LEADERSHIP FOR
SOCIAL JUSTICE

Making Revolutions
in Education

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LEADING BEYOND DISABILITY: INTEGRATED, SOCIALLY JUST SCHOOLS AND DISTRICTS

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INTRODUCTION

Developing a vision of social justice that truly includes an understanding and awareness of disability requires a significant shift in thinking for many educators. We are socialized and indeed trained to understand disability as something that is individual, pathological, and defective. In schools, disability is typically seen as something special that must be assessed, identified, and rehabilitated as opposed to just one of the many ways people can be different from one another. Even in many schools that claim to be inclusive, students with disabilities continue to be viewed as “special,” often merely tolerated, seen as a burden, or expected to assimilate rather than supported to be active members of the classroom community.

To conceptually frame this chapter, we draw on the field of Disability Studies. Ultimately, Disability Studies challenges our perceptions of what is “normal,” or standard, regular, and usual (Davis, 1995; Ware, 2001). In contrast to common notions of disability as medical, internal, individual, immutable, deficient, and pathological, Disability Studies asserts that disability is contextual, unstable, socially constructed, and relational (Baker, 2002; Davis, 1995; Linton, 1998). That is, though students may differ by their ability to see, hear, be mobile, think, speak, or relate to others, these differences are just that—differences. These differences then become something “special” by virtue of society’s and schools’ responses to these differences. Similarly, Disability Studies perspectives can be extended to challenge our perceptions of other constructs of difference, including race and ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, home language, and social class and the implications of these perceptions on the school experiences of all students.

In communicating this Disability Studies–imbued perspective, we believe that language is important. As leaders for social justice, we use “person first” language, always
Disability Studies is a rapidly growing, multidisciplinary field. In broad terms, Disability Studies is a site of academic inquiry and political activism that seeks to understand disability as socially and culturally constructed, as opposed to something wrong with people’s bodies that must be remediated, fixed, or cured.

placing the person before the label. We refer to “students with disabilities” or, for example, “students with learning disabilities” rather than “handicapped students,” “special education students,” or “learning disabled students.” We also use the phrase “students labeled with disabilities” deliberately, as a way to show that the disability does not rest within the student but instead is a label put upon students.

In this chapter, we next address why leaders for social justice must consider students labeled with disabilities in their equity efforts. Then we offer practical examples of how students labeled with disabilities are educated in typical schools contrasted with schools where leaders are striving toward an integrated, socially just education for all students. We end the chapter by describing key common characteristics of integrated, socially just schools and districts and briefly point to initial steps educational leaders can take toward this end.

WHY LEADERS FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE NEED TO CONSIDER STUDENTS LABELED WITH DISABILITIES

Despite the considerable amount of time school leaders spend on issues associated with students labeled with disabilities, most research and literature related to educational leadership and social justice fail to meaningfully consider disability (Theoharis, 2007). In this body of literature, disability is most often treated within discussions about the overrepresentation of particular groups of students in special education. Sapon-Shevin (2003) and Theoharis (2007) are among the few researchers of social justice who address the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms. Certainly we recognize that overrepresentation of some students in special education is part of the problem and we acknowledge the importance of inclusion; however, we contend that social justice leaders must move beyond this conversation to build truly integrated, socially just schools and districts, not just for students with disabilities but for all students. To show why disability is such an important part of the social justice conversation, next we provide an overview of the conversation about overrepresentation and then go beyond to discuss some of the other problems with traditional approaches to educating students with disabilities.

Research suggests that between 10 and 12 percent of students in any school, regardless of the social class and racial demographics of that school, should have a disability requiring special education services (Scheurich & Skrla, 2003). However, many schools label much larger proportions of students with disabilities.

In addition to this all too common, general overidentification of students with disabilities, students of color and low-income students are overrepresented in special
education and are more likely to be segregated from their peers who have not been labeled with disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, 2000). Over 3 percent of students identified with disabilities in 2006 were Native American; however, Native American students made up 0.966 percent of the school-age population (IDEA Data, 2007). In the same year, African American students comprised 15 percent of school-age children in public schools. Yet they made up over 22 percent of special education referrals (IDEA Data, 2007). Moreover, African American students are more likely to be labeled with a disability as compared to students of other racial groups. In 1999–2000, 30.5 percent of African American students were identified as having a disability compared to 4 percent or less for Hispanic and Native American students (U.S. Department of Education, 2001).

In many schools, students who are English Language Learners (ELLs) are also overrepresented in special education, while in other states, their needs are ignored and they are not served well in general or special education (Klinger, Artiles, & Mendez Barletta, 2006; McCardle, Mele-McCarthy, & Leos, 2005). For example, a study of 11 California school districts suggests that, although the percentage of ELLs in the total school population declined after sixth grade, the percentage of these students identified for special education increased after tenth grade (Artiles, Rueda, Salazar, & Higareda, 2002). Research also suggests that the language program in which ELLs participate is an important variable in special education placement. That is, ELLs educated in English-immersion classes had a greater likelihood of being placed in special education settings than ELLs who participated in other language programs (Artiles, Rueda, Salazar, & Higareda, 2005).

