

>> These two words stick in my head every time I think of Project MAX, is "presuming competence." And if I could show you my students at the beginning of this year to where they are now, they've exceeded all expectations that I've had, I think that their parents have had and the general education teachers have had. And I know that this is mainly due to Project MAX. And what I've learned, to not only be confident in myself, to push a little more, to see if the child can do it, but expect them to be able to do it. And they can.

>> Pennsylvania was very fortunate to receive a state-professional development grant. And we have affectionately titled it, "Project MAX." But it's really about shorting the word "maximizing." And we use the word "maximizing" because want to maximize access to the PA core and general education curriculum for all students, in particular, those students with complex instructional needs, who may not have had that type of access of instruction in their classroom environment.

>> ... is that it's not about place. It's not about which room you're receiving instruction in. It's that here, you're raising the bar for everyone.

>> That bridging of where we are, where we want to go and Project MAX is going to be that conduit that's going to get us from where we are to being able to offer standards-aligned programs and age-appropriate materials for all of our students.

>> It is using best instruction, best strategies; using general curriculum that all children can learn, no matter what their ability is or no matter what their disability is.

>> It's a social justice issue. It's about providing access for all kids, and not excluding some kids from some kinds of content based on evaluations of what they may or may not be able to do.

>> Education for students with complex instructional needs should look like it looks like for any student. They should receive access to all the same things as their non-disabled peers, and have all the same opportunities.

>> There are certain elements that are the underpinnings to this work. And one piece of it is what we call "presuming competence." And presuming competence means that we are going to start with the least dangerous assumption, that all students can learn. And that's just a grounding philosophy of this work.

>> This isn't your mama's preschool anymore. Everything that the kids learned in kindergarten is now almost in preschool, or even earlier than that. So I think we really have to do our part. And I think Project MAX has helped us to get to that part in preschool, so that we can get kids ready for kindergarten. If we say that they can't, or we're not going to do this, it's too hard, it's too difficult, then we've already set that student back.

>> It doesn't matter what we have in terms of training and background. It boils down to, do we have it in here? Do we have the fire within? Because no matter what your skillset is, we can uniquely work together if we do it for the children.

>> When we have districts decide to engage in the project with us, what becomes important is that they not only receive professional development in an intense sort of way, but that we're there to help team meetings talk about what that professional development means. Think about what that means from an

application standpoint in the classroom for the teacher, actually modeling, discussing, consulting over a period of time. And the teachers, the speech language therapists, the related service workers, the administrators -- it's this robust team that's really looking at the entire process. So we don't just do a once and done and we're out. Implementation science says everyone continues to work together and create this continual feedback loop of, here's something new, let's try it. Let's talk about how it works, let's adjust. And you keep moving forward. So it's a spiraling effect to continue the progress that's happening in the project.

>> The application activity I did was the KWL chart.

>> Oh, good.

>> So I provided the students with a chance to express and vocalize their part, by using switches and the iPads. And I gave them choices of things to say as far as, what did they know? What did they want to know? What have they learned?

>> I collaborate with the teacher to figure out what unit she would like to work on next. And sometimes I'll create a vocabulary board, which is very similar to kind of a communication board, but it has prioritized vocabulary for that specific unit. And I work on understanding the underlying vocabulary that is needed for the reading and math instruction in the classroom.

>> We know that effective instruction is incredibly important. So that means the planning and preparation of lessons to the delivery of lessons, using great feedback, formative assessment, summative assessment, to see how our students are progressing, so that we can monitor and adjust.

>> But then as I worked through Project MAX, I'm learning so many different components of it; the collaborating with other teachers, the breaking down of a unit to provide the instruction more appropriately. It's just so beneficial. And if I have to explain it to someone, it almost makes your job easier, because you're understanding all the important key aspects of instructing the students.

>> Oh, I was so excited. I was running around the room, like, we're talking about types of clouds, and we're talking about government, and we're talking about layers of the earth. And these are things that we may not have taught 10 years ago. But now our kids can access these things with the tools that I've been given as a result of the training through Project MAX.

>> We have a partnership with what we call our "PTI," our parent organization for Pennsylvania. And we are forming a network of parents who are helping from a grassroots respect to help build the capacity of parents out there to understand more and more about not only what's happening at schools, but what they can hope to have happen for their children.

>> My role as a parent in Project MAX is giving the community of parents a louder voice in advocating for their children, and also to some parents, this change in education is very intimidating. So I'm also here to support them.

>> So that coaching aspect comes in, that, you know, it's more heads are better than one. And we're finding that that's a critical piece that just is in constant motion. And it seems to be the piece that everyone relies upon to keep moving forward in the work that they're doing.

