

## INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE: BUILDING CAPACITY TO IMPROVE STUDENT OUTCOMES THROUGH COLLABORATION: CURRENT ISSUES AND INNOVATIVE APPROACHES

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Many students experience significant academic and social behavioral problems and drop out or leave school unprepared for adulthood, resulting in significant costs to these individuals and to society (Patterson, Reid, & Dishion, 1992; Walker, 2004). It is vital that schools build capacity to support all learners, including those at risk for failure, and to support this effort, schools need to use evidence-based practices (Hoagwood et al., 2007; Walker, 2004). In addition to using evidence-based practices for academic instruction, it is also important that students receive evidence-based interventions for social, emotional, and behavioral problems (Hoagwood et al., 2007; Ringeisen, Henderson, & Hoagwood, 2003).

Teachers, however, have reported they do not feel prepared to provide support for social, emotional, and behavioral problems (Reinke, Stormont, Herman, Puri, & Goel, 2011). In addition, teachers are also confronted with challenges related to adopting new practices to support academic learning for which many report they do not feel adequately prepared. As an example, prevention-based tiered systems are increasingly being implemented in schools across the country, and teachers are essential interventionists at the universal and Tier-2 levels (Horner et al., 2009; Stormont, Reinke, Herman, & Lembke, 2012). Within the context of such tiered models, in theory, schools utilize the most effective available practices, and student academic achievement and/or behavior are closely monitored (Stormont et al., 2012). However, within these models, teachers are often required to make major changes to current practices with varying levels of training and support, and are often presented with multiple, sometimes competing, demands on their time.

When schools are adopting new practices, it is critical that there are continued efforts to explore ways to use all available resources wisely and build capacity for change. Collaboration is one way to increase capacity to meet more students' needs and is often cited as an avenue for instilling changes in practices through ongoing support for school personnel (Reinke, Herman, & Sprick, 2011; Turnbull, Turnbull, Erwin, Soodak, & Shogren, 2011). However, for collaborative efforts to be successful and lead to changes in professionals' practices and subsequent student improvements, several factors need to be considered. One issue is the implementation gap that exists for schools trying to adopt evidence-based practices (Fixsen, Naoom, Blase, Friedman, Wallace, 2005; McIntosh, Reinke, Herman, 2010). That is, school professionals struggle to implement interventions as they were intended to be utilized when tested in more controlled settings. Subsequently, without high fidelity of implementation, student outcomes are often not as positive as they could be (McIntosh et al., 2010). There are many factors that make implementing specific interventions very challenging, especially for teachers (e.g., lack of confidence, knowledge, or skills; perceptions of use; buy-in; Stormont, Reinke, Herman, 2011; Stormont et al., 2012). When teachers are asked to use new interventions without individualization, ongoing support, and systems change, they are likely to fail in their efforts (Fixsen et al., 2005; Noell et al., 2005).

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Overall, it is important to understand both the collaborative practices that are supported by research and the challenges to getting these practices implemented (Durlak & DuPre, 2008). School psychologists often play a key role in identifying, monitoring implementation fidelity, and helping schools bring new practices to scale. To this end, this issue includes seven articles that address topics related to innovative models or programs to support increased collaboration and current issues related to collaboration. The first two articles provide examples of collaborative intervention models to support students through building teachers' instructional and classroom management skills. In the first article, Vo, Sutherland, and Conroy present their BEST in CLASS model (Behavioral, Emotional, and Social Training: Competent Learners Achieving School Success), which was designed for early childhood programs. This model includes universal interventions designed to increase the use of effective instructional practices. The specific focus of the model is to support teachers in effectively intervening with children at the Tier-2 level through improving the quality of teacher–student interactions.

In the second article, Reinke, Stormont, Webster-Stratton, Newcomer, and Herman, describe how coaching is utilized to provide generalization support for teachers within the Incredible Years Teacher Classroom Management Program (IY TCM). More specifically, the article describes the IY TCM, which includes a series of group-based trainings on specific topics introduced over time (e.g., effective behavior management, strategies for building teacher–child relationship skills, parent–teacher collaboration) and provides examples of how specific principles of the program are supported in the classroom setting through an onsite coach.

The focus of the next two articles turns to building capacity to support teachers in learning how to provide different types of instructional supports for students. The article by van Garderen, Hanuscin, Lee, and Kohn describes a collaborative program, QUEST: Quality Elementary Science Teaching, designed by teacher educators in both science education and special education to support teachers' implementation of inquiry-based instruction, formative assessment, and Universal Design for Learning as ways to meet the needs of diverse learners in kindergarten through sixth-grade classrooms.

The next article also focuses on an underrepresented area in the research, specifically infusing technology to support students. The article by Thomas, Hassaram, Rieth, Raghavan, Kinzer, and Mulloy presents findings from a university–school partnership in which researchers and teachers collaborated to integrate technology and support teachers in implementing multimedia-anchored instruction within an integrated language arts and social studies curriculum for diverse middle-school students. These two articles share a focus on learner-centered curriculum, emphasizing methods that foster the development of higher order thinking skills and providing access to the curriculum for all students.

The fifth article addresses an emerging challenge many school districts and states are facing related to effectively integrating models for supporting social behavior and literacy practices. In this article, Chaparro, Smolkowski, Baker, Hanson, and Ryan-Jackson, present a model, the Effective Behavioral and Instructional Support Systems (EBISS), that they are currently evaluating. Interesting data on capacity-building efforts across 140 elementary schools are presented.

Common themes across the first five articles highlight the point that to ensure evidence-based practices are actually practiced by the intended professionals, it is important to provide sustained and ongoing assistance through professional development and onsite support. These articles also illustrate the need for both structure and flexibility. Adult learners, like younger learners, need different types of support to acquire, generalize, and sustain their use of new skills.

The final two articles address knowledge to date pertaining to collaborative models from systematic literature reviews. The first review by van Garderen, Stormont, and Goel specifically targets collaboration between general educators and special educators and explores the literature on

the impact of this collaboration on student outcomes. In the final article, Solis, Vaughn, Swanson, and McCulley explore the broader literature base on inclusion and co-teaching and present teachers' perceptions of and needs for support for collaboration to be successful, as well as what is known about specific models.

## SUMMARY

Schools across the country are trying to build capacity to meet the diverse needs of learners. School psychologists are often expected to play a key role in capacity building and systemic change. Many students have or are at risk for having significant academic and social-emotional problems, and to date, schools have not been well equipped to successfully respond and intervene. This special issue highlights the need for increased attention to successful collaborative models and to innovative and intensive approaches to bridging the gaps between practice and research and research and practice through ongoing support and sustained efforts.

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