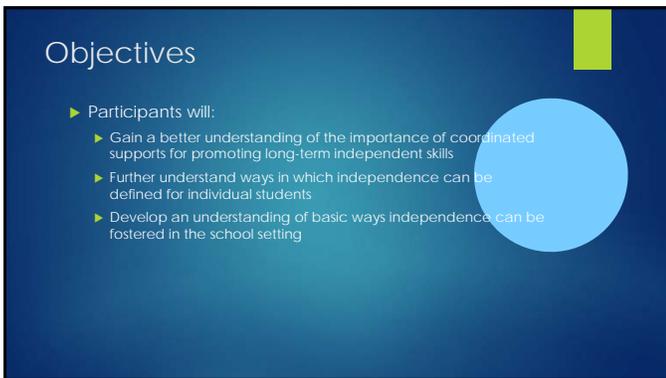# It Takes a Village:
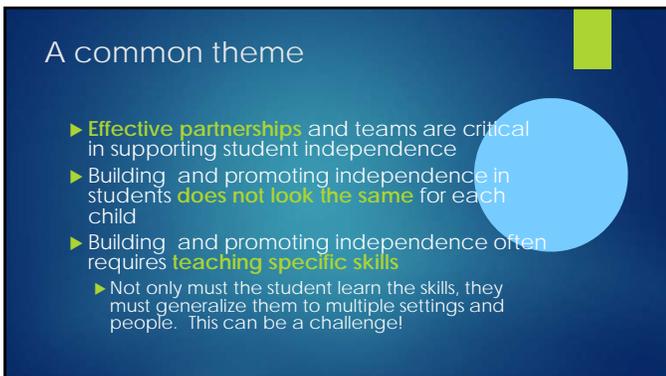## Promoting Independence for All Learners

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PORTIONS ADAPTED FROM BLUE VALLEY SCHOOLS AND OLATHE PUBLIC SCHOOLS INDEPENDENCE MATERIALS

Objectives

▶ Participants will:
  ▶ Gain a better understanding of the importance of coordinated supports for promoting long-term independent skills
  ▶ Further understand ways in which independence can be defined for individual students
  ▶ Develop an understanding of basic ways independence can be fostered in the school setting

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A common theme

▶ **Effective partnerships** and teams are critical in supporting student independence
▶ Building and promoting independence in students **does not look the same** for each child
▶ Building and promoting independence often requires **teaching specific skills**
  ▶ Not only must the student learn the skills, they must generalize them to multiple settings and people. This can be a challenge!

District-Wide Independence Initiatives: Things We Know

- Some students require intensive supports across their day for safety or due to medical issues.
- Paras, special education, and general education staff work hard and have the best interest of students at heart.
- Some students could be more independent than they are currently allowed to be.

What We Can Do

- Promote independence in our students.
- Identify where students can be more independent or use naturally occurring supports.
- Identify and provide adequate resources for students who must have additional adult supports.

A Process, Not an Event

- Student independence is a worthy goal
- It doesn't happen over night
- There is an element of teaching when promoting student independence
- Independence does not mean the same thing for everyone student

What are the desired results?

- Beginning with the end in mind:
  - **Preparing** students for transition to the next environment within the district and beyond high school with **increased independence** skills
- Doing WITH, not FOR
  - Special education teachers move **from externally managing** student academics and behavior through para support **to directly teaching** appropriate behavior and essential skills in the special education setting (to generalize to the classroom)
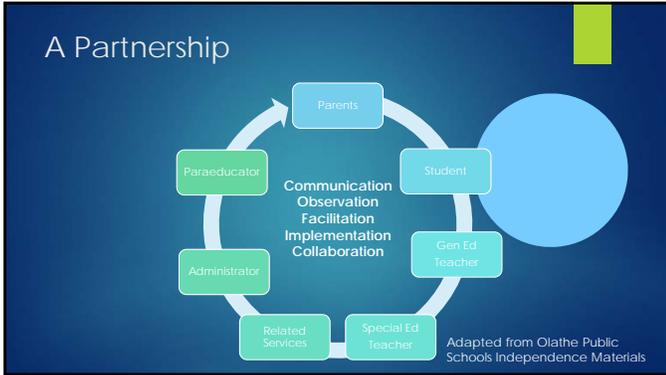
A Mindset

- *A major hurdle in creating independence is the mind set of adults. It is much easier to assist a student than to promote independence. We must stay focused on the student's independence consistently and the bigger picture must be considered at all times.*

  - Anita Haines

Who do we have in the audience?

