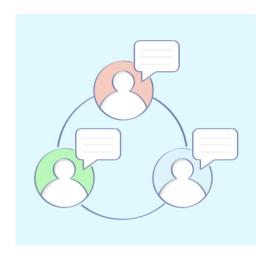Inclusionary Practices and Systems:

HELP DESK SUPPORT

WHAT IS IT?

The purpose of a Help Desk is to provide support to teachers, principals, related service providers, family partners and staff in their efforts to provide each and every student with equitable and inclusive educational opportunities. The Help Desk is facilitated by a core team. Facilitating team members can include program specialists, teacher leaders, instructional coaches, and inclusion experts from outside of the school with the intention of building district capacity.

The goal of the Help Desk is to create an ongoing opportunity for educators to share teaching dilemmas they are facing with a larger group of colleagues and receive actionable items they can take away and use in their practices. Topics for the Help Desk could include questions about adapting lessons; strategies for directing the work of paraeducators during remote learning; how to build school-wide systems and structures that prioritize inclusive practices; suggestions for how to provide equitable and inclusive assessments; or instructional strategies related to teaching core subjects such as math, science, social studies and literacy to students with significant cognitive disabilities.

The format of the Help Desk should mirror the school culture and needs of the team. Example formats that schools are using include:

- Weekly 60-minute Help Desk divided into three separate 20 minute sessions.
- Bi-monthly 30-minute session with one teaching dilema to explore as a group
- Monthly 1.5-hour session with 2 to 3 teaching teams each sharing a dilemma for discussion.

Across the various formats a Help Desk can take, there are Important components to increase its efficacy including: having a user friendly way for educators to access the Help Desk, maintaining regular scheduled opportunities for Help Desk support, opportunities for teachers and teams to opt in, note taking and data collection to allow for both reflection and follow up and providing actionable items to move practices forward based on Help Desk discussions.

Here are some versions of the Help Desk. All Help Desk formats were developed by school teams to determine the best format for the individual schools.

1) 3 separate 20 minute sessions for a total of one hour.

- Occurs weekly. One hour broken down into 3 separate Help Desk sessions.
- Teachers and staff opt in by completing a brief inquiry form. The inquiry form includes questions on what is the reason for the Help Desk, what have you tried, who have you reached out to and anything else important to know.
- Inquiry form is shared to Help Desk facilitators.
- The Help Desk discussion is informal. During the Help Desk, clarifying questions are asked, actionable items are identified and Help Desk facilitators take notes.
- Help Desk notes are shared.
- Follow up in a few weeks. Teachers and staff are always welcome to follow up at another Help Desk session.

2) One 60 minute session

- Meets every other week.

- Individual teachers, teaching partnerships, or teams sign up for a slot (offered every other week) to present and receive support with a consultancy need related to inclusive education. The presenters share the context of their consultancy need and a focus question at the beginning of the session.

- 3-4 teachers and specialists sign up to serve as consultants for the session. The team engages in listening, asks clarifying and probing questions, and offers open suggestions.

- The presenters have a chance to reflect on what they've heard and plan initial next steps. A plan for following up with the presenter is made.

- Notes are collected and made available for anyone in the school to use as resources.

3) One 1.5 Hour session

- Occurs monthly.

- Teaching teams opt in

- In preparation, Teachers are given questions in advance to Help Desk to help frame their dilemma and give some background information.

  – Reason for Helpdesk: What is something I (or my team) is struggling with or unsure about related to inclusive education?

  – Why is this challenge important to me, and what tensions has it brought up for me?

  – What are some things you have already tried related to this challenge?

  – What have you already tried? What resources have you consulted? What other people have you consulted to try and resolve the challenge?

  – Anything else that could help us help you?

  – These questions are shared with facilitators prior to the session.

- These questions are shared with facilitators prior to the session. Facilitators include demonstration team inclusion specialists and building leadership.

- The format does not follow a protocol, but pulls from the SRI protocol to have a facilitator, a proposed dilemma and facilitation of the group to frame discussion and pose clarifying questions and the whole group offers suggestions. Help Desk closes with facilitators reframing the dilemma and identifying actionable items.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

- A Help Desk Provides the potential for a low-stress/high impact format for collaboration.

- Improves outcomes for all students.

- Systems wide approach to providing equitable and inclusive opportunities for all students.

- Efficient and responsive way to receive feedback and ideas quickly.

- Builds capacity within schools and districts.

WHAT ARE THE OUTCOMES?

- Serves as a welcoming entry point to collaboration.

- What is learned can be shared with leadership to further understand the needs of their teachers and students.

- Inform systems wide changes which positively impact the schools' ability to support teachers and students.

- Has the potential to build capacity re: inclusive practices in schools and districts.

- Informs professional development needs.

CASE STUDY: TWAIN ELEMENTARY, KIRKLAND IN LAKE WASHINGTON SD

When planning implementation of a help desk, Twain Elementary looked at current collaboration spaces. The school team already had a bi-monthly equity team meeting that was well attended. As the help desk would be an opt in opportunity, leadership determined using the same time on alternating weeks would work for staff schedules. Additionally, as staff had found value and engaged in the current meetings, they may be more receptive to another collaborative opportunity at the same day and time on alternating weeks. Twain set up the help desk for success by looking at and capitalizing on existing collaborative structures. To build sustainability, Twain also was intentional about who would lead the help desk facilitation. UW Haring Center inclusion specialists participated to support Twain's continuous growth plan. In addition to school team members, a district level program specialist, who already supported Twain and other elementary schools in the district, was included. The inclusion of the program specialists aided in building district capacity.

Twain's help desk follows a modified SRI consultancy protocol. This format provided a clear process to delineate roles and to use the help desk time efficiently. The process involves assigning a presenter, facilitator and consultants (educator peers) and comprises 6 steps to guide the process. Those steps include 1) presenting the consultancy need/ teaching dilemma 2) clarifying questions, 3) Probing questions, 4) open suggestions, 5) presenter reflection and 6) closing. (Please see the resources for complete descriptions of the modified protocol). Twain's Help Desk involves deep reflection on the teaching dilemma and asking probing questions before moving right to suggestions. This reflective process also allows educators to focus on current strengths and what is already in place, before going right toward suggesting solutions to the dilemma. FUrthermore, it supports teachers to begin shifting their focus on perceived student deficits towards making changes in their own practice and environment.

In one help desk session, the teacher presenting the consultancy need, asked the group about strategies to engage a particular student in meaningful and collaborative instruction with peers. While the teacher celebrated the student's many strengths, she was concerned that the class pace moved so quickly that the student was not accessing the learning as deeply as she'd like. Through the consultancy team's support and thoughtful questions, the problem of practice came into sharper focus around the need for grade-level collaborative planning and classroom structures that would allow for the creation and implementation of supportive classroom structures for all students (including small group instruction, conferring, pre-teaching concepts, and modeling communication through an AAC device during whole class instruction). The teacher who brought the consultancy need to the group left with some tangible next steps that were responsive to her students, her own practice, and her particular classroom context.

Help desk can take on a variety of formats. No matter the format, the purpose remains the same. To create a collaborative space for reflection on teaching, collaboration and student experiences to build an inclusive school culture.

RESOURCES

SRI Consultancy Protocol

Twain Help Desk Modified Protocol