



NCTI 2009 Innovators Conference

Podcast Interview

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Transcript

Well, I think I'll focus mainly on the technological aspects of assessments from two different vantage points: one being the technology that's used to accommodate on assessments; and then once we actually have data on special education students, the way in which we go about at Hopkins trying to help individuals who are educating those students use that data in meaningful ways to a) look at what's happening with performance, b) look at ways to predict future performance, breaking those students down into subgroups, targeting interventions, and then looking at how well those interventions are taking place over time.

So what we've done at the state level is we've been able to develop systems so that accommodations are readily reported along with student test scores. Having said that, we've been able to get some trend data. I think over time we have three to four years trend data at the state level that you can drill down by county and then to school to see exactly what is happening with those students. What we're not able to do at this point is to then further break those students down into meaningful groups to target them in terms of intervention. So what we've been working on, and what I've been working on specifically along with my colleagues, is these models of data-driven decision making. And there's been a lot of going back and forth between what is an allowable accommodation for the state assessments, what teachers are actually doing in the classroom as accommodations versus what they're actually doing on the state assessment. A lot of the accommodations that teachers would normally use in the classroom are not allowable on the state test. Right now we have a decree from our Assistant State Superintendent for special ed that, for example, the Kurzweil is the only text-to-speech reader that's available to use on the state test, when in fact we know that teachers are using a range of options in the classroom. Different devices are obviously able to use: augmentative communication devices, there's some word prediction if it doesn't actually involve reading, if it's simply to test content knowledge in science and math it's an allowable accommodation but we've spent quite a bit of time in discussion about what exactly is an accommodation versus modification, and this has been going on for about ten years now, ever since I've been at Hopkins.

I coordinate, or have coordinated the Maryland Assistive Technology Network for the last nine years and recently have focused my attention back on to the Technology for



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Educators program, which is both a masters in special education and a masters in education, both focusing on technology. And in that time we've spent a considerable amount of effort to try to increase individual IEP team members knowledge about what is an accommodation, and what's a modification, and what's an assistive technology. So that's one half of the puzzle right there. The second half has been working with the state to develop in the first five years of the project I was the director for, our Maryland online individualized education program plan. And in that time that required us to bring all 24 counties plus the Maryland School for the Blind and the Maryland School for the Deaf together to come up with one IEP that all districts would implement. Having done that, we now have a standardized process for what an accommodation and an assistive technology and a modification looks like. And in that time, at the same time as we started developing the online IEP at the state level, the state introduced the alternative Maryland State Assessment.

The Maryland state assessments and the high school assessments had been in place already, and so the question of the one percent versus two percent obviously had come up and Maryland had contracted with Pearson to develop an electronic development system – it captured students' scores essentially and helped teachers write objectives for that. And then since that time, we've moved into, last year was the first time that we've offered a modified high school assessment and a modified Maryland state assessment, and so now we actually have three different levels; we have the alternative assessment, the modified assessment, and the regular Maryland state assessments. And so now as we're beginning to track trend data on those students, I've been working with school systems in the form of cohorts to actually take a look at trend data over time, but in more creative ways than just the way the data is presented on the website, which there's a Maryland report card and it simply just states what's been happening, and so what I'm encouraging schools to do is take a different look at how to track that data, how to further break students down into subgroups so that they can be targeted. And that requires a pretty unique look at what the special education student population is, because one special education student is clearly not the same as another special education student, even with the same disability, designated disability, we've also had the same increase in population of autistic students as well. So what I've been trying to do is get schools to take a look at if in fact you were to move students, say, into least restrictive environment A, which would be a more inclusive area, what would be the appropriate range of services that would be needed to support that student. So along with the testing option comes this whole other series of interventions and services that go along with that, with assistive technology being one of the most important, in my opinion, service to be offered to increase the ability for kids to test well.