- Parents?
- General Education Teachers?
- Special Education Teachers?
- Speech Language Pathologists?
- Occupational Therapists?
- Other Related Services?
- Administrators?
- Paraeducators?
- Others?

A Partnership

Parents

Paraeducator

Student

**Communication
Observation
Facilitation
Implementation
Collaboration**

Administrator

Gen Ed
Teacher

Related
Services

Special Ed
Teacher

Adapted from Olathe Public
Schools Independence Materials

A Partnership, Continued

▶ Key aspects of team member roles forging effective partnerships:
  ▶ Collaborative and Efficient
  ▶ Outcomes-Driven
  ▶ Balanced Approach

Roles of team members SHOULD	Roles of team members SHOULD NOT
Be grounded in **collaborative** teamwork based on **shared purpose** and goals	Be based on **disjointed** approaches based on individual purposes or separate goals
Be consistent with their respective skills, knowledge, training, and certification/licensure to engage in tasks they are **qualified** to undertake	Include engaging in tasks for which they are **inadequately qualified**
Be **complementary**, synergistic, and based on **evidence-based practices**	Be **contradictory**, working at cross-purposes, or **lack an evidence base**

Collaborative and Efficient

Giangreco, M., Suter, J., Graf, V. (n.d.) Roles of Team Members Supporting Students with Disabilities in Inclusive Classrooms. Inclusive *Special Education Service Delivery*

Roles of team members SHOULD

Contribute to positive outcomes for students with disabilities such as:
- classroom membership
- achievement of individually appropriate learning outcomes
- positive peer relationships
- access to increasing opportunities

Roles of team members SHOULD NOT

Interfere with positive outcomes by inadvertently creating barriers to membership, access to inclusive settings, achievement, peer relationships, or other opportunities available to students without disabilities

Outcomes-Driven

Giangreco, M., Suter, J., Graf, V. (n.d.) Roles of Team Members Supporting Students with Disabilities in Inclusive Classrooms. Inclusive *Special Education Service Delivery*

Roles of team members SHOULD

Result in **equitable opportunities** for students with disabilities including **participation** in class/school activities and environments and **access** to:
- instruction from highly qualified teachers and **special educators**
- the **general education** curriculum
- **appropriately** modified/adapted curriculum and instruction
- **necessary** supports

Roles of team members SHOULD NOT

Result in **inequitable**, though unintended, double standards, including:
- restricted involvement in class/school activities and environments
- inadequate access to instruction from highly qualified teachers and special educators
- inadequately modified/adapted curriculum and instruction
- **inadequate** or **unnecessary** supports

Balanced Approach

Giangreco, M., Suter, J., Graf, V. (n.d.) Roles of Team Members Supporting Students with Disabilities in Inclusive Classrooms. Inclusive *Special Education Service Delivery*

ISLAND IN THE MAINSTREAM
MRS. JONES AND MRS. COOPER ARE STILL TRYING TO FIGURE OUT WHY FRED DOESN'T FEEL LIKE PART OF THE CLASS.

Independence might mean…

- …in the general education classroom 100% of the time.
  - And it might not.
- …completing tasks without adult support.
  - And it might not.
- …demonstrating functional life skills.
  - And it might not.
- …demonstrating a skill with minimally invasive prompting.
  - And it might not.

What does independence look like to you?

