

To Be Determined...

I used to hate those letters TBA or TBD when it came time to schedule classes while I was in college. Too many unknowns about who would be teaching the course and which building on campus would be used for me to be able to feel comfortable about my upcoming term. I like to think I can be accommodating and “go with the flow” but truth be told I like planning. I feel better with an agenda to follow, especially one I’ve created. I hate to admit it, but sometimes anything I do once might just become a habit.

So you might imagine my level of discomfort as we approach a new school year with new forms to use (has your district chosen plan A, B, or C?), new ways of determining the presence of a learning disability (responsiveness to intervention just doesn’t seem closer to scientific), new ways of measuring intelligence without using norm-referenced testing (OK, phrenology is old but you’ve got to admit feeling cranial bumps through protective rubber gloves is a new twist), new directives about ensuring that no child is left behind by their handicapping condition (it just may take divine intervention for this one to fly), and potential new laws that redefine federal regulations so that not much remains recognizable from Public Law 94-142. Yes, I know, boo-hoo I’m getting old and clinging to the past.

I have no argument with those that say we as a profession must address more regular education issues and become more adept at crafting interventions there rather than see ourselves only as an extension of special education. I truly believe that we must answer the referral question, and that answer cannot just be eligibility for an IEP, a 504 Plan, or nothing else. We do have unique skills that should make us an integral part of the learning process for all students. Mental health services do belong in the public schools because that is where the public is and no other discipline can better address these needs for our students than we school psychologists.

That said, I do wonder what will happen to our special education population. I hear conflicting reports that “reform” will enable providing intervention services to all children who need them, while at the same time new measures will address too many children being labeled as handicapped (especially learning disabled) when they in fact are not. Responsiveness to intervention purports to determine handicapping condition much better than any discrepancy score could yet current economics dictates cuts in education funding where critically needed professional development (training) is a must if public education is ever to address leaving no child behind. We need a paradigm shift in regular education and I wonder how that motivation will happen. And of course there will be little or no additional funding so we will have to do more with less as one “education” governor once said. Will somebody please point out the emperor’s new clothes?

We have advocated for those who needed advocacy the most and had the fewest resources to assist them. Will these sweeping changes and politically correct sound bytes usher in a brave new world of learning for all? And will school psychologists play an integral part in greeting this new dawn? To be determined...