

A diverse group of nine young adults, including men and women of various ethnicities, are standing behind a large white banner. They are all smiling and looking towards the camera. Some are pointing at the banner, and one woman is making a peace sign. They are dressed in casual clothing like t-shirts, jeans, and hoodies. The background is plain white.

# **Increasing the Achievement of Students with Disabilities** (and other students who struggle)

**John O'Connor**  
**[greatinstruction@bellsouth.net](mailto:greatinstruction@bellsouth.net)**  
**678.243.8957**

# A Little about Me

- Around disability my entire life
- Until recently, all of my professional jobs have been related to special education.
  - Teacher for students with orthopedic impairments
  - Georgia Department of Education
  - Assistant Director for Special Education
  - Executive Director for Special Services
  - Assistant Superintendent for Student Services
  - Director for Interventions

# I have told you a little about me...

□ Tell me a little about you

- Principals
- Assistant Principals
- General Education Teachers
- Special Education Teachers
- RESA Personnel
- GDOE Personnel
- Central Office Personnel
- Other?

**For all that you do...**

**Thank You!**

# **Pop Quiz**

## **(Partner Discussion – 2 or 3 people)**

The Superintendent has called you to his/her office.

**“We have to radically improve the achievement/learning of our students with disabilities in our school/our district. What should we do?”**

What would you say?  
(3 minutes)

At the end of the day, that is  
THE  
question...

**At the risk of sounding  
arrogant...**

I Know the  
Answer



# Provide GREAT INSTRUCTION

# **The good news...**

**We, as educators, control 100% of that.**

Some students need less than GREAT instruction (even though they deserve it)

A few students can even do fairly well with “OK” instruction

- Approximately 3-5% of children teach themselves to read.
- They break the “code.”

# Many students in the following groups require GREAT instruction

- ❑ Students with disabilities
- ❑ Students who are designated as Economically Disadvantaged
- ❑ Students with Limited English Proficiency
- ❑ Students who struggle, but do not qualify for a “label.”

# Objectives for Today

- ❑ Discuss the big elements of GREAT instruction
- ❑ Determine priority elements of specially-designed instruction
- ❑ Develop a partial Road Map for increasing the achievement of students with disabilities in your school/district.

# Handouts

- Visual Organizer – O'Connor's Road Map
- Activity Sheets

# Please...

- Share your expertise with each other
- I want you to talk/complete activities more than I do
- Feel free to be selective

# **GREAT Instruction**

What classes are we talking  
about for students with  
disabilities?



# Did you know...

- That approximately 62% of students with disabilities across the U.S. spend at least 80% of their school day in general education classes? (increase from 48.2 in 2002)
- That an additional 20% of students with disabilities spend at least 40% of their school day in general education classes?

U.S. Department of Education. (2014). *35<sup>th</sup> Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.*

**Therefore, if we are going to  
increase the achievement of  
students with disabilities, we  
have to impact **ALL**  
classrooms.**

**(General ed classes with one teacher, co-teaching  
classes, and pull-out special education classes)**

**In fact, it could be argued...**

**That if you want to move the needle  
on student achievement for SWDs,  
then you MUST FOCUS on general  
education classes**

**(not at the exclusion of pull out  
classes)**

# What is GREAT instruction?

- Work in pairs or triads
- 3 minutes – Write your answers on your *Scratch Paper*
- You only get 6 bullets

# Debrief

# GREAT Instruction includes:

- ❑ Standards Driven Instruction
- ❑ Rigorous
- ❑ Ongoing assessments that guide instruction (i.e., benchmarking, progress monitoring, etc.)
- ❑ Differentiation in Flexible Grouping
- ❑ Scientific or evidenced-based instructional practices
- ❑ **What piece is missing?**

**The missing piece**

**Magic**

How do you like this  
acronym?

**GREAT instruction is:**

**G**uided by the performance standards

**R**igorous with **r**esearch-based practices (two parts)

**E**ngaging and exciting

**A**ssessed continuously to guide instruction

**T**ailored (differentiated) in flexible groups



Increasing the Achievement of Students with Disabilities  
*and other students who struggle*

**Provide GREAT Instruction**

*Every day in every class for every child*

**G  
R  
E  
A  
T**



**Research-based**

1.

2.

# You have a Visual Organizer

- Fill out the acronym for GREAT Instruction
  - **G**uided by the performance standards
  - **R**igorous with **r**esearch-based practices
  - **E**ngaging and exciting
  - **A**ssessed continuously to guide further instruction
  - **T**ailored in flexible groups

# Note

- GREAT Instruction also applies to non-academic instruction
  - Behavior
  - Communication
  - Self-Advocacy
  - Student Agency
  - Collaboration
  - Etc.

# Important Message!!!

- Teachers are critically important
  - Ultimately providing instruction for our students
  - Biggest impact on those students
- But, they are not completely responsible
- As administrators/coaches, etc., we have the obligation to create the environment and context where teachers can successfully provide GREAT instruction

