Case Study #2

ISLLC Standard #2: A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth.

Title:

Improving the quality of IEP compliance and program and service implementation for students with disabilities.

Key Questions:

1) Did the district implement a change that would improve the professional growth of the special education faculty at individual schools?
2) Was the change in district level staff effective in improving academic success among students with disabilities?

Discussion:

Beginning several school years ago, Clayton County made the decision to create a position called "Consultative Teacher" that would be stationed at each middle and high school throughout the district; at the elementary level one consultative teacher would be assigned for every two or three elementary schools depending on the size of the school. The purpose of this position was to serve any student with consultative hours on their IEP and handle all scheduling and program implementation for students with disabilities within their school or assigned schools. The consultative teacher would also be responsible for holding all initial staffings for new students with special needs and would review the IEPs and all related paperwork produced by the teachers within their assigned schools. The purpose of the position was to cut down on the amount of time special education coordinators and lead teachers had to spend in schools taking care of clerical tasks and training new teachers about standard paperwork and operation procedures. It was also suggested that these positions would free up valuable instructional time that classroom teachers had to spend on clerical tasks. It was proposed that alleviating the coordinators of these tasks would allow them to devote more time to improving the quality of programs being provided to students with special needs within the district; Likewise, it would allow classroom teachers to focus on instruction and program implementation. District level coordinators would take on the responsibility of providing weekly trainings on selected topics that would improve the ability of teachers to write IEPs, implement the contents of student IEPs, handle aggressive behavior, implement strategies and techniques that would improve student learning, etc. Consultative teachers were responsible for redelivering the information presented at the weekly training sessions to the special education faculty members at their assigned schools.

Near the end of the 2004-2005 school year it was announced that the role of the consultative teacher was found to be ineffective and that the position would be eliminated. The consultative teachers would be used to fill open classroom teacher positions that existed due to the current teacher shortage in the field of special education. The district reviewed data that indicated that many student schedules still did not match the services listed on student IEPs resulting in the district failing to comply with state and federal regulations. The data also indicated that the amount of time being spent to train consultative teachers was pulling them and the coordinators facilitating the training sessions away from other essential job duties, turnover remained high so training costs were not decreasing, consultative teachers spent less time than desired training faculty members and a great deal of time was unaccounted for in the consultative teacher's schedule. Overall, the position focused too much on clerical duties and the school system was still experiencing too many schools failing short of their AYP goals. The district was experiencing too much teacher shortage to justify so many positions across the district with no teaching responsibilities.

The district announced they would be implementing a new position titled School Improvement Specialist where one person would have similar job duties but would be assigned to several schools instead of one school as was previously the case in the middle and high schools. The school improvement specialist would also be responsible for conducting compliance reviews at each of their assigned schools where three times a year they would audit the IEPs of the students at each school to ensure that the programs and services prescribed by the IEP were being implemented accordingly. The school improvement specialist would be trained to evaluate the performance of classroom teachers and provide feedback on their performance to the teachers and administration of the schools to which they are assigned. The position of school improvement specialist would be a 12 month position and the summer months would be used to improve the extended school year programs currently offered and for the professional development of the school improvement specialist so that the academic year could be devoted to the delivery of information that is essential to improved student achievement. It was also noted that with increased program implementation and improved services for students with disabilities, the number of schools meeting AYP would likely increase and improve the district's ratings on the state report card.

Answers:

1) I feel that the district's decision to eliminate the consultative teacher position and create the position of school improvement specialist was for the correct reasons. By eliminating the consultative teacher position we increased the number of certified special educators in our district and improved the quality of education being provided to our students by using these teachers to fill positions that were previously occupied by long-term substitute teachers who were not state certified to teach students with special needs. By creating a supervisory position that oversees the needs of each school, the district should

be able to assess the professional learning needs of the district as a whole and the school improvement specialist will be able to coordinate professional development activities that are tailored to the individual needs of the faculty at each school instead of treating professional development as solely a district level function.

2) At this time, the level of improvement in student success cannot be evaluated but on-going data is being collected to determine if IEP compliance has improved and if the quality of individual programs and services are improving for students with disabilities. If these programs improve as planned I suspect that the success rate of our students as measured by the CRCT and Georgia High School Graduation Test, as well as the number of students with disabilities who are able to complete a high school diploma will drastically improve.

Case Study Evaluation: The administration's level of proficiency is at a developing level at this time. Because the data collection is still on-going and the first school year since these changes have been implemented has not drawn to a close, it cannot be determined if student success has increased and whether or not opportunities for professional learning will be improved. It should be noted that it is commendable that the administration is making changes that are intended to improve overall student achievement.