What is fidelity of implementation?

Fidelity of implementation occurs when teachers use the instructional strategies and deliver the content of the curriculums in the same way in which they were designed to be used and delivered.

*Why is fidelity of implementation important in teaching research-based curriculums?*

Fidelity is critical to achieving the same results that were achieved during the research. When changes are made in how the curriculum is presented, it is unclear what the effects on the students will be.

Critical to the fidelity of the implementation of a curriculum is the importance of teaching the lessons in order that the publisher has presented them. Teachers are also to teach each lesson according to the publisher's recommended time. Furthermore, teachers are instructed to follow the recommendation of the publisher about how many lessons to teach per week. In addition, teachers are to make use of each publisher's recommended questions and homework pages or activity sheets that will give students the opportunity to practice the skill they are learning. In brief, all of the publishers have specific recommendations for their programs that teachers should follow.

The ultimate aim of a fidelity system is to ensure that class­room instruction at various level are consistently implemented and delivered as intended across environments. General education at the core, using a standard pro­tocol, is an important beginning to the educational process. Fidelity must also address the integrity with which screening, diagnostic and progress-monitoring procedures are completed and an explicit decision-making model is followed. Fidelity is important at both the school level (e.g., implementation of the process) and the teacher level (e.g., implementation of instruction and progress monitoring). When school staffs administer a standardized state as­sessment, the assumption is that the test is adminis­tered according to the directions in the test’s accom­panying manual and that the examiner is qualified. Implementation of the core curriculum, diagnostics, dominie, interventions, etc. must meet the same standard.

Implementing instruc­tion and interventions with fidelity also satisfies one of IDEA’s legal re­quirements for appropriate instruction when determining whether a child has a disability. “In making a determination of eligibility under paragraph (4)(A), a child shall not be determined to be a child with a disability if the determinant factor for such deter­mination is– (A) lack of appropriate instruction in reading, including the essential components of read­ing instruction; (B) lack of instruction in math; or (C) limited English proficiency [SEC 614.(b)(5)].” Positive student outcomes may be attributed to three related factors:

1. Fidelity of implementation of the process (at the school level)

2. Degree to which the selected interventions are empirically supported

3. Fidelity of intervention implementation (at the teacher level)

***How Can Schools Ensure Fidelity of Implementation?***

Direct and frequent assessment for fidelity is considered to be best practice. It is critical to know whether the program, assessment or intervention is being implemented as designed, so if initially unsuccessful, schools can take appropri­ate measures to remedy the deficiency rather than abandoning the entire reform.

Several key components lead to high fidelity, and several key indicators are evidence of implementa­tion with fidelity.

*Key components.* The key components that lead to fidelity in general education include the fol­lowing:

• Systematic curriculum following the publisher’s guidelines

• Effective instruction

• Direct instruction

• Specified instructional materials

• Checklist of key instructional components

• CBM assessments

• Videos and/or observations of classroom in­struction

• Results graphed against goals

• Data (results) graphed against goals

• Student progress monitored monthly

• Decisions regarding curriculum and instruction based on data

*Key indicators.* Key indicators of fidelity in general education include:

• 80 percent to 85 percent of students pass tests

• Improved results over time

• High percentage of students on trajectory (Reschly & Gresham, 2006)

Schools are already encumbered by numerous pol­icy initiatives, increasingly diverse student needs, and limited resources. To reach optimum levels, schools must:

• Allow for early identification of at-risk stu­dents

• Align assessment procedures with instruc­tion

• Provide multiple data points on which deci­sions are based

• Ensure access to appropriate instruction through the use of progress monitoring and evi­dence-based instruction

However, these potentials cannot be realized if screening procedures, interventions, and prog­ress monitoring procedures are not properly imple­mented. Fidelity of implementation leads to such success.