Increased population and diversity in our Nation and in our state demand more and differently trained special education leaders/administrators. The field of special education has been in a state of continual transition and debate about the best way to implement special education services since the federal government first passed legislation mandating special education in 1975.

Federal legislation addresses the required procedures for providing a free and appropriate education for students with disabilities. However, the rules and regulations do not specify how educational agencies are to proceed. Today, teachers and administrators in the United States are challenged by the many changes mandated by the 2004 Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002.

To gather a diverse perspective on these changes in education and their impact on special education leadership, we invited four Arizona special education leaders to join us in responding to a series of questions about educational change and leadership. We chose experienced special education leaders with diverse backgrounds personally, educationally, and professionally from different districts implementing various special education models (Maria Berecin-Rascon–Casa Grande Elementary School District, Dr. Richard Faidley–Amphitheatre Unified School District, Sue Tillis–Sunnyside Unified School District and Leila Williams–Tucson Unified School District). We then summarized, collated, and categorized their responses with ours for this article.

What Has Changed In Special Education In Recent Years?

Increased Standards

Higher performance standards and expectations have been established for successful learning outcomes.

Increased accountability has been placed on teachers for assessing the performance and progress of both general and special education students.

More rigorous certification requirements

Continued on page 7
**President's Point!**

**Making A Habit Of Leading By Positive Design!**

**DR. CHRISTY CHAMBERS**

During the first three years of my Superintendency, our special education joint agreement, the Special Education District of McHenry County, experienced significant governance and operational change. SEDOM is a joint agreement of the eighteen (18) districts in the county in Northern Illinois. We act as an extension of the districts by providing services, training, assessments and other supports where needed. For thirty-five (35) years, the joint agreement had operated as it had when first created in 1965.

In 2003 we embarked upon a deliberative planning process to meet the current needs of our districts. The result was dramatic change in programs and services. Many staff were transferred to district employment. Staff were uncertain about their futures and retaining staff was a challenge as there was fear there would not be a position for everyone in our future design. We worked diligently to increase the capacity of our member districts to serve a wider range of students locally and at the same time our districts were experiencing significant population growth. We knew there were jobs for everyone, but the staff needed encouragement, recognition and assurance they were doing a good job and they were needed at SEDOM. We needed a plan.

We had noticed that we are contacted when something does not go as planned or there is a concern, but when things run smoothly and services are provided as expected, the phones are quiet. To ensure administrators and all staff members are recognized and appreciated for their work, we have been implementing several strategies over the past year. We began making a special point of recognizing our staff to reassure them they were valued and to foster motivation.

Previously we were recognizing staff on a monthly basis with a Board Salute. Although we were recognizing staff nominated by their supervisors, or anyone, really, we had noticed not everyone enjoyed being singled out from the group. We started brainstorming additional ways to recognize staff individually. I have always written birthday cards for all of my staff. In those cards, I have tried to write a specific note recognizing something positive for each staff member. To help me with meaningful notes, all administrators began making it a point to send positive notes to staff members every month-copying the note to me.

Another strategy that seems to be very much appreciated is leaving a positive voice mail at the end of the work day. On my way home from the office, I make it a point to take out my cell phone and leave at least one message recognizing someone’s work. Of course, the message has to be specific and meaningful. I make sure not to praise ordinary performance. Recognition is more powerful when only excellence is acknowledged. Each time I have left a message, the individual has expressed how receiving a message of recognition and appreciation marked the beginning of a great day! It is important to not just remember birthdays. I have a stack of both note cards and birthday cards made by our student printing enterprise. The students are amazed at the volume of cards they have to print for me!

While email has its purposes, I never use it for the positive notes. I want the recipient to know the note was important enough for me to put in some extra effort. An idea that may sound a little silly but helps us remember to praise and in turn motivate people is to put three or four pennies in your pocket each day. Take one penny out each time you send a note or praise one of your staff. Be sure to empty your pocket every day! It’s all about creating the habit, the habit of meaningful, positive feedback to staff. We get so busy and so occupied with the paper shuffle or with putting out fires. As a leader, recognizing and motivating our staffs should be foremost in our minds and actions. I began this process by recognizing my administrators and these administrators then began “paying it forward” with a domino effect we hope continues to be effective and infectious!

In education, we certainly don’t have the funds for bonuses or company gifts and incentives. We have to show our staff we notice the work they do and then we must recognize excellence!

A good leader recognizes and motivates their staff. Great leaders do it every day.

Dr. Christy Chambers is the Superintendent of the Special Education District of McHenry County, Illinois. She is also the current president of CASE and is very active in her state CASE organization, IAASE.

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**SEE YOU THERE!**
Avoiding Legal Disputes In Special Education
Five Training Points For Administrators
(First In A Series Of Training Points)

JULIE J. WEATHERLY

Unfortunately, mistakes occur in the process of developing IEPs and implementing educational programs for students with disabilities. Intended or not, many of these mistakes can lead to mistrust on the part of parents that is likely to culminate in a legal dispute. Administrators should ensure that all school personnel are trained to appropriately participate in the development and implementation of IEPs and to do their best to avoid making mistakes, particularly those that may be fatal to a school district’s position that FAPE has been provided. The following five “No-No’s” are particularly important for Administrators to keep in mind as they demonstrate leadership by training their staff to implement the requirements of the IDEA.

No-No #1: Impeding Sufficient Parental Opportunity to Participate in the Decision Making Process

A “predetermination of placement” will not only cause a parent to lose trust in school staff, it may very well lead to a finding of a denial of FAPE. “Predetermination of placement” could include action such as fully developing and finalizing an IEP prior to a meeting with the parents and asking them to sign without discussion. Denial of parental participation or sufficient input might also be reflected if proper notice is not provided to parents of relevant information with respect to issues such as complete evaluation results or proposed placement. Possible “No-No” scenarios to avoid would include school staff meeting prior to the IEP meeting, completing the IEP, and leaving the special education teacher to present the IEP at a later time to the parents. Similarly, it may appear to be a predetermination if school personnel arrive at the annual IEP meeting with the IEP completed in full and ready to be signed by the parent. Draft IEPs, if developed, should be presented and explained to the parent to be a draft that is for discussion purposes only.

