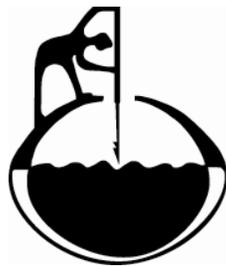


SPECIAL OLYMPICS WORLD WINTER GAMES CURRICULUM

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SPECIAL OLYMPICS WORLD WINTER GAMES 2001
SCHOOL ENRICHMENT PROGRAM

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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

When the 2001 Special Olympics World Winter Games were held in Anchorage in March 2001, among the many benefits Anchorage residents reported was better understanding of people with disabilities. The games brought close to 2,000 athletes with mental disabilities and more than 740 coaches from 70 countries to Alaska.

As part of the planning for the 2001 games, the Game Organizing Committee established the Special Olympics School Enrichment Program. Under this program, Alaska teachers in 2000 developed a Special Olympics curriculum for Alaska schools. That curriculum was intended to involve Alaska students from grades K-12 in the experience of the upcoming games. Students were to learn about the special needs, talents, and potential of people with disabilities, in addition to learning about the lifestyles, histories, and cultures of people from various countries who would be arriving in Alaska for the games.

Using funds from the U.S. Department of Education, the School Enrichment Program contracted with the Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER) at the University of Alaska Anchorage to evaluate the implementation of that curriculum. The Special Olympics program hopes such information will help other organizing committees to better plan for future events. This report describes how we did the evaluation, what we learned, and how that information might benefit future Special Olympics events.

What are Special Olympics?

Special Olympics provide athletic competition and year-round training for children and adults with mental disabilities. Since 1968, more than a million athletes from around the world have participated internationally in Special Olympics. “Special Olympics Alaska also traces its beginnings back to 1968. . . . initial interest blossomed into the first state games in Fairbanks in 1969.”¹

To participate in Special Olympics, athletes must be at least eight years old and have been identified by an agency or professional as mentally retarded—that is, affected by cognitive delays measured with formal assessments or by significant learning or vocational problems due to cognitive delays that require specifically designed instruction. Athletes may also have physical, sensory, emotional or other disabilities—but they must have some mental disability to qualify for Special Olympics.

What is the 2001 Special Olympics School Enrichment Program?

Schools offer one of the best forums to help children with mental disabilities be accepted and included. The Special Olympics World Winter Games Organizing Committee developed several programs to help Alaska school administrators, teachers, and athletic coaches build meaningful opportunities for all students to train and complete together:

- School Enrichment Program • Athlete Leadership
- Unified Sports • Sports Partnership • Partners Club

¹ Special Olympics Alaska Web site: <http://www.specialolympicalaska.org/whatis.htm>

The School Enrichment Program was intended to develop a program allowing Alaska schools to take advantage of the organizational structure of Special Olympics. The program had a number of specific goals:

1. To develop a school curriculum using the Alaska Content Standards, based on the World Winter Games 2001
 - 1.1 To develop an integrated K-12 curriculum that could be used in high-performance classrooms
 - 1.2 To develop lesson plans that would educate all students about persons with disabilities and about Special Olympics. Lesson plans should include adaptations and modifications for those students with cognitive disabilities
2. To enhance the use of technology in schools
 - 2.1 To disseminate the curriculum through print, interactive CD-ROM, and Web-based technologies
 - 2.2 To develop communications technologies through online sports, e-mail, discussion boards, chat, and other Web-based systems
3. To provide professional development around Special Olympics in the schools
 - 3.1 To train selected educators about Special Olympics programs such as Special Olympics Sports, Unified Sports, Sports Partnerships, Partners Clubs, and Motor Activity Training
 - 3.2 To engage the selected educators to develop lesson plans specifically using those Special Olympics programs.
4. To find out how much Alaska schools know about Special Olympics
 - 4.1 To develop and distribute a survey of Alaska schools, asking about their current participation and knowledge of Special Olympics
 - 4.2 To interpret data collected in the survey to determine the successful practices already existing in the schools
5. To develop Special Olympics outreach programs in the schools
 - 5.1 To increase the existing number of athletes and partners in the schools already active
 - 5.2 To enroll potential athletes and partners in those schools not currently active
6. To investigate a long-term curriculum for special education, based on Special Olympics
 - 6.1 To investigate ways special educators can use the opportunities presented to students through Special Olympics.
 - 6.2 To investigate how students can demonstrate cognitive, vocational, and social skills through the sports partnership programs

