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Supporting Students with Emotional Disabilities in General Education Classrooms

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Schools are faced with two conflicting impulses: to respect and support individual student and parent preferences, beliefs, and needs and at the same time to standardize academic and social expectations. Moving between these strong currents, the shift from special to inclusive education represents more than a change in educational policy—it reflects and typifies this larger crisis in educational philosophy and wider cultural concerns.

The University of New Hampshire's Institute on Disability (IOD), as part of its commitment to fully inclusive schools, has been working to support local school systems in developing flexible and comprehensive supports for students with educational disabilities. In collaboration with Keene State College in Keene, New Hampshire, and the state Department of Education, the IOD began the New Hampshire Statewide Systems Change Project, funded by the U.S. Department of Education. One aspect of this project involved developing and implementing proactive strategies and supports for those students identified as "seriously emotionally handicapped." Through ongoing training and technical assistance, schools throughout New Hampshire are developing a wide variety of student and teacher supports that allow them to successfully include identified students who are at risk of being placed in a separate classroom or school. The full inclusion of children with emotional disabilities rep-

resents a significant challenge for many schools. This project provides ongoing and systematic support to encourage systemwide change over time as opposed to a quick-fix mentality. Several districts receiving support have made long-term commitments to develop, implement, and monitor strategies and supports that enhance the social and emotional development as well as academic achievement of identified students.

There is no one answer as to what works, and no two schools have addressed the question of how to accomplish full inclusion of identified students in exactly the same way. This chapter presents case studies, based on numerous visits and in-depth interviews over a full school year, of four students in four different schools in four different areas of the state. Each school is deeply involved in the process of change and committed to inclusive education. Their experiences help shed light on the process and meaning of inclusion for individuals with behavioral difficulties.

BRIAN

Southwest Elementary School is in one of the wealthier communities in New Hampshire. This community of mostly white middle and upper-middle income families is committed to the importance of education and believes that directing local taxes to the schools is a good investment. As a result, the educational standards are quite high, and most children in the town attend public schools.

Much as one would expect, Southwest Elementary was clean, orderly, and quietly active. My visit felt like I was having lunch in a slightly pricey and popular restaurant. I met on a snowy, late winter morning with Brian's fourth-grade teacher and an assistant, both of whom had a warm, quiet way about them. When we began talking about Brian, their first words were, "He's a great little guy. And he's very intelligent."

Brian's mother was a single parent when he was born; he has never known his father. When he was of kindergarten age, his mother remarried and his stepfather is alleged to have abused him sexually and, inevitably, emotionally.

When he came into the first grade, he was kicking, biting, and spitting both at adults and at other children. His teachers are not quite sure what happened or why, but in the course of the next 2 years, Brian lived with his grandmother, at a group home for children with emotional disabilities, and with an aunt before coming back to Southwest as a fourth grader.

As part of this complicated life, Brian is legally the resident of another town but actually lives in the town of Southwest. Technically, he is a ward of the state, but his primary caregiver is his grandmother. The state pays for a psychologist to work with him at school for half an hour every week, but Brian works better when he has a full hour. Although it was recommended that he be seen by a psychologist for an hour each week, funding is only available for him to meet every other week for 1 hour. The compromise of 1 hour every other week is not the same as 1 hour every week. A full-time assistant works with Brian's class. Brian is still considered "explosive."

There have been days when Brian has broken pencils and chairs and then stormed out of the room when his teacher or the assistant have said "no" to him. Being in control is important to Brian, and he often has a hard time when told "no." Once he calms down he is expected to make up the work he has missed. As a consequence he often loses recess so that he may make up work that he has missed, but increasingly his teachers have been able to help him learn to make better choices by showing him alternative ways to deal with and talk about his anger and frustration. He is seen as gaining better control.

Brian's teacher thinks that his outbursts are sometimes connected to his diet and sometimes internally triggered by his difficult childhood. But for whatever reasons he gets upset, his teacher usually tries to get him to leave the room so he can yell outside until he has calmed down. She knows that talking with him when he's upset is useless but that he can be helpful in sorting his thoughts and feelings out once he's settled down again. Once Brian is calm, he is able to talk about what has made him angry and figure out alternatives to yelling or getting aggressive.

Like most children, Brian feels safe with clear boundaries, and his teacher's calm presence has helped him. As he starts to settle down, she asks him, "Do you want to go back to the classroom? Or do you want to walk more?" At first it would take him a good 15 minutes to wind down, but now it's more likely to take 5. Over time he has learned to recognize his readiness to return to structure and demands. Knowing that he has this choice gives him the sense of control he needs and helps him to deal more effectively with both the demands of school life and the internal stressors about which his teacher can only guess.

Brian's grandmother has petitioned the state for legal custody and has been encouraging more contact with his mother and his half-sister. The day I came to visit, Brian was planning to spend the upcoming weekend with his mother, his stepfather, and his half-sister on a trip out of state even though he has told his teacher, "Since I've been seeing my mother, I'm not doing the kind of work I was before." Staff who work with Brian recognize that disruptions in his life due to unstable and/or unsafe living situations often cause him to have more difficulty succeeding in school, and these staff members are able to adapt assignments and expectations when he is clearly too stressed to focus on these tasks.

An important factor in Brian's successful school experience has been the facilitating and trusting relationship he has had with his teaching assistant. When interviewed, the assistant reported, "I didn't have any special ed. background and, I [initially] turned the job down because I didn't know what to do.... But [the teacher] called me and told me I'd be fine. She told me 'He's wonderful. Wait until you get to know him.' The other teachers said, 'You're

going to have your hands full. He's a monster,' but I decided to give it a try. When I met Brian, I realized his potential. He needs a lot of TLC, so that's what I give him."

Her positive vision of who Brian was and her high expectations of what he could become if provided with a safe and supportive environment have clearly contributed to Brian's performance in a typical classroom. The assistant said, "If he had a bad morning he couldn't turn it off. So I taught him to realize that [even] if he had a bad morning, afternoon [could be] different. I taught him to smile and [stay] calm as a way to do it. I don't like tokens. They're about being perfect. I think it's better to teach respect, trust, communication, and honesty. No one's ever going to be perfect."

Because the assistant started in Brian's class as a substitute teacher, when she came as a teaching assistant, the pupils saw her as she hoped to be seen—as an aide to the whole room, not an assistant to one child. She and Brian get along very well. During school vacations, Brian will drop by her house just to say "hi."

