

## States United in Education

### A continuation of “Advanced Concepts for a Better Future”

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As a teacher that has worked at a variety of schools ranging from charter, public, and private, I noticed that each school had different ways of managing students considered at risk. Now, when I say “at risk” I am referring to students that are at risk of not meeting grade level proficiency because they are failing either reading or math. The methods at which each school utilized in regards to creating a plan for students to reach proficiency, and how documents were stored and transferred varied as well. The one thing they all had in common was that they all used printed paper that was kept in the student’s academic file. Here I will reveal several issues with our current system and present a state wide proposal to remedy these issues.

The most important thing a teacher is responsible for is student success. But what does a teacher do when they are faced with a student that is falling below the mark? How do they procure all vital information regarding the student’s past and compile new data for future teachers? What model should they follow in regards to helping students turn their weaknesses into strengths? For public school teachers, policies and procedures regarding at risk students is often provided through training. However, private school teachers may not be provided the same training or guidance. How can we ensure the proper management of at risk students no matter what school they attend? To resolve this issue, we must first start at the top.

Let’s start at the state level. If each state were to join in on a national program that provided teachers with a model to follow with procedures on how to identify, create goals, set intervention plans/schedules (Personalized Educational Plan/PEP), and properly report for future school years, we would be able collect data on student progress and success rates. Not only would teachers have a better understanding on how to manage at risk students, but it would ensure that teachers were following through and held accountable for maintaining the student’s PEP. Besides just providing teachers with a model and procedures to follow, this national program would allow participating states to train teachers on how to utilize an online reporting system. Once teachers complete the training program, likely to be online, they could log into this online reporting system that would populate all students on their current rosters that have been identified as at risk. Teachers could access previous documents and notes regarding student progress and continue with successful interventions and create new ones. This would allow them to update the student’s file through the program and the program would in turn send reminders when progress monitoring is required. In addition, teachers could add new students to the system if they find they are becoming at risk of not meeting grade level proficiency.

By creating an online reporting system that would collect at risk student data, teachers would have access to their at risk student’s previous PEPs, have the ability to update the PEPs, receive reminders to complete progress monitoring and update PEP notes, and allow administrators to monitor teacher data input, all at the touch of a button. This would eliminate the need for constant printing, copying, and overflowing academic files. Parents could review an electronic version of the PEP and sign electronically during conferences. Again, this system is

about ensuring the success of at risk students through identification of academic deficits, proper documentation of goals/interventions/progress monitoring and continuous collaboration of educators.

Let's take a step back to discuss the best model to follow when managing at risk student before delving further into the electronic reporting system.

- 1) Teachers must thoroughly examine their student roster and check all academic files for possible IEPs, PEPs, 504 plans, etc.
- 2) After reviewing all pertinent information, reach out to previous teachers (if available) if you have any questions or concerns.
- 3) Create a general plan for all at risk students based on the best methods employed during the previous school year. Be ready to be flexible and make changes as early as day 1 though. Remember, every year is a new year. Students change!
- 4) Update goals and interventions throughout the school year. The student will need added goals based on new grade level expectations if they perform below proficiency. Change interventions to meet the needs of the student.
- 5) Maintain constant communication with parents/guardians regarding student progress. This should be documented and occur during regularly scheduled conferences.
- 6) Reach out to your administrator if you are not seeing positive results with the current PEP. If your school doesn't have a Student Support Team (SST), you should ask your administrator to start one. This consists of a team of teachers (and administrators) who meet to discuss at risk students and work together to create goals and interventions to best promote the student's success.
- 7) Keep all documentation neatly organized by date. All documents should be signed by all parties involved during meetings and kept in the child's PEP file.
- 8) Prepare the file to be passed on to future educators. Having an organized file with detailed reports on what was successful will help the next teacher be successful, too.

With that thought, if we were to implement the above model using an electronic reporting system (ERS), it would simplify our current methods on so many levels. All of the above methods could be completed using the ERS with many added benefits. These benefits include, easier manageability, automatic reminders to teachers to update files, sharing ability amongst teachers, administrators, and parents during SST or parent/teacher conferences, and insurance that future teachers will have access to at risk student files to maintain successful methods. Not only that, but this system could track data of how successful certain methods are based on what goals, interventions, and how frequently set interventions are delivered. Overall, if each state were to participate in a nationwide ERS, teachers would be able to access vital information of at risk students no matter what school they transfer from.

What's the next step for teachers when they feel that they have done everything and still aren't seeing positive results? This is a major concern for teachers since it tends to reflect on their method of instruction. Even when we feel that we have done everything we can, who do we turn to, what do we do when failure seems eminent? This is especially a concern for private school teachers who often lack the support of a special education coach, literacy coach, school counselor, speech/occupational therapist, etc. Bridging the gap caused when students transfer between states can often be a challenge. Grade level expectations vary based on the state and methods of delivery can vary from school to school. Our country has a very "square peg in a round hole" mentality. In my previous paper, "Advanced Concepts for a Better Future", I address how teachers can teach beyond the state standards. Teachers shouldn't be forced to only teach the basics. Should they teach them? Absolutely! But should it be the only thing taught? Absolutely not!

If we continue to focus on student deficits and don't provide students with alternative methods of instruction, that include an expansion of curriculum, students will become focused on their weaknesses. By giving the appropriate amount of attention to their deficits and offering them advanced concepts (career driven hands-on instructional activities) students will blossom more than you could imagine! Students deserve to know the importance of what they are learning in school. By introducing students to advanced concepts and integrating it into our current curriculum programs, students will see first-hand how they will use their knowledge in the real world. When you show a student how successful they can be by telling them that they are successful every day, they will become successful! Success is a state of mind. Everyone has a different idea of what successful means. Let your students decide what success is to them by enhancing the curriculum offered to them. Expose them to more than the state standards and allow them to help drive the classroom based on their interests.

So now we must ask ourselves, what is student failure? Is student failure when they can't pass the end of school year state test? Is failure when they can't pass math or reading? We first must recognize real failure. Real failure is when we as the teacher give up on our students. When the teacher gives up on the student, the student will give up on themselves. We must never fail our students. We must remember that all students are individuals. Each individual has strengths and weaknesses. It's how teachers approach those strengths and weaknesses that will determine how the student will develop into adulthood. Remember, our ultimate goal is to turn students into successful adults that will make positive contributions to the world. We may just be a stepping stone along the way, but each step a student takes could change the direction they go.

In the end, for us to make positive progress as a country it is imperative that the states unite in education. First each state must adopt an electronic reporting system that is used nationwide to promote the needs of at risk students. Teachers must be vigilant about identifying at risk students, establishing goals and interventions, progress monitor as frequently as necessary for success, and remember to document all data. Having a proper documentation system will not only protect the teacher, but it will protect the student as they progress in their academic career by ensuring that future educators have access to their personalized educational plan. Students shouldn't have to have an individualized education plan to have the right to individualized attention. All students are individuals and as individuals they deserve their teachers best.

Teachers must also recognize what true failure is and be ready to make change for the better. Our current educational system is in need of a makeover. By implementing advanced concepts in our classroom we can promote student strengths. A student is only as weak as they believe themselves to be. Remember to tell your students that they are successful every day and you will begin to see a class full of successful students. Overall, if you apply these methods in your classroom and join me in making some much needed changes to our current educational system, together we can make a difference!

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