No-No #2: Making Recommendations/Decisions based upon the Availability of Services

Sometimes, IEP recommendations are made based upon the availability of programs or services, rather than upon a student’s individual needs. Under IDEA, the availability of services is not the pertinent consideration. Rather, recommendations for services must be based upon each student’s individual educational needs. Otherwise, the recommendation could be considered to be a predetermination of placement, as well as a failure to consider the individual needs of a student. When a parent does not believe that his/her student’s individual needs are being considered, a dispute will very likely arise. Statements such as “oh, how I wish we could offer three hours of occupational therapy per week because he really needs it, but we don’t have that here” should be avoided. If the student needs three hours of OT per week in order to receive FAPE, the school district must offer and provide it. Similarly, statements such as “we always do it that way” or “we’ve never done that before” must be avoided when discussing services to meet the individual needs of a student with a disability.

No-No #3: Making Recommendations/Decisions based upon Cost

There is no dispute that the provision of special education services can be costly. However, cost is generally not a defense for the failure to offer services that are required to meet a student’s educational needs. Thus, it is not helpful to respond to parental inquiries or requests using cost as a “defense” to providing services. Statements such as “I am sorry but that would just be too expensive” or “do you know how much that would cost if we did that for all of our students?” are simply not helpful and should be avoided.

No-No #4: Failing to Sufficiently Notify Parents of their Rights

Providing the procedural safeguards/parent rights is a hallmark requirement of the IDEA. The 2004 IDEA requires a copy of the procedural safeguards to be given to the parents one time per school year, except that a copy must be provided upon initial referral or parental request for evaluation; upon the first occurrence of filing of a complaint for due process in a school year; and upon request by a parent. The need to document the provision of the procedural safeguards is vital and school staff must be trained to do so.

No-No #5: Making Recommendations/Decisions Based Upon Inadequate Evaluations

Evaluations must be up-to-date, thorough and adequate before appropriate IEPs can be developed. In some cases, a school system may lose a disputed case based solely upon its failure to appropriately evaluate a student prior to making educational recommendations. It is important to always consider the need to conduct or update evaluations in responding to parental requests. In addition, it is vital to obtain all previous records and to demand current evaluations or to insist upon the right to conduct current evaluations. School staff should be trained to adopt the motto that “when there is debate, evaluate!”

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GLOBAL FOCUS

World Special Education Leaders & Their Leadership:
The International Special Education Forum in Lima Peru

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The International Special Education Forum (ISEF) will convene in Lima, Peru, from July 8-12, 2007, and will attract established and emerging international special education leaders from throughout the world.

Many factors contribute to the development of leaders and leadership, i.e., general qualities and attributes that help to define and make leadership an operational construct. In the view of Barr and Barr (1989) “leadership is the process of influencing people to give their energies, use their potential, release their determination, and go beyond their comfort zones to accomplish goals… Leadership draws trust, acknowledgement, risk, and loyalty from the led.” (p.9).

In discussing educational reform Fullan, Bertani & Quinn (2004) offer descriptions of ten components of large-scale systematic improvement. These are viewed as essential to effective leadership. From the components described, consider the following: “a compelling conceptualization” which implies that leaders must form a coalition of leaders who share ownership, create and advance clear and coherent strategies; “a collective moral purpose” which implies that responsibility for educational change belongs to the larger education context and leaders must foster cultures of interdependence, trust and loyalty; “capacity building” which implies that leaders must focus both on achievement and the ongoing development of other leaders; “ongoing learning” recognizes that compelling visions will continue to evolve and respond to various forms of pressures such as policy shifts and economic or financial conditions; and “external partners” which recognizes that active partnerships such as community-based organizations, business groups, foundations, or universities are essential to improvement and change.

A compelling challenge is to make operational the concept of leadership. In effect, the decisions, acts, practices, day-to-day contributions and outcomes facilitated by leaders provides fundamental and substantive meaning to leadership and, ultimately, our conceptualization or operationalized perspective of international special education leadership.

There are numerous international special education leaders that have demonstrated leadership in bringing about advances in the world special education community. Their work offers models for future leaders to emulate. For example, the truly monumental leadership and contributions of such figures as Gunnar and Rosemary Dybwad in the 1930s, 40s and 50s, Henry Vissardi and Ignacy Goldberg in the late 1940s, Bell Greve, Henry Kessler and Harold Balme of England (who was instrumental in establishing the United Nations rehabilitation program and advising the World Health Organization and UNICEF on their first disability programs) in the early 1950s, Mary E. Switzer, Elizabeth Boggs, Frances Connor and many others through the 1950s and 60s have surely constructed a foundation upon which we can continue to advance international disability and special education collaboration and innovation. And, of course, we should remember the extensive contributions of the many special education pioneers who immigrated to the United States from Western Europe.

A study commissioned by the World Institute on Disability, the World Rehabilitation Fund and Rehabilitation International resulted in an excellent publication titled, “The U.S. Role in International Disability Activities: A History and Look Towards the Future” (Groce, 1992). The following statement taken from this publication is particularly instructive:

Ideas, approaches and concerns that American leaders were instrumental in developing within the United States, were carried on into their work abroad. Likewise, ideas and innovation to which United States leaders were exposed in international rehabilitation programs were often quickly incorporated into programs in the United States. This rapid absorption of ideas from other countries was due, in part to the fact that those Americans involved in overseas work were already senior enough to command the attention of fellow professionals here in the United States (p.5).

During the month of July, 2007, the International Special Education Forum will convene in Lima, Peru. Recognized special education leaders from various countries and world regions will share their research and experiences. In effect, they will discuss their respective contributions to special education at an international professional conference. Will this be sufficient in characterizing them as international special education leaders and does this define their leadership?

The following biographical sketches of special education leaders who are scheduled to deliver keynote addresses at the International Special Education Forum can perhaps be juxtaposed with the qualities and components discussed earlier as an acknowledgement of their emerging leadership in the field of international spe-

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Global Focus  Continued from page 4

Liliana Mayo

Dr. Mayo’s work began when, during her internship as a psychology student, she was transferred from a hospital to a special education school – “as a punishment for asking too many questions,” she said. There she met Patty, an autistic girl. “When I tried to teach her I realized that she learned fast,” Dr. Mayo said. A priest then took her to see other autistic children, and what she still remembers as “just horrible things – kids in cages, kids tied to chairs.”