# GREAT instruction is:

**G**uided by the performance standards

**R**igorous with **r**esearch-based practices (two parts)

**E**ngaging and exciting

**A**ssessed continuously to guide instruction

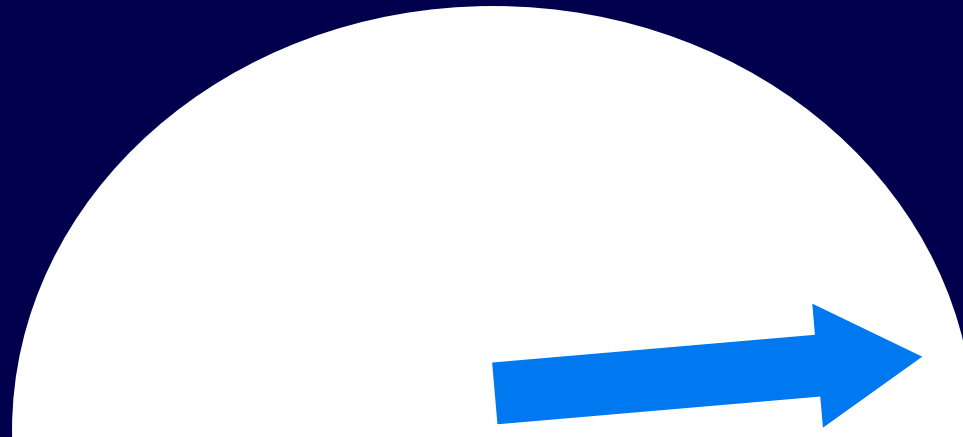
**T**ailored (differentiated) in flexible groups

All of these components  
are intertwined

# What's so special about “Great Instruction?”

Average Instruction

Weak  
Instruction



Great  
Instruction

Gauge of Instruction

**Our students with disabilities  
(and other students who  
struggle)**

**are more susceptible to average  
or weak instruction than other  
students**



# In your school...

If you asked every teacher what constitutes  
GREAT instruction, how many answers  
would you get?

# If the answer is.....

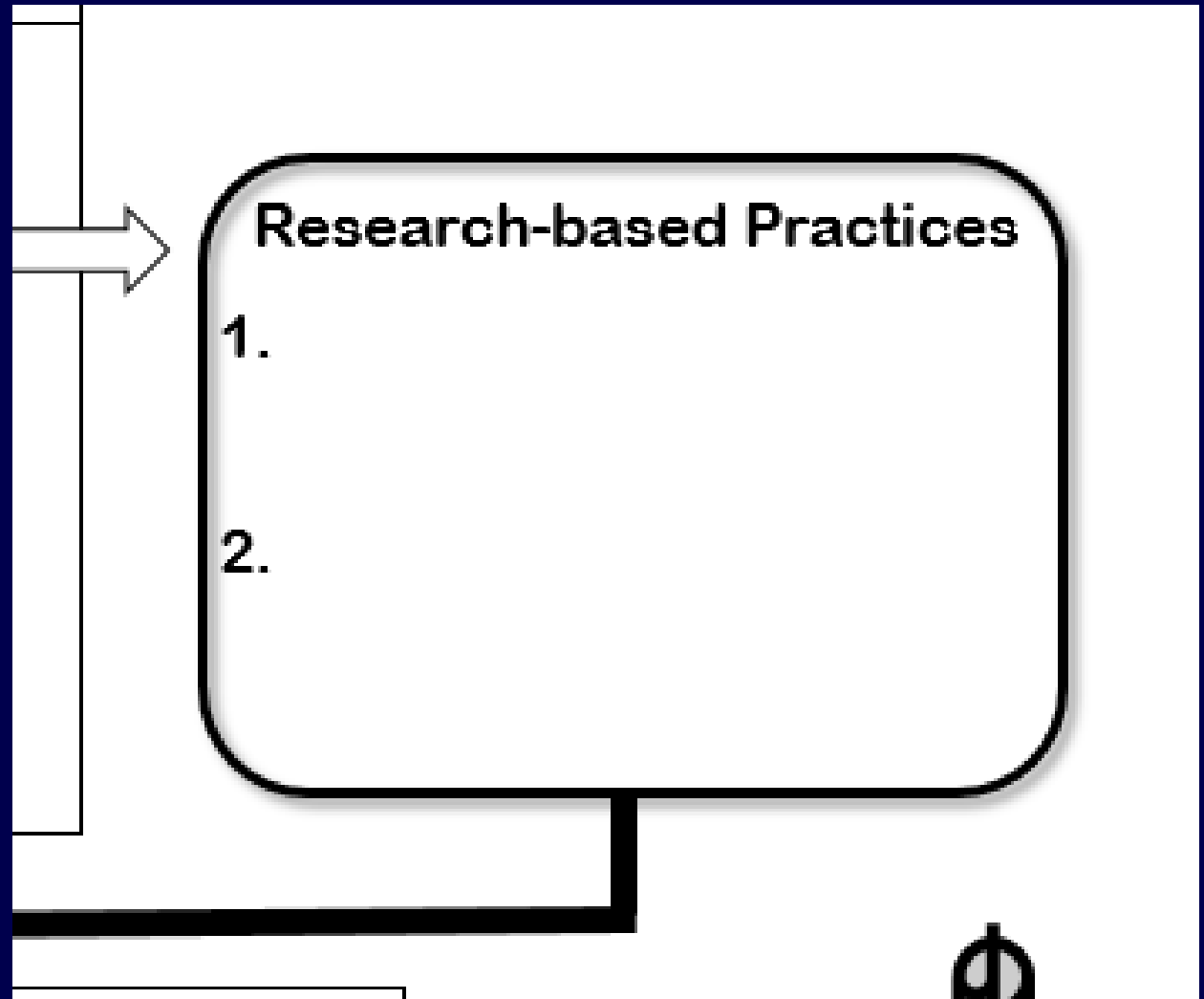
- You would have as many answers as there are teachers
- Does that seem like an efficient way to move instruction in the same direction?