In addition to students of color who are overrepresented in special education, low-income students are also overidentified for special education. According to Cameto (2003), 36 percent of students receiving special education services live in homes with annual incomes of $25,000 or less. When analyzing poverty levels and identification in various disability categories, Skiba, Poloni-Staudinger, Simmons, Feggins-Azziz, and Chung (2005) learned that students living in high-poverty schools were more than twice as likely as their counterparts in more affluent schools to be labeled with mental retardation. In sum, students of color and low-income students are overidentified for special education and in turn are more segregated than White, affluent students.

Certainly these facts about the overrepresentation of some students in special education are alarming. Yet at the bottom of this reaction is the question: What is wrong with labeling students with disabilities? First, we must acknowledge the undeniable proof that current approaches to special education and disability are not socially just. We need only to look at the dismal achievement, school completion, and employment outcomes for students labeled with disabilities. A glance at student achievement scores on state-mandated assessments, disaggregated by special education status, quickly reveals that students who are identified with disabilities nearly always achieve far below their peers in all content areas at all grade levels. Further, these achievement gaps generally grow as students with disabilities reach high school (see for example WINNS, 2007). In the 2005–2006 school year, of secondary students who exited special education, 15.3 percent exited due to dropping out (IDEA Data, 2007) compared to a national overall dropout rate of 9.4 percent (NCES, 2007). Of those who dropped out, students of color labeled with disabilities were disproportionately overrepresented by over 11 percent (NCES, 2007). Regarding
employment, after being out of secondary school for one year or more, only 55 percent of young adults with disabilities have a paid job outside of the home (NLTS2, 2006a) and only 23 percent attend any postsecondary institution (NLTS2, 2006b).

In addition to these bleak outcomes, students labeled with disabilities are typically segregated from their peers for at least part of the day. Although this is true for all students with disabilities, African American and Native American students tend to spend even more time in segregated educational environments. Only 41 percent of African American students labeled with disabilities receive services in a general classroom for more than 80 percent of their school day (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). Native American students labeled with disabilities tend to be even more segregated. Slightly over half (51 percent) of Native American students identified as having disabilities receive services in a general classroom (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). When noting the percentage of students placed in special education programs in California, Parrish (2002) found that 48 percent of American Indian students receive their instruction in a resource room, rather than within the general education classroom, a higher percentage than any other ethnic group. Moreover, research shows that labeling students with disabilities as a way to meet their educational needs is the most expensive and least effective option (Odden & Archibald, 2001).

Perhaps most fundamental to our discussion about the importance of addressing disability in social justice conversations is the fact that, when students are labeled with disabilities as an attempt to meet their educational needs and our understanding of disability remains unchanged, so too does the core of the school remain unchanged. When educators identify students with disabilities as in need of something “special” to remediate or fix some difference that educators believe cannot be tolerated within general education classrooms, we allow general education classrooms to be places where only some differences are tolerated, where only some students can achieve. This has powerful implications, not only for students with disabilities, but also for students whose race or ethnicity, home language, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, or even learning style differs from that supported by the dominant cultures in our schools.

By looking first to the core of the school, we can also address educators’ concerns that, in spite of the number of students being labeled and placed in special education, the “gray area” students or the “students in the middle” continue not to be served as a result of the special education system. In this sense, as long as educators can place students who

Segregated educational environments have many detrimental consequences for all students. Segregation (a) tracks and marginalizes students of color and students of lower social classes, (b) prevents access to core classroom instruction, (c) results in some students receiving services, while other students are denied services, (d) fragments a student’s day, (e) blames and labels students, (f) causes students to become fringe members of a classroom community, (g) enables educators and students not to change or take responsibility for the learning of all students, (h) prevents the transfer of educator and student knowledge back to integrated environments, (h) lacks accountability, and (i) requires schools to expend a tremendous amount of resources in determining eligibility (Frattura & Capper, 2007).
Integrated Comprehensive Services (ICS) offers one way to move toward integrated, socially just education by changing the core of the school in ways that align with social justice principles (Frattura & Capper, 2007).

struggle in special education, special education placements will enable educators not to make changes in the core functioning of the school.

Several researchers have suggested that instead of making special education “better” or “more effective,” leaders for social justice need to rethink and restructure the entire school to ensure the high academic achievement of literally all students (Burrello, Lashley, & Beatty, 2000; Frattura & Capper, 2007; Sailor, 2002). In so doing, all students can make significant achievement gains in integrated environments. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to address all aspects of an integrated, socially just education. However, in the next section, we briefly describe what we consider typical schools and districts in contrast to schools and districts that are moving in the direction of integrated, socially just schools and districts.