Two years later, in 1979, she opened the school in her native Peru, named after Helen Keller’s teacher, in the garage of her parents’ home. In 1984, with about 50 children with severe developmental disabilities and autism enrolled, Dr. Mayo’s parents sold a house they owned “so I could go to the United States and see if we were doing a good job or not,” she recalled. “We also wanted more for the families and children who came to our school.” Dr. Mayo applied to the University of Kansas in Lawrence because she had been impressed with the writings of a psychologist there, Dr. Judith LeBlanc and wanted to share the benefits from the state-of-the-art disabilities research and education at KU.

To strengthen the program in Peru, she began an arduous but exhilarating 11-year journey to her Ph.D. and, literally, between Lima and Kansas University, where she trained at the Schiefelbusch Institute for Life Span Studies. She continues to work with her KU colleagues, including Judith LeBlanc, in human development and family life. She attended KU in the spring semesters and applied her new knowledge at the center during the rest of the year. Meanwhile, the center grew, and more and more of her KU colleagues made the pilgrimage to Lima to both teach and learn.

Today the Centro Ann Sullivan del Perú serves 500 children and adults through 21 clinical, professional and parent programs and serves as a model for programs in Peru and in eight other countries. Mayo has been supported by a steady stream of her KU colleagues – close to 300 – who have volunteered as consultants, trainers, administrators and fund-raisers, notably, Judith Le Blanc, professor emeritus, who serves as research director, and former Life Span Director Stephen Schroeder and professor emeritus Carolyn Schroeder, directors of the nonprofit Annie Sullivan Enterprises, which helps raise funds for the organization.

In 2003, Mayo received KU’s highest honor, the Distinguished Service Citation, bestowed on those who have become leaders in their professions and communities. She also has received the Peruvian Professional Excellence award, the Cuban Medal of Honor, and the Queen Sofia of Spain International Award. In September, 2006 Dr. Mayo spoke on the topic “Education for a Lifetime of Inclusion for Children with Disabilities: World-Class Program in Peru-Centro Ann Sullivan del Peru” at the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Maryland.

Lynn Fuchs

Dr. Lynn Fuchs has over 20 years experience working with students with special needs. She is a nationally recognized expert conducting research on classroom-based assessment and instructional methods to enhance outcomes for students with disabilities. She is the co-director of the Vanderbilt Reading Clinic, which provides intensive reading instruction to students with severe reading disabilities and designs sophisticated evaluation methods to track and account for student growth. She was the co-editor of The Journal of Special Education for 15 years and currently serves on the boards of ten journals. In 1998, Dr. Fuchs was the co-recipient of the Mayor’s Award: Educator of the Year (Nashville, TN) and won the Palmer O. Johnson Memorial Award for the best article in an American Educational Research Association journal. She was also the recipient of the Samuel Kirk award for Best Practice Article in Learning Disabilities Research and Practice (2000), of the School Psychology Review Best Article of the Year award (2001), and of the Career Research Award from the Council for Exceptional Children.

Dr. Fuchs’ studies education methods for individuals with reading and mathematics disabilities. With her colleagues, she has developed methods to enhance educator’s ability to promote reading and mathematics development. These include Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS), curriculum-based measurement (CBM), and response to intervention (RTI) assessment as a means for identifying students with reading and learning disabilities.

Temple Grandin

Temple Grandin, Ph.D., is inarguably the most accomplished and well-known adult with autism in the world. She has been featured on major television programs, such as “ABC’s Primetime Live,” the “Today Show,” “Larry King Live,” “48 Hours” and “20/20” and written up in national publications, such as Time magazine, People magazine, Forbes, U.S. News and World Report, and New York Times. Among numerous other recognitions by media, Bravo Cable did a half-hour show on her life, and she was one of the “challenged” people featured in the best-selling book, Anthropologist from Mars. She has also authored over 300 articles in both scientific journals and livestock periodicals on animal handling, welfare, and facility design. She is the author of “Thinking in Pictures,” “Livestock Handling and Transport,” and “Genetics and the Behavior of Domestic Animals.” Her book “Animals in Translation” was a New York Times best seller.

Dr. Grandin didn’t talk until she was three and a half years old, communicating her frustration instead by screaming, peeping and humming. In 1950, she was labeled “autistic,” and her parents were told she should be institutionalized. She tells her story of “groping her way from the far side of darkness” in her book Emergence: Labeled Autistic, a book which stunned the world because, until its publication, most professionals and parents assumed being diagnosed “autistic” was virtually a death sentence to achievement or productivity in life.

Dr. Grandin has become a prominent author and speaker on the subject of autism because “I have read enough to know that there

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How Important Is “Leadership”?

Dennis Hooper

In his 1998 chart-topping The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership, John Maxwell claims that the effectiveness of any organization rises and falls on the quality of its leadership. He calls it “The Law of the Lid.”

“Leadership ability is always the lid on personal and organizational effectiveness... To reach the highest level of effectiveness, you have to raise the lid... It is the capacity to develop and improve their skills that distinguishes leaders from their followers. Successful leaders are learners.”

Do you agree with these statements? Are there independent confirmations of Maxwell’s assertions? How about you... are you a leader who is aggressively seeking new insights and paradigms?

The criteria for the United States national quality award, signed into law in 1987, give an indication of the importance of leadership. You can find detailed information about the award and its criteria on the internet at www.quality.nist.gov.

Although initially established to encourage and recognize the most effective businesses in the nation, the criteria were modified in 1999 to allow educational institutions to apply. The first educational awards were granted in 2001. In the past six years, seven educational awards have been granted. (See www.nist.gov/public_affairs/factsheet/nqa_appdata.htm.)

The criteria for the awards are in two parts: a results category and six process categories. Almost half of the point value (45%) is allocated to the results category. That makes sense, as we would not want to recognize educational organizations that have poor outcomes!

The remaining point allocation (55%) is distributed among the six process categories. If they were equally weighted, each would be allocated just over 9% of the total valuation.

These six process categories describe generic functions followed by educational organizations to accomplish their missions. One of those six process categories is “leadership.”

Let’s look briefly at all six categories, then at the point value allocated to each. We should be able to determine something of the importance of leadership by its relative point value allocation compared to the other five process categories.