# Debrief

- There are lots of ideas and concepts under each of the elements of GREAT Instruction
- If our ultimate goal is implementing improved practices across the district or school, then the leaders and teachers must build consensus on the most powerful indicators that they want to see in each classroom under each element of GREAT instruction

# My Big Ideas about Tailored in Flexible Groups

- ❑ Tailoring (or differentiating instruction) cannot be done effectively in large group instruction
- ❑ Therefore, small group instruction should occur routinely in all classes and grades (K-12<sup>th</sup>)
- ❑ Small group instruction allows for providing different practice turns based on student need along with differentiated feedback on students' attempts.
- ❑ Anytime there are two adults in the classroom, both should routinely lead small group instruction at the same time. There can also be student independent groups.
- ❑ Kindergarten and 1<sup>st</sup> grade teachers are typically the best at tailoring instruction in small groups



# In that space, write...

- Powerful Tier 1 (Universal) Instruction
- Effective Specially Designed Instruction

# Differentiated Activity

- Middle school students who have difficulty with reading (good for all levels)

Group A

- Effective Math Instruction (all levels)

Group B

# **Group A**

## **Discussion Activity: A few months ago, I observed a Middle School Reading Connections (Elective) class...**

- ☐ The students were chosen to participate in this class because they had weaknesses in reading.
- ☐ There were roughly 18 students in the classroom.
- ☐ They were all completing a sheet that asked them to break a list of words into syllables.
- ☐ Review the work of 3 students in the class.
- ☐ At a quick glance, I realized that all 18 students had similar answers.
- ☐ Discussion: What does the student work tell you?
- ☐ How does the work impact the next steps of instruction for the students?
- ☐ Why is this important?
- ☐ Share your thoughts with a partner.



# Group B

## Tier 1 Math Instruction

- ❑ In your packet, there is a quick quiz about effective math instruction. Complete that quiz. You can work in pairs.
- ❑ Read the excerpts from the National Mathematics Advisory Panel (2008) to determine if the answers to your quiz are accurate. You can work with a partner.

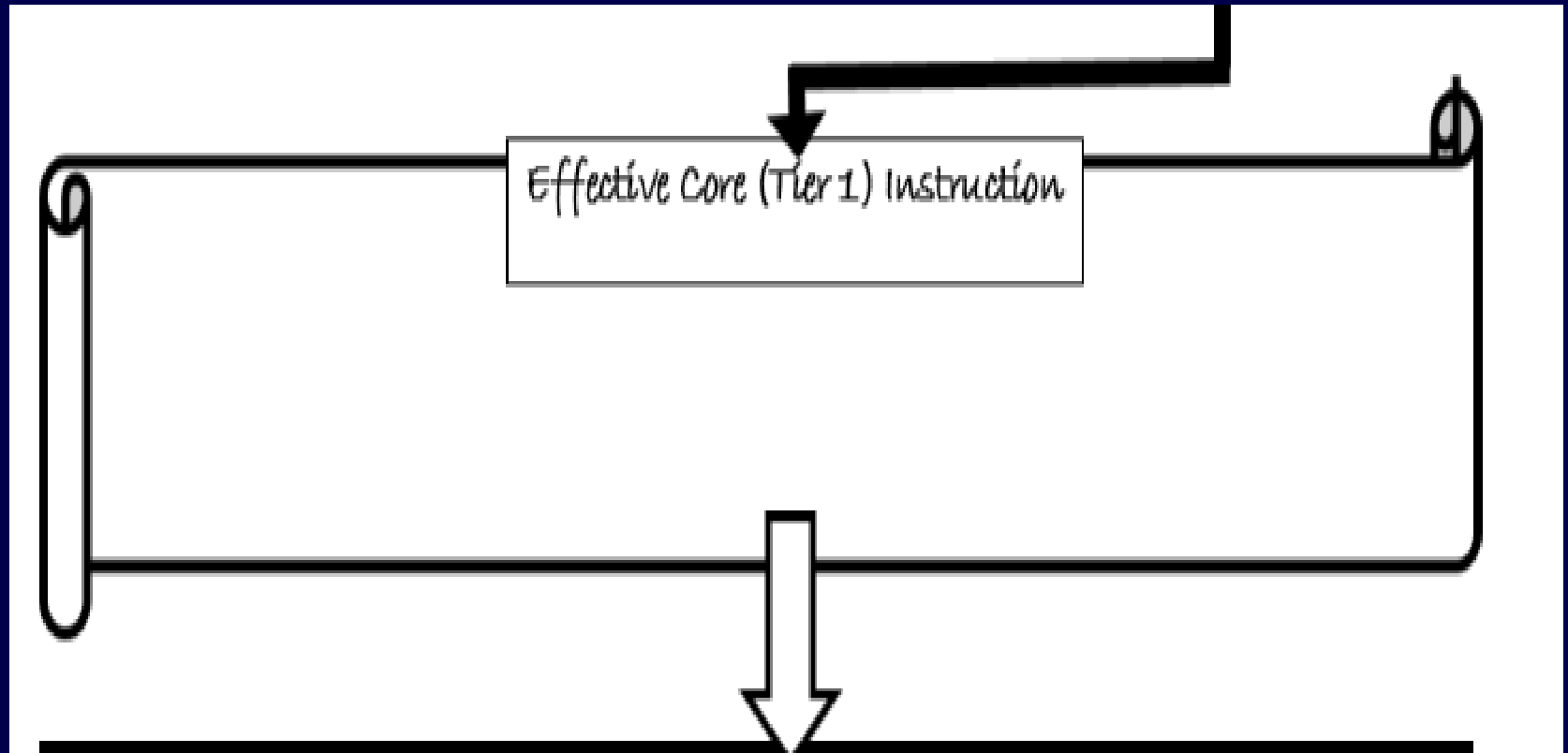
# Debrief

## ☐ Group B

- ☐ What does the student work tell you?
- ☐ Why is the skill of breaking words into syllables important for all readers and especially struggling readers?
- ☐ What percentage of your upper elementary, middle or high teachers know this?
- ☐ Should special education or general education personnel know this stuff deeply?