WHAT DO INTEGRATED, SOCially JUST SCHOOLS AND DISTRICTS LOOK LIKE?

Nearly all educators believe that their school represents an “inclusive” school. When we further inquire, however, we learn that the school continues to segregate students into resource rooms, pull-out programs, lower-track courses, or at-risk programs, to name a few. In addition, we learn that students from lower-income households, students of color, students with disabilities, and ELLs are often overrepresented in these programs and that these programs do not serve all students well. We also learn that educators sometimes cluster students with disabilities into particular classrooms and call these classrooms “inclusive” classrooms. In so doing, educators are, ironically, segregating students in the name of “inclusion.”

Many educators wish to know what exactly an integrated, socially just school or district looks like in practice. Some educators believe that such schools could be possible at the elementary level but not at the middle or high school levels, or that these practices might work for an individual school but would not work for an entire district. Some educators challenge the feasibility of an integrated, socially just education for students with severe learning or behavior challenges. We cannot address all these questions here. However, in the next section, we briefly describe a typical elementary, middle, and high school and typical district. We then respectively contrast these typical scenarios with schools and districts that are working toward integrated, socially just practices. All the descriptions refer to features of schools and districts with which we have worked; however, to protect anonymity of these settings, no description describes just one particular school or district.

A Typical Elementary School

Brook Hollow Elementary is a large, inner-city school composed of 968 students. The school is 99 percent Latino, with about 70 percent of the students qualifying for free or
reduced-price lunches. The school has struggled with meeting state academic standards for several years.

Mr. Donaldson, principal, is a former middle school history teacher in his second year at the helm of Brook Hollow. He recently attended a principals’ meeting at the district office where he and his colleagues were informed about a “push for inclusion” of students receiving special education services in each school. Mr. Donaldson immediately volunteered when the assistant superintendent asked for schools to be pilot sites for the inclusion model. Unbeknownst to other stakeholders at his school, this quick decision put Mr. Donaldson and Brook Hollow in the district administration’s good graces.

Since it is close to the end of the school year, district officials encourage the pilot sites to begin professional training sessions over the summer to be ready to implement the inclusion model in September. Mr. Donaldson informs his staff at the last faculty meeting of the year that Brook Hollow will begin full inclusion of students receiving special education services into general classrooms. He briefly informs teachers about the professional learning opportunities over the summer and tells everyone to be ready to “hit the ground running.” Most teachers are confused about what inclusion requires. Others admit that they do not feel sufficiently prepared to meet the learning needs of students with exceptionalities.

Come September, the principal meets with the curriculum specialists in language arts, mathematics, and science and the certified special education teachers to discuss their new roles as itinerant support for general education teachers. He envisions these specialists visiting classrooms for one hour a day three times per week. This way these specialists can serve students in the least restrictive environment as opposed to pulling them out for instruction. Many teachers complain that they do not understand the role of the itinerant staff in helping them meet the needs of ELLs who receive special education services. Actually, the itinerant staff is also unclear about their roles. Mr. Donaldson recalls that very few teachers took advantage of the district-sponsored professional development sessions, which he had hoped would help develop a shared sense of purpose. Instead there is lack of preparedness and an air of trepidation at attempting to engage students effectively.

As the fall semester progresses, all teachers and specialists are trying to follow their directives as best they can. Teachers are frustrated that they have no structured time during the school day to share lesson plans for the week. The ELLs receiving special education services through this model are often confused about having two teachers in the room. Some students claim to miss their self-contained classrooms and the resource room because they feel that as the support person leaves the general education class, so does their lifeline in the classroom—the general education teacher feels the same way.

Part of the problem is that there was no structured and ongoing professional learning for the teachers and staff of Brook Hollow. Teachers are unaware as to their roles in the inclusion setting. Student achievement scores begin to plummet for all students, including those of students in special education. Some of the teachers express their frustration at not meeting the needs of diverse learners by stating among each other, “See, inclusion doesn’t work.” This comment reverberates through the school into teachers’ mind-sets and belief systems.

An Integrated, Socially Just Elementary School

Eastside Elementary is located in a thriving urban center. It is a small school of 455 students who are primarily White and African American with a growing number of Latino students
who are ELLs. A small percentage of these students have also been identified to receive special education services. The principal of this small school is Ms. Martinez. She has served in this capacity for five years and has extensive experience as a teacher in the field of special education.

Ms. Martinez and the teacher representatives on her school leadership team are continuously seeking ways to better meet the needs of all students. These efforts have progressed in phases. The first phase consisted of educating administrators and teachers about effective integrative practices. At the same time all administrators and teaching staff have participated in professional learning opportunities that enhance the delivery of integrated services.