Lately, Brian's individualized education program (IEP) team has been talking of weaning him from what they view as his dependency on the assistant. This is an odd response for a child who has had so difficult a time trusting adults. Still, the assistant has not tried to distance herself from Brian so much as she has tried to give him more sources of support and more ability to monitor his own behavior. As the year has progressed, his classmates have been offering him more spontaneous assistance. As they are better able to act as natural supports, the assistant's role is changing to one of facilitator. If Brian still needs sustained daytime support when he is in middle school, he could have a system of planned peer support.

He is already making more friends at school. Last year a group of girls were like mother hens around him, and he often avoided playing with other boys because he would get into fights. But now he is fitting in better. He's doing well in karate, which gives him some status, too. Karate seems like a good way for him to connect socially because it has clear rules, boundaries, and a way to focus and direct energy positively.

In spite of all of this hardship for one so young, Brian has remained at grade level. His teacher says, "He does not need to perform at a certain level in order to get a passing grade. He enjoys being challenged, and our flexible grading system gives him some leeway in excusing his individual variation. Sometimes we accept the work, but [other times] we tell him, 'This is not the best you can do, so let's try it again.' I've been in the classroom 22 years. You can see challenge in a lot of different ways, and no two classes are alike. The trick is to make a class of so many individuals into a unified community.

"I was teaching third graders, and when I went to fourth grade, 18 kids came along. During that year, I began to think my discipline was too negative, and I didn't like behavior [modification]—it wasn't positive, and I was looking for positive discipline. So I put up signs like *We're here to help each other* around the classroom. I'm looking for ways to teach kids about looking for solutions, not blame.

"I also started having class meetings every morning. The agenda comes from a community problem book. The issues have ranged from minor ("Recess is too short") to serious ("I'm scared of this kid who kicks me"). These class meetings have really changed things for the better. Talking about these things has made all the difference in the world.

"Recently, the class had been in a debate because of what a boy had said and how a girl had reacted. What had started between two pupils became a major dispute. But in the class meeting, the kids themselves resolved the whole thing. They decided it's not a good idea to tell other people when someone is bothering you. It's a lot simpler to talk to the person directly. Brian had the last word on this. He pointed out that boys and girls see things differently and that it was important to remember this when talking things out. The other kids were impressed. Brian says he hates the morning meetings, but he likes the compliments he receives from the other students when he has something to contribute."

KEVIN

When Kevin started first grade at Northeast Elementary School, his teachers remember him crawling on the floor, barking, and destroying his work. He seemed to have mood swings from happy and giddy to seriously depressed within minutes. He was referred for assessment fairly quickly, was diagnosed as having attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and a major mood disorder, and was reassigned to the school's self-contained special education classroom.

But during second grade, Kevin was placed into the general education second-grade class at Northeast Elementary School, with a resource room available within the school as a back-up. He was considered one of the brightest kids in his room so his teacher focused on his academic ability. Originally, an assistant was assigned to work with him on arithmetic, but she decided it would be better to help the children who were struggling most with their work. As it turned out, Kevin was rarely one of them. As she described it, "He could do work well above grade level, but he couldn't do, 'What's your name? Can I play with you?'" Although academically bright, Kevin had problems using social skills to make friends, solve problems, and deal with frustrating situations.

When Kevin has a difficult time dealing with his emotions or needs to settle down, he goes to the resource room for a while. The resource room teacher has an open, sunny manner; and although we intruded on her fairly busy schedule, she matter-of-factly talked to us while she worked. "Our strategy has been to pull him out to the resource room when he's getting confused, give him some one-to-one instruction, and then get him right back into class to try it

out," she explained. "I try to make a safe space here for *all* kids in the school. It should be a choice [for] all kids to say, 'I need a break, I need to go,' and not have to deal with emotional crisis in public or in front of a group. Sometimes teachers can get into a struggle with the child, and the only way they know how to deal with it is through public correction. I even have teachers who say public humiliation is good sometimes. But it is just inhumane for kids who didn't get dinner last night, whose parents were drunk, or who get beaten. This is not correction. For these kids it means, 'You are worthless.'"

By the second half of the year, Kevin, at 9 years old, was doing well as a full-time member of the second grade class. Kevin's teacher, with 18 years' teaching experience, had thought at the beginning of the year that having Kevin full-time in the class was going to be more difficult than it has turned out to be. As she began designing accommodations, she found that this process was not much different from how she had always adapted her methods in individual situations so that each student could get the most out of school. She had been individualizing her approach for pupils all along.

She said she believes that "maybe the real secret to our success had been having more people and the flexibility that gives us. Using the teaching assistants intelligently is work; I don't want someone just listening to me talking. Having the assistant makes planning more work, but because of the other adults in the room, I can have a group go out to do something while I get the chance to have five pupils in a writing lab. At that level of personal attention, instruction gets much more effective."

Her biggest challenge has been how to be fair but firm with Kevin. One of the difficulties of working with a student with neurological differences or emotional difficulties is sorting out when the child is overwhelmed, genuinely confused, or is just being a kid. "He will push and try not to be responsible. When he gets stressed or out of control, he cries or says, 'Everyone else is doing it!' I feel confident with the checklists we have developed to help remind him about work and conduct. And it helps having the safety valve of [the resource room teacher] and her room."

Both Kevin's school and the local mental health services agency recognize that a child is not just a "behavior problem" or a "difficult student" but a family member with a life beyond the school and that parents need (and usually want) to be part of their child's education in more significant ways than simply coming to an IEP meeting. The local mental health services agency has instituted a program of in-home therapy for children identified as having behavioral or emotional difficulties at school.

The director of this program said, "Many parents thought of the therapy program as 'They're coming to get me and take my kids away.'" Now, like good teachers, the agency staff meet families where they are most comfortable and allow trust, a critical variable in both therapy and education, to develop.

"Initially, I was only going to oversee this program," the director explained, "but it became clear that whoever was overseeing the program had to be involved personally. I wanted to create predictability and consistency. Relationships are critical, and I stay involved with every family. Ours is not a program where staff working with these families can come and go; every time a face changes, we set them back tremendously. Our hope is to carry over treatment into the home. For instance, if a child is learning to make friends, we figure out ways of helping school friends be a part of after-school life."

