

# Learning From Colleagues



**Purpose:** This activity uses examples of how school leaders introduced high-leverage practices to staff members as a springboard for reflection and discussion.

## Activity Overview

Although high-leverage practices in special education are relatively new, some school leaders already have begun to introduce them to staff members in their schools and districts. These early implementers were asked the following questions:

- How did you become interested in high-leverage practices? What contributed to making you want to learn more?
- How have you introduced and/or shared high-leverage practices with your staff members? What strategies were successful in piquing their interest?
- What are your next steps in enhancing knowledge and further study of high-leverage practices?
- What recommendations do you have for other school district leaders who may be considering introducing high-leverage practices to their staff members?

As school leaders reflect on the next steps to using high-leverage practices, they may find ideas—not to mention inspiration—from these early implementers. While this activity can be completed independently, results are enhanced when it is done with a group.

## Activity Steps

1. Read the interviews.
2. Note the different strategies school leaders used to introduce and support further learning of high-leverage practices. Identify which strategies might be useful in your current situation. How might you use them and/or adapt them?
3. If working in a group, share your reactions with other group members. Consider using some of the following conversation starters to motivate discussion:
  - What strategies did the school leaders in the interviews describe that have particular relevance to your situation?
  - What more would you like to know about the strategies to determine if they are a good fit for your situation?
  - Were there strategies that were new to you? Can you envision yourself using them?
  - How do you think your staff members might respond to the strategies described in the vignettes?
  - If the school leaders featured in the interview were present, what would you ask him or her? What would you like them to elaborate on?



## Introducing High-Leverage Practices in a Training and Technical Assistance Center

### An Interview with *Jocelyn Washburn*

*“High-leverage practices in special education give special education teachers the language they need to self-advocate for the very important role they play in improving outcomes for children with disabilities.”*

**Jocelyn Washburn**

Coordinator, Training and Technical Assistance Center at Virginia Tech University



#### ***How did you become interested in high-leverage practices? What contributed to making you want to learn more?***

Dr. Bonnie Billingsley at Virginia Tech invited me to write a research synopsis on high-leverage practice 2: “Organize and facilitate effective meetings with professionals and families.” Next, she invited me to co-author a chapter in *High Leverage Practices for Inclusive Classrooms* on this same practice.

#### ***How have you introduced and/or shared high-leverage practices with your staff members? What strategies were successful in piquing their interest?***

I shared my writings with colleagues at the Training and Technical Assistance Center. They became interested in learning more about how to include the high-leverage practices in their work with teachers and administrators in the schools in our region.

Initially, we made the high-leverage practices the focus of our quarterly email newsletters for a school year [2017–2018]. We described the high-leverage practices areas [collaboration, assessment, social/emotional/behavioral, and instruction] and provided related resources. Each issue also featured a description of a local school or teacher effectively implementing one or more of the high-leverage

practices. Piquing my colleagues’ interest was easy, as our mission, which is to serve professionals who serve students with disabilities, aligns perfectly with the purpose of the high-leverage practices in special education.

Next, we included “learning more about high-leverage practices” in a needs assessment survey in spring 2017. A large number of teachers and administrators expressed interest in learning more about the topic. We now are in the process of hosting two professional learning days to introduce and expand upon the high-leverage practices for up to 150 participants.

#### ***What are your next steps in enhancing knowledge/further study of high-leverage practices?***

During the professional learning day, participants identified one high-leverage practice as a focus and wrote a goal for its use. Next, participants were offered several options for follow-up activities throughout the school year: virtual meeting, online professional learning community, email reminders, and resources tailored to their area of focus.

#### ***What recommendations do you have for other school district leaders who may be considering introducing high-leverage practices to their staff members?***

Ask teachers to consider which high-leverage practices they are already doing well before identifying high-leverage practices to improve. Integrate emphasis on the high-leverage practices into your systems and communications to show the relevance and importance to ongoing efforts. Use peer coaching for professional growth once teachers set goals for improving certain high-leverage practices. Share high-leverage practices with general education teachers because these practices can be delivered in all settings by all teachers to varying degrees.



## Introducing High-Leverage Practices to Special Services Staff Members

An Interview with *Dr. Ryan O’Grady*

*“When the high-leverage practices were unveiled, it was certainly a hallelujah moment for me! Finally, we have something we can call our own that helps guide our professional learning and helps others understand the role of the special services staff member.”*

**Dr. Ryan O’Grady**

*Director of Special Services,  
Northwest Public Schools, Grand Island, Nebraska*



### ***How did you become interested in high-leverage practices? What contributed to making you want to learn more?***

Throughout my career as a special educator and as an administrator, I have always felt like we were missing the boat in providing special education staff specific feedback and professional development regarding their specialized role. Special education and related services staff that serve children from birth to twenty-one need specific feedback from one another and from administrators to grow. Many times, administrators struggle at meeting these needs because the special education role is different from that of a general education teacher.

The high-leverage practices do a great job of capturing the role of these staff members. The high-leverage practices give teachers and administrators a blueprint to work from in order to give specific feedback, develop personal goals, and to grow as a professional.

