



# Inclusive **Reading** First Program

**Sandy Creek  
Central School District**  
*Sandy Creek, New York*



## **S<sup>3</sup>TAIR Project Validated Effective Practice**

***Sandy Creek** is a rural community located approximately 45 miles north of Syracuse in Northern Oswego County. The Sandy Creek Central School District provides educational programming to 1,150 students in Pre-Kindergarten through the Twelfth Grade, grouped by grade levels that follow an inclusion model. There is a 95% graduation rate with 75% of the graduates continue in some form of post-secondary programming.*

### **Philosophy...**

Sandy Creek is dedicated to the philosophy of inclusion. The original model of inclusive service delivery was piloted at the middle school level in 1989. By 1995, all students needing special education supports were being included in general education classrooms. Although the program has experienced various philosophical and structural challenges since its inception, it has evolved. Two basic tenets have provided the foundation on which the program is built and have driven decision-making process for all students. When a student arrives at the door, the teachers and staff at Sandy Creek assess strengths and needs and begin to develop a plan for how they will bring the tools to the student to move him or her ahead with their same age peers, rather than look at where the student might be "sent." Sandy Creek looks at inclusion as a right to which the student is entitled, not something the student must earn. While the teachers and staff admit

that is often a tough road to navigate and challenges regularly appear, they hold true to the notion that if you remember to return to your basic tenets you will eventually succeed and conquer even the most demanding obstacles.



### **Program Description...**

In 2003, Sandy Creek became a Reading First school. The implementation of this highly prescriptive reading program provided new challenges to the provision of inclusive special education services at the elementary. After a self-described rocky start, the decision was made to see Reading First as a challenge that could improve the delivery of services and impact the success of students with disabilities. The reading and special education departments began to collaboratively plan and work as a team to provide appropriate, intensive services for all students. The work required all involved to be creative, determined, and outspoken. The result is a remarkable program that is benefiting all students in the early elementary grades and beyond. This success at the elementary, combined with solid instructional practices for all students at middle and high school, has impacted progress as students move through to graduation. Identification rates are down, student success is up, and all students are seen as "our" students.

## Key Components...

There are a variety of components that contribute to the success of Sandy Creek's Inclusive Reading First program. First and foremost, is the district's commitment to collecting data and actively using the information to drive instruction. All teachers are responsible for collecting data from a variety of sources that include the Early Reading Intervention, Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, Houghton Mifflin Theme, Word Lists and Word Passages Assessments and DIBELS. All teachers in grades K-6 have a Palm Pilot device to use for DIBELS assessments and to access information during data meetings. Teachers are active participants in team data meetings, which serve to assess student progress and plan for the future programming of large and small group as well as individual instruction. The team data meetings stress structured and focused time management as well as equal accountability for input. The data meetings also serve as forum to discuss and gauge program fidelity.

Placement of special education students is a well thought out process at Sandy Creek. Students are assigned to general education sections within each grade level, not to special education teachers. Special education teachers go to the general education classroom to provide support to students and teachers at the point of instruction, using a consultant, co-teaching or in class resource model. In regards to generalization and sustainability of the program, the inclusive Reading First model is currently being implemented in grades K-6 and plans have been created to introduce a specifically designed data driven model to middle and high school levels. In addition, the Comprehensive District Education Plan, the living document that drives the education of the students at SCSD includes the inclusive education program as a vital component.



## Evidence of Impact...

There are a variety of strong examples of evidence to support the effectiveness of the Reading First program within the inclusive special education service delivery model. Since the inception of Reading First in the 2003-2004 school year:

- DIBELS data highlights an overall 40% improvement in K-3 (38% to 78%) and K-5 (30% to 70%) students that have reached benchmark standards.
- Specific examples of gains using DIBELS data that include: Kindergarten – PSF (78% improvement); 1<sup>st</sup> Grade-NWF (37% improvement); and 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade-ORF (47% improvement).
- Between the years of 2006-2008, NYS ELA scores in grades 3-5 have shown gains in students receiving score of 3 and a decrease of students receiving scores of 1.
- 54 special education students have been declassified and the number of students with disabilities has decreased 33%.

In addition to quantitative test data, interviews provide qualitative information. Feedback from members of the Sandy Creek school community included the perspectives of the SCSD Superintendent, School Board President and board members, teachers and staff as well as parents and students. While each person had a specific viewpoint, 100% were supportive of the Reading First program and even more so the whole school inclusive service delivery model.

## For Additional Information:

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