Kevin's family decided that participating in the in-home therapy program would be a good idea. One program staff member who works with Kevin said, "Home workers can take him and his friends down to the [arcade] to play computer games. The other kids' parents are comfortable with that, and Kevin gets to have his friends while doing something fun. Kevin has come through the same stages we have come through as a system. His mom was angry at the school, and she was right—we really were messing up. And now his mom has her own support group of other parents with kids with ADHD issues. She's listened to the other parents, and this has given her a way to work on her parenting skills."

Northeast Elementary is unique in its ability to gain access to community supports for students and families, which helps school staff extend support beyond the school day. Given the complexity of many of the students' problems, it is difficult for the school to provide all necessary supports in isolation from other professionals. Kevin's success is partially due to the school's ability to collaborate in providing comprehensive supports for him and his family.

Kevin is only 9 years old, but he has had a lot to cope with. Beyond the ordinary pains of growing most kids have and beyond having an unpredictable emotional life and adjusting to ADHD, Kevin had a hard time with his parents' separation. His big wish was that they would get back together.

Last April, Kevin spent part of his spring vacation week with his father, who committed suicide shortly after Kevin left. Kevin's teachers did not know how to talk to him about this, but they knew it was important that they do so. A clinical social worker who spends 2 days per week at Northeast Elementary School and who had been seeing Kevin at school was able to help them with their concerns.

The social worker said, "Kevin talked with the class about it: He told them he was having a tough time 'because my dad died over vacation,' and the kids asked, 'Are you okay?' The kids and the teacher understood, and he got a lot of support because of it. After this the kids were better able to accept him when he was difficult."

Success in school is only a beginning for Kevin, who will need significant supports as he continues to grow and develop. Social skills remain an area of concern. According to the social worker, "His relationship skills are weak. He gets depressed a lot, and he's hard to approach. If a kid asked him to play, he would appear not to hear [him or her]. And then if he did play, he would

have a hard time understanding the rules or would have a hard time playing if he tried to join in."

The positive relationship between Kevin and his teacher will continue to be a key factor in making further growth possible. "I am his safety net; I am always here. He knows I will make good choices when he can't make them for himself and he knows I will never hurt him. I give him safety first and that is the biggest issue for kids who have been hurt." Helping kids be safe and successful is what it's all about.

ELIAS

I arrived at Central Elementary at the same time that another researcher was interviewing the teachers whom I was scheduled to meet. The teachers were answering this researcher's questions and talking to one another simultaneously. I waited for this to subside before jumping in with my questions about Elias, a sixth grader who was identified as having a "severe emotional disorder."

As I sat there, I was struck by the maxim "We are who we serve." These same teachers who spent much of their time each day organizing material so that children could be focused and attentive were, themselves, busily and noisily unfocused; were interrupting themselves and one another; and were distracted by everything going on around them. In the midst of this flurry, I started to piece together how life at Central Elementary might have been going for Elias and what it had been like before he had come to Central.

Elias started in parochial school and had a good first year but in the second grade began losing verbal control. He started swearing and was considered behaviorally difficult because of his resistance to direction and his argumentativeness with teachers. His mother was asked to take him out of the school.

Elias's mother took him to Central Elementary, where he was so argumentative and physically aggressive that he was assigned a one-to-one assistant. The assistant would take him out of the general education classroom for individual instruction in a room so small that his teacher said it was almost a closet. Soon after, Elias was diagnosed with Tourette syndrome and ADHD. The school district felt that it had little knowledge about how to deal effectively with a child with these diagnoses and was initially not willing to serve a child who was out of physical control. So, Elias was bused out of the district to finish second grade in a day school for children with behavioral and emotional disorders. This school did not use individual behavior plans but rather had a policy of sending disruptive students to a time-out room staffed with two assistants. Instead of teaching Elias more effective strategies to deal with his problems, he was punished for losing control. Elias spent more and more time in time-out and less and less time in class. As it happened, Elias came to enjoy socializing with the assistants, but they did not give any instruction. When his mother reported that she was having a hard time at home getting him to do the work he had missed in class, the school responded by no longer sending the work home with him. If his teacher asked him for his assignment, he would just swear and be sent to time-out for the rest of the day.

Not surprisingly, his academic levels at the end of the year were the same as at the beginning of the year, and by the end of fourth grade his behavior had deteriorated to the point where he spent large amounts of time angry and out of control. So, the out-of-district day school asked for additional funding. Confused and concerned by the school's inability to appropriately support Elias, his school district decided to develop an individualized transition plan to bring him back to Central. They decided that they could use the funding they were paying to the day school to provide better and more typical supports to Elias in a typical classroom environment. Initially, Elias came to school for just half a day, but he quickly complained that he was not really part of the class, and he was right.

When Elias began fifth grade, he was worried about math so he went to a tutor over the summer, and that helped to the extent that he came back with no academic lags. Now he has typical math skills, but his verbal abilities are very high. He began the year on a "diagnostic placement," which meant that for 45 days teachers would collect data and then develop a plan. They began with a tentative IEP until they could tailor it to him as they got to know him better.

Elias's initial behavioral goal was to control his speech volume, not the profanity (he would shout "yummy" or "f*** you," or make a clucking sound). The teachers did cue Elias to make him *aware* that he was swearing and give him 2 minutes to quiet down. If he didn't, they found his behavior would escalate and get very loud. For that reason, if he did not regain control in the 2 minutes, he earned a time-out, which meant he was sent to the resource room to regain control.

Once, when Elias failed to calm down in the resource room, the teacher called the special education van to remove him from the building. Elias was very upset and couldn't believe that he was being sent home. As the teacher explained, "I didn't know then how much control he had." A few days later she talked with Elias about the incident. She said, "I eventually asked Elias if he really wanted to be here at this school, and he said he did. So I told him, 'Then I expect you to be appropriate in the class and the hallway.'"

The point of time-out was not to be punitive but to give Elias a chance to calm down. Once calm, he was expected to plan a different way to deal with the next time he became angry or anxious. Elias was subsequently taught how to self-monitor his anxiety. When he found himself becoming anxious, rather than wait until he was out of control, he was allowed to quietly leave the classroom and go to the resource room until he felt he could return. But he still thought of this as a punishment. So, he and the teacher worked out a deal. In his classroom, he can say "I need to leave," or he can just leave without saying anything—and he can go where he chooses on school grounds. He usually chooses to go for a walk or to sit in the resource room.

The teacher reports that some of the other teachers are confused by this policy. They ask, "How does Elias get away with being out of class on his own like that?" Elias's teacher tries to help these teachers see this as not a moral lapse but rather an accommodation that Elias needs to successfully cope with school.