## ☐ Group C

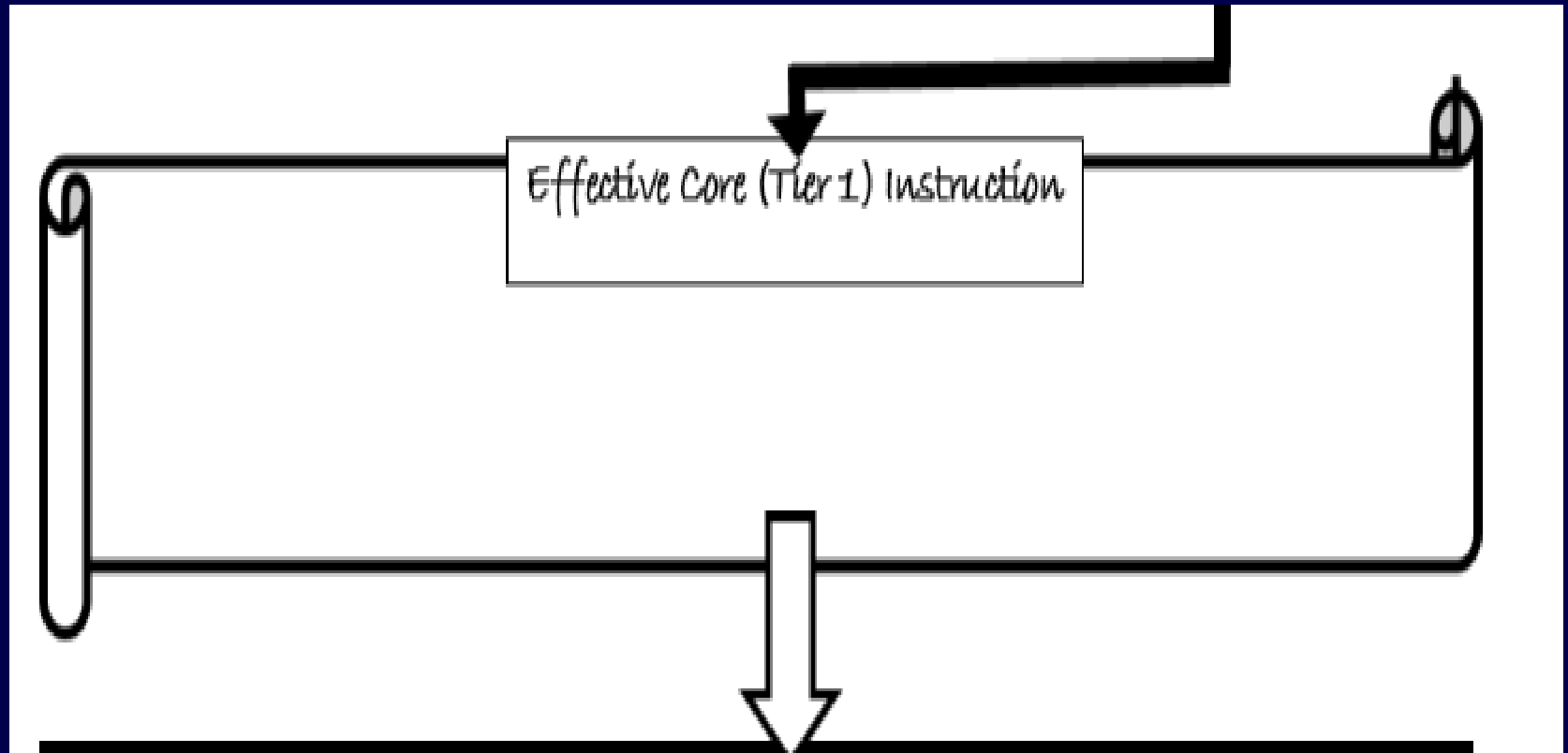
- ☐ What percentage of your math teachers are familiar with/deeply knowledgeable of the recommendations of the National Mathematics Advisory Panel?
- ☐ Should special education or general education personnel know this stuff deeply?



# In that space, write...

- Deeply understand the 5 Dimensions of Reading
- Provide effective literacy instruction in all classes
- Implement the recommendations of the National Math Advisory Panel

# **Two other seminal works regarding effective Tier 1 instruction**



# Understand and implement recommendations from:

- *Visible Learning for Teachers* by John Hattie
- *Classroom Instruction that Works 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition* by Dean, Hubble, Pitler and Stone (1<sup>st</sup> Edition from Dr. Marzano)

# Open Question

Today's training is supposed to be about increasing the achievement of students with disabilities.

Why did O'Connor spend so much time on instruction that happens in the general education class?

