

Background

Karela Education Agency is a regional education agency that provides quality services to 21 public school districts and 21 nonpublic schools in a service area covering 5,000-square-miles. Karela serves eight counties in a midwestern state with a population of more than 30,000 students in grades pre-K-12. The three Karela Agency trainers each had prior experience teaching students with significant cognitive disabilities (SCD) and providing teacher professional development (PD) workshops.

Trainers started by reviewing Dynamic Learning Map® (DLM®) alternate assessment results and teacher/administrator surveys. They found that some teachers struggled with the belief that all students can learn. Teachers also said they lacked knowledge in determining how to unpack the Essential Elements and which materials would be most appropriate for instruction, and often overlooked students' needs of having a means of communication to participate in meaningful instruction.

Trainers set goals to change teacher beliefs about student learning and ensure teachers use UDL principles, so all students have a means of communication to participate in academic instruction. They wanted to provide teachers and administrators with evidence that, given the opportunity and quality instruction, all students can learn. The trainers agreed that changing teachers' beliefs and providing strategies to differentiate instruction to include all students was critical in changing teachers' mindsets.

Opportunities and Challenges

The trainers faced challenges, including time constraints, the lack of a platform to reach large groups of teachers in multiple districts, teacher turnover, and lack of administrative support. The lack of face-to-face training opportunities, low teacher participation, and scheduling issues negatively impacted the number of teachers they could reach. The trainers realized that to achieve their goals, they needed a long-term plan that included a series of PD topics and a platform for delivery. They also needed to enlist support from key leaders to change expectations for what instruction should look like. The SETTT for Success framework and online delivery platform provided trainers an opportunity to reach many more teachers, and the strategies to use data to inform administrators of teacher needs.

Support for Trainers

- recommended resources to meet the teacher's learning goals
- provided information on using data including DLM assessment results to drive conversations with building-level leadership and teachers
- introduced online tools for teacher access to quality PD activities

Early Trainer Accomplishments

- conducted a PD workshop targeting teacher beliefs and expectations about their students' competence and potential
- targeted UDL to support teacher knowledge of different ways to instruct all students
- learned how to use an online content authoring program and learning management system to design and deliver PD modules on demand that target beliefs, UDL, and comprehensive academic instruction

Continued Work

- developing modules using the RISE platform to deliver quality PD
- continuing to change teacher beliefs that students with significant cognitive disabilities can learn academic content and not just functional skills.
- teachers' use of UDL strategies during lesson planning
- ensuring PD translates into action so students have an opportunity to communicate and participate in quality academic instruction