- Pick one picture that looks like independence to you
  - Not necessarily the "most" independent – just one that represents independence for you
- Why does that represent independence to you?
  - Share with the person next to you
  - Be prepared to share with the group if you are comfortable

What do we want students to do?

- ▶ Work independently on a task
- ▶ Self-advocate
- ▶ Ask questions
- ▶ Engage in the class activity
- ▶ Attend to the teacher
- ▶ Self-regulate their behavior
- ▶ Transition

"Ultimately, the goal of academic and social skill instruction is to enable the student to function independent of external or teacher-mediated interventions and control." *(p.508)*

Wolery, Bailey, and Sugai (1988)

Independence Obstacles

- ▶ Overuse of adult assistance
- ▶ Time (it's easier/faster to do it myself)
- ▶ Lack of a systematic plan
- ▶ Lack of ongoing communication
- ▶ Lack of staff training
- ▶ Lack of self esteem, motivation, and/or confidence
- ▶ Lack of experiences or opportunity to generalize

Independence Enhancers

- ▶ Risk-taking / allowing student to make mistakes
- ▶ Plan for fading support
- ▶ Peer support
- ▶ Positive atmosphere
- ▶ Family involvement – in IEP process, parent training, understanding of the disability
- ▶ Self-determination skills
- ▶ Assistive technology
- ▶ Behavioral and instructional strategies

Building Independence 4 Square

Think of a student who could benefit from increased independence.	Are there specific obstacles to achieving independence for this student?
What "enhancers" exist to increasing their independence?	How did you know what these obstacles and enhancers were?

Student Independence Profile

- ▶ A tool to assist teams with determining the amount of support the student is currently receiving and to recognize the area(s) where assistance can be faded.

Team Use of the Profile

► Examine:
- ► Which areas are creating the greatest barriers for the student's independence
  - ► Transitions?
  - ► Specific academic content?
  - ► Completing task?
  - ► Mobility?
- ► What skill deficits are limiting the student's independence?
  - ► Ability to follow classroom rules?
  - ► Attending to instruction?
  - ► Curriculum demands in a specific class?
  - ► Dangerous behavior?

Student Independence Profile

Skill areas assessed:
- ► Finds Place
- ► Maintains Place
- ► Manages School Related Belongings
- ► Uses Materials Appropriately
- ► Attends to Instruction
- ► Responds to Instruction
- ► Participates in Task/Activity
- ► Completes Task
- ► Terminates Task
- ► Follows Classroom Rules
- ► Academic Independence

Barriers Assessed
- ► Interpersonal Relationships
- ► Exhibits Dangerous Behaviors
- ► Eating
- ► Grooming
- ► Dressing
- ► Toileting
- ► Mobility
- ► Transfers

Skills Example

MANAGES SCHOOL RELATED BELONGINGS

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE		INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITIES		LUNCH	TRANSITIONS WITHIN CLASSROOM		TRANSITIONS FROM ONE CLASS TO ANOTHER	ELECTIVES		OTHER/ COMMENTS
SPED	GEN ED	SPED	GEN ED		SPED	GEN ED		SPED	GEN ED	

Rating 0 - Student brings school related belongings to class and keeps them in their proper place, in an orderly fashion.
Rating 1 - Student needs reminders to bring school-related belongings to class and/or to keep them in their proper place, in an orderly fashion.
Rating 2 - Student seldom remembers to bring school-related belongings to class. If brought, materials are often out of place and messy.
Rating 3 - Student consistently forgets to bring school-related belongings to class. If brought, they are usually out of place and messy.

Skills Example

FINDS PLACE

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE		INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITIES		LUNCH	TRANSITIONS WITHIN CLASSROOM		TRANSITIONS FROM ONE CLASS TO ANOTHER	ELECTIVES		OTHER/ COMMENTS
SPED	GEN ED	SPED	GEN ED		SPED	GEN ED		SPED	GEN ED	

Rating 0 - Student locates where he/she is supposed to be in the school, classroom and nonacademic settings.
Rating 1 - Student needs cues and/or assistance to find his/her place in the school, classroom and nonacademic settings.
Rating 2 - Student seldom is able to locate where he/she is supposed to be without verbal cues and occasional physical assistance.
Rating 3 - Student cannot locate where he/she is supposed to be without consistent help from staff both verbal and physical.