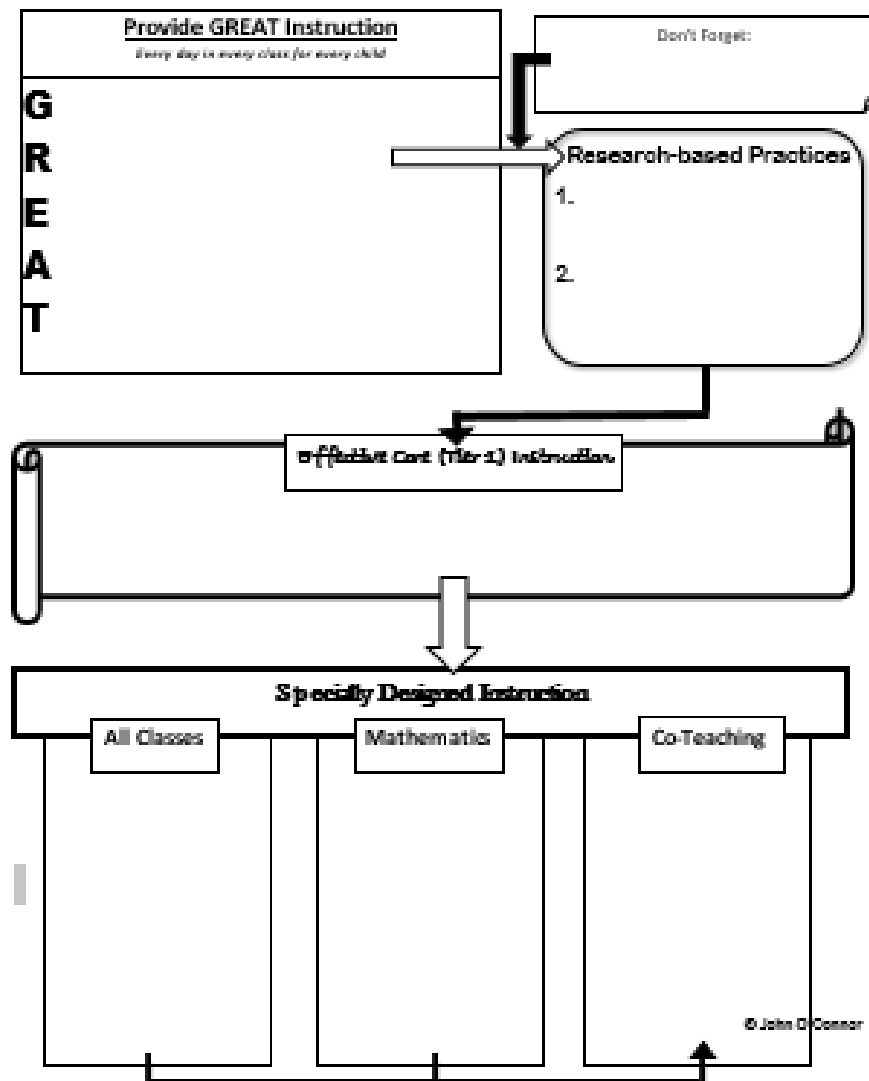


# Debrief

- Roughly 62% of students with disabilities spend at least 80% of their school day in general education settings.
- Another 20% spend at least 40% of their school day in general education settings.
- If we don't impact Tier 1 instruction, we will not increase the achievement of students with disabilities.

**Neither incredible specially  
designed instruction nor  
fantastic interventions can ever  
make up for ineffective Tier 1  
instruction**

Increasing the Achievement of Students with Disabilities  
and other students who struggle



# **Let's turn our attention to Specially Designed Instruction**

**In fact, since 1975 (Education for All Handicapped Children Act) “Special Education” has been defined as**

**Specially Designed  
Instruction**

## **Partner Discussion (3 Minutes)**

**What is specially  
designed  
instruction?**

# Did your answer sound something like...

- ❑ Designed to meet the unique needs of the student with a disability
- ❑ Enables the child to meet grade-level standards
- ❑ Includes adapting content, methodology, or delivery of instruction
- ❑ Based on the child's IEP
- ❑ Research-based

**Those things are legally true,  
but....**

**They don't tell us much**



**Just telling special education  
teachers to “provide specially  
designed instruction” is  
insufficient**

# **We have to get more specific!**

If we want our teachers to implement (and our administrators to lead) specially designed instruction consistently for all of our students...

We have to clearly define it and provide more support

We have enough experience.  
There is significant research.  
We have enough common sense.

Can we make a list of instructional practices that are needed by a large majority of students with disabilities (those not taking the alternate assessment)?

# Partner Activity (4 minutes)

Make a list of the specific instructional practices that are needed by the greatest number of SWDs (not taking the GAA).

If these things were implemented with great fidelity for all students with disabilities, in all classes, then you would see great gains.

# **My short list that apply to all subjects**

- ❑ Drastically increase student practice turns and feedback
- ❑ Provide highly organized and sequential explicit instruction with modelling, guided practice with feedback and independent practice
- ❑ Implement explicit and embedded vocabulary instruction
- ❑ Implement fill-the-gap interventions
- ❑ Incorporate metacognitive instruction
- ❑ Implement effective behavioral systems

# I am not saying...

- ❑ That this list is an absolute
- ❑ Your list may be different
- ❑ But, we need to be able to set a foundation for “specially designed instruction” in our districts/schools
- ❑ Sits on top of effective Tier 1 instruction
- ❑ Sets the foundation for specially designed instruction

**If 10 different parents asked 10 different special education teachers, “What specially designed instruction will you provide for my child?,” what answers would they get?**



# What if they answered (and were very well trained)...

“We make sure that we:...

- ❑ Drastically increase student practice turns and feedback
- ❑ Provide highly organized and sequential explicit instruction with modelling, guided practice with feedback and independent practice
- ❑ Implement explicit and embedded vocabulary instruction
- ❑ Implement fill-the-gap interventions
- ❑ Incorporate metacognitive instruction
- ❑ Implement effective behavioral systems

And then on top of that...

**Let's dig a little further...**

**In my opinion, all learning comes down to 2 things. People only learn how to do something if they have these two things...**

- It doesn't matter if you are a beginning learner or an advanced learner in a skill/area**
- It doesn't matter what you are learning**

- Ballroom dance**
- Balance equations**
- Read**
- Write a paragraph**
- Read an X-Ray**
- Collaborate with classmates**

- Bake cookies**
- Throw a spiral**
- Speak Mandarin**
- Read informational text**
- Use the Periodic Table**
- Compare two texts**

# Partner Discussion

**What are those two things?**

# Debrief

# Practice Turns and Feedback

- All people only get better at *something* if we practice doing that *something*
- But, practice alone is insufficient
- All people need feedback on their efforts/attempts/practice turns

## Partner Discussion:

- Do you agree with the statements above?
- Why or why not?
- Can you think of any exceptions? (O'Connor can think of one.)

