

# **Participant Feedback from the Fourteenth McKee Learning Lunch**

## **Inclusion**

**October 3, 2017**

This learning experience is co-sponsored by the Hamilton County Department of Education, and the McKee Chair of Excellence in Learning, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga

### **Introduction**

In 1975, Congress passed The Education for All Handicapped Act (PL. 94-142). Since that time, the public schools of the United States have been working to provide a free and appropriate education (FAPE) for all students with disabilities. One of most difficult elements of the requirement of law has been to incorporate what we commonly call *inclusion*—that is, to provide FAPE in the least-restrictive environment (LRE).

The public schools of Hamilton County are dedicated to meeting the needs of all students, including those with disabilities. In order to accomplish this goal, we must understand the best ways in which to modify how we think about the provision of FAPE. Every student deserves an education that is specially designed to meet his or her unique needs. How to best achieve that ideal was the basis for the discussion that we held at this McKee Learning Lunch.

This McKee Learning Lunch explored issues, concerns, and opportunities related to the inclusion of students with disabilities. Dr. Cale Horne, professor and advocate, introduced the session. Dr. Horne is Coordinator of the Chattanooga Inclusive Education Working Group. He also is co-leader of the Chattanooga 2.0 Inclusive Education & Opportunities Action Team.

After the presentation, in accordance with the process used at every McKee Learning Lunch, there were three general feedback opportunities, or Assignments 1, 2, and 3. The participants, who are listed at the end of this report, have provided their insights and questions about the topic. Those responses and insights are presented below.

### **Assignment 1**

**Post-presentation Questions: Following the discussion, participants posed questions about Inclusion. The questions are listed below.**

#### **Looking Back and Looking Forward**

- Why have inclusion trends decreased (until now)?
- How can we, as a school district, change the mindset of parents, teachers, administrators, and students toward evidence-based inclusion-education in Hamilton County?
- What are some ways to help skeptical teachers see the benefit of inclusion?
- What is being done to identify and address legal barriers of “appropriate inclusion”?

#### **Preparation for Evidence-Based Inclusion**

- How do we strategically change/transform/move to inclusion?
- What additional preparation and support does the HCDE need to make maximum inclusion possible in three years?

- What supports and training for co-teaching are currently in place for HCDE teachers?
- What are UTC teacher-preparation courses doing to support this change in inclusion?
- How do we come together for a three-year plan?

### **Implementation in the Classroom**

- How do you support, include, and instruct exceptional-education students in a general-education classroom?
- How can general-education teachers stop themselves from establishing different achievement standards for exceptional learners in the classroom?

### **School-to-School Variation?**

- Will the evidence-based inclusion-education initiative be standardized across Hamilton County Schools?
- How much authority will principals have in the matter?

## **Assignment 2**

**Discussion Question: After the presentation, participants, in groups of four, discussed three assigned questions. Questions and responses are listed below.**

**Question 1. Is it realistic to assume that every student, regardless of his or her learning challenge, should be in an inclusive learning-environment?**

- Yes! There should be *appropriate* inclusion opportunities available for every student!
- The more we do early, the more successful we will be. Early intervention is vital! Let's look at Child Find and audit practices.
- Transition from early intervention to kindergarten or Hamilton County Department of Education's 2.0 (birth to pre-K).
- Provide general education for all students (7 hours) and then focus on individual areas of strength.

**Question 2. How is the education of students with disabilities different from the education of students without disabilities? Can the educational and socio-emotional needs of both types of students be met in the same classroom?**

- Levels of support will vary, as will related services.
- Delivery of curricula *may* be different. You will find that children with and without disabilities thrive in class together.
- Yes, if done correctly. The education is the same; the instruction is different. The difference is that students with disabilities have individualized education plans (IDPs) and general-education students do not.
- Yes, especially the social aspects. Education should be individualized anyway, for every student, according to best practices.

**Question 3. What barriers might arise as Hamilton County increases inclusive practices? What proactive steps can the district take to address potential barriers?**

- For the sake of all individuals involved, the mindset that we cannot do it must change.
- Physical spaces within schools as well as accessibility for all Hamilton County Department of Education buildings.

- Lack of support in the classrooms.
- Training regarding both theory and practice for existing teachers as well as preparation programs are necessary.
- Planning is essential!
- Funding.
- Time.
- Know your students and eliminate labels.
- Variation of practices. Embrace differences across individual schools and students.
- Bus services for students with disabilities.
- Parents and teachers may be reluctant. Start educating and selling inclusion before questions arise or procedures change.

### **Additional Thoughts**

- With extra needs you need extra hands.
- All children are on a spectrum of some kind; it just may not be the autism spectrum. All children need individualized instruction at some point.

## **Assignment 3**

**Post-discussion Question: After the discussion, we asked participants to respond, in writing, to two additional questions. The questions and responses are listed below.**

**Question 1. What is the most important thing you learned today?**

### **Collaboration**

- The importance of collaboration. We all have a part!
- We stakeholders need to work together to meet the needs of all of our students.
- Community support, along with UTC, will help build inclusive practices in Hamilton County.

### **Success Is Possible**

- Inclusive education will work and makes a difference for all students.
- The stakeholders here today are action-oriented, and I feel confident that we will reach our goal of increased evidence-based inclusion.
- Hixson is already doing it!
- Through continued student-focused dialogue, we can do it!
- Hamilton County is already making efforts to implement evidence-based inclusion.
- Inclusion *can* work, and the barriers we identify don't usually involve the students themselves.

### **Complex Issues**

- Everyone understands that inclusion is possible and necessary, but people may have many different ideas on how it's done.
- There are great aspirations for inclusion among various groups in Hamilton County, but we must move from talk to action.
- There is a critical importance in marketing evidence-based inclusion to stakeholders—[in] telling the story—[in order] to generate “buy-in” and empathy.

## **Question 2. What unanswered question(s) are you leaving with?**

### **Marketing**

- How are they going to sell this change to the various audiences?
- What is HCDE going to do to help facilitate parental involvement and understanding of the process of systems-change, inclusion, school reform, and policy and procedure change?
- How will we promote, advertise, and communicate this to the public? Who will do it?
- How do we change mindsets?

### **Action Plan**

- What is the plan of action for Hamilton County?
- What is the process for implementation?
- Where does this group go from here? Next steps?

### **Important Details**

- What are the critical, technical, and planning issues the HCDE will face (transportation, training, and so forth)?
- What are the models mentioned and how would they work?
- What systemic changes will be made to support these aspirations?
- What legal barriers to “appropriate inclusion” do we need to identify and address?

### **Student-Centered and Teacher-Centered**

- In what ways does every child receive a unique learning experience?
- How can we guarantee emotional stability for exceptional education students in the classroom?
- Why should there be competition in teaching?

## **Participants**

**We would like to thank the following participants for their interest in and contribution to this McKee Learning Lunch.**

**Margaret S. Abernathy.** Director, Exceptional Education, Hamilton County Department of Education.

**Jonas Barriere.** Executive Director, UnifiEd.

**Angela Bouch.** Classroom teacher, Developmental Communications.

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**Peter T. Cooper.** Retired. Former President, Community Foundation of Greater Chattanooga.

**Sheri A. Fox.** Executive Director, Legal Aid of East Tennessee.

**Justin Gilbert.** Attorney, Gilbert McWherter Scott & Bobbitt, PLC.

**Cale Horne.** Coordinator, Chattanooga Inclusive Education Working Group and Co-leader; Chattanooga 2.0 Inclusive Education & Opportunities Action Team.

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**Carmen Penney.** President, Chattanooga Down Syndrome Society.

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