

Friday Institute Education Brief

Seven Key Lessons from the Manning Elementary School Learning Differences Program

This brief highlights seven key lessons from the case study [“A Constant Conversation” The Implementation and Impact of the Learning Differences Program at Manning Elementary School in Roanoke Rapids, North Carolina](#). Through the various data collected, the Friday Institute identified the following seven key lessons learned that may assist future schools and districts seeking to implement the Learning Differences program, which were:

Lesson 1: Determine the Most Feasible Implementation and Support Approach

1



The foremost lesson learned from this case study was to consider the feasibility and scalability program implementation and support efforts. In other words, before beginning this work, sites should ask themselves the following questions:

- What will implementation and program support look like for the site?
- How will the site develop and maintain communication channels?
- How will the site document progress and next steps?
- Who will be the point person responsible for coordinating this work?

Lesson 2: Engage the Instructional Leader

2



The importance of principal engagement is a vital factor for other schools to consider as they are implementing this program. A key strategy to engage the instructional leader is to align the Learning Differences program with their priorities. At MES, learning differences was loosely related to the school’s focus on supporting students with learning disabilities.

Lesson 3: Strategically Garner Teacher Buy-In

3



Once the instructional leader is invested in the Learning Differences program, a second stakeholder group that must buy in is the teachers. To successfully garner teacher buy-in, it is critical to consider teacher backgrounds and appeal to their needs. Future sites should consider how they frame the program to best elicit interest from teachers.

Lesson 4: Consider a Year-Long Implementation

4



Traditionally, participants complete the Learning Differences program over the course of six weeks. However, Principal Lauren Hinnant explicitly decided that her school would complete the program over the course of the year instead. The extra time allowed the staff to work on self-paced modules. In their focus groups, teachers praised this decision, commenting on how they enjoyed having an entire school year to focus on the program. As referenced in the title of this case study, they felt as if it was a continual conversation throughout the year.

Lesson 5: Utilize PLC Time for Group Engagement

5



Building on the previous lesson, although teachers appreciated the ability to work on the initiative on their own time and at their own pace, they also greatly valued the opportunity to engage with their colleagues during their PLC time. Both the teachers and administrators found the small group engagement helpful and were pleased they were not required to stay after school. Other sites can use this time to compliment individual work with group dialogue and application.

Lesson 6: Explain the Research Process Early and Often

6



If conducting research alongside implementation, it is important to spend time explaining the research process early and often. Engaging in regular research-related conversations with the staff can help answer their questions, alleviate their concerns and increase their buy-in regarding the research process.

Lesson 7: Be Mindful When Collecting Observational Data

7



As mentioned previously, observations only represent a snapshot of what is occurring in the classroom and should be considered in tandem with other data sources. Reflecting on the usefulness of the observation protocol itself, the team found it to be a helpful guide of what to look for; however, it was evident that this tool was built for secondary classrooms. As such, they noted that strategies for learning differences may look different for elementary, especially in K-2 classrooms. Finally, when conducting observations, individuals should consider timing and type of lessons.

About the Authors



[Alex Dreier](#) is an instructional design lead at the Friday Institute for Educational Innovation.



[Callie Womble Edwards, Ph.D.](#) is a research associate at the Friday Institute for Educational Innovation where she evaluates educational initiatives using quantitative and qualitative methodologies.