# Open Question

**In our schools, which students need more Practice Turns and Feedback to master the same skills?**

- ☐ Gifted students?
- ☐ Typically developing/average students?
- ☐ Struggling students?
- ☐ Students with Disabilities?

**In our schools, which students typically get the fewest Practice Turns and Feedback?**

- ☐ Gifted students?
- ☐ Typically developing/average students?
- ☐ Struggling students?
- ☐ Students with Disabilities?

**WHY?**

**Do we all agree that students with disabilities (and other students who struggle) need much more practice and feedback than other students to learn the same skill?**

**Then should “increase practice turns and feedback” be a critical component of specially designed instruction?**



**Let's try an activity that  
increases student Practice Turns  
and Feedback**

**Vocabulary Activity**

**For this activity, work in pairs**

**Person A: Can look at the next slide**

**Person B: Cannot look at the next slide**

**Person A: Give clues for all of the words below. You can use sentences and gestures, but you cannot say the word/phrase.**

☐ Senator

☐ vote

☐ law

☐ Constitution

☐ bill

☐ District

☐ Governor

☐ Peacock

☐ Supreme Court

☐ Republicans

☐ Democrats

☐ Washington D.C.

☐ Electoral College

☐ Majority

☐ Broccoli

# Debrief

- ❑ Were there high rates of Practice Turns and Feedback in that activity?
- ❑ Who received feedback?
  - Person A?
  - Person B?
- ❑ Is this an effective way to practice using vocabulary?
- ❑ Would it be effective in Biology, U.S. History, 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Reading class?

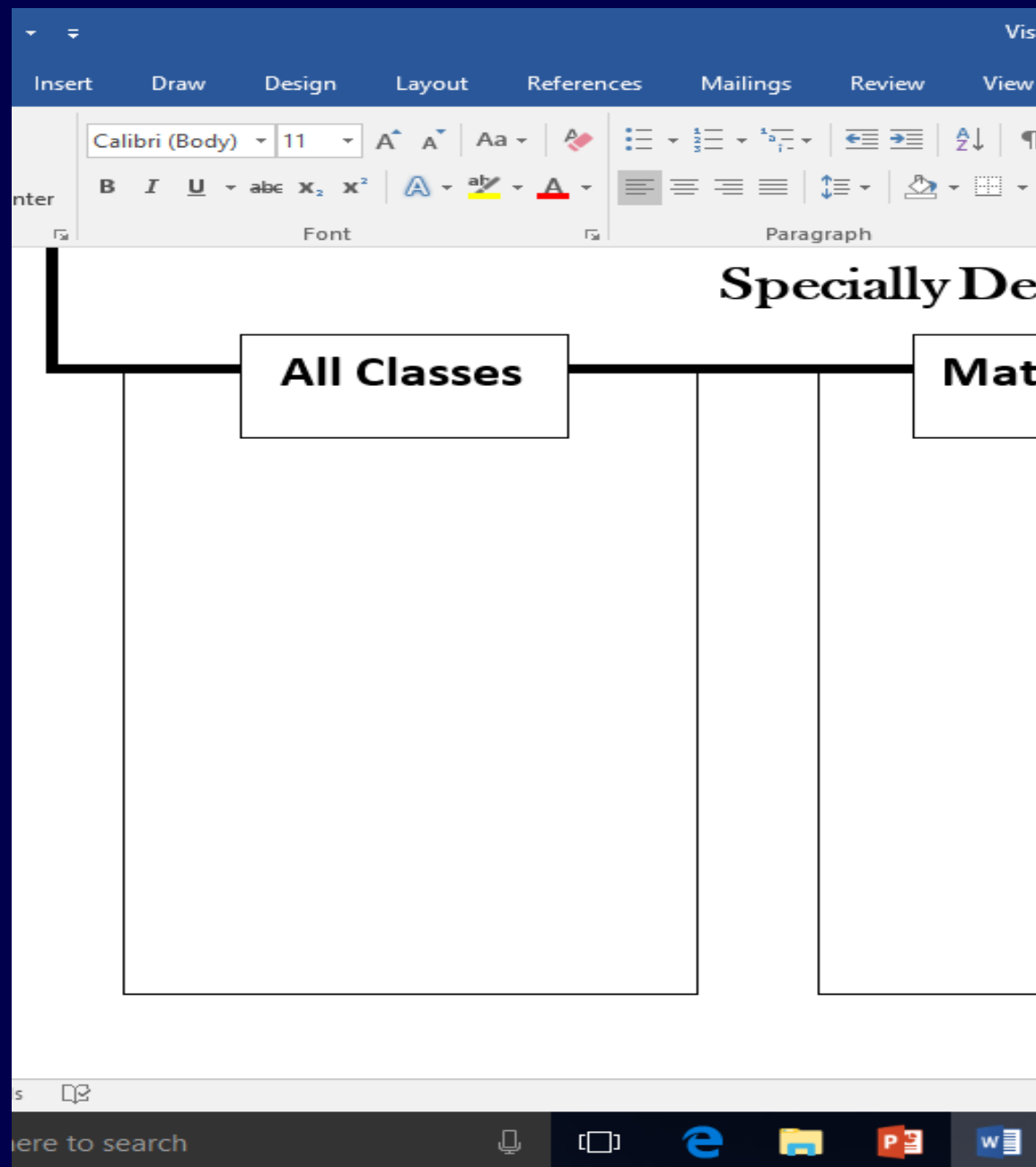
**Your list doesn't have to match  
my list...but you need a list**

# Partner Discussion

- In your district, if you developed a list of specific instructional practices that became the foundation for specially designed instruction, how would that change:
  - Your work?
  - Who you train?
  - How you train special education and general education teachers?
  - Who you partner with?