**PROCESS MANAGEMENT.**

This is the “real work” of an educational organization, the myriad of linked activities that generates the learning environment and growth for students and other stakeholders.

**FACULTY AND STAFF FOCUS.**

People do all of the work of an organization. There are systems for bringing people into the organization, giving them basic orientation, assigning them to specific work, building their skills and confidence, paying them, communicating with them, etc.

**STUDENT, STAKEHOLDER, AND MARKET FOCUS.**

The work of everyone in the educational organization should be directed to meet the needs of students and other stakeholders. Awareness of student and stakeholder needs is at the center of the thinking of every leader.

**STRATEGIC PLANNING.**

Most educational organizations expect to be around for longer than a few months! In addition to being able to describe current reality, leaders should be able to describe a vision, a set of values, and a direction and set of action steps for the future of the organization.

**LEADERSHIP.**

The thinking, planning, and decision-making of the leaders give direction and clarity to the future work of the organization. Fortunately, leadership skills can be improved! That’s what these bi-monthly columns will address!

**MEASUREMENT, ANALYSIS, AND KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT.**

Leaders determine how they measure outcomes for each of the five process categories described above. Analysis of the current condition identifies improvement opportunities for the future.

How are the points allocated for these six process categories? 8.5% of the total is allocated to each of the first four categories listed above. 9% is allocated to the “Measurement, Analysis, and Knowledge Management” category. 12% is allocated to “Leadership.”

That means that in the overall criteria for the national quality award, “Leadership” is rated second only to the “Results” category. And of the six process categories, “Leadership” is rated at a value 1/3 greater than the next highest process category!

These criteria – and their relative weighting – have been tested by time. For almost twenty years, the criteria have undergone intentional annual scrutiny by the best minds of business, education, academia, and government.

Many independent research efforts have also determined that if you could enhance only one independent variable to improve results, that one item would be to improve the quality of leadership in your organization!

Readers are encouraged to order a personal copy of the “Education Criteria for Performance Excellence” by calling (301) 975-2036 or by sending an e-mail with your name and mailing address to nqp@nist.gov. Not only will you receive the current booklet, you’ll be added to a mailing list to automatically receive annual updates to the criteria.

Dennis Hooper is a certified leadership development coach. He writes frequent articles helping leaders build organizations of excellence. If you would like to provide feedback on this article, offer suggestions for future “In CASE” articles, or be added to his mailing list for his other articles, please contact Dennis at dhooper2@juno.com.
have been established to be classified as a highly qualified teacher.

**Increased Teacher Requirements and Responsibilities**

Teaching methods and strategies used in the classroom now must be supported by evidence-based research.

Greater emphasis is placed on data-based decision making for all students, particularly special education students.

Increased collaboration and communication between general and special education personnel is required for decision making and implementing individualized education programs.

**Increased Difficulty in Providing and Maintaining Special Education Programs**

Conflicting movements and controversies exist as to which special education service delivery model is the most effective and efficient.

Interpreting and implementing the mandated protections and safeguards for students and parents presents new challenges.

Recruiting and maintaining special education personnel in the schools is becoming increasingly difficult.

**What Kinds of Competencies Do Leaders Need for the 21st Century?**

Leaders in administering future special education programs will have two major responsibilities. First, they must provide the necessary guidance and direction for making the necessary program transitions to meet the special needs of children with disabilities and comply with federal and state mandates. Second, it is increasingly important for them to influence decisions about future directions and policies through proactive vision. These two responsibilities require that special education leaders of the 21st century have specific knowledge and performance competencies.

Tomorrow’s proactive leaders will have to be problem solvers to address the growing challenges created by the increasingly complex student population, the rapidly expanding number of children from diverse cultural and language backgrounds, and the ever-changing federal and state mandates for delivering special education services to students. It is not possible to know exactly what additional challenges the future holds. When future changes occur and there is little or no precedent as to how to meet these changes, leaders must fill the vacuum by making knowledgeable decisions. The best approach is to be well informed with current information and develop a collaborative, diagnostic approach to creating solutions. A visionary leader who can acquire and integrate information and be an informed, effective and articulate problem solver needs a minimum of the following five important competency areas.

1. Knowledge about evidence-based practices for the identification, assessment, special education teaching methods, and delivery of service systems
2. Skills in leadership and management with a base in the legal foundations of special education, policy development, and analysis, and personnel development
3. Effective communication and collaboration with school faculty, community groups, and families in decision making and mediating conflicts.
4. Knowledge about and skills for providing culturally responsive education to culturally and linguistically diverse learners
5. Proficient use of technology that collects and analyzes data and information for determining student and program outcomes

**Five Suggestions for Current Special Education Leaders**

**I. Be Involved and Collaborate with Regular Education Initiatives and Colleagues**

Based on Rascon:

**Rascon:** Immerse in the educational reform initiatives in your district in order to understand, support and encourage reform for all students.

**II. Provide Professional Development to Special and Regular Educators**

Based on Williams:

**Williams:** Provide regular, on-going professional development to special education and regular education staff, support staff and administration. Mentor and support new teachers and support staff.

Attend professional development opportunities for special educators as well as those geared toward regular educators and administrators.

 Invite a regular education colleague to attend an ADE/ESS meeting or training.

**III. Develop Leadership Teams of Regular and Special Education Personnel**

Based on Faidley:

**Faidley:** Develop leadership teams for the various issues and challenges that special education leaders must address. Empowering others to develop and assist with solutions to very complex issues creates greater ownership and an environment more conducive to change.

Based on Tillis:

**Tillis:** Work closely with individual schools and principals as they try to problem solve the challenges of NCLB for special education students.

**IV. Use Data for Decision-making**

Based on Faidley:

**Faidley:** State assessment and individual district assessment data should guide the development of individual student goals that are measurable and connected to the accountability that all other students are required to meet as a result of NCLB.

**V. Identify Support Networks and Resources**

Based on Williams:

**Williams:** Join a special education administrators’ group, which, among other things, offers opportunities to network. Develop a relationship with your Department of Education program specialist.

Based on Rascon:

**Rascon:** Develop a support network within your field to keep you going when you feel as if you cannot take on one more project or one more conflict. Remember why you entered the field... to make a difference for kids!

