

# "4" SPECIAL EDUCATION...

May 2008\*

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## It Depends... (Shades of Gray)

## ...Or Does It? (Black and White)

Special Education is generally a world of gray, with moments of 'black and white.' When people ask questions, my response is often, "It depends..." It depends on the details and specifics of the situation in question. It depends on the age of the child. It depends on the time frame. It just depends. Here are some of my favorite, 'It depends' moments with splashes of 'black and white'...

- ✓ Accommodations and/or Modifications for students with disabilities... the question is often which accommodations would work best for a student. The answer is "It depends..." What is the academic need of the student? The IEP team must determine appropriate accommodations or modifications on a student by student basis; there is no one set of accommodations that should be checked for all students. Accommodations and modifications will and should vary. There is a black and white component to this though... while specific accommodations may vary, the provision of those accommodations is a non-negotiable. If they are needed, they MUST be provided.
- ✓ Response to Intervention, a.k.a. RtI, is a process intended to support students and teachers. NDE has created a series of 'Essential Elements' of RtI; components that must be in place before the process can be used to verify students with learning disabilities. How a district implements the 'Essential Elements' of RtI is where we enter the world of gray and "It depends." Implementation will vary because of district leadership. Curriculum, interventions and progress monitoring will vary from one district to another. So, while we believe that the implementation of RtI is black and white because of its support for student learning and school improvement, the initiation of RtI will be gray.
- ✓ Sharing information with classroom teachers about students with disabilities, their needs and accommodations that are required for them to be successful within the general classroom is somewhat dicey because of the issue of confidentiality. The black and white of this issue is that the information MUST be provided and teachers MUST be aware of the needs of their students. How that information is shared is where we enter the world of gray. Some districts create specific forms with that information, while others have a notebook system. One of the best things of having special education meetings is that special education teachers can share their process and what's worked well for them. New teachers are able to develop a system that works for them and the teachers in their district. Sharing information is a black and white activity with gray implementation!
- ✓ There are some things that have absolutely no gray anywhere... making sure that initial special education evaluations are completed within 60 days and meeting to conduct the 3 year re-evaluation or to update IEPs prior to the anniversary date are pretty black and white. However, because of extenuating circumstances on those rare occasions where we might not meet deadlines, we are given a bit of gray in documenting the circumstances. The trick is to remember that this color of gray should not be used very often.
- ✓ There is one final bit of "Black and White" that needs to be shared as a non-negotiable... Have a terrific summer break! See you next fall!

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