Elias regularly sees a local pediatric neurologist who has served on the multidisciplinary team that has been working on giving Elias specific behavioral supports and coordinating these with his medication. Recently, perhaps as the result of a medication change, he seems to be smiling instead of getting angry or only saying "yummy" rather than swearing noisily.

Elias has come to see the resource room as helping rather than punishing and as something available to anyone who needs it. He explained, "If there's a problem in a class, we can come down here where's its quiet, or they let [me] go outside to take a break. Or we can go walk around with the teacher in the school. We go back when we are okay." I asked him how he would know he needed to take a break. "If I get warm inside and if I can't concentrate, I can act really wild. I get warm inside my head, and I start fooling. I've learned to figure this out and take a break."

When asked what helps the most, Elias answered, "the teachers, because they understand me. I have had a tough time. They think of ways to help me and give me goals and stuff and help if I need it. They help me stay in class and with the homework and write home about what kind of day I've had. They don't say, 'He was bad today.' They don't use bad words. They write, *It's been a tough day.*"

Elias's sixth-grade teacher had worked in an automotive customer service department for 20 years when he decided to go back to school. He said, "I had always wanted to teach." He has a reputation of being very understanding but lets kids know when they are not acting as well as they might. "Kids may get crazy, but they are not all bad. I can gain the kids' confidence and that's reassuring to them. This year's class is an anxious group.

"I guess I have some structure, but it's flexible enough to make changes on the run. You can't go in straight lines; you may have to take a lot of detours. At the same time, you have to leave enough space for the kids. They have to be comfortable. If they aren't comfortable, nothing is going to get done. If they don't have that trust in you and what's happening, they will just shut down. To get that trust you have to be open and not assume things—actually see what's happening and respond to it. I help [each of] them find out what's going on, because sometimes the kid doesn't know either. I know this sounds vague, but that's the whole point—it *is* kind of vague."

CORY

The town of Southeast is a mixture of "haves" and "have nots." Approximately 12% of its population have college degrees, and 25% have not finished high school. A number of parents have a vision of education as a way for their children to advance. But another group, more vocal and active in local politics, have said, in effect, "I didn't have computers when I was in school, and I'm all right." A number of parents have chosen home schooling for religious reasons. One quarter of the homes in the community are mobile homes. After the IOD conducted a series of workshops for the Southeast school system, the town's high school embarked on a process of becoming fully inclusive.

First, I met with the principal of Southeast High. He had been described as young, caring, flexible, and supportive. He had arranged for students to take courses at the community college or for them to have personalized schedules so that they could graduate. Given the support of the superintendent, he worked to bring pupils who had been placed out-of-district back to their local schools.

He has a clear sense of what a school should be like and has worked to create a system in which experts support the teacher and the classroom rather than send the child to the expert. This way, he reasoned, a sense of ownership for each student's education would rest with a student's teacher. His goal is to create a culture where teachers have primary ownership and responsibility at every step.

Inclusion inevitably means more widely varying student needs. Students do not necessarily thrive simply by being included. The principal asked the faculty to design an approach to rule-violating behavior. He asked them how they could develop a consistent sequence of responses that would help students learn from their behavior rather than simply be punished for it. The results have been interesting, largely because of the way the issue was conceptualized. The principal might just as easily have asked, "How are we going to get kids to behave better?" This question would have led to a consideration of various strategies of cajoling, control, or coercion. Instead, by considering all of the staff in the school to be both stakeholders and resources, he invited them to have responsibility and investment in the result.

The faculty brainstormed about ways to address kids who break rules or do not make good choices and ways to give them more responsibility for their behavior, and how they could move from a punitive to a proactive learning system. They settled on an advisor–advisee program in which any adult in the building who wanted to work with kids would meet with a small group for half an hour once a month. The principal explained, "We use it mostly just to touch base with the kids. Every staff member agreed to be a part of it, though at this point it's voluntary, and some are better than others. We have all the teachers as well as people in food service, the secretary, the aides—they all have a group. This wasn't the point of doing this, but our school dropout rate fell from 8% to 2%. These sessions give kids a sense that if you're not here, someone will want to know why personally, not because it's their job to check up on you."

A technical assistance advisor from Keene State College also helped the school come up with a consistent system for responding to difficult situations.

Rather than send students directly to the vice principal, who is the administrator traditionally in charge of misconduct, the advisor suggested that students come to a planning room where they could identify what got them into trouble, identify their feelings, and think of different ways they could act in such situations in the future. The faculty feared that this would overwhelm the planning room and the specialists there, so the advisor's suggestion was to let this system develop over time as each teacher found a way to respond to difficult situations. In practice, the teachers have found that with consistency and predictability, the explosions are less frequent and kids are doing better.

Cory was identified as a student with educational disabilities by a student intervention team comprised of special educators, guidance counselors, administrators, teachers, and the school nurse. The team's function is to keep an eye out for kids who aren't succeeding or are at risk. The basic attitude of these teams is, "Something in this school is not working for this student, so what do we need to do?" Cory, however, was identified late and therefore was not provided with special education supports until his junior year in high school.

In his junior year at Southeast High, Cory dropped out but then decided to come back to graduate. He was missing 17 credits and needed to take three English classes, so he signed up for as many as he could in the fall. Teachers thought he would be overextended and were not optimistic about this plan. But he and his guidance counselor got along well, and she supported Cory in his plan. To almost everyone's surprise, he not only went to class and did his work but also passed all of his courses. Some of his teachers thought that a lot of this had to do with the counselor's faith in him.

By mid-year Cory got an after-school job and again enrolled in more than the usual number of classes for another ambitious semester. The job gave him some money, but it also added to his stress. Cory began spending his money on alcohol and drugs and started failing in his courses. At this point he started becoming defiant, saying, "I'm not listening to anyone anymore." His counselor wondered whether graduation meant that Cory would lose the structure and the safety that they had created at school.

Not far into the second semester, the principal noticed that Cory had a glass bottle in the cafeteria and reminded him of the rule forbidding glass containers in the cafeteria. Dealing with authority is, in the best of times, hard for Cory. In less time than it takes to read this, Cory lost control. He smashed the bottle and threatened to slash the tires on the principal's car, all the while menacing him with the jagged bottle neck. The principal knew that Cory needed time to blow off steam and process before he could talk rationally and that he had no skills of coping in the moment. The principal told him, "We know how hard you are trying, and we want to help you through." But Cory could only shout that the rule about glass containers was a stupid rule. Meanwhile, someone called the police, and as they removed him, they found a hash pipe in his jacket. (The school also has a rule forbidding drugs or paraphernalia.)