**Dr. James C. Chalfant is Professor, Program for Special Education at the University of Arizona and currently co-directs the Special Education Administration Leadership Program.**

**Dr. Margaret Van Dusen Pysh has been a faculty member and co-director of the Special Education Administration Leadership Program at the University of Arizona.**

**Drs. Chalfant and Pysh are internationally renowned as the developers of the Teacher Assistance Team problem solving model to support teachers with at-risk children. Contact them at pysh@u.arizona.edu**
School Leadership in Special Education

Lindy Zaretsky & Louise Moreau

Background

Among the people with a vested interest in special education are, of course, principals charged with the day-to-day running of schools. However, few school leaders are well prepared to mediate the instructional, ethical, political and legal complexities inherent in special education processes. Special education presents one of the key challenges facing educational leaders in contemporary contexts characterized by diversity and comprehensive school reform. As expectations increase for more rigorous and demanding academic standards of achievement for all students, the progress of all must be accounted for. To this end, the school leader’s role has become increasingly important in developing, implementing, and sustaining inclusive and equitable educational opportunities for students with special education needs.

The overarching aim of this study was to better understand the role of the principal in the administration and supervision of special education programs and services. We contend that such an understanding can assist in the development and/or re-structuring of professional preparation programs and subsequent professional development activities that have as their focus an approach to instruction and instructional leadership within an accountability context that may better serve the needs of exceptional and non-exceptional students alike.

Methodology

The research study attempted to inquire into principals’ perceptions of their leadership roles and responsibilities in special education. The central purpose was to address the following four interrelated questions: (1) what does it mean to provide leadership in special education, (2) how is this leadership demonstrated in the day-to-day management of special education programs, services, and personnel among principals, (3) how well prepared do principals consider themselves to be engaged in these roles and responsibilities; and (4) in what areas of special education do principals perceive the need for more professional development for themselves? These questions provide the central analytic foci of this study and allude to the more ambitious research goals of considering how best to influence the development of meaningful professional leadership preparation programs.

In-depth interviews with six elementary school principals and two secondary school principals in the province of Ontario were conducted. Priority was given to principals in schools with a high proportion of students with special education needs in a variety of regular and special education programs and placements in their schools. As part of the selection criteria, principals chosen had a minimum of two years experience in their administrative role. The interviews were used to develop case studies of principals in schools who have identified special education as one of their primary leadership responsibilities. These case studies provided rich, descriptive data on the role of the principal in special education. Their cases are described with descriptive narratives so that readers have an opportunity to ‘experience’ the relevant events and draw their own conclusions. A subsequent cross-case analysis allowed for the identification of common circumstances shared by participants as well as ones that remained unique to the individual principals.

Findings

Identifying Multiple Layers of Instructional Leadership in Special Education

The principals in this study identified the following responsibilities they were expected to assume related to providing programs and services to students with special education needs in their schools: (1) support of regular and special education teachers in their efforts to provide sound instructional and assessment practices embedded in individualized education programs, (2) coordination of services, (3) development of effective communication strategies and protocols among teachers, parents, regional support staff, advocates, agencies, and associations, (4) establishment of procedures to ensure compliance with provincial legislation in special education, and (5) identification and arrangement of effective in-service training opportunities in the area of special education for all staff in their schools.

Principals in this study addressed key issues, including engaging parents and communities, developing teachers’ knowledge and skills, and promoting a school-based professional community. They were committed to helping teachers improve their classroom performance and making academic instruction the school’s top priority. The principals provided opportunities for...
teachers to share information and work together to plan instruction. These leaders saw themselves as stewards and coaches in the development of a school culture of high expectations and achievement for all students. Of particular relevance to instructional leadership was the language of caring, vision, courage, and collaboration that counter-balanced most principals’ focus on achievement and standards embedded in their understandings of instructional leadership.

The principals in this study stressed the importance of learning in context where knowledge could become specific, useable and distributed. For example, by identifying teachers who have exemplary knowledge and skills related to effective instruction and assessment, principals were able to provide opportunities for mentoring, coaching, shared leadership, recognition of talent and effort, and structures for collaborative and professional growth. Each principal distributed day-to-day responsibilities in special education to a variety of staff. There was a clear understanding that different people assumed more specific leadership roles and responsibilities based on their current knowledge base in special education. Evidence suggests that the principals in this study were also committed to learning more about special education but felt that the knowledge domains were often so complex and vast that one leader could not “know it all.”

Definitions of instructional leadership are becoming increasingly broad and rich. These principals have included more sophisticated views of professional development that emphasize data-informed decision-making practices and processes (Elmore, 2000; Lambert 2003). There is a focus on curriculum, instruction and assessment as they are embedded in school improvement planning processes that continuously measures progress in raising student performance (Elmore, 2000; Fullan, 2003). This more integrated and personalized approach has been defined in terms of guidance and direction of instructional improvement framed within the building of collaborative learning communities (Planche, 2004). A focused discussion on the distribution of instructional leadership responsibilities among and across organizational membership is also more explicit in dialogue and action (Belchetz, 2004; Elmore, 2000; Harris, 2003; Lambert 2003).

### Identifying Critical Knowledge Domains and Challenges in Special Education

The principals in this study identified several substantive knowledge domains and processes they perceived as critical to their success as leaders in special education. These included (1) the development of sound instructional and assessment practices linked to measurable goals, (2) an in-depth understanding of the Individual Education Plan (IEP) and Identification, Placement, and Review Committee (IPRC) legislative processes, (3) current research and best practices associated with different categories of exceptionality, (4) a deeper understanding and acceptance of different conceptions of inclusive education, (5) accessing and equitably distributing a scarcity of resources; (6) nurturing relationships and networks within and beyond their schools, and (7) the development of effective mediation and negotiation strategies for interactions with parent advocates.

The principals in this study understood the need to ensure that teachers have the knowledge, skills, and support needed to use student data effectively to make appropriate instructional modifications. They also expressed their concern over pending shortages of qualified teachers in special education which they attributed to rising standards, paperwork compliance, and increased accountability to parents.

Legal issues have become an area of growing concern for them as well. Principals viewed legal compliance issues as playing a large role in their leadership decisions. They understood their role in ensuring the delivery of educational services to students with disabilities and meeting the procedural requirements of the law in addition to avoiding any type of litigation (Valesky & Hirth, 1992).

