

NASHIA Tip of the Month!

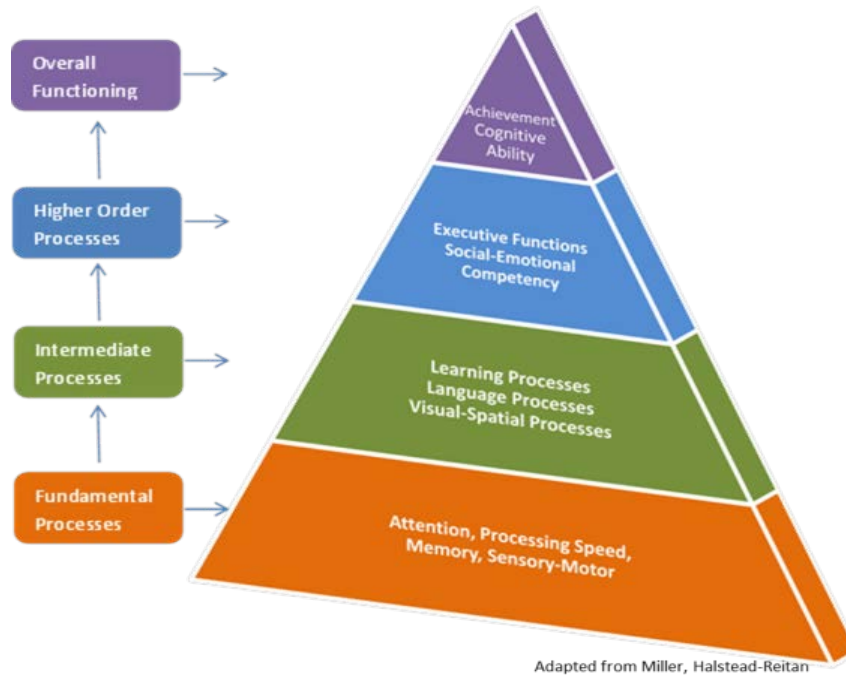
Advancing Brain Injury through Cross-Disability Projects within the Department of Education

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Meeting the needs of children and youth with brain injury is a struggle for many states, especially within the context of education. Brain injury has historically been viewed as a medical condition and as such, educators have felt inept in providing supports for students with brain injury, when in fact, many of the educational impacts experienced by students with brain injury intersect with other neurological disabilities that educators have been effectively supporting for decades. The following is meant to demystify brain injury in the education setting and to provide helpful hints for state lead agencies and departments of education for leveraging existing infrastructures and partners to maximize supports for students identified with brain injury.

All educators can learn from knowing the typical impact areas of brain injury – after all, we are talking about brain functions, which impact all learning and all behavior. In Colorado, we use the hierarchy of neurological functioning to illustrate this (see graphic below).



Building this hierarchical understanding of the fundamental, intermediate, and higher order thinking processes, and how these processes build upon one another (in the context of typical impacts in brain injury) allows us to broaden the application to all neurological functioning – and therefore all learners. This

expansion provides an opportunity to partner with other consultants across disability categories (e.g., Specific Learning Disability (SLD), Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Speech or Language Impairment (SLI), Serious Emotional Disability (SED), etc.), while, at the same time, specifically address the TBI criteria for the special education identification.

Here are a couple of examples of our collaborative efforts at the Colorado Department of Education (CDE).

Example 1: The “stand-alone” special education category of Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) was revealed in Colorado on October 2012. Training opportunities were provided on the TBI disability category and its corresponding criteria. Given all the recent changes such as, updates to the Exceptional Children’s Education Act (ECEA) Colorado rules, the implementation of the educator effectiveness evaluation requirements, the adoption of the Colorado Academic Standards/Common Core Standards, and the new state assessments – just to name a few – concerns have arisen about whether TBI would rank as a high priority among administrators to attend training themselves and release educators for training. Therefore, we partnered with various special education consultants who were also training on revisions made to other special education categories (ASD, SED, etc.), to provide full day level 1 trainings on the updated disability categories together. This partnership allowed us to train 40-100 participants per training, thereby broadening all participants understanding of brain injury and neurological functioning. The participants included such professionals as autism and behavior specialists, speech language pathologists and administrators, just to name a few. After the level 1 trainings, the basic understanding of brain injury and its broader application, as well as excitement, was generated such that we moved to full day level 2 trainings the following school year. For the level 2 trainings, the CDE Brain Injury Education Specialist and the Speech and Language Specialist partnered to provide regional trainings around the state. Creating an opportunity for administrators and special education evaluation teams to collaborate in a more purposeful and deliberate manner in order to assess students with brain injury and create an interdisciplinary approach to educational planning. The feedback from training participants was incredible. With a 51.33% response rate, eight weeks after the training (via an electronic follow up evaluation) we received the following:

