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Who Signed Me Up for This?

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We've all heard the story of the little boy's first day in first grade. When the big hand and the little hand were both pointing straight up, he put on his jacket and began gathering up his things to go home. The teacher explained to Tommy that he was big boy now, and that he didn't go home at lunch like he did when he was in kindergarten; first graders stay at school all day.

"Who signed me up for this?" Tony demanded.

I'm glad someone signed me up to be a part of this first edition the *Electronic Journal of Inclusive Education*. I commend Wright State University for their leadership in providing a forum for the exchange of ideas, sharing practices, and discussion of the collection and use of data to better prepare students with disabilities to become successful adults.

Ohio is in its ninth year of a systematic and systematic change in how we educate our students with disabilities. The process began in February of 1988. Then Superintendent of Public Instruction Franklin B. Walter invited representatives of 30 statewide organizations (parent, administrator, special education, higher education, general education) to participate in the Futures Forum.

A year of study and discussion was followed by a year of interacting with stakeholders, and in 1990, *Ohio Speaks* was published. By 1991, a plan was in place to allow districts to convert existing special education teacher units to "experimental" or model status. This waiver process provided school personnel and families with more flexibility in deciding how and where students were served and, in many cases, provided the impetus for changing the building climate and culture to support all youngsters in more meaningful ways.

For the next two school years, pre- and post-data were collected on 400 classes of students, their parents, and teachers. The results of an Ohio State University study were very promising. In each of the four models, and across all disability categories, students achieved a higher percentage of their academic and social/behavioral short-term objectives. Teachers and parents were much more satisfied with student progress than they were in the baseline year.

Since the 1991-92 school year, the number of special education classroom teachers operating under alternative service delivery options has grown from 400 to 7,238 (73% of all special education teacher units). If acceptance and implementation are positive indicators of success, then the alternative service options have been a sensational success. As with any other endeavor, widespread acceptance raises new issues. Is the implementation high quality? Are the needs of each student carefully considered when the placement decision is made? Are parents, teachers, related services personnel, and principals part of the planning? Or, did someone else "sign them up for this?"

Are teachers provided with the training and support necessary to be successful? Are principals providing enthusiastic leadership? Are parents active partners in the endeavor? Are students achieving more? In short, how sure are we that alternative service delivery options are producing better results for students? If so, how much better? How do we know? To what degree can we replicate best practices across the state? How do special education reforms fit into the broad school reform issues?

Alternative service delivery options are but one of Ohio's initiatives calculated to produce better results. Ohio's Classroom Management System, IBMFE (intervention-based multifactored evaluation), venture capital, SchoolNet, and a host of other efforts intended to change routines and relationships are working to create better learning environments for *all* children.

A final point. Even though we may have excellent aggregate results, *All* means *All*, and *All* means *Each*. We all need to get better to assure that each district, each building, each student, and each family is getting the service and support necessary to contribute to the development of successful adults.

Each of us -- teacher, researcher, administrator, parent -- has information/data which, when analyzed and shared, can add to our collective knowledge of what works under what conditions. The *Electronic Journal of Inclusive Education* makes the sharing process easy. Please don't wait for someone to "sign you up." Do it yourself -- from your classroom, your office, your home. You have information to share that will help others in achieving our mission.

And, if we do our job right, Tommy will be glad someone "signed him up."