The second phase included the beginning of the reform effort. To support integrated practices, pull-out programs have been steadily decreased over several years. At Eastside, specialist teachers in special education, English as a second language (ESL), and reading collaborate with general education teachers in a variety of ways to support learner needs in the classroom.

Throughout the implementation process, continuous professional development is coordinated by Ms. Martinez. An alternative model of professional learning that the Eastside staff has engaged in is peer observation, which gives teachers the opportunity to observe each other in action with students of different ability levels. This has been especially helpful to teachers who are new to the school to gain a better understanding about differentiation of instruction. All teachers have gained an appreciation of each other’s strengths. The level of empowerment stemming from this process has proved invaluable in supporting teachers to effectively engage all learners.

Ms. Martinez hosts weekly meetings with her assistant principal and lead teachers from all grade levels. These meetings are meant to share ideas and concerns regarding the education of students in integrated learning environments. One of the most important recommendations made by this team was requesting structured time every month for joint planning time among teachers with different expertise. This includes bilingual teachers, special education teachers, and literacy teachers, among others. Joint planning sessions give teachers the opportunity to share their collective knowledge areas for the overall improvement of curriculum preparation and instructional delivery.

Teachers are not the only stakeholder group at Eastside engaged in continuous learning and planning. Parent engagement in the process has been critical. Informational sessions are held with all parents, not just with parents of children with disabilities, several times throughout the year. Topics are selected by the parents and facilitated as a collaborative effort between parents, teachers, and administrators. Some topics recently discussed were explanations of how to advocate for their children to be in integrated environments when they move on to the middle school and information on culturally responsive teaching.

A Typical Middle School

Ms. Mitchell is the principal of Northwest Middle School, which is located in a small urban setting. The student population of 753 students is comprised primarily of Latino and White students with a growing number of Hmong students categorized as ELLs.

Students who are ELLs are segregated for content area instruction. The purpose of grouping the students into smaller classes is to help them with their acquisition of English in a supervised environment. The content area ESL teacher is able to dedicate his time and
effort to making the lessons relevant for students using second-language acquisition strategies. This dedicated teacher enjoys working with this group of students in a controlled environment. Through conversations with Ms. Mitchell this teacher has come to see the value of providing ELLs with opportunities to engage with English-dominant peers and the value of exposing students to a variety of teaching styles. However, he is torn between teaching “his” kids safely within the confines of the ESL classroom and letting students learn and socialize in mixed classrooms.

Students receiving special education services at Northwest are mainstreamed into general classrooms as often as possible based on their IEP. An educational assistant travels with groups of students with disabilities from class to class, prepared to lend support as needed. Most of the content area teachers do not share their lesson plans with the educational assistant prior to class. Thus, the assistant must wait to hear the lesson alongside the students prior to providing one-on-one support.

In addition to teaching assistant support, the school also maintains a pull-out resource center where special education teachers often work with specific students on content area instruction. In this chaotic hub, students come and go as they please without a set time limit to return to their classrooms. Many teachers at Northwest have argued about the level of effectiveness of this program. Yet they believe that the best way to give students the help to be in mainstreamed classrooms is through one-on-one instruction.

Some ELLs also qualify to receive special education services, thus finding themselves segregated on two fronts. They participate in a content area ESL program to help meet their language needs, and they receive the support of the special education department assistant within these small classes. Last month, a concerned group of teachers visited with the principal and the academic coordinator to discuss options to better serve ELLs who receive special education services. They decided to create a task force that will look into alternative delivery models, specifically co-teaching between general educators and ESL and special educators.

As task force members begin sharing their goals, a small pocket of resistance emerges from teachers who are not keen on sharing the teaching duties in “their” classrooms. They prefer that special education teachers, ESL teachers, and teaching assistants support students in their classrooms but that they retain control of the curriculum and teaching.

An Integrated, Socially Just Middle School

Mr. Alvarez is in his third year as principal of Martin Middle School. This school of 812 sixth- through eighth-grade students is located in a large urban setting. The composition of students includes about equal numbers of African American, Latino, and White students with fewer Native American students. About half of the Latino population at Martin is recent immigrants from Central American countries.

To serve the needs of all students, particularly those in English language development and special education, Mr. Alvarez has implemented change toward a unique approach to service delivery and teacher teaming. At Martin, students are fully integrated into general education classrooms for the entire day. The school has no pull-out resource rooms for special education or ESL. Teams of three teachers—one special education or ESL teacher and two general education teachers—share the responsibility for delivering
high-quality content area instruction for groups of approximately 45 students. Each team of
teachers and students shares two adjoined homeroom classrooms. Students are placed in
these homerooms in heterogeneous groupings that reflect the overall demographics of the
school based on gender, race, social class, language proficiency, and disability. Although
students whose IEPs require direct service delivery from a special education teacher and
ELLs with low levels of English proficiency are clustered on teams with special education
and ELL teachers, respectively, the staff at Martin is careful that the proportion of students
with disabilities and ELLs in each classroom does not exceed the overall percentage of that
group of students in the school. Importantly, each spring, grade-level support teams schedu-
le by hand each of the school’s 812 students to a homeroom and, thus, an instructional
team. These decisions regarding classroom placement are made to ensure naturally propor-
tionate, heterogeneous groupings of students based on the input from students’ previous
teachers and the administration team.