For many years I have searched for better ways to meet the needs of our special services staff. When the high-leverage practices were unveiled, it was a welcome surprise. It felt like the lost was found. It was certainly exciting! The high-leverage practices

captured what I had been searching for as a teacher and administrator.

### ***How have you introduced and/or shared high-leverage practices with your staff members? What strategies were successful in piquing their interest?***

I first introduced the high-leverage practices to the special services staff in January 2018. This included special education teachers and all related service providers. They were excited to have something they could call their own. Over the course of the semester, they interacted with the high-leverage practices in their professional learning communities and created a rubric for each of the twenty-two high-leverage practices that could serve as an evaluation tool and as a tool to provide guidance for continued professional learning.

I found I did not have to do anything out of the ordinary to pique their interest. After they reviewed the high-leverage practices in their professional learning communities, they strongly connected with them. They engaged in a reflective process that has helped guide us from participating in professional development to creating professional goals to having meaningful conversations during the self-evaluation process.

### ***What are your next steps in enhancing knowledge and further study of high-leverage practices?***

We will continue to work together and learn more about the twenty-two high-leverage practices. Every staff member conducted a self-evaluation to set a baseline for his or her continued growth. The high-leverage practices allow this to happen. There are elements that even I, as an administrator, can grow in. I am not immune to continued growth, and I enjoy growing and learning with my staff. Having



## Introducing High-Leverage Practices to Special Services Staff Members

An Interview with *Dr. Ryan O'Grady* (continued)

the twenty-two high-leverage practices as a guide is significant in that reflection and growth. In working with special services staff, we can do better for each other and for kids, together.

***What recommendations do you have for other school district leaders who may be considering introducing high-leverage practices to their staff members?***

The high-leverage practices can play a significant role in teacher and administrator development. Many administrators do not understand the full role of the special education teacher or related services personnel. The high-leverage practices are helpful in outlining that in a way that is not overwhelming. The high-leverage practices are easy to understand.

I recommend that school leaders consider introducing high-leverage practices through professional

learning communities. If a staff is not large enough to have a professional learning community of multiple special education teachers, include related services members who may serve your district. We have found that the high-leverage practices are beneficial for all special services staff members. In many ways, the high-leverage practices also could be beneficial for growing guidance counselors as they interact with kids and families in a variety of settings.

I highly encourage the self-evaluation process. During that process, the staff member and I met for about an hour and reviewed the high-leverage practices together. Most meetings were longer than one hour due to the rich conversation. The staff member rated himself or herself on each practice. This allowed both of us to discuss growth and evidence supporting each practice. This has proven to drive individualized and departmental professional development.



## Introducing High-Leverage Practices in a School Team Meeting

### An Interview with *Jessica Martin Young*

*“Our weekly team meetings helped us to work smarter, not harder. We were able to build a collaborative team whose focus was on helping a student learn social skills.”*

**Jessica Martin Young**

Speech Therapist, Patrick Springs Primary,  
Patrick County, VA



#### ***How did you become interested in high-leverage practices? What contributed to making you want to learn more?***

Our Community of Leaders in Autism team at Patrick Springs Primary worked with the Virginia Tech Training and Technical Assistance Center to provide support to a student with autism. As division leaders we collaborate with others to build capacity in our buildings and to better support students. Thus, the collaboration high-leverage practices were of great interest to us.

We began by scheduling weekly team meetings with the student’s parent, special education teacher, general education teacher, speech therapist, occupational therapist, principal, day-treatment counselor, and our lead speech therapist [who is also on the Community of Leaders in Autism team]. Our weekly meetings helped us to collaborate and plan more effectively with each other and with the student’s parent. At the meeting, we shared strategies and tools that we used at school with the parent, who then implemented them at home.

#### ***How have you introduced and/or shared high-leverage practices with your staff members? What strategies were successful in piquing their interest?***

In addition to the collaboration high-leverage practices, we also focused on the high-leverage practice,

“Teach social skills.” Our team elaborated on the practice in the following ways:

- Teachers should teach appropriate interpersonal skills explicitly, including communication and self-management skills.
- Corrective, positive feedback must be used to teach the skill.
- Social scripts, social stories, and social clubs are excellent strategies for teaching social skills.

During our team meetings we established that our student needed explicit instruction and opportunities to demonstrate appropriate social skills. We created a social club for our entire third grade. Each third grader gets to participate and support a student who may need social skills coaching.

We shared with the general education teachers the purpose of our club and the social skills we were teaching. General education teachers have been willing participants in this endeavor. They help us in selecting students each week on a rotating format. Teaching social skills and giving positive, corrective feedback has become part of what we do in our school.

#### ***What are your next steps in enhancing knowledge and further study of high-leverage practices?***

We are expanding opportunities for social skills instruction.

#### ***What recommendations do you have for other school district leaders who may be considering introducing high-leverage practices to their staff members?***

Introduce collaboration first! Collaboration is the key to success when supporting students with disabilities. Our weekly team meetings help us communicate better as school members and with our student’s parent. We were able to set goals together and try many of the strategies across the student’s day.