Cory went before the student board and negotiated his return. Given his difficulty in controlling his temper, his guidance counselor went over some options with him. The school rules, she explained, were not going to change for him, but he could make some choices about how he could live with them. She told him that if he felt stressed and needed to, he could walk around the school but that someone would need to know where he was, so one safe place would be to come to the planning room in the guidance department and calm down.

Sometimes, though, he would just walk to the restroom and smoke. He did this often enough to be caught six times, and the handbook on student behavior mandates suspension for 1 week after the sixth offense.

The day I came to Southeast High to meet Cory would have been the first day he was eligible to come back, but he had decided that it was hopeless. He was failing his classes and could not see how he could pass. His job, in a bottling factory, ironically enough, paid what seemed to him to be a comfortable wage. Compared with the structure and routine of his job, getting organized at school well enough to graduate probably seemed overwhelming to him.

I was curious about what kinds of clinical assessments Cory had been through. I was concerned that he had so many symptoms of a treatable neurobehavioral disorder that the school's accommodations, however well intended, simply missed the point. It made sense to me that the rules of the school would not change for him, and I admired the ways the adults in the school had worked so hard to be accommodating, but the difficulty, if my hunch was right, was not in Cory's intellectual grasp of success. Without having met him, I was sure that he knew very well what the rules were. I was concerned, though, that his highly variable capacity to gain access to that information, his impulsivity, his use of drugs, and his history of explosive behavior and substance abuse all might suggest that he had ADHD or a related disorder.

Just as Elias had Tourette syndrome but was not identified until it affected his academic work, Cory had not been identified as having educational disabilities until his junior year in high school, because he had been able to struggle along academically. Without any other way to understand him, and given his apparent intelligence, his behavior was seen as a lack of discipline or lack of regard for social norms. Without further clinical assessment, his underlying neurological condition could not be discerned or addressed, Cory would blame himself further and be more discouraged, and even adults who wanted to help would have to concede defeat in helping him.

It is difficult to strike the right balance. Because so much assessment focuses on what people cannot do (at least while being tested), some schools who have taken on inclusion have a justifiable suspicion of formal testing. Southeast High turned out to be one of these, and little assessment information on Cory was available.

Cory's girlfriend came to the guidance office to ask for the paperwork so that he could formally drop out. Perhaps with an accurate diagnosis and

some clearer accommodation, he may yet be able to return to school eventually and graduate.

IMPLICATIONS

Each of these four students' schools is unique in it's ability to gain access to resources, train staff, develop schoolwide approaches that focus on discipline as opposed to punishment, teach social skills and problem-solving strategies as part of a general curriculum, and in general provide safe and supportive environments in which children can learn. Despite the diversity of communities, staff, and organizational history, certain similarities appear across all of the environments represented in these case studies. Each school not only initiated changes in their *responses* to challenging behavior but also addressed the need for the *system as a whole* to expand beyond traditional boundaries to enhance the school's ability to provide successful social and learning experiences. Some common themes from these four case studies have clear implications for policy and practice in the following areas:

- Labeling and diagnosis
- Discipline and assessment
- Supportive school cultures
- Teamwork and interagency collaboration
- Flexible curricula and scheduling
- Appropriate supports for students and staff
- Parental involvement

Implications for Labeling and Diagnosis

In watching teachers, administrators, and parents struggle with the issue of including all children, I have noticed that the one group that seems to have be the hardest to support are the children labeled "severely emotionally disturbed" (SED), which is defined in the *New Hampshire Code of Administrative Rules* (n.d.) as the following:

> A condition exhibiting one or more characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree, which adversely affects educational performance:
>
> (1) An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory or health factors;
> (2) An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers;
> (3) Inappropriate types of behaviors or feelings under normal circumstances;
> (4) A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression or
> (5) A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems.

> (6) The term includes students who are schizophrenic.
>
> The term does not include students who are socially maladjusted, unless it is determined that they are seriously emotionally disturbed.

This definition sounds as though it were a diagnostic category when in fact it is a social construct. "An inability to learn" might be expected among children whose teachers cannot teach. It would be hard, and by no fault of their own, for children from a feared or hated minority or even a low-income family to "build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships." Section 3 leads one to question, "What is an inappropriate feeling?" It may not be "appropriate" to be tearful in geography class, but this obviously is not the case for a depressed child; it may not be "appropriate" to be rageful in algebra class, but it might be the best that a child with Tourette syndrome can do at the moment. This is not about blame. Children with "emotional disturbance" can come from chaotic homes; they can also come from homes where parents are doing as well as anyone knows to do.

I wonder who has more fun, logicians or lawyers, with the concluding sentence of the definition: "The term does not include students who are socially maladjusted, unless it is determined that they are seriously emotionally disturbed." In other words, children labeled "socially maladjusted" are not labeled SED unless they are SED.

The problem is that the term *SED* has pretensions to being a diagnostic label rather than the context-dependent, socially constructed expedient that it really is. No disability definition is—or even could be—about a child alone. To say a child has a body weight of 26 kilograms says nothing about the scale or the person who weighed the child, but to say a child has "an inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers" necessarily says something about those peers and teachers.

The medical impulse to call children with difficulties in school by a name that was not pejorative, such as SED, was probably an attempt to describe, neutrally, a condition and not a child. But most schools talk about "EH [emotionally handicapped] children" or "SED children," so in effect the term has found its actual value. It has come to be used as a synonym for "crazy," "rebellious," or "troubled."

Children labeled SED often *do* have real difficulties in making friends with other children. It would be one strategy, albeit not at all useful, to say that those other children must lack in empathy if they are not able to embrace this child. But it is not a matter of blame. Some children baffle other children—and adults—not because these other people are uncaring or stupid but because they are just baffled. Similarly, if parents struggle to cope with a child whom they love more than they understand, they are at risk of being assessed as "dysfunctional." This tendency to blame, however, stops with professionals. If a therapist or a program has no effect, we

professionals often console one another that these children must be, in effect, impossible.

Recognizing the mutuality of the problem children can present for schools invites us to ask honestly not just "What do we do about Brian (or Kevin, Elias, or Cory)?" but "What do all of us in this school need to support one another in creating a place where all can learn?"