# Benefits

- Gets us closer to widespread and consistent implementation
- The other option – expecting way too much from our special education and general education teachers
  - In medicine, we have different specialties.
- Impacts not only SWDs, but other students who struggle (and many other students)





# **My short list that apply to all subjects**

- ☐ Drastically increase student practice turns and feedback
- ☐ Provide highly organized and sequential explicit instruction with modelling, guided practice with feedback and independent practice
- ☐ Implement explicit and embedded vocabulary instruction
- ☐ Implement fill-the-gap interventions
- ☐ Incorporate metacognitive instruction
- ☐ Implement effective behavioral systems

# Let's look at co-teaching

- Partner Discussion: What benefit are students getting from having 2 teachers in the room?

# How are students benefitting from the second teacher?

- They are not.
- We are paying for 2 teachers to do the job that 1 teacher can do!

# Co-Teaching

## Open Questions

- Who is co-teaching for?
- Should the co-teaching environment be **DRASTICALLY** different for the students than a class taught by only one teacher?
  - If yes, how should it be different?

# What should we see in a co-teaching class?

- Small group instruction
- Both teachers should be leading small groups at the same time. There can also be student independent groups.
  - High rates of (student) practice turns and feedback
  - The list of Specially Designed Instructional Practices

# Let's discuss co-teaching

- One Teach/One Assist
- One Teach/One Observe
- Team Teaching
- Alternate Teaching
- Station Teaching
- Parallel Teaching  
Marilyn Friend et. al.

- Supportive Co-Teaching
- Parallel Co-Teaching
- Complementary Co-Teaching
- Team Teaching  
Villa and Thousand

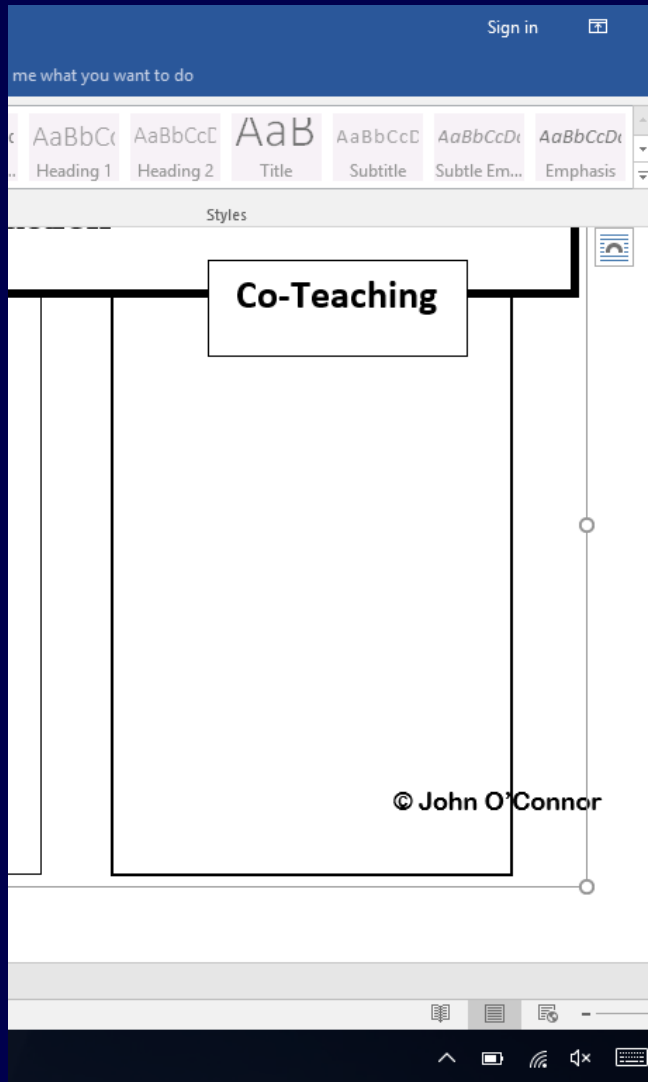
# What happens in small group instruction?

- Students participate in more practice turns and a higher frequency of **TAILORED** feedback
- The list of specially designed instructional practices
- **See how it all fits together!!!**

