

00:04

Hey, everyone, this is Katie Novak, and you're listening to the Education Table, a micro podcast where I answer your questions about inclusive education in 10 minutes or less. In today's episode, we're talking about four strategies to increase teacher buy in when transitioning to universal design for learning and more inclusive practices. Change can be really hard. So I'm here to share practical tips to help educators feel support and engaged throughout the process. So let's dive in. I am a mom of four, and right now, three of them are teenagers. And raising teenagers has taught me a lot about buy in and ownership. So when my kids set their own alarms, they somehow wake up ready to tackle the day. Early morning showers, pop tarts in the toaster. Sometimes the dog even goes out before I'm up.

01:02

Now, when I try to wake them up, it's a very different story. It could be noon and the kids push back and say, mom, oh my gosh, turn off the lights. Why are you doing this? Now? You probably remember those days yourself. I know that I definitely did that when I was a teenager. But it's a really good reminder that people are far more motivated when they're on their own terms. That when people have control over their actions, they tend to be more motivated because no one likes people making decision for them, especially without their input. And teachers are no different. So when educators feel like something is being done to them rather than with them, we can fully expect resistance and frustration to follow in our schools.

01:48

If we want to increase teacher buy in, we have to create a collaborative environment where teachers really honestly feel involved, like their voice matters. And so let's dive in quickly to the research on how critical that buy in is, and then I'll share some concrete strategies for getting teachers on board. Okay, so the research is really, really clear that teacher buy in is absolutely crucial for the implementation of any educational change. And if you're in education, you probably don't even need research to tell you that. But what we know is that teachers are so much more likely to embrace new practices when they feel involved, when they feel supported, and when they feel valued in decision making. Distributed leadership. This teachers as leaders making decisions is so crucial. Michael Follen's work on educational change absolutely emphasizes this.

02:47

We know that teachers are more engaged and they are more empowered when they are active participants in the transformation process. We also know that this will lead to more effective and more sustainable outcomes because we're valuing teachers, their expertise, their experiences in the classroom, and we are doing this alongside with them. So how can we improve, empower teachers and increase that buy in, let's dive into four concrete strategies. The first strategy is we have to highlight strengths and build confidence. So before coming in hot and talking about everything that needs to change, we have to start by highlighting what teachers are already doing well. We have to point out teachers strengths, we have to celebrate and elevate their practices, and we have to let them know that there is a foundation that's really strong that they're going to build on.

03:44

So acknowledging what teachers are already doing really well creates a foundation of confidence and positivity and it makes people much more likely to try new things. Because goodness knows, right now teachers are working their tails off and they need some appreciation for the work that they are committed to already. Before we start talking about how we're going to change things now, number two is introduce small manageable changes. So once we talk about these are things you're already doing well, now let's try to do something a little bit different and try one small manageable change that teachers can commit to a routine right away. When I was an assistant superintendent of schools, we worked with the PD committee to come up with one positive change every single quarter so we could go all in.

04:33

So one quarter we focused on being really clear about what students were learning and why. Another quarter were really focused on really helping students to self reflect. And in another we might be focused on how do we give every student feedback every single day on formative assessments. And because we tackled a single strategy at a time, teachers had a lot of opportunities to learn in PD because that was the PD theme of the quarter. And during their professional learning communities they would share strategies. We could model really effective practices in faculty meetings and teachers had a lot of opportunities to get feedback on those practices from coaches and administrators. When teachers were nailing it again, were celebrating that we asked them to share those strategies in staff meetings. And it really allowed people to have a much more cohesive approach to improvement.

05:25

This approach really helped to build confidence and buy in. And because teachers had an opportunity to choose what those focus areas were going to be through that UDL lens, they felt much more successful, much more confident, but they really felt valued as well. Now the third is to offer constant support. So a lot of the times we're asking teachers to make changes and then it's kind of like hey, good luck, see you later. But no matter how small the positive shifts are, we have to be able to celebrate those things. And when we see effort, even when it doesn't work out, that is a win as well. I recently was working with a principal in Western Massachusetts and she talked about how she loved to hand out little tiny packages of M and M to celebrate teachers making mistakes. Get it? Eminem?

06:17

And if she walked in and saw that a teacher was trying something new, and maybe they seemed frustrated and maybe it wasn't going really well, but she would say, I love that you are open to change. I love that you're trying this, and this is a really valuable good mistake because you know that doing it this way might not work, so you don't have to try it maybe that way again. But ultimately, let's try another way because we want to celebrate the fact that people are trying and that this is not about perfection. This is about progress. And we need this culture of error so that teachers are willing to keep experimenting and trying new things, knowing that we figure out what works in some ways by figuring out what doesn't work.

06:56

And the last number four is if we are asking teachers to change, they also need the resources to do that. We have to look for ways to make things more efficient for educators. Maybe it's providing them with access to shared resources, maybe it's arranging for collaboration time, maybe it's helping them streamline tasks by showing them how to make things more efficient with artificial intelligence. But we have to show that we are committed to teachers being successful. So in one school, for example, that I worked with, they decided to transition half of their faculty meetings to co planning time because they realized that they could get through the meeting portion pretty quick.

07:34

And then they wanted to honor teachers and say, okay, so this is our professional development focus for let's say, the next quarter and come together, take out some lessons, incorporate those strategies into your lessons. If we want to be inclusive of kids, we have to be inclusive of the adults who support them. So giving time in that faculty meeting to allow general education teachers to work with special education teachers and adjustment counselors and multilingual learning experts, all of that lets our teachers know that we are here to support you through the change and we've got your back. In conclusion, increasing teacher buy in for UDL and inclusive practices comes down to positive reinforcement, a really great environment for change, manageable steps, and lots of collaboration.

08:29

And when we can highlight teacher strengths, when we can support their progress, and when we create an environment that allows them to try new things and figure out what works, we can really help to increase teachers feelings of empowerment and the transformation of our schools and districts. So thank you so much for joining me at the education table. Be sure to check out the show notes for more resources on supporting teachers in implementing udl. Until next time, onward.