When he began implementing this approach to teaming and service delivery, Mr. Alvarez
realized that to be effective, teachers needed time to work out the logistics and
that many teachers would be nervous about the change until they could see it working.
Mr. Alvarez recruited the sixth-grade teachers to pilot this integrated, collaborative
approach. In the first year of implementation, Mr. Alvarez worked closely with the sixth-
grade teachers, securing resources, problem solving around challenges, and celebrating
and publicizing successes.

After the pilot year, instructional design in grades 7 and 8 were also transformed
according to the new approach. In the summer before schoolwide implementation, sixth-
grade teachers took a significant role in leading professional development and planning
around this restructuring effort. Martin continues to support its approach with targeted pro-
fessional development to ensure that teachers have the “tools” that they need. This includes
knowledge of best practices for ELLs and students receiving special education services.

An important aspect of Martin’s approach to service delivery and collaboration is the
strong professional relationships teachers have developed due to increased common planning
time with their instructional teams. All students within each instructional team attend
elective and exploratory courses at the same time, leaving the three core teachers to participate
in daily team and individual planning time. Intensive planning has led to a more
streamlined and efficient use of instructional time in the classroom.

Three years after implementation of Martin Middle School’s approach to integrated
service delivery for all learners, the stakeholders evaluated its effectiveness. Students previ-
ously segregated by special instructional program expressed that they liked coming to
school. Teachers expressed that their approach to teaming has enhanced their ability to
teach increasingly diverse groups of students. The principal is pleased to see the results of
teachers working together and taking ownership for all students in the school. Enacting
change that benefits all students, especially those traditionally segregated in schools, is the
impetus for future reform efforts at Martin Middle School.

A Typical High School

Wilson High School is located in an urban district and serves approximately 1,700 students in
grades 9 through 12. Wilson has a diverse student population, with 30 percent White students.
32 percent Hispanic, 24 percent Black, and 14 percent Asian. Sixty-two percent of Wilson students qualify for free or reduced-price lunches. Between 22 and 24 percent of students are identified for special education services.

Wilson’s mission statement declares that Wilson is “committed to academic excellence.” Wilson’s student achievement scores in math exceed district and state averages, while student achievement in reading and graduation rates meet district averages and exceed state averages. In the past four years, five of the school’s students have been National Merit Finalists. Teachers at Wilson are committed to teaching and rigorous academic learning.

Wilson offers all content area courses at the regular, enriched, and honors levels. Students who are enrolled in honors courses generally do very well on Advanced Placement exams in their senior year and leave Wilson for college with many credits already under their belt. While enriched and honors courses are technically open to any student, students must receive a recommendation from their current teacher prior to enrolling in these courses the following year. Entering freshmen are placed in regular, enriched, or honors content areas courses based on the suggestion of their eighth-grade guidance counselors.

Teachers at Wilson collaborate in content area teams, with special education and ESL organized as their own departments. Four years ago, an assistant principal led an initiative to establish “freshmen houses,” in which students were grouped in cohorts, each taught by a team of content area teachers. As part of this initiative, Wilson eliminated tracked classes for ninth graders, opting to offer the enriched-level curriculum to all students. Although the initiative met with some success, the program was dismantled when the assistant principal accepted a position outside the district and teachers grappled with the lack of common planning time with other teachers in their content area. Teachers also faced pressure from families who wanted their children in honors classes.

As independent departments, the special education and ESL staffs at Wilson are highly committed to supporting students. Each department is led by a teacher who has an office in close proximity to a cluster of special education and ESL classrooms, respectively. Both of these departments are seen by the rest of the staff as experts in their fields, and general education teachers sometimes visit the lead teachers of these departments to obtain advice on working with particular students. One tenth-grade geometry teacher reports that the special education and ESL departments are a great resource, as Wilson has been working hard to mainstream as many of its students as possible into regular classes.

Wilson receives several students from outside its attendance area to attend the school’s alternative school-to-work program. In this off-campus program, students spend the morning working on online lessons to earn credit hours toward their certificate of completion. All of the students in this alternative program are in special education.

