is defined for case management meetings.

❑ An agenda format is defined for unit/lesson planning meetings.

❑ An agenda format is defined for IEP meetings.

❑ Agenda items are chosen according to the purpose and desired outcomes for the meeting.

❑ A flexible timetable is developed for addressing each item on a meeting agenda.

❑ Team members address agenda items that are within their capacity to influence.

❑ At the end of each meeting, the next meeting's agenda is planned.

❑ "Meeting evaluation" is an agenda item for all meetings.

Attendance at Meetings

Meetings are most effective when the right people attend the meeting. This supports the effective and efficient use of each team member's time.

Indicators

❑ Based on the agenda, those who should attend each meeting are identified and invited.

❑ There is an accountability structure in place for attendance at meetings.

❑ There is a structure in place for sharing the decisions and action steps with team members who are unable to attend a meeting.

Meeting Roles

Shared leadership of responsibilities within the meeting encourages a sense of community and ownership of the meeting process. Rotation of meeting roles and responsibilities is critical to meeting success.

Indicators

❑ Team members agree on meeting roles.

❑ "Meeting Roles" (e.g., facilitator, timekeeper, note taker) are assigned in each meeting.

❑ Meeting roles are rotated on a regular basis reflecting a commitment to distributed leadership.

Meeting Environment

The environment contributes to the overall productivity of team members as they participate in meetings. Environments that have few distractions and a comfortable arrangement of the table and chairs contribute to team members' abilities to attend to the work of the meeting.

Indicators

❑ The meeting location is chosen to maximize effective and efficient work of the team.

❑ Team members arrange the meeting room environment in accordance with the meeting purpose and agenda.

❑ All team members, including the facilitator, are able to see and hear one another.

❑ The seating arrangement allows team members to focus on flip chart paper or other writing devices and the facilitator.

Team Processes

Building Community and Team Identity

The establishment and nurturing of a sense of community is an on-going task in an effective and inclusive school. Teams commit to doing community- and team-building activities while they are in their formative stages, when their work together is going smoothly, and when there are conflicts that impede their effective functioning.

Indicators

❑ Team members engage in "get to know one another" activities, including sharing personal stories and professional experiences.

❑ Team members define their roles and responsibilities.

❑ Teams create their own rituals (e.g., birthdays, snacks) and celebrate their successes.

❑ Team members support one another during times of personal stress or crisis.

❑ Team members characterize their interactions with words like trust, confidence, and confidentiality.

Setting and Maintaining Group Norms

When teams establish and maintain norms that govern when and why they meet, how they communicate with one another, how they resolve conflicts, how they make decisions, and how they assure confidentiality, each member of the team is held accountable for behavior that contributes to the effectiveness of the whole team.

Indicators

❑ Teams set norms related to group behavior.

❑ Teams develop procedures for personal and group accountability to their group norms.

Building Sustainable Agreements

Building sustainable agreements is the primary purpose of collaborative teaming for students with significant disabilities. Effective teams use structured processes for gathering diverse points of view, building a shared framework of understanding, developing workable solutions to problems, developing consensus, reaching closure, and articulating action steps.

Indicators

❑ Teams decide who needs to be involved in which decisions.

❑ Teams use brainstorming and creative thinking activities to gather diverse points of view and ideas.

❑ Teams use strategies to explore possible solutions to problems.

❑ Teams generate alternative solutions when appropriate.

❑ Teams create guidelines that specify the level of agreement or consensus necessary for making different decisions.

❑ Team members use processes such as voting to see how close they are to agreement.

❑ Team members use decision-rules for coming to closure on decisions.

❑ Team members use efficient processes for determining the action steps necessary for implementation of decisions.

Reflecting on Practice

Effective teams use student learning as the benchmark for determining their own effectiveness. They continually reflect on all aspects of their professional practice to improve their individual skills and their team efficacy.

Indicators

❑ Teams use reflective practice protocols to solve problems, examine student work, and change systems.

❑ Teams participate in study groups or action research projects to reflect on their practice in light of student learning outcomes, new knowledge, and their own experiences.

❑ Teams evaluate their own effectiveness in a systematic way on a regular basis relative to student learning outcomes.

❑ Teams use reflective practice to improve their individual professional capabilities.

❑ Teams use reflective practice to improve their collective collaboration capabilities.

Resolving Conflicts

Conflicts arise within every team. Effective teams acknowledge this and use structured processes to address differences in ideas, repair relationships, improve members' communication skills, and mediate win-win solutions.

Indicators

❑ Teams identify two kinds of conflict: conflict around ideas and conflict around relationships.

❑ Teams openly address each type of conflict as it arises.

❑ When trying to resolve differences, team members state their individual needs and points of view clearly rather than arguing for a specific position or point of view.

❑ Teams strive for "win/win" solutions rather than "I win, you lose" solutions.

❑ Teams respond to conflict around ideas by seeking clarification, engaging in dialogue to understand the ideas, and engaging in discussion to achieve a resolution.

❑ Teams respond to conflict around relationships by identifying the source of conflict, engaging in dialogue to understand the issues related to the relationship, and identifying ways to work together more effectively.

❑ Teams call on the services of an impartial mediator if their effectiveness is diminished because of internal conflicts.

❑ Teams acknowledge the negative impact that interpersonal conflicts have on negotiating student supports and carrying out their professional responsibilities.

