Articles and books are among the most accessible and economic ways educators can bring in outside expertise and new knowledge to inform their thinking around improving practice and reaching all students. Beginning with this issue, *JSD* will occasionally offer a selection of useful readings around a specific focus, chosen and annotated by educators with deep knowledge of the relevant literature in the focus areas.

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SPOTLIGHT
on special education

BY BELINDA DUNNICK KARGE AND BETH LASKY

With the everyday juggling act principals perform, they have a daunting challenge to keep up with the latest research in education. At the same time, the literature documents an intensive need for increased professional development of principals in special education (Goar, Schwenn, & Boyer, 1997; Lasky & Karge, 2006; McLaughlin & Nolet, 2004). To assist these busy leaders, we provide 10 must-reads to help administrators enhance their knowledge and skills, and the skills of their staffs, in special education. In some cases, the articles have been widely cited in journals; in other cases, the articles contain good solid timely advice or suggested best practice.

➔ **"Access to the core curriculum: Critical ingredients for student success"**
D. Fisher & N. Frey, *Remedial and Special Education,* May-June 2001

1 The reauthorized Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 requires that schools provide services to students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment whenever possible — that is, they should have as many opportunities as possible to learn in the same environment and with the same options as their nondisabled peers. The philosophy of educating students alongside their peers is honorable, yet sometimes challenging to implement. In "Access to the Core Curriculum: Critical Ingredients for Student Success," based on three case studies, Fisher and Frey describe useful strategies for helping students with significant disabilities to access the core curriculum. The authors provide specific examples of how students with disabilities can access the core curriculum with appropriate accommodations and modifications. These ideas are important for an administrator to share with teachers who have students with disabilities integrated into their classroom.

→ **"Rethinking inclusion: Schoolwide applications"**
W. Sailor & B. Roger, *Phi Delta Kappan*, March 2005

2 "Rethinking Inclusion: Schoolwide Applications" outlines the use of specialized accommodations and modifications, such as those suggested in the article above, to enhance the learning of all students. The authors advocate for a schoolwide approach where students with disabilities are not removed from general education classrooms and all supports and services are designed to enhance the learning of all children, not just the students with disabilities. The article covers evidence-based practices that work for general education teachers as well as special education teachers. The No Child Left Behind Act establishes the baseline that all public education students are to be considered general education students. The article illustrates how this is possible through a case study and lists six guiding principles for any site working to implement a schoolwide program. The article concludes with three legal case studies and an explanation of why the schools highlighted in the case studies did not achieve true legal compliance.

→ **"Making collaboration work in inclusive high school classrooms: Recommendations for principals"**
J.T. Hines, *Intervention in School and Clinic,* 2008

3 "Making Collaboration Work in Inclusive High School Classrooms: Recommendations for Principals" also covers the concept of inclusion. The author outlines four important conditions for successful student collaboration. The description of each condition begins with a short vignette that describes a challenge teachers face in inclusive classrooms, followed by a discussion of how the principal can address this issue. The author offers suggestions for opening communication, sharing leadership, developing goals, and resolving conflicts. Although the title refers to high schools, this article is appropriate for all school levels.

→ **"Inclusion of learners with autism spectrum disorders in general education settings"**
R.L. Simpson, S.R. de Boer-Ott, & B. Smith-Myles, *Topics in Language Disorders,* April-June 2003

4 The fastest-growing category of disabilities is autism. There are many challenges to including these students because of the nature, severity, depth, and breadth of the autism spectrum. Simpson, deBoer-Ott, and Smith-Myles, authors of "Inclusion of Learners With Autism Spectrum Disorders in General Education Settings," introduce the Autism Spectrum Disorder Inclusion Collaboration Model. This model offers guidelines and supports that can facilitate the successful inclusion of people with autism in general education settings. The article defines autism, explains the debate over least restrictive environment, includes a lengthy checklist of instructional methods used with students with autism spectrum disorder within general education classrooms, and provides five major components for schoolwide consideration.

→ **"Co-teaching: Guidelines for creating effective practices"**
L. Cook & M. Friend, *Focus on Exceptional Children*, November 1995

5 Cook and Friend have produced seminal work in the field of co-teaching among general education and special education teachers. Co-teaching is defined as "two or more professionals delivering substantive instruction to a group of students with diverse learning needs" (p. 15). Any administration team could use their article, "Co-teaching: Guidelines for Creating Effective Practices." The article outlines the big ideas and rationale behind co-teaching along with suggested classroom practices. Although these authors have written many subsequent articles, this key article suggests who should be involved in co-teaching and highlights major topics for team discussion when a school decides to adopt

→ **Select a reading for a schoolwide discussion. Ask selected staff members to come prepared with background information on two or three key definitions or concepts to extend the learning. Alternatively,** use articles with distinct sections in a jigsaw fashion.