Implications for Discipline and Assessment

These discussions of how difficult behavior is handled in schools have significant implications for what appropriate behavior is and what the consequences of inappropriate behavior should be. If we look at schools as factories making parts for the business world, then the emphasis on external appearance and conformity to social norms is well placed. But if we see schools as preparing children to feel like part of their communities, to make responsible decisions about themselves and their communities, and to continue learning and growing throughout their lives, then the focus shifts from appearances to understanding and accommodating each child's interior reality and needs. Without this feeling of understanding and acceptance, few children will be able to feel enough sense of belonging to care about social norms in the first place.

For example, one common misperception is that a child who is having tantrums or who is aggressive is angry. In reality, aggressive children are more often afraid. Typical discipline strategies may comfort the teacher and the class, but these responses can actually make matters worse for frightened children.

I suspect that routine disciplinary procedures are much more satisfying to the adults implementing them than they are instructive for the students on whom they are used. If, as a teacher, I have a student who for the first time is restless and is talking loud enough to disturb other students, I might try a gentle reminder. If the student escalates and tells me to back off, I might ask the student what is going on, with the implication that I'm really asking, "What's wrong? How can I help?" It might be that today this student is so anxious about something that he or she cannot say, "I'm worried about going home tonight." Or, this might be an anxiety attack that the child him- or herself poorly understands. Even a nonconfrontational and relaxed encounter can result in the student's blowing up and screaming threats or obscenities.

At this point, the class has a problem. Typically, the teacher is held responsible for managing a solution. Teachers choose, most likely, the route that seems to follow with what they think is the reason for a particular behavior. If they see disruptive behavior as coming from a "wild" kid who needs to learn that one doesn't talk and act like that in class, then sending him or her to the principal's office has a certain logic to it. If a disruption seems to be a

chronic pattern, a teacher might want to put the student on a program where he or she can earn rewards or expect consequences depending on his or her "choices." If the teacher thinks the child is having a hard time at home and needs to cool off, then maybe offering 10 minutes somewhere quieter, not as a punishing time-out but as a break, would help.

If we take as our starting point that Elias, for example, is disruptive and perhaps aggressive when he is anxious, the addition of a punishment that is contingent on disruptive behavior, if he pays attention to it, will probably only increase his anxiety about how he is performing. Increased anxiety will almost certainly diminish performance. This will lead to more of the disruption or aggression and is likely to lead to an increase in the punishment he can expect. (For some reason, behaviorally based schemes almost always escalate punishments rather than rewards.) As these behavioral programs fail to work, they are shaped in ways that soothe the adult administering them rather than the child they purport to help.

Many adults mistakenly assume that these difficult behaviors are intentional and learned and that students can control them. One could just as easily reverse this vicious cycle with one that has more responsiveness to Elias and his teacher. Most of us prefer unconditional reassurance when we're upset. If Elias is in fact having an anxiety attack or is frightened that he will be discovered and ridiculed for his lack of information, then he might be so nearly out of control that the only thing that will help is a chance to go somewhere quiet and calm down. Some days he might need to sit and refocus with a computer game or to go out and walk around the school 20 times as fast as he can. In the ideal world, Elias and his teachers know that these stressful times can happen and have negotiated these options in advance. That Elias knows he has options when things start to be too much for him reduces his stress.

As Elias experiences less stress, he can be expected either to show less disruption or aggression or at least to begin to learn how to control those behaviors. With his stress level reduced and a relationship with adults that is supportive rather than competitive, he is in a better position to take in information. A relaxed atmosphere also allows both Elias and the teacher to be more creative about solutions. If walking around or computer games don't work, then maybe something else will. The point is not to expect Elias to be compliant to the program but for the program to be supportive of Elias. Instead of teaching him that "1) we don't care about your feelings; 2) you will have to sort things out within our expectations; and 3) if you don't, you will be punished," the school might teach him that "1) you already know—or can learn to recognize—your own feelings; 2) we trust you to tell us decent ways of helping you; and 3) if those ways don't work, we can trust one another to find something that might."

Students need predictability. Predictable consequences, though, are less supportive than a predictable process. Knowing that whenever I do something

wrong a certain loss of privilege will always occur is less comforting than knowing that there is a process that will help me to take more responsibility. When punished, I resent and learn to avoid my punisher. When helped to take responsibility, I have greater skill the next time.

These kinds of negotiations subtly teach what is appropriate. By teaching Elias that we are working to make things safe for him, he learns that he can value this safeness because he has experienced it. Many students who are "emotionally disturbed" have received a great many lessons from adults on maladaptive behavior.

Implications for Supportive School Cultures

Just as the school systems' case studies represent different communities, they each have arrived at somewhat varying technologies of support:

- Brian's school uses class meetings and staff support team sessions to identify pupils with difficulties and collaborate in supporting them. Support teams consist of trained school staff who meet on a regular basis and take referrals from school staff when any student is experiencing social or emotional difficulties.
- Kevin's school has collaborated with the local mental health services agency to bring supports to the school and to families with an emphasis on social skills development as well as collaborative problem solving. They also have brought in mental health consultation and increased adult assistance in classrooms in which kids need more support.
- Elias's school uses a planning room with in-school consultation for teachers.
- Cory's school has a planning room system as well as advising sessions for all students.

Given that inclusion is more of an attitude than a technology, it is not surprising that these schools had more similarities in their attitudes toward children than in the ways in which they implemented them. These attitudes were not just about children identified as having difficulties but about all children—as one school psychologist said, "We are trying to help all kids, coded or not."

This attitude—that everyone has value and needs to feel a sense of belonging—was a common characteristic among all four school systems. Often this came from what might be called *visionary leadership.*

In each school there was at least one administrator, but often several, who had a strong sense of what a school community should be like. These administrators tended to work collaboratively and collegially. As Cory's teacher at Southeast High School put it, "[The principal] supported this change. And he asked us, 'What do you need to make this happen?' He kept saying, 'I don't know.' He's *still* not sure and is worried about the special education kids' academic progress." A different principal might have opposed these innovations, but by sharing his concerns and raising good questions, this principal has been able to develop as a leader and his faculty have developed as collaborators.

For example, the advising sessions at Southeast High School came about when the principal asked the school staff to consider ways for keeping students personally connected to and part of the school. By sharing a problem and asking the key players for ideas, he was demonstrating how these connections are made. He might just as easily have decided on a solution and held a staff meeting to announce how they would implement this. Instead, he created an environment in which the staff could be committed to the students first rather than primarily to him or his policies.