Most principals expressed a fundamental curiosity to seek out new knowledge and research related to categories of exceptionality and instructional interventions to support learners with special education needs. In particular, principals often referred to the challenges associated with including students with autism and with various emotional/behavioural disorders. They reported a significant increase in numbers of students with these diagnoses entering the public school system.

Principals in this study defined inclusive education in broader terms and with broader aims. Inclusive education was seen less as an approach to serving children with disabilities within regular education settings, but rather one in which diversity and difference among learners was welcomed and celebrated. The principals were committed to providing all children equal access to quality instruction. The political nature of inclusive education was also acknowledged by each of the principals as they struggled to reconcile demands for academic accountability and improved achievement levels with the immediate social and emotional needs of their students. Principals’ perceptions about what constituted an inclusive learning environment
The principals in this study expressed an uncompromising commitment and belief that all children can learn, belong in, and contribute to a school community.

varied considerably and for the most part were dependent upon the disability category. For example, principals most often preferred the special education classroom setting for students with serious behavioural/emotional disabilities and autism. These findings are consistent with the results identified in Praisner’s (2003) study which found that the disability category was related to the recommended placement by principals. Similar findings have been reported in other research related to inclusive education (Zaretsky, 2004; 2006; Faircloth, 2004).

Principals articulated a need to know how to access the different kinds of resources available to them in order to support student achievement. They stressed a need for quick access to useful information (i.e., new legislative action, regulatory changes, relevant research, online resources, and professional development opportunities) that they considered germane to their local instructional and managerial needs in special education. Many principals also expressed their frustration at not having sufficient time to devote to special education leadership in their schools. Many principals identified the challenges of accessing appropriate assistive technologies and of offering the necessary professional development to teachers so they too could become more proficient in embedding these technologies in the design and delivery of their instructional programs.

Principals emphasized the importance of addressing issues of tension and conflict when attempting to engage alternative perspectives with parent advocates in order to become more responsive to the diverse needs of the individuals who make up a school community. From their viewpoints, this critically reflective and dialogic practice has the potential to promote the overarching shared goal of providing all children with equity and excellence in inclusive education while re-conceptualising parent involvement in the decision-making processes.

Inventing a New Paradigm of Instructional Leadership in Special Education

The principals in this study expressed an uncompromising commitment and belief that all children can learn, belong in, and contribute to a school community. Many saw themselves as problem-solvers, mediators and facilitators of inclusive practices (Begley & Zaretsky, 2004; Richmon, 2004; Ryan, 2003; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2002; Starratt, 2003) to create a more responsive, inclusive and sophisticated repertoire of knowledge and skills for educational leaders.

What Principals Say They Need in Professional Development Programs

According to the principals in this study, the focus of leadership preparation should be on connecting theory and research with the critical issues and dilemmas of practice that school leaders face. In particular, the principals voiced their concerns that often the content covered in formal training does not align well with their experiences and the increased complexities of their positions. They wanted to see an infusion of case studies and inter-professional and trans-disciplinary collaboration with content that was locally determined and focused on current special education issues in their schools. Many principals noted that some things are better learned on the job and in the particular conditions and circumstances of their school. Most principals interviewed pointed to the importance of substantial in-service opportunities for teachers and administrators to refine (or develop) the requisite attitudes and skills needed for working more effectively in the specific contexts of their local settings. From their viewpoints, a substantial block of instructional time should be devoted to professional development for both aspiring school leaders and those individuals currently in the role.

Implications for Leadership Preparation Programs in Special Education

Findings from this study underscore the importance of training leaders in ways
which will prepare them to manage and mediate the instructional needs of all students while leading their schools in increasingly diverse (yet ostensibly inclusive) contexts.

This study provides district school boards and university preparation programs in Ontario with preliminary recommendations in order to improve the quality of leadership in special education. The principals in this study recommended that their critical issues and dilemmas of practice in special education be explicitly integrated into the curricular design of leadership preparation programs. Rich examples and experiences from the field could be critically examined through a case study/problem-based learning approach. Special education scholars could work alongside practitioners in the planning of instruction across curricular areas and disciplines. Preparation programs could encourage administrators and aspiring administrators to be more reflective, and avail themselves of opportunities to explore alternative ways of knowing and doing in special education leadership. Principals who understand effective research or evidence-based practices can provide more appropriate support to students, parents, teachers and other professionals associated with special education. These are leaders who understand the importance of well-designed learning and working environments and can facilitate the development of appropriate placements and assignments that reflect student and teacher needs. These leaders will be well-equipped to realize improvement in learning and achievement for all students. Leadership preparation programs in universities and professional development programs in school districts need to foster this type of leadership where all administrators are expected to lead and learn with care in special education.

References


Lindy Zaretsky has a PhD in Education Administration. She is Superintendent of Special Education and Leadership Development in the Simcoe County District School Board. Dr. Zaretsky has written articles and conducts research on educational leadership and special education.

Louise Moreau is a Superintendent of Education responsible for Special Education in the York Region District School Board. She also serves as President for the Ontario Council for Administrators in Special Education.
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are still many parents, and, yes, professionals, too, who believe that ‘once autistic, always autistic.' This dictum has meant sad and sorry lives for many children diagnosed, as I was in early life, as autistic. To these people, it is incomprehensible that the characteristics of autism can be modified and controlled. However, I feel strongly that I am living proof that they can.” (Taken from Emergence: Labeled Autistic)

Temple Grandin obtained her B.A. at Franklin Pierce College and her M.S. in Animal Science at Arizona State University. Dr. Grandin received her Ph.D. in Animal Science from the University of Illinois in 1989. She presently works as an Associate Professor at Colorado State University but also speaks around the world on both autism and cattle handling, design, livestock handling, and animal welfare.

Doug Fuchs

During his career he has taught first graders with serious emotional problems in a special school in Baltimore; taught in a fourth-grade classroom in Pennsylvania; and was staff psychologist for the Minneapolis public schools’ special education preschool program. He currently holds the Nicholas Hobbs Endowed Chair in Special Education and Human Development at Peabody College of Vanderbilt University, where he is also co-director of the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center Reading Clinic. Dr. Fuchs has been principal investigator of 35 federally-sponsored research grants, most of which have come from the U.S. Department of Education. This research has focused on the development of pre-referral interventions, peer-assisted learning strategies in reading and math, curriculum-based measurement procedures, methods of reintegration of students with high-incidence disabilities into mainstream settings, and response to intervention assessment as a means for identifying students with reading and learning disabilities.