Skills Example

ACADEMIC INDEPENDENCE

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE		INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITIES		LUNCH	TRANSITIONS WITHIN CLASSROOM		TRANSITIONS FROM ONE CLASS TO ANOTHER	ELECTIVES		OTHER/ COMMENTS
SPED	GEN ED	SPED	GEN ED		SPED	GEN ED		SPED	GEN ED	

Rating 0 – Student is able to participate in the general curriculum with little or no differentiated instruction or accommodations to the curriculum.
Rating 1 – Student is able to participate in the general curriculum with occasional differentiated instruction and accommodations to the curriculum.
Rating 2 - Student is able to participate in the general curriculum with daily differentiated instruction/accommodations/modifications to the curriculum.
Rating 3 - Student is not able to participate in the general curriculum without complete modification **OR** requires instruction based on essential elements

Barriers Example

Transfers	**Rating 0** - Student is able to transfer independently with age-appropriate skills. Physical presence of a staff is not needed for safety during transfers (Note: Supervision may be appropriate for EC and early elementary students). **Rating 1** - Student requires only minimal assistance for some transfers. **Rating 2** - Student requires moderate assistance in most transfers. **Rating 3** - Student is completely dependent on another when transferring.

Barriers Example

Interpersonal Relationships	Rating 0 - Student acts age-appropriately when interacting with peers and adults; and/or student is accepted by others or knows how to interact with peers and adults. Rating 1 - Student will occasionally do or say some things that offend or "turn off" peers or adults with whom he is interacting -and/or- will not know the way to interact with peers and adults and will at times offend them. Rating 2 - Student seldom interacts in an appropriate manner with peers or adults and is often rejected by them -and/or- seldom knows the appropriate way to interact with peers and adults and is frequently isolated from them. Rating 3 - Student does not act appropriately with peers or adults -and/or- does not know how to interact appropriately with peers and adults and is socially isolated.

Barriers Example

Mobility	Rating 0 - Student moves age-appropriately through the environment without assistance or supervision. Rating 1 - Student needs stand-by assistance such as holding hand, support going up/down curbs or steps or occasional assistance with wheelchair on uneven surfaces. Rating 2 – Student has limited participation in controlling or propelling wheelchair or requires significant stabilization and weight support in order to walk. Rating 3 - Student is completely dependent on another for mobility needs or needs consistent supervision.

Independence Profile

- Does anything strike you?
- Many areas assessed: Success in school is more than only academic progress – it is an important piece, but not the only piece.
- Would you add more? Take any away?
- Other ways of measuring independence?

Guiding Questions for Teams

► Which areas are creating the greatest barriers for the student's independence (ex: transitions? Specific academic content? completing tasks? mobility? etc.)?

► What skill deficits are limiting the student's independence (ex: ability to follow classroom rules? attending to instruction? curriculum demands in a specific class? dangerous behavior? etc.)?

► What are some potential IEP goals for explicit instruction that could be written to increase student independence?

► In what areas might adult support be faded now?

► What natural supports might be put in place of adult support to increase student independence (ex: assistance from a peer? involvement of the general education teacher? visual schedule? Co-teaching? etc.)?