In all of the schools visited, administrators took a personal interest and personal leadership in creating inclusive environments, though how the administrators expressed this varied. The personalities of the people in the school appeared to be a more powerful factor in their success than did any one style of administration or set of policies.

Administrators also tended to see their schools as communities committed to personal growth, not just for their students but for their teachers and themselves. One principal said of his school's accomplishments, "The staff makes it all possible. When there is a conference they want to go to, I try to send as many as I can. It's important for them to go and part of my job to see their classes are covered."

It is not surprising that a number of the personnel involved in these schools had not always been educators or mental health professionals but had come into the field as part of their own personal or career growth. Some had been drawn to these innovations because they had family members with disabilities and felt strongly about the ways people with disabilities sometimes have been poorly treated in our culture.

A number of those interviewed mentioned that they spent some of their own time with families, working without pay. Although this voluntary contribution could be easily turned to exploitation, many of the teachers, consultants, and administrators talked about this work as something they found personally rewarding and engaging.

These administrators were committed to finding good staff, providing time for planning and professional development, and supplying information that teachers wanted. In turn, the teachers had some empathy for issues beyond their own classrooms. As one said of the school district's superintendent, "We have administrative support for our work. And we in turn are always looking for how we can consolidate to save money, but our administrator is not sacrificing quality for cost. In the long-term this kind of working relationship will pay off for everyone."

When matters did not go well, teachers saw this as coming from a breakdown in getting information, from not being listened to, or from working too

much in isolation. As one administrator said, "The problem is that you can't mandate getting along."

These innovative administrators worked within a community that they had nurtured and helped to grow, not in a world they invented and whose values they established and enforced. This patient building and the need for wide ownership has significant implications for school systems that might attempt to replicate their work.

Implications for Teamwork and Interagency Collaboration

Given the number of social agencies and family members teachers might have to be in touch with, poor communication from system to system is a common complaint, even in schools in which things are going fairly well. Brian's service coordinator comes to school meetings but, for reasons of confidentiality, teachers have learned almost nothing about the facts of Brian's life beyond school. No one knows whether his stepfather was ever charged or how the allegations of his sexually abusing Brian have been pursued. Services coordinators, who change all the time, can keep teachers apprised of what is currently happening in a student's life but do not divulge history.

In Northeast, where Kevin lives, the good connection among the families, the schools, and the local mental health center has paid off. The mental health center has made a conscious effort to keep staff over time so that the relationships they make with children, their families, and school staff can have some stability and depth.

In one school system, the elementary teachers were concerned that so many children were showing up in first grade with unanticipated needs. By working with the private preschools (New Hampshire's public education begins with first grade), they were able to coordinate so that children who might have difficulty in school would have less difficulty. But this kind of thinking and planning helps all children and thus is not something that is done just for children perceived as different but for all children who are seen as needing some extra attention as they begin their school careers.

Implications for Flexible Curricula and Scheduling

There has been some confusion between the concept of individualized educational planning and personal planning. Just because a plan is for one child does not at all guarantee that it is suited to him or her personally. At some self-contained special education schools, all children have essentially the same individual plan of instruction, but this is all the children themselves have in common.

Good teachers have always tailored their methods to the student. As one teacher said, "Good teachers are sensitive to the needs of kids, able to communicate and problem-solve, and are not locked into one style. They're flexible." Teachers have some students with disabilities, though, are asked to

stretch this flexibility even further. For example, Brian's teacher knows that writing can be frustrating for him. So she gives him the option of reporting orally to the class. If this is too stressful, then she and Brian can meet quietly in the hall. She uses a flexible grading system for him so that his differences don't translate automatically into poor grades.

When his class was preparing for a field trip to the opera, Brian found listening to the Italian words too difficult. So his teacher gave him two alternatives: going to the library and researching the opera on his own or listening to it during recess with an assistant. The point of giving him these choices was to let him know that he could in fact learn what others did and that his teachers could be flexible in teaching him. What is important to remember, though, is that without the mutually valued relationship he and his teacher had, this could easily have become a struggle of wills. Her way of working with him was to accommodate him with respect, and, fortunately, this was how he understood this process himself. Without this help, school staff might have been able to say either directly or with their own behavior, "You are not a good learner. If you can't learn with the others, then we should not expect you to keep up with the class." This would have been an especially difficult lesson given Brian's eagerness to learn. Instead of being discouraged and ostracized because of his differences, he was able to become a contributing member of his class.

Teachers need this flexibility as well as opportunity for real connection with other staff. In one school, all of the staff meet before school on Wednesday mornings to consider any child of concern. These meetings were called "child study groups," but teachers felt uncomfortable presenting a child in a case conference format. So, because the school took the idea of cooperation seriously, the same consultants—special education teachers, speech-language therapists, the school nurse, and so forth—who might have passed judgment contribute to the meetings and are now part of a conversation, admitting their own confusion, asking questions, and talking adult-to-adult with the teachers. When there is a culture of nonjudgmental support for teachers, making this culture available to pupils as well becomes easier. As one teacher put it, "Teachers are more confident to be creative; they are more able to focus on what they want to be creative about. When people are insecure, they focus on protocol, strict behavior programs, regulations." The success of these meetings is not just in the format but also in the relationships among school personnel. Because they generally like, trust, and respect one another, almost all school staff regularly attend these meetings, a sign that they find the meetings helpful.

Virtually everyone working in the four schools discussed in this chapter admitted a willingness to help one another, especially if asked. Although no one rationally expects any one teacher to be equally effective with each pupil, in many schools teachers act as if that were the case. In another school system, which was far less successful in including all students, I asked a teacher, "Can you go to the principal and say, 'This child and I are not a good match'?"

"Sure," she answered, "the principal has stated that kind of flexibility is school policy."

"Have you ever done it?"

"Oh, Lord no. It's bad form. It would mean you aren't a good teacher."

Implications for Appropriate Supports for Students and Staff

"A lot of teaching is very lonely," Brian's teacher said. "You are alone with the kids. Twenty-four kids can be hell on some days, and on other days they are the best thing that can happen to you."

Given this intense relationship that teachers have with their students and their work, it can be hard for teachers to ask for the help they need or even to consider that they might want it. As one school psychologist said, "You have to be so careful about how you enter that empire of the classroom. Teachers often need a lot of support for information and understanding, but they aren't entirely open to talking about things. A lot of teachers like closing the door and having that classroom as theirs."