The staff and volunteers of the School Enrichment Program developed a school curriculum for schools across Alaska. The lesson plans were to teach students in various ways. By illustrating the determination of Special Olympics athletes in sports and in life, they were to inspire students. They were to bring cultures and customs from around the world into Alaska classrooms. They were to help create bonds between people with and without mental retardation. Each lesson plan was to be tied directly to Alaska's curriculum content and standards for schools (i.e., performance standards). The curriculum was to be distributed in three formats: hard copy, compact diskette, and Internet.

The School Enrichment Program was intended to benefit both special and traditional education programs, through real-life application of skills all students need— including socialization, teamwork, independent living, responsibility, and personal hygiene. The program was also to provide teachers with a dynamic community-based resource for their classrooms.

How was the Special Olympics World Winter Games Curriculum Developed?

Teachers from schools throughout Alaska developed the School Enrichment Program curriculum during two separate institutes in 2000. (Institutes are short, intense courses.) Participating teachers got continuing education credits.

In the first institute, held in the spring of 2000, ten Alaska teachers met on four weekends over three months to develop a philosophy, mission statement, objectives, and an overall format for instructional plans, as well as to begin creating the first few lesson plans. The participating teachers were also part of a curriculum writing team for a minimum of 30 hours, under the direct supervision of the course instructor. The three-credit course consisted of a brief review of the historical, social, philosophical, and political foundations of curriculum development in the United States.

The group developed a curriculum plan around the theme, "Special Olympics World Winter Games 2001 Alaska: Promoting Peace in our Global Neighborhood," to be implemented in K-12 classrooms through the Special Olympics School Enrichment project. They used state and national standards to frame curriculum that would be relevant to children in the United States and around the world.

The second institute—the Special Olympics Training Institute—was held for 32 hours in June 2000. More than 40 Alaskan teachers from varied backgrounds (urban and rural, special and regular education, new and veteran) attended. Table 1 describes teachers who participated.

Participants examined such topics as curriculum implementation and evaluation, technology integration, peer coaching and mentoring, and professional development planning. They developed lesson plans and designed implementation and evaluation plans. Participants devoted a minimum of 16 additional hours outside formal classes to writing a curriculum implementation and evaluation plan.

Both institute courses included lecture and discussion, an examination of model curriculum implementation and evaluation processes, and writing and editing workshops.

Table 1. Characteristics of Teachers at Special Olympics Training Institute

Participants

Teachers	41
Educators removed from the sample*	9
Total participants	50

*1 news coordinator, 1 retired teacher, 1 teacher from another state, 1 superintendent, 2 teachers in non-profits, 3 non-responding teachers.

What is your current assignment?

Current Assignment	Yes	No	No Answer
Teacher	36	4	1
Administrator	3	37	1
Other Assignment	5*	35	1

*Special education counselor, special education teacher's aid, guidance counselor, administrative trainee, other special education duties.

In what type of educational setting do you work?

Educational Setting	Yes	No	No Answer
School	37	3	1
District Offices	2	38	1
Organization	1	39	1

How many years have you been in the profession?/How many years have you taught?

Years in Profession or Teaching	In Education Profession (Number of Respondents)	In Teaching (Number of Respondents)
0-10	16	19
11-19	13	12
20-29	4	4
30-39	5	4
40-49	1	1
No Answer	1	1

In what kind of setting do you teach?