>> Not only are you guys providing us with the monthly professional development, which are, like, the have-tos, but you're also providing us with the guidance by coming into our classrooms. You're taking the time to support us in where we need to be. And I think having those outside eyes on us helps guide us to continue to get that hard work done that we know we have to get done, so keeping us honest and accountable.

>> I think coaching is a critical component because it helps the new teachers know as they come on that they're going to be supported, that they're not just being kind of thrown out there with these ideas, and trying to figure it all out themselves.

>> The coaching that I received last year through Project MAX helped me to transform my own classroom, because I realized that I could be doing so much more to help my students learn standards-aligned material.

>> I think the broadest impact to date that we are seeing is that students who typically have not had access to the standards, or possibly communication systems and devices, are having that opportunity now. And it's really telling us that these students can possibly do much more than what was originally expected, or maybe has been expected traditionally in the past.

That the work that's being done is a frontrunner of work in this area with students with complex instructional needs. There's a real collaborative effort happening in education right now. And our intermediate units have been great partners. Our districts who have been with us have been great partners. And there's a collegiality and a feeling of excitement for education that we see with folks, and that's just a good feeling to be a part of that work and to see that work happening.

>> I saw a classroom of students that were at a life skills designation. They are receiving math, reading, social studies, science instruction. It's integrated across the curriculum. It's integrated with the speech therapists and the classroom teacher are collaborating together. And students are doing much more than people thought possible.

>> I've had gen ed teachers come to me and say, "Can I access the materials that you're using, because I have students in my classroom that could benefit from these materials as well." And now we're building relationships with our gen ed teachers.

>> As a mother with a child with special needs, I've never been able to push him. I've seen him have so many obstacles in his life that I've never wanted to ever make him more uncomfortable, or bring any other hardships to his life. And so when he came to the IU, he was saying three or four words at a time. And that was good enough for me, because he was communicating. But now he is talking in sentences. He's reciting nursery rhymes. And I see the confidence he has. And I see what happens with this child that they're bringing out of his comfort zone and making him do more than I ever thought he would be capable of doing.

>> We have a parent, her son is 14. Now that she's seeing that he has it in there, he just has a way of getting it out now. She said, "I am just so happy that you guys are incorporating stuff that is real-life, academic, important stuff for my son to know."

>> We have a student that has really struggled. She has a lot of needs, medical, and we have just recently started figuring how to communicate with her. And we're finding now that we're starting to

break down that barrier of communication with her, that there's a lot happening in there that we just didn't realize. We kind of suspected, but we didn't realize it until we figured out a way where we can start communicating with her. And now we're starting to see that she is a very good thinker. She's a bright young lady. And we just needed to break through that communication piece. And once we got into it, the sky's the limit now. We can't wait to see how far we take her.

>> I think that we're looking at growth, growth for kids, growth especially, though, for adults, because we're really not changing kids. We're really changing adults.

>> It's helped me to think larger than just, this child has to do A, B and C, because that's what the class is doing. Well, maybe this child can do D, and can answer it in a different way. And so, it's helped me to think differently with my kids.

>> Project MAX has had a significant impact on our service delivery, on our instruction, and we will continue working with our school districts and growing this throughout our IU classrooms. It has had profound implications.

>> The vision for the future of Project MAX at IU-6 is that there will no longer be the language of Project MAX. It will simply be, this is what we do at IU 6. This is how we educate our students. This is how we train our teachers. This is how we support all of our staff members. And that it will be just the how we do what we do.

>> Through Project MAX, my perspective has changed where I look at those students and I think, okay, it's in there. How can I get it out? So I provide them with multiple modalities, multiple ways of telling me what's in there.

>> Empowering, and that's empowering professionals, administrators, children, parents. It's empowered the whole gamut of those involved with educating kids.

>> The things that we are learning in our professional developments and I'm taking into the field and working with my teachers, these are all things that are best practice techniques that can be used with all students, including those with complex learning needs.

>> Revolutionary because it really has changed the way that our teachers are looking at their practice every day. It's pushed them outside of their comfort zone, it's pushed our tech team outside the comfort zone. It's pushed me outside of my comfort zone.

>> It's believing that if we provide the right kinds of supports and instructional opportunities, that all children can learn, all teachers can teach, and good things can happen for all students.

>> I've seen more success, more expectations for students, more cooperation and just more learning all around.

>> Finally, we're taking action and addressing the needs of students with complex instructional needs, and giving them what they need to live as contributing citizens.

>> There has to be a sense of community that we're all in, that we're focused on what the kids need. And we're doing our part at each level to help it be sustained. So that's the word, "community."

>> All students have the same opportunity to learn and grow and develop as learners. Supports are different, but they all have the same opportunities, so -- equitable.

>> Life changing. Those were the words I would use to explain Project MAX.