General Education Teachers

► Teachers contribute to the education of students with disabilities in inclusive schools and classrooms and demonstrate educational ownership by:
  ► CO-create inclusive opportunities
    ► Environment
    ► Curriculum
    ► Universal Design for Learning
    ► Paraeducator direction
  ► Role model for acceptance and inclusion as well as problem solving strategies
  ► Know individual student needs in general and special education
  ► Engage all students
  ► Facilitate social interactions

Special Education Teachers

► Special educators contribute to the education of students with disabilities in inclusive schools and classrooms by:
  ► CO-create inclusive opportunities
    ► Environment
    ► Curriculum
    ► Universal Design for Learning
    ► Paraeducator direction
  ► Maintain working knowledge of curriculum (general and special education)
  ► Monitor student progress frequently to assess for opportunities for increased independence
  ► Provide direct instruction and support generalization

Paraeducators

- ► Paraprofessionals contribute to the education of students with disabilities in inclusive schools and classrooms and help create opportunities for classroom teachers and special educators to spend time instructing students with disabilities and collaborating with each other by:
    - ► Implementing secondary instruction
    - ► engaging in classwide instructional monitoring of student work when appropriate
    - ► collecting data
    - ► Assisting students who require personal care supports
    - ► Support/facilitate peer interactions

Related Service Providers

- ► Related services providers contribute to the education of students with disabilities in inclusive schools and classrooms by:
    - ► Providing supports that have been determined by a student's educational team to be educationally relevant
    - ► Providing supports that allow for student access or participation
    - ► Selecting or developing adaptive equipment that allows for access, active participation, or prevents negative outcomes
    - ► Consulting with team members to transfer information and skills
    - ► Working directly with students
    - ► Working with team members to determine when supports should be continued, modified, faded, or discontinued based on relevant student data

Students and Parents

- ► Students with disabilities and their parents contribute to the education of the student with a disability in the family within an inclusive school and classrooms by:
    - ► Developing an understanding of the student's strengths, interests, and needs
    - ► Offering information and insights to the team
    - ► Identifying or selecting a set of the highest learning priorities for the year
    - ► Making informed decisions about choices within the general education program and curriculum
    - ► Helping to identify supports necessary for student success
    - ► Monitoring student progress and applying learned skills to nonschool settings (e.g., home, community)
    - ► Communicating key information to the team
    - ► Playing a prominent role in long-range educational and transition planning

Together, we can…

- Give greater consideration to alternatives to paraeducator/adult support
  - Peer supports
  - Modifications and accommodations
- Include a goal for independence in the IEP if the team determines that a student needs adult support
  - Keep in mind what "independence" means for the student
- Collect and examine data to support the discontinuation, continuation or addition of adult support
- Develop a fade plan to be included in the IEP, when appropriate for a student receiving adult support
  - Keep in mind what "independence" means for the student and what would be reasonable to fade
- **Presume ability**: challenging adequately and supporting effectively

Tips for Educators
How to support instruction, foster independence, and discourage learned helplessness

- Promote Peer Relationships / Avoid Isolation
- Maintain Student Dignity
- Let Students Make Mistakes / Take Risks
- Help Students Create Authentic Work
- Set up the Environment / Plan Ahead
- Multi-task in the Classroom
- Step Back

Quick Strategies: STEP BACK

- **S**it further away. If you've been within arm's reach, move just within earshot. If you've been within earshot, sit across the room.
- **T**ake data instead. Keep a tally of the number of times in a lesson student appropriately attends.
- **E**nlist peer support for tasks such as making a lunch choice, finding the correct page, or putting away materials.
- **P**ause before answering or helping.

Quick Strategies: STEP BACK

- ▶ **S**e sure to include other team members in the plan for increasing independence. What is the time frame? What are the specific skills? What is the measure for determining when they are independent?
- ▶ **A**cknowledge your impulse to make the student's days go smoothly. There is a reason you are in education.
- ▶ **C**lock how long it takes the student to do things independently. It may seem eternal, but is actually a very short time.
- ▶ **K**eep asking yourself, "Could I be doing less for them?" to remind you to step back.

A common theme…Revisted

- ▶ **Effective partnerships** and teams are critical in supporting student independence
- ▶ Building and promoting independence in students **does not look the same** for each child
- ▶ Building and promoting independence often requires **teaching specific skills**
  - ▶ Not only must the student learn the skills, they must generalize them to multiple settings and people. This can be a challenge!

Thank you!