

A Collaborative Culture: The Secret to Growing a Positive Climate and Retaining Special Education Staff

AA #3940

Dr. Mary Furbush & Tricia Sharkey

Tuesday, December 6, 2022 - 9:00am - 12:30 pm

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In a climate of constant reaction to crisis after crisis, Illinois continues to struggle with a shortage of educators. Staff retention and recruitment is now on the forefront of thought for every school administrator. In this academy, participants will hear the perspective of one special education cooperative about what can be done to increase the retention of teachers. The Cooperative Association for Special Education (CASE), which has been a Chicago Tribune Top Workplace in Illinois for the last five years, targets staff retention to combat the special education staff shortage. Maintaining a positive culture is a major focus of the organization. In addition, it has prioritized provision of a robust and personalized professional development pertaining to the special education needs of CASE staff and our district. CASE administrators will share proactive communication strategies, review additional supports provided to staff that have made a positive impact, discuss climate surveys and staff evaluation rubrics that have been authored to accurately evaluate special education staff, and provide needed feedback. In addition, this academy will focus on three main factors that CASE has identified which impact the decision of special education staff to stay at the cooperative and in the field:

Positive relationships – CASE has developed very specific strategies to encourage positive relationships, including a job-alike learning team structure for non-traditional teaching and related services staff, customized training for building administrators on “look fors” when evaluating special education staff, professional development opportunities that are appropriate for special education teachers, support and training of building administrators regarding the legalities of special education, and an ongoing platform to connect administrators to administrators so that they are informed and consistent in responding to the needs of special education staff in their districts.

Mentoring program – CASE has developed a mentoring program that incorporates elements of mentoring practices developed by the New Teacher Center but has been tailored to the needs of special education teachers and related services providers. CASE staff have been involved in developing the program, which continues to be strengthened by an ongoing feedback cycle in which participants provide ideas, topics, and needs to the administration. Advocacy of stress reducing practices amongst staff (positive climate, clear role definition, appropriate workloads, and providing novice staff with stress-reducing strategies).

Outcomes

1. Participants will understand how the staff recruitment and retention crisis has affected special education staff and special education students.
2. Participants will be introduced to programs and practices that are being implemented which contribute to staff retention and an overall healthy and positive work culture.
3. Participants will leave with tools and strategies that can be implemented in school districts and/or cooperatives throughout the state.



Presenter:
Dr. Mary Furbush

Dr. Mary Furbush is the executive director at CASE. She has been with CASE for 11 years beginning as an administrator of Itinerant Services and ESY and has served as the executive director for six years. CASE has been recognized as one of the Chicago Tribune's Top Workplaces for the last five years securing a spot in the top five each of those years. As a special education classroom teacher for 20 years, Mary has worked with students from second grade through high school. Her passion is finding ways for students with special needs to be successful in learning. Mary holds a bachelor's degree in Political Science, a master's degree in Elementary Education, and a doctorate in Educational Leadership.



Presenter:
Tricia Sharkey

Tricia Sharkey is an administrator of Student Support Services at CASE. She has worked for the last 15 years at CASE. Tricia started off as a speech language pathologist for CASE, then moved into the role of assistive technology consultant and is currently in an administrative role. Tricia has a master's degree in Speech Pathology from Illinois State University. She also has a master's degree in Teacher Leadership from Concordia University in Chicago with a Principalship Endorsement. Tricia is currently working on obtaining her Director of Special Education Endorsement as well. Tricia is passionate about connecting with her staff members and leading them to discover their individual and unique talents.