→ **Promote bookclub activities.** Some articles will be ideal for grade-level or subject-area learning teams researching a critical issue such as autism or co-teaching.

→ **Provide an article to spark a discussion among stakeholders about school- or districtwide reform.**

co-teaching practices. Such topics include instructional beliefs, planning parity signals, confidentiality, noise, classroom routines, discipline, feedback, and pet peeves.

→ **"Research into practice through professional development"**
M.F. Little & D. Houston, *Remedial and Special Education,* March-April 2003

6 In "Research Into Practice Through Professional Development," Little and Houston present suggestions for coaching teachers to understand scientifically based theoretical approaches to quality instructional methods for students with special needs. They recommend that school leaders ask teachers to identify their needs, then group teachers in teams based on their needs. Once in teams, the teachers work together to research a specific need. The article includes a questionnaire designed to help teachers determine if the research-based approach they selected meets effective instructional practices criteria. The authors encourage teachers to try the strategy in their classrooms. The authors provide a critical teaching behaviors checklist for team or individual evaluation of the lesson.

→ **"Instructional components that predict treatment outcomes for students with learning disabilities: Support for a combined strategy and direct instruction model"**
H.L. Swanson, *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice,* Summer 1999

7 When administrators are supporting special education teachers, it is essential that they encourage their special education teachers to use research-based practices. Swanson has provided critical information to the field of learning disabilities by identifying the instructional components across 180 intervention studies that best contribute to academic success for students with learning

disabilities. The results from "Instructional Components That Predict Treatment Outcomes for Students With Learning Disabilities: Support for a Combined Strategy and Direct Instructional Model," suggest that a combination of cognitive strategies and direct instruction yields the best outcomes. Specifically, this article highlights sequencing, drill-repetition and practice-review, segmentations, directed questioning and responses, control difficulty or processing demands of a task, technology, group instruction, supplements to teacher involvement, and strategy cues as specific instructional components that increase the chance of an intervention's success.

→ **"Responsiveness-to-intervention: Definitions, evidence, and implications for the learning disabilities construct"**
D. Fuchs, D. Mock, P.L. Morgan, & C.L. Young, *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice*, August 2003

8 When the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act was rewritten and signed into law in 2004, many sections of the law reflected new ideas about learning disabilities and the concept of a pre-identification strategy called Response to Intervention (RTI). Unfortunately, the regulations specific to RTI have not been established, and while everyone is talking about the concept, no one knows how RTI will be used in practice. In "Responsiveness-to-Intervention: Definitions, Evidence, and Implications for the Learning Disabilities Construct," Fuchs, Mock, Morgan, and Young cover the use of IQ tests for identifying students with disabilities. This approach is often considered flawed because it is a discrepancy model: It measures the difference between how a student performs currently and the level they are expected to perform at academically. RTI is often considered a viable alternative. RTI is typically described as a three-tier approach that provides gradually more intensive help to students with academic challenges. Some educators recommend trying these approaches before assessing a student for a learning disabil-

ity. The authors describe two different methods of using RTI and encourage readers to discuss which method might work in their school.

➔ **"Meeting the needs of students with disabilities: Experience and confidence of principals"**
B. Lasky & B. Karge, *National Association of Secondary School Principals Bulletin,* 2006

9 "Meeting the Needs of Students With Disabilities: Experience and Confidence of Principals" examines the formal training of more than 200 principals in a variety of school districts. The study reported a need for increased training of principals in special education. If principals are to be leaders in schoolwide change, they need to understand the concepts behind the changes in special education over the past few years. The article provides a summary of DiPaola and Walther-Thomas' (2003) six skill and knowledge areas that principals need to develop to ensure the growth of students with disabilities, and concludes with Lasky and Karge's resources and recommendations for implementation of each area.

➔ **"Schools attuned: A model for collaborative intervention"**
I. Weiner & M.W. Murawski, *Intervention in School and Clinic,* May 2005

10 In order to implement any form of RTI, schools must come together with a shared vision and common principles and vocabulary. Weiner and Murawski advocate for the use of a professional development program, Schools Attuned (Levine, 2002), as the basis for a three-tier collaborative model in "Schools Attuned: A Model for Collaborative Intervention." The Schools Attuned model stresses that all students learn differently, and educators and parents need to identify students' strengths and areas in need of improvement. Weiner and Murawski summarize the major ideas of Schools Attuned, the associated comprehensive training, and describe how the program aligns with the collaborative model. They then discuss how Schools Attuned can be used as a three-tier model to intervene when students demonstrate individual needs, similar to the levels for behavioral intervention used in many schools. These tiers progress from providing schoolwide interventions for all students, additional support for those students with additional concerns, and then more intensive support for individual students for whom previous interventions have not proved effective. Weiner and Murawski conclude their article by discussing the benefits and limitations of their proposal and how it will assist in building a collaborative school environment

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