In a course she is taking at the university, Wilson’s new principal recently conducted an in-depth analysis of her school’s demographic and student achievement data. She was alarmed to find that, despite Wilson’s highly talented staff and reputation for academic excellence, students of color, ELLs, male students, and students with disabilities are disproportionately underrepresented in enriched and honors classes and that student achievement for several of these groups had actually fallen in the past five years. Having seen the successes of nearby Gibbs High School, Wilson’s principal begins planning to make some changes.
An Integrated, Socially Just High School

In grades 9 through 12, 1,867 students attend Gibbs High School. Located in an urban district, 55 percent of Gibbs’s students are White, 23 percent are African American, 11 percent are Asian, and 11 percent are Hispanic. Six languages other than English are spoken as the primary languages of 16 percent of the students at Gibbs. Just under half of the students qualify for free and reduced-price lunches. Over the past five years, between 13 and 14 percent of the students at Gibbs are identified to receive special education services.

Ms. Douglas, Gibbs’s principal, frequently acclaims that the school’s greatest asset is its teachers. She has worked hard to recruit and hire a staff that reflects the student demographics of the school, including one teacher with significant physical disabilities who uses a wheelchair and service dog. Ms. Douglas reflected on this practice by stating, “Having a diverse staff means we can come together to respond to student needs from a variety of different perspectives.”

At Gibbs, students take courses within heterogeneous grade-level teams that share the same teachers for Math, English, Science, and Social Studies. Ms. Douglas strategically assigns teachers with expertise in special education and ESL on the teams to provide support and share strategies. These teachers also take on roles as classroom teachers in core content areas and electives. Teachers work collaboratively in these teams to support all students. One teacher reports, “At Gibbs, all the students on your team are your students. It’s not like the students with IEPs are just the special ed teacher’s students, or like ELLs belong to the ELL teacher.”

Ms. Douglas explains that Gibbs’s approach to service delivery is based on three interrelated assumptions: natural proportions; access to a rich, engaging, culturally responsive curriculum; and teacher capacity. First, natural proportions refers to the fact that the demographics of students within grade-level teams, as well as in specific class sections, receiving services and participating in extracurricular activities closely reflects the natural demographics of the entire school. For example, in one section of eleventh-grade advanced English, approximately 46 percent are students of color, 14 percent are learning English as their second or third language, and 12 percent are students who also receive special education services. These percentages reflect the proportion of students with these demographics in the school.

Second, all students at Gibbs have access to a rich, engaging, culturally responsive curriculum. Gibbs educators have eliminated tracked classes (i.e., regular, advanced, and gifted) as well as segregated at-risk programming and now offer only courses that embody rigorous, student-centered learning. These classes are open and required for all students. Similarly, the staff at Gibbs develops extracurricular and support opportunities with the tenant of access to high-quality services for all students in mind. Two years ago, Gibbs transformed a tutoring center that was previously available only for students in special education into a writing center that is now accessible to all students.

The third tenet of Gibbs’s approach to service delivery is teacher capacity. According to Gibbs’s principal, all decisions about hiring, teacher placement, and professional development are centered on how to best build the capacity of all of Gibbs’s teachers to work with a diverse range of learners. Although Gibbs teachers do have opportunities to develop professional content knowledge with other teachers in their content areas, the
keystone to building teacher capacity is grade-level teaming. By teaming teachers with specialized expertise, for example, in ESL or special education, with content area teachers and vice versa, teachers become each other’s best resource for professional development. Additionally, the principal now hires only teachers who are dually certified in special education, bilingual education, or ESL or willing to become so and has supported many teachers to return to school to receive dual certification. Dually certified teachers are key to developing the local expertise in the building and allow for more flexible placement of students in inclusive classrooms.

Teachers at Gibbs express that they had initial concerns about many of the changes involved in their approach to socially just education, particularly abandoning content area teams for grade-level teams across the content areas. They also point out that student achievement levels and graduation rates at Gibbs are higher than they have ever been. One teacher happily shares, “Now I feel more comfortable differentiating instruction for kids with disabilities and using some ESL strategies. Really that makes me a better teacher for all the students in my room.”

A Typical School District

Hartland School District (HSD) is an urban district with 25 elementary, 6 middle, and 4 high schools. HSD serves approximately 65 percent White students and 35 percent students of color. Just over 45 percent of the district’s students qualify for free and reduced-price lunches, and 15 percent of the students are ELLs.

Fueled by concerns about the achievement of students with disabilities and the disproportionate representation of students of color in special education, HSD has been making efforts to provide more inclusive educational experiences for students with disabilities. According to HSD’s five-year strategic plan, “It is our goal to meet the needs of our students guided by the individual needs of students.” Nine of the district’s elementary schools and one middle school have also included similar statements in their school missions.

As part of this initiative, the district has provided several professional development sessions on inclusion to special education teachers. Led by the district director of special education, these sessions have addressed why inclusion is good for all students, differentiating instruction in the general education classroom, and co-teaching with general education teachers. The director of special education also brought in a consultant to speak at one of the monthly principal meetings about the benefits of inclusion. Many of the principals were excited about this new direction and district support for inclusion but left the training session feeling overwhelmed and unclear on how it could work at their schools, especially for students with severe learning or behavior challenges.

