

Effective, Efficient and Engaging

by John Klaber
MASE Executive Director

Where has the year gone? Whether you keep track of a school year beginning after Labor Day or a fiscal year (July 1st) we are more than half way through it. In fact, as you read this take heart that even your most challenging student may be making graduation party plans. By contrast, the challenge of anticipating and planning for staff openings should have begun. This is increasingly more important as the pool of potential candidates is becoming even more shallow. I want to challenge you to consider thinking about how we attract and keep the best educators. To that end, I want to share with you three key words and associated concepts to consider.

Effective, Efficient and Engaging.

Is what you are doing in support of students something that staff, both new and returning, recognize as effective? No one wants to be aligned to a process or system that fails to demonstrate positive outcomes for our students. Take some time to carefully consider what you are doing and make sure that it is based solely on its demonstrated effectiveness. Team members will remain on a team and be strong contributors to that team if they see themselves part of a successful and productive system. To use a sports analogy, consider how professional athletes are drawn to teams with a history of success and in some instances accept less pay. The same holds true for your teachers and staff. They want to be part of an effective program or district. Prospective candidates have the Internet to ferret out those systems recognized as highly effective. How are you spreading the news about your successes?

Is what you are having your staff do on a daily basis an efficient use of their time? Paperwork and due process activities may not be considered as representative of the most efficient parts of the workday. There is a place for it and a value to doing it well. But have you considered ways in which your staff will recognize that they are allowed to work efficiently on behalf of their students? Has technology been made available to them, as it is for their students? Have you considered how clerical support might be provided? Have you spoken with your legislator about the challenges imposed by a system that values process over product? I expected an absolute deluge of new teacher candidates from Wisconsin, but I wonder whether potential candidates considering a move are balancing the perceived volume of paperwork required of special educators in Minnesota versus

the new work and contract climate in Wisconsin.

Why do folks engage in the profession of special education instruction and services? There may be as many reasons as there are educators, but for me as a prospective employer, I was looking for an individual whose sense of self worth as a professional was intertwined with their ability to expand their knowledge and improve the lives of students with disabilities. I often found those individuals were willing to take on the most challenging of students because they felt so engaged in the learning process. They were also the same individuals who sought a role in helping to plan for and design systematic improvements in how we delivered services. So, the question is, to what extent have you helped to foster relationships that encourage and reward staff members as contributors to improve your district's system of services and supports for students with disabilities?



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As I visit with your legislators, I routinely ask them to keep those three words in mind when they consider new legislation. Will it enhance our effectiveness, improve our efficiency and help to make the profession of special educator an engaging career that attracts the best and the brightest to serve our students with disabilities? If not....don't do it!

In closing, it continues to be my privilege to serve you, the members of MASE. Our organization, like most others, relies inordinately on the efforts of a small number of individuals to create the "rising waters that raise all boats." We are fortunate to have those folks and the extent to which we can increase their numbers, we increase the effectiveness of MASE. Please consider volunteering for the various committees, task forces and opportunities to testify before the legislature...be more than a boat.

IMPACT is your newsletter and we encourage your input! If you have ideas or an article to share, please contact us at the MASE offices—(651) 789-4061 or email us at aranallo@mnasa.org.