# **When we write co-teaching in a student's IEP...**

**We are obligated to provide specially designed instruction in that class**

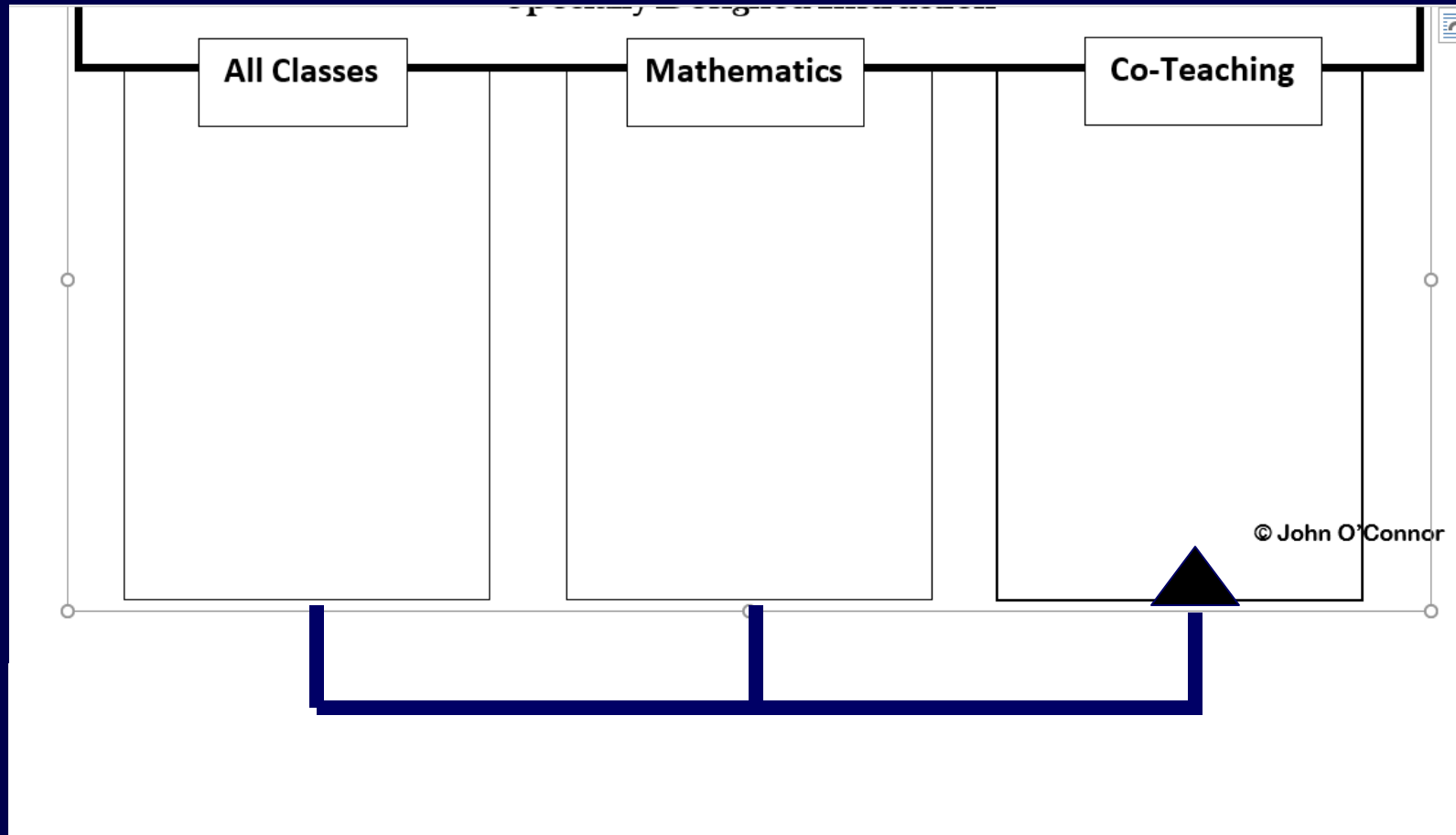




**In that space write...**

- **Both teachers lead small group instruction. There can also be student independent groups.**
- **Implement specially designed instruction from the left**

See this line...



# **We have finished the Road Map**

The Superintendent has called you to his/her office.

**“We have to radically improve the achievement/learning of our students with disabilities in our school/our district. What should we do?”**

What would you say?

# Please DON'T:

- ❑ Just give this sheet to someone and think the job is done
- ❑ This is a multi-year endeavor that takes lots of alignment, prioritizing elements, training, coaching, etc.

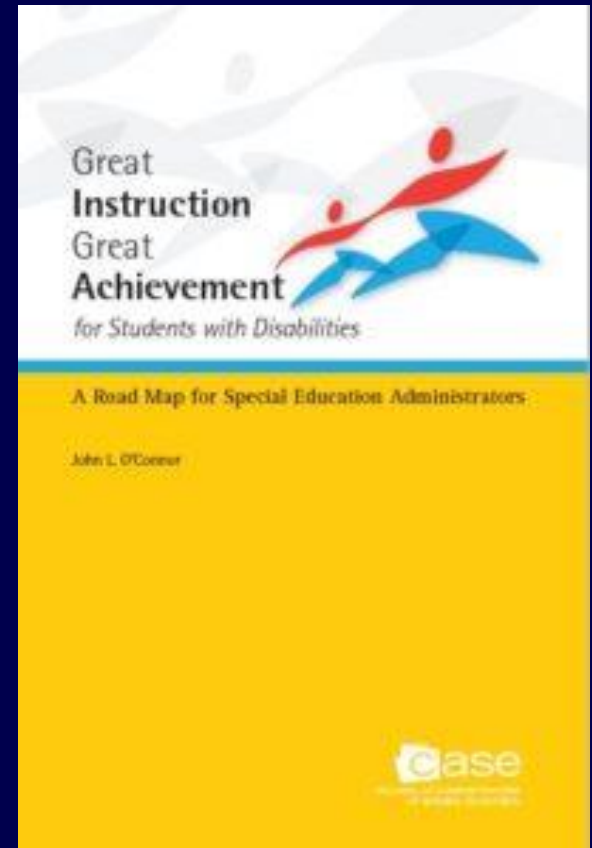
**If we have to impact the  
instruction in ALL classrooms,  
who has to be involved in this  
work?**

# **Additional Resources and Training Opportunities**

**Note: I don't earn any money off of  
any of these.**

# ***Great Instruction Great Achievement for Students with Disabilities: A Road Map for Special Education Administrators***

**Available at  
[www.casecec.org](http://www.casecec.org)**



# Disclaimers about book

- ❑ I don't make any money off of the book
- ❑ Contributed the manuscript to CASE (but kept the intellectual property rights)
- ❑ Mailed it to each of their members in January of 2017
- ❑ National CASE: Council for Administrators of Special Education (national organization) – Outstanding Organization
- ❑ Even though the book is targeted toward Special Education Administrators, the first half is beneficial for every educator



# SSTAGE Full-Day Conference

*Increasing the Achievement of Students with  
Disabilities*

June 21, 2018  
Macon, Georgia

Registration available at [sstage.org](http://sstage.org)

# Bi-Weekly Newsletter

- ❑ Every other week, I send out a quick, email hint about how to increase the achievement of students with disabilities
- ❑ Target audience - leaders: administrators and teacher leaders
- ❑ If you want to be added to the email list, text me at 678.243.8957 and include your email address
- ❑ Can unsubscribe at any time