At the school level, HSD’s move toward inclusion for all students has been met with varying amounts of success. Although the district has identified classrooms that are indeed models for inclusive practices, many special education teachers still work with students in resource rooms and self-contained, categorical classes. On a recent tour of one elementary school with a reputation for being inclusive, the superintendent observed many special education teachers who were working in the general education classroom, yet some only interacted with the students with disabilities. The district continues to operate a magnet school for students who are ELLs.
One district-level administrator recently suggested eliminating several special programs for at-risk youth, reasoning that if the district’s schools are truly inclusive, funding for the support of all students should flow to general education classrooms and professional development. One program on the chopping block was an off-campus, computer-based center for high school students with disabilities. The proposal to cut these programs met significant resistance from the teachers, principals, and families, all of whom were concerned that without these programs students’ needs would not be met and were uneasy about the prospect of providing specialized services in general education classrooms. In the fallout of this proposal, the district quickly found that segregated programs as a remedy for student needs that are not met in the general education classroom are deeply embedded in the district culture and, thus, difficult to change.

Serving students in integrated classrooms is certainly on the radar in HSD; however, district administrators are frustrated with the inconsistent way it has been implemented at the school level. Student achievement data reflect that students with disabilities in HSD are still struggling in all content areas and the proportion of students of color identified with disabilities has decreased by only 1 percent in the last five years. Additionally alarming are data that show that ELLs are struggling in math and reading as well. Upon reflecting about the success of implementing integrated education in his district, the superintendent replies, “Personally I think inclusion has a lot of potential to benefit students. I’d like to see all of our schools being fully inclusive, but really some do it, some don’t.”

**An Integrated, Socially Just School District**

Serving approximately 3,400 students in 2007 from early childhood through grade 12, Washington Public Schools (WPS) is located in a small town of about 12,500 residents. WPS is made up of three elementary schools, one intermediate school (grades 5 and 6), one middle school (grades 7 and 8), and one high school. WPS operates in a predominately White, middle-class community but the district has enrolled an increasing number of Latino students who are ELLs.

Motivated by rising identification rates of students with disabilities, a desire to increase student achievement, and dissatisfaction with its current model of service delivery, WPS undertook a major initiative toward Integrated Comprehensive Services (Frattura & Capper, 2007) for all students. In WPS, all students receive an education in general education classrooms with meaningful access to age-appropriate curriculum regardless of disability, English language proficiency, social class, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, gender, or any categorizations of difference. Students in WPS attend their neighborhood schools, and the district does not operate any special schools or magnet schools for students with disabilities, ELLs, or students identified as talented and gifted. As has been highlighted in the school-level cases, adopting this approach meant substantial changes for WPS in where services were delivered, the role of educators, how general curriculum is made accessible to all students, and how schools approach funding.

Making the shift from a traditionally fragmented, program-based system has taken WPS five years and continues to be a work in progress. Initially critical to this transition was the vision of the superintendent and her ability to invest other district leaders in her philosophy. The superintendent first introduced her vision as part of the district’s five-year
strategic plan and then established a district-level committee to explore this vision. After developing a shared understanding, committee members were charged with spreading the word and spearheading efforts in professional development to prepare for implementation.

Adopting an integrated, socially just approach to service delivery at the district level required significant changes in fiscal and human resources systems. WPS now centralizes several functions that were formally left up to building leaders, such as textbook adoption and purchasing, and all projects are processed at the district level through an advisory committee to avoid fragmented programming and ensure alignment with district goals. This advisory committee is made up of individuals from the school system and the community who represent the student and family demographics of the district. The committee includes individuals with disabilities as well as representatives from other traditionally excluded groups. The district takes an active role in recruiting a diverse, highly qualified teaching force that is committed to social justice. One of their strategies for doing so is publicizing open teaching positions with disability advocacy and other civil rights organizations. The district also directly supports professional development by allocating district resources for common meeting time to develop teacher capacity to meet the diverse needs of students.

Although the district retains much control over functions such as budgeting, school administrators are at the same time afforded considerable flexibility in other areas. Once the budget reaches the school site, principals have considerable discretion in determining how to use their allocation rather than being confined to a particular line of funding. Building-level administrators are supported to work creatively within human resources structures to decrease class sizes and build instructional capacity. For example, principals may convert allocations for educational aids to hire more certified classroom teachers.

Since moving toward integrated service delivery, WPS has seen a decrease in the proportion of students identified for special education and encouraging increases in student achievement in math and reading. Despite its successes, WPS continues to refine its approach to educating all students in heterogeneous learning environments. District leaders understand that continual improvement is part of the process and articulate this message to other members of the school community.

COMMON CHARACTERISTICS OF INTEGRATED, SOCIALLY JUST SCHOOLS AND DISTRICTS

Across the schools and district examples in our vignettes, several lessons emerge. Here we discuss four key themes in particular.