The IOD has provided ongoing technical assistance to each of these schools. Given the voluntary nature of this relationship, these outsiders have been able to give new ideas. But most consultants can give new ideas. What is critical is that this outside help was offered in the sense of discovering together what this work could mean. Schools were more able to ask simple questions knowing that few of them had simple answers. A technical assistance consultant to a school said, "Every now and again, teachers wonder if all this planning and working actually has made any difference. I try to be their memory. I remind them what things were like a couple of years ago."

Good consultants don't strengthen dependency on them so much as help school communities develop their own strengths. Many teachers have found a reliable resource in their own network of informal support. As one teacher said, "I can just catch someone in the hall and say, 'I'm losing it with Terry.' And the other teacher will listen or even help me out herself. This doesn't go through formal channels, so we can help one another without having to call a formal meeting. Some administrators think a lot of requests for consultation is a sign of incompetence, and getting help for children can be made to look like—and feel like—professional failure."

Similarly, schools have developed ways for students to get help without making them feel like failures either. The schoolwide support teams at Southeast High make problem solving part of the school culture rather than something done only for "bad kids." The opportunities that students in the middle of behavioral difficulties get—taking a break, leaving the building for a walk, having a chance to talk to someone who knows them—are all ways of helping them to move from an escalating cycle of behavior to building a culture of accommodation and support. As one teacher said, "Having the backing

of people familiar with the clinical pieces, having the support on a daily basis rather than a crisis, and having administrative support keeps this new for me."

Implications for Parental Involvement

Once someone said about children with emotional disabilities, "These are the kids no one wants. They are physically aggressive. They're not consistent. The parents are difficult to deal with." It is interesting to note that this was said by a psychologist who had spent a number of years in working to support children and their families. Having a child with a behavioral or emotional disability can be a stress on even the most stable and confident of families, and the schools did not pretend that parental involvement was simple and easy. They were committed to working in this way because it was the best they knew for their students.

Just as schools have historically tended to isolate and ostracize children with differences, so, too, have communities pulled away from their families. The collaboration with local mental health and family support services agencies evident in the four school systems described in this chapter helped parents to keep their connections or establish relationships that would sustain them.

In all of the schools studied, people mentioned the importance of sustained relationships. The wraparound services in one system did not work merely because the professional staff were so accomplished. It also worked because they understood the importance of coordinating their professional expertise in the context of a relationship in which all the players knew, trusted, and respected one another. This combination allowed families, schools, and professional service providers to work in a spirit of collaboration. Because there are no clear answers for most of the difficulties these children experienced, it was important for people to feel confident to guess as to what might help most. This way, the adults in the children's lives saw the children and their parents as people they were getting to know rather than as problems. As the local mental health director in one system said, "With the good case workers, there is a lot of communication among the players, so the families get clinical help they need or want. The clinical component often gets left out of most schools and after-school support. Lots of schools are still doing behavior control programs that assess the parents and hold them responsible for the child's progress. A lot of them are trying to get the parents under control as well."

One pupil's mother has mental retardation. His general education teacher said, "His mother does so well with most things that we forget how difficult life can be for her. She called the school for a meeting, but then when we sat down, she said things were fine, and there was nothing much to talk about. People wanted to blame her for being manipulative, but I think she was afraid that since her son was doing well at school and not at home, then we would think she was a bad parent. So the teachers spent time with her so she could trust that they did not want to judge her as a mother."

CONCLUSIONS

My own interest in the New Hampshire Statewide Systems Change Project has been as much in the adults in schools as in the children. Typically, we psychologists ask, "What's wrong with this child?" But this project allowed me the luxury of asking, "What makes this situation work so well? Why do you think you have these positive attitudes in working through difficult situations with children?"

I have been intrigued by the number of people in the helping professions who, when something goes wrong, are quick to find reasons in themselves and to take responsibility—"I'm afraid I failed Elias. He needed more than I could give." But when confronted to take responsibility for why things are going well or even outstandingly well, many teachers shift the credit: "Anyone would have done the same."

Teachers and administrators talked about this work of including students with difficult behavior as something that renewed them personally and professionally. It is interesting to note that many people talked about how their personal and professional growth became unified rather than parallel. Precisely because there is no one answer, the challenge of engagement never ends. The work can never become routine or stale. Listening to students with difficult behavior requires an attitude of openness, of looking from as many angles as it takes to develop a solution. Schools that have been successful have administrators who either allowed teachers to be creative or actively encouraged and supported them. Similarly, outside consultants were seen as helpers rather than rescuers. A sense of collaboration encouraged speculation and experimentation and gave people the security necessary for this to work.

Finally, the sine qua non of these successful experiments has been the relationships among all the players. Merely having good feelings about one another is no substitute for competence on the teacher's part and for availability for learning on the student's part, but without this primary and positive connection, education takes place in spite of the school rather than because of it.

It seems fitting to end with the wise words of two of the many people who gave their time and insight to this chapter. I asked Elias if he had any advice for teachers. He responded, "Talk nice. and don't give up on the kid. Try to understand what the kid is going through." A school psychologist said, "I know the kids, the staff, their families, the psychological umbrella that each child has. We do a lot of hand-holding, even if we call it coordination and consultation. But whatever you call it, when it works it means two human beings talking to one another compassionately."

REFERENCE

New Hampshire Code of Administrative Rules, Ed. 1102.31(j) (1999).

6

Turning Points

The Story of High School Inclusion in New Hampshire

Cheryl M. Jorgensen and Carol Tashie

The story of high school inclusion in New Hampshire and the role played by the University of New Hampshire's Institute on Disability (IOD) is similar to any other "once upon a time" tale in three parts. In the first part of this story, we look back before any students with significant disabilities were included in general education classes. As the story unfolds, we show the relationships between the lives of individual students, the changes their schools were undergoing, the role of the IOD as the state's leader in systems change advocacy and action, and the educational and political contexts that were unique to the state. The second part provides insight into the IOD's effectiveness as a change agent by focusing on local schools' inclusion histories, both the good news and the disappointments. Our reflections are framed within the context of educational reform theory and experience. Finally, the third part describes systems change strategies for the future. The IOD's goal is to learn from the past, respond to the needs of today's students and families, and build New Hampshire schools' capacity to be true inclusive communities of learners.