He is the author or co-author of more than 200 articles in peer-reviewed journals, and has won best paper awards for several of these publications, including the American Educational Research Association’s Palmer O. Johnson Award, the American Psychological Association’s Fellows’ Award (Division 16), the Samuel A. Kirk Award (Division for Learning Disabilities of the Council for Exceptional Children), and Best Paper of the Year Award (National Association of School Psychologists). He was recently identified by Thompson ISI as one of 250 most highly cited researchers in the social sciences. In 2001, he was named Joe B. Wyatt Distinguished University Professor by Vanderbilt University. With Lynn Fuchs in 2003 and 2005, respectively, he was given the Career Research Award by the Council for Exceptional Children and the Distinguished Researcher Award by the Special Education Research SIG of the American Educational Research Association. From 1987 to 2002, he was co-editor of The Journal of Special Education.

Mary Ruth Coleman

Dr. Mary Ruth Coleman is a Senior Scientist at the FPG Child Development Institute, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and Research Associate Professor of Special Education in the School of Education. She is Director of Project U-Stars-Plus, (Using Science, Talents and Abilities to Recognize Students – Promoting Learning in Under Served Students), a Javits Gifted and Talented Student Education Program and the Director of Project ACCESS (Achievement in Content and Curriculum for Every Student’s Success) funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Office for Special Education Programs, a project of national significance. She is Co-Principal Investigator for the Early Learning Disabilities Initiative sponsored by the Emily Hall Tremaine Foundation. From 1994 to 1998, she Co-Directed North Carolina’s Statewide Technical Assistance for Gifted Education Center. Prior to this, she was Associate Director of the Gifted Education Policy Studies Program at the Frank Porter Graham Center.

Dr. Coleman has numerous publications and is the junior author on the 11th Edition of the seminal textbook, “Teaching Exceptional Children” by Samuel A. Kirk, James J. Gallagher, and Nicholas J. Anastasiow (2006). She served as the associate editor for the Journal for the Education of the Gifted for over ten years, and has put together two special issues of JEG – the first on gifted girls and women, and the second on underserved gifted. Dr. Coleman served as the guest Editor for the fall 2005 issue of Teaching Exceptional Children with a special issue on gifted students with disabilities. Prior to this, she developed and chaired a new department at Chowan College in Murfreesboro, N.C., designed to address the needs of special populations: disabled, culturally diverse, and economically disadvantaged college students.

Dr. Coleman served three terms on the Board of Directors for Association for Gifted (TAG) one of which she was President; recently completed her third term on the Board of the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC); and served on the Board of Directors for the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC). She was recently elected President-elect for the Council for Exceptional Children and is past president of the Association for the Gifted, a division of the Council for Exceptional Children.

Judith M. LeBlanc

Judith M. LeBlanc is professor emeritus of special education and human development and family life and former coordinator of international programs for the Schiefelbusch Institute for Life Span Studies of the University of Kansas where she served for 32 years. The Schiefelbusch Institute for Life Span Studies (LSI) was created in 1990 out of the 67-year-old Kansas Bureau of Child Research. Today it is one of the largest and most highly regarded human development and disabilities research centers in the country.

Dr. LeBlanc has been a contributor to Centro Ann Sullivan del Peru in Lima, Peru for more than 15 years where she continues to serve as a consultant to the center. Dr. LeBlanc recently accompanied Dr. Liliana Mayo, Director and Founder of Centro Ann Sullivan del Peru in Lima, Peru to Madrid, Spain, where she received an international special education award. Along with the award, Mayo received the equivalent of $32,000 for program development. “The credit for receiving this award goes in part to Dr. Judith LeBlanc and the University of Kansas,” Mayo said. “Her trips here since 1985 taught us state-of-the-art techniques in education.

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The center is going to receive the award, but it is the work of a team.”

In conclusion, leadership and the development of leaders in special education, or international special education and services, eventuates in conjunction with general and specific human attributes and qualities; and their subsequent interaction within varied contextual conditions. Our recognition of the value and importance of leadership in special education has never been more pronounced. As we continue to explore the complex construct of leadership and how it can be nurtured and developed, we should draw inspiration from the achievements of both national and international special education leaders, past and present. The legacy left to us was undoubtedly achieved against great odds. Our obligation is to continue to amplify global awareness, social policy development, as well as the growth programs that bring equity and justice to the lives of individuals who are exceptional or disabled, and their families throughout the world.

Please make every effort to join colleagues near and far at the International Special Education Forum in Lima, Peru. For more information, go to www.carlow.edu/~sorourke/ISEF/information.htm or the DISES web site at: www.cec.sped.org

References

CASE Endorsement Process

As a service to our members, CASE has established a process for the endorsement of products. The process and the rubric may be viewed on the CASE website at www.casecec.org. CASE does not do exclusive endorsements and the process is designed to take some of the “legwork” off special education directors. The Products and Publication Committee look carefully at the product in each of seven areas: Product Marketability and Feasibility; Research Base; Field Testing; Company Longevity and reputation; Enhance Professional Practice advocated by CASE/CEC policy and/or standards; Addresses identified member needs; and Evidence and documentation of customer satisfaction. CASE does not search out companies/products but evaluates those requested by the companies. Not all products that have gone through the process have been endorsed and all endorsements last for 3 years only before a review has to be done. The CASE website has a link to all companies/products endorsed by CASE. Be sure to ask these companies for the special benefits they provided to CASE members as you consider purchasing any of the endorsed products. The following companies/products are currently endorsed by CASE:

Master Teacher – ParaEducator Learning Network • Paraeducator Training Resources
Netchemia – NetEP • Spectrum K12 – ENCORE!
Voyager Expanded Learning – Passport, Passport Reading Journeys, Vmath
MAXIMUS – TieNet • Computer Automation Systems, Inc. – SEAS (Special Education Automation Software)

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In conclusion, leadership and the development of leaders in special education, or international special education and services, eventuates in conjunction with general and specific human attributes and qualities; and their subsequent interaction within varied contextual conditions. Our recognition of the value and importance of leadership in special education has never been more pronounced. As we continue to explore the complex construct of leadership and how it can be nurtured and developed, we should draw inspiration from the achievements of both national and international special education leaders, past and present. The legacy left to us was undoubtedly achieved against great odds. Our obligation is to continue to amplify global awareness, social policy development, as well as the growth programs that bring equity and justice to the lives of individuals who are exceptional or disabled, and their families throughout the world.