First, integrated, socially just practices benefit all students, not just students labeled with disabilities. Rather than seeking to “fix” special education, these school and district leaders sought to redesign the core instructional practices of the school, not only for students with disabilities but for all students, including ELLs. These leaders’ actions toward more socially just, integrated schools are not constrained by the many federal and state laws and regulations regarding students labeled with disabilities. In fact, leaders for social justice who are clear about their equity vision leverage any federal and state policy toward this end (Frattura & Capper, 2007; Scheurich & Skrla, 2005). They neither use policy as an excuse nor accept it as a barrier to their leadership. Likewise, when leaders are unclear
LESSONS FOR EDUCATIONAL LEADERS FROM INTEGRATED, SOCIALLY JUST SCHOOLS AND DISTRICTS

1. Integrated, socially just practices benefit ALL students.
2. Student classroom placement and participation in extracurricular groups must reflect natural proportions of students in the overall school population.
3. Leaders must work actively to recruit and hire a high-quality, diverse teaching force and to support all teachers' instructional capacity.
4. ALL students must have access to rigorous, differentiated, culturally responsive instruction.
5. Leaders must maintain a strong vision of socially just education and work to invest stakeholders in that vision.
6. Moving toward integrated, socially just education requires a purposeful plan for implementation.
7. In seeking inclusive, integrated, socially just schools and districts, leaders' commitment cannot stop at disability but must include all students who may be marginalized based on some perception of difference.

about their social justice principles or how those are applicable to special education, regardless of law or policy, students labeled with disabilities will continue to be segregated and miseducated and leaders will not see the contradictions between their practice and social justice leadership principles.

Second, in the vignettes we presented, students are assigned to heterogeneous classrooms in numbers that reflect their proportion in the school. That is, students with disability labels (or ELL students) are not clustered in particular classrooms in proportions that exceed the natural proportion of that group in the overall school population.

Third, the classroom teachers are the instructional experts in these schools. Thus, a key goal of school leaders is to develop the capacity of all teachers to be able to teach across different student learning needs. The school leaders hired teachers who held more than one teaching license in general education, special education, bilingual education, reading education, or ESL. In addition, they facilitated ongoing, embedded professional development by providing time for teachers to collaborate on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis in addition to providing teachers opportunities to increase their expertise via courses and workshops. These leaders went beyond traditional co-teaching teams and instead assigned specialists to teams of general educators with the sole purpose of developing the capacity of the general educator.

Fourth, the leaders' key to raising student achievement was ensuring that all teachers taught via a rigorous, standards-based, differentiated, culturally responsive curriculum and pedagogy. In contrast and with good intentions, many educators today are rushing to implement intervention on top of intervention to provide supplemental support to students who are struggling. We have heard principals claim that they provide many interventions to struggling students in their school, but, because of the number of struggling students, are running out of staff to implement the interventions. A social justice leader's response to this
Service delivery teams at the grade, school, and district levels support the implementation of integrated, socially just educational environments. These teams share decision making regarding staff design and student placement to build teacher capacity and maximize student learning in integrated educational settings.

quandary is that educators should not take pride in their list of interventions. If the school was providing high-quality instruction in the first place, in the context of an integrated, social justice perspective, as described, the need for such interventions would dramatically decrease. The most important "intervention" needed is high-quality, rigorous, culturally responsive instructional practices.

To move toward integrated, socially just schools and districts, educational leaders first create a service delivery team at the school and district levels. One of the first tasks of this team is to conduct an equity audit (Chapter 14; Frattura & Capper, 2007) and to map the current and future ways that students and staff can be assigned in alignment with the principles of integrated, socially just education for all students.

CONCLUSION: LEADING BEYOND DISABILITY

In sum, our conceptual framework for this chapter as well as the underlying framework for an integrated, socially just education is grounded in the field of Disability Studies. This framework offers an alternative perspective for leaders for social justice as they address not only disability but also other constructs of difference, including race and ethnicity, gender, social class, and sexual orientation. This perspective challenges our perceptions about what is normal and shows us that normalcy, difference, and disability are constructed by the social and cultural contexts within our schools. Given this perspective, educators carry primary responsibility for constructing loving, responsive, integrated school environments where all students can achieve. To be true leaders for social justice, we must remember that there are many ways to learn, know, teach, and interact. When we as school leaders challenge what a school community accepts as normal, we open up new possibilities for community, participation, and empowerment for students, families, and educators alike.

CLASS ACTIVITIES

1. On newsprint, students make a list of all the programs their school or district offers to students who struggle. They then list all the ways to prevent student struggle in the first place. Then they share their list with another student at the same school level (e.g., elementary, middle, high), noticing which list is longer. Students then share what struck them from their paired discussion with the rest of the class.

2. Students compare their school/district to the vignettes described in the chapter and evaluate where their school is along a continuum of segregated practices to integrated, socially just