- As a result of the training,
 - In what ways has student learning and engagement improved?
 - Increased engagement (39%)
 - Increased time on task (24%)
 - Increased participation in class (19%)
 - In what ways have students benefitted?
 - Students receive more consistent and appropriate accommodations/modifications (60%)
 - Students receive more consistent and appropriate interventions (50%)
 - Special education evaluations are more targeted and yield richer data (37%)
 - Trainees indicated higher proficiency rates at:
 - Designing an evaluation plan to obtain specific and relevant data for eligibility purposes
 - Designing a program (e.g., interventions, goals, behavior plans) to improve student outcomes for students with brain injury AND students with ALL TYPES of disabilities
 - Providing teachers/staff with additional strategies that meet the needs of students with brain injury AND any student/ALL students with disabilities
 - Assessing and analyzing the needs of students with brain injury AND students with other disabilities (e.g., ADHD, SED, ASD, etc.)
 - Understanding the typical impacts of students with brain injury and the effects on learning

Example 2: Executive function (EF) skills impact all students, as learners and as social beings. It is also part of the criteria for identification of students with a special education disability in the area of TBI in Colorado, and pertinent in the identification of students with other special education disabilities (e.g., SLD, SLI, ASD, and SED).

The Brain Injury Education Consultant led efforts to bring in a national expert and trainer to provide two statewide trainings for educators. The first training was titled: Interventions to Improve Executive Function Skills and the second training utilized a “train the trainer” model on the same topic, in an effort to advance support and expand implementation across the state.

Collaboration with a large local school district, the Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Commission, many other DOE specialists within the Exceptional Student Services Unit and across other units within the DOE (Secondary Services Team, Family Partnerships Team, disability specific specialists, Assistive Technology Team, Multi-tiered System of Support Team, Health & Wellness Unit, etc.) resulted in being able to provide a full day training to nearly 550 participants statewide (this is a significant increase in the amount of participants for a typical statewide training). We reached capacity at some locations within one day of opening registration and had to turn many educators away. Outreach and marketing were provided specialists and teams to get the training “on the radar” of Colorado stakeholders. It was important to provide access to this training throughout the state in both metro and rural areas. This was accomplished by video conferencing the training out to 10 sites around the state, in addition to the “live” site. The full day “train the trainer” model included 65 educational leaders (teachers, administrators, district leaders, and Dept. of Education specialists,) who now have the tools to implement and share the strategies learned in this training across the state.

The area of brain injury can be highlighted through collaboration efforts with other educators and stakeholders. Efforts such as these intensifies the impact in a couple different ways; increasing the numbers of participants, as we were able to reach many more educators and provide these valuable training opportunities, and broadening awareness of brain injury and its impact on learning for each of the training participants. We know executive function is a “hot topic” across CO and the nation – for all educators. By identifying these “cross-over” areas we can advance our work in the area of brain injury. In your state, consider the following:

1. Reviewing your special education categories – does TBI stand-alone as a category or is it a sub-category under another disability category (e.g., physical disability)? If it is not a stand-alone category, talk with your Department of Education about making this a stand-alone category. This would be done through your State Department of Education rule-making process.
2. Find out what your State Department of Education has in place to support students with other types of disabilities such as autism, specific learning disability etc., where there are similar impacts (e.g., executive functions). Identify the overlap and where you can partner.
3. Find out if your State Department of Education has training initiatives similar to those listed above that you can “piggy back” on to provide education on brain injury.

Resources:

Brain Injury in Children & Youth: A Manual for Educators – (free download)

<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdesped/sd-tbi> (Colorado Department of Education) or

<http://cokidswithbraininjury.com/educators-and-professionals/> (Colorado Kids Brain Injury Resource Network)

NASHIA Compilation of State definitions and guidance for educating students with TBI-related disabilities.

http://www.nashia.org/pdf/state_education_tbi_definitions_criteria.pdf

For further information contact NASHIA at info@nashia.org.