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References
A New IDEA in Leadership

You have seen this tag line with the familiar CASE logo for the last year. If it is more than 12 months old, is it still a NEW IDEA? Of course all special education leaders recognize the play on words with the 2004 reauthorization of IDEA, but what does this tag line REALLY mean? The Design for the Future Report, released in September, 2005 by chair Fred Weintraub, stated CASE should

- Focus on the development of effective state/provincial units.
- Provide proactive leadership in shaping policies that effect special education.
- Become active in the development and mentorship of special education administrators.
- Directly and through its units provide the information and professional development its members need.
- Be recognized in the education community as The Voice of Local Special Education Administrators and THE Conduit for communicating with them.

CASE should provide leadership in developing and advancing research based practices in special education administration that are highly correlated to improved student outcomes.

All six of these statements or goals deal with LEADERSHIP. Under the very capable leadership of the CASE Presidents, CASE has been able to make headway on some of these issues. Past President, Steve Milliken is leading the development of these six suggestions and with the help of the Executive Committee and the Board of Directors is developing implementation strategies and timelines. All of these activities by the very capable leadership of CASE is continuing to build on the strengths of the organization and at the same time shore up the areas of weakness. True leadership requires vision, hard work, constant monitoring, and the daring to make needed adjustments.

CASE has a long history of great volunteer leadership and today’s volunteer leaders at both the unit and international level are absolutely stellar! These dedicated volunteers are just like you – they have fires to put out each and every HOUR, they have professional and personal challenges, and they have a life beyond both their careers and their families! They spend hours on the work of the organization that they believe helps them do a better job for the children and community they work with every day. They spend this time and often their personal money because they believe in the investment for the good of others… they do it for you… they are true leaders… they invite YOU to join them.

Invest in your professional organization, Council of Administrators of Special Education by participating in on line surveys; reading the In CASE Newsletter and the Journal of Special Education Leadership; participating in CASE staff development opportunities; attending the CASE annual membership meeting; enjoying your fellow members at CASE NIGHT at CEC; volunteering to be on a CASE committee; encouraging teachers who have the “leadership gene” to move into the area of special education administration! Let this new year be a time to reflect on your leadership and develop a plan for improvement starting today!

CASE Night 2007

“Race” to reserve the evening of April 19 in your calendar, and “race” to order your ticket as soon as you receive the flyer or e-mail. Since this year’s CEC Convention is in Louisville, KY, site of the famous Churchill Downs, we have reserved the Derby Museum for dinner and entertainment. This is an event you definitely do not want to miss, especially since ticket prices will remain at $50.00 per person! The price includes dinner, entertainment and transportation from the downtown area to the Derby Museum. So make your plans to attend the CEC Convention and CASE Night 2007 in Louisville!
The 5th Annual Educational Leadership Seminar is scheduled to be held at the Hilton Arlington Towers, July 15-18, 2007! This very unique professional development opportunity is one you should not miss! The seminar is devoted to developing leadership in our members by learning advocacy techniques from some of our partner associations in the DC area, developing strategies for implementing CASE annual policy positions both back home and up on “THE HILL,” and taking our members to a new level of leadership in the advocacy arena.

For the first time last year we added an optional half (1/2) day workshop for Unit officers on LEADERSHIP. We discussed conference planning; membership activities for both retaining current members and recruiting new members; and communication – newsletters, electronic venues, and other opportunities, This session was attended by six different units and received rave reviews! We will be adding to this optional unit leadership module and hope more of our units will take advantage of this opportunity to provide training for “developing” leaders and/or a “booster shot” for your veteran leaders!

Some of our past participants had these comments about their participation in the Seminar:

Thank you! It was a great seminar, we are taking a lot of ideas back. We’ll look forward to more working together.
Laurie Jefsen (MI)

Thank you for providing a rewarding and I hope productive opportunity for me. What a welcoming group of leaders CASE has! I felt this experience was invaluable.
Carol Scanlan (PA)

This year, as in the previous seminars held, the CASE July Education Leadership Conference was superbly organized, strategically relevant and timely on special education issues, great for networking and included special education information to support “credible” advocacy for visits to Capitol Hill—what could be better than these qualities for professional development learning, participation and outreach at a national level? Thank you to CASE leadership and members of the planning committee for these wonderful events on our behalf. I look forward to the 2007 Conference.
Carla B. Jentz, (MA)

This seminar is limited to the first 75 enrollees in order to maintain the close collegial atmosphere needed for this hands on leadership training. Be sure you are one of the 75 – registration will begin in late April!

CASE Calendar of Events

January 17-19, 2007
CASE Winter Institute, Sheraton Sand Key, Clearwater Beach, FL
Contact: Luann Purcell, Executive Director, 478-825-7667, email lpurcell@bellsouth.net or website: www.casecec.org

April 18-21, 2007
CEC Convention – Plan to come early enough to participate in all the CASE activities at CEC, Louisville, KY – Annual Member/Board of Directors meeting (Wednesday, April 18) and CASE NIGHT (Thursday, April 19). Watch for tickets to go on sale end of February.

July 15-18, 2007
5th Annual CASE Educational Leadership Seminar, Hilton Arlington Towers, Arlington, VA Contact: Luann Purcell, Executive Director, 478-825-7667, email lpurcell@bellsouth.net or website: www.casecec.org

November 8-9, 2007
CASE Board of Directors Fall Meeting, Long Beach Hyatt, Long Beach, CA Contact: Luann Purcell, Executive Director, 478-825-7667, email lpurcell@bellsouth.net or website: www.casecec.org

November 9-10, 2007
18th Annual CASE Fall Conference, Long Beach Hyatt, Long Beach, CA Contact: Luann Purcell, Executive Director, 478-825-7667, email lpurcell@bellsouth.net or website: www.casecec.org
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