Maintaining Communication

Maintaining communication within a large team requires the establishment and consistent use of a variety of communication processes.

Indicators

❑ Teams record and share meeting notes or minutes to keep all members, including families, informed.

❑ Teams use electronic communication when appropriate to communicate with one another.

❑ Teams record meeting notes (including chart paper recordings) that capture the clearest statements that summarize important meeting content and process.

❑ Team members communicate with one another outside of meetings to complete team assignments.

❑ Team members communicate with one another prior to meetings regarding upcoming meeting topics.

Collaborating to Provide Instruction and Supports

The provision of effective instruction and support to students with significant disabilities often requires that team members work together in the classroom and in other inclusive school and community environments. Team members use proven co-teaching and other collaborative processes to maximize their effectiveness and student learning.

Indicators

❑ When appropriate, related service staff work together with students as they provide direct services.

❑ Team members collaborate to write reports related to student assessments and other aspects of students' educational program.

❑ Team members engage in curriculum planning meetings.

❑ Team members engage in case-management meetings.

❑ Team members observe, coach, and give feedback to one another while providing instruction and support to students.

Team Skills

Pausing

Effective team members pause during conversation and discussion for a variety of purposes. Pausing encourages active listening by team members. When a group monitors for the use of pausing, their productivity and satisfaction increases.

Indicators

❑ Team members listen attentively to others' ideas.

❑ Team members allow time for others to think after asking a question or making a response.

❑ Team members paraphrase silently what others are saying to further understand their communications.

❑ Team members wait until others have finished before entering a conversation.

Paraphrasing

Effective team members paraphrase to promote mutual understanding and valuing of others' contributions. Paraphrasing validates what another has said, fosters active listening, and accommodates different team members' learning styles. When a group monitors for paraphrasing, their work becomes clearer and more cohesive.

Indicators

❑ Team members use paraphrases that acknowledge and clarify content and emotions.

❑ Team members use paraphrases that summarize and organize.

❑ Team member use paraphrases that relate a topic of conversation from specific examples to broader themes and vice versa.

<u>Probing for Specificity</u>

Effective team members seek to clarify information before engaging in decision making. Problem definition, problem solving, and solution generation all rely on specificity for success.

Indicators

❑ Team members seek agreement on the meaning of words.

❑ Team members ask questions to clarify facts, ideas, and stories.

❑ Team members ask questions to clarify explanations, implications, and consequences.

❑ Team members ask questions to uncover assumptions, points of view, beliefs, and values.

Putting Ideas on the Table

and Pulling Them Off

Effective team members share their ideas. Knowing when and how to pull ideas off the table is equally important. Ideas can be both facts (e.g., data about student learning, school events, teacher demographics) and impressions (e.g., opinions about what student outcomes tells us about their learning style, support needs, or motivation).

Indicators

❑ Team members state the intention of their communication ("I'd like to offer a comment that may add some information to this discussion." Or "I'd like to make a suggestion that may help us get un-stuck.")

❑ Team members reveal all relevant information related to the idea.

❑ Team members consider the intended communication for relevance and appropriateness before speaking.

❑ Team members state facts, inferences, ideas, opinions, and suggestions.

❑ Team members explain reasons behind statements, questions, and actions.

❑ Team members withdraw, or announce the modification of, their own ideas, opinions, and points of view.

❑ Team members maintain focus on one agenda topic at a time.

Paying Attention to Self and Others

Effective team members are attentive to themselves and to others. When team members show awareness of what they are saying, how they are saying it, and how others are receiving and responding to their ideas, meaningful dialogue and discussion are fostered.

Indicators

❑ Team members maintain awareness of their own thoughts and feelings while having them.

❑ Team members maintain awareness of their own voice patterns, including tone of voice and rate of speech.

❑ Team members maintain awareness of their own nonverbal communications, including the use of eye contact, gestures, and facial expressions.

❑ Team members maintain awareness of their own use of physical space.

❑ Team members maintain awareness of others' voice patterns, including tone of voice and rate of speech.

❑ Team members maintain awareness of others' nonverbal communications, including the use of eye contact, gestures, and facial expressions.

❑ Team members maintain awareness of others' use of physical space.

❑ Team members maintain awareness of group's task, mood, and relevance of own and others' contributions.

<u>Presuming Positive Intentions</u>

Honest and open conversation about important matters is encouraged among team members when they presume that others' intentions are positive. Team members are effective when they take others' comments at face-value. Positive assumptions reduce the possibility of one team member perceiving threats or challenges from another.

Indicators

❑ Team members act as if others mean well by validating concerns, acknowledging questions, and maintaining a non-defensive posture.

❑ Team members restrain impulsivity triggered by their own emotional responses.

❑ Team members use positive assumptions when responding to and asking questions of others.

Pursuing a Balance Between

Advocacy and Inquiry

Team members increase their effectiveness when they create a balance between advocating for their point of view and inquiring about others' points of view. To balance means to spend equal amounts of time and energy advocating for one's own ideas and inquiring into the ideas of others.

Indicators

❑ Team members advocate for their own ideas.

❑ Team members inquire into the ideas of others.

❑ Team members act to provide equitable opportunities for participation by encouraging all team members to contribute to the conversation.

❑ Team members present rationale for positions, including underlying assumptions, facts, and personal feelings.

❑ Team members disagree respectfully and openly with ideas and offer a rationale for disagreement.

❑ Team members ask others about their reasons for reaching and occupying a position.

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