Setting	Yes	No	No Answer
Regular Classroom	27	12	2
Special Education Resource Room	14	25	2
Classroom with Special Needs	28	11	2
Other Setting*	7	32	2

*Includes: 2 all special needs students, 1 guidance counseling, 1 pre-school multi-handicapped, 1 team teach with regular teachers, 1 tutor, and 1 work with small groups

What certifications do you hold?

Certification	Yes	No	No Answer
Elementary	23	16	2
Special Education	20	19	2
Secondary Education	16	23	2
Administrative	4	35	2
Other*	8	31	2

*Includes: early childhood education, guidance counselor, K-12 music, national teacher's exam, K-12 physical education, pre-school, K-12 reading specialist, reading specialist. Additional certifications include coach, curriculum specialist, endorsement for emotionally disturbed, and endorsement for severe special education.

Following the last class session, the Special Olympics School Enrichment Committee began reviewing the lesson plans the educators had developed, using a scoring rubric established for the participants in the second institute. The selected plans were organized in a binder, copied on to compact disks, and uploaded on the Special Olympics World Winter Games School Enrichment Web site. A binder of lesson plans and a copy of the CD were sent to each school in Alaska before the 2001 games began.

The course instructors continued to work with those teachers whose lessons did not meet the standards in the evaluation rubric, to insure they would also be included on the Web site.

Overview of the Evaluation

The Special Olympics School Enrichment Committee asked ISER to examine several questions:

- How widely is this curriculum used and by whom?
- What happens when you attempt to introduce the Special Olympics World Winter Games curriculum into the schools?
- What are the perceived effects of the curriculum?

To examine these questions, ISER collected data through several surveys.

Pre-Implementation Survey of Participants in Special Olympics Training Institute

In the fall of 2000, ISER surveyed participants in the School Enrichment Program's Special Olympics Training Institute. Our questions were designed to determine participants' experience with and knowledge of curriculum development, implementation, and evaluation.

Post-Implementation Survey of Institute Participants

In the spring of 2001, after the Special Olympics World Winter Games were held in Anchorage, we surveyed the same teachers who had participated in the institute, to ask about their progress in implementing the Special Olympics curriculum.

Post-Implementation Surveys of Teachers in Participating Schools and Educators in Other Schools in Participating Districts

To get a sense for how well the curriculum was disseminated and implemented, ISER also surveyed samples of educators from two additional groups:

- Teachers in participating schools: Teachers in the same buildings or at the same school campuses as those who participated in the Special Olympics Training Institute.
- Educators statewide: A random sample of educators (primarily principals and special education directors) in schools in the same districts where educators took part in the training institute

We asked these educators the same questions about the implementation and effects of the Special Olympics curriculum as we had those who took part in the training institute. Table 2 summarizes when we did the surveys and whom we surveyed.

Table 2: Surveys, Target Populations, and Time of Administration

Surveys	Target Population	Time of Administration
<i>Pre-Implementation Survey</i>	Special Olympics Training Institute Participants	Fall 2000
<i>Post-Implementation Surveys</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special Olympics Training Institute participants • Other teachers in participating schools • Educators in random sample of schools statewide 	Spring 2001 Spring 2001 Spring 2001

Planned Student Focus Groups at Anchorage Schools

To get some idea of the effects of the curriculum on students’ knowledge, understanding, and attitudes, we had planned to hold focus groups with students in participating schools before and after the curriculum was implemented. We planned to use that approach in part because of the stringent regulations that govern access to student information in the participating districts. In addition, resource constraints precluded the use of more intensive data collection. However, ISER was unable to conduct the focus groups. Aside from the difficulty of obtaining permission to speak with students, we also found that the teachers who had participated in the training institute simply lacked the time to help us plan, organize, and coordinate the student focus groups. As a result, the 2000-2001 school year ended without ISER’s talking with students who had been taught the Special Olympics curriculum.

Organization of Report

Chapter II provides more detail about the curriculum evaluation surveys. Chapter III profiles the responses of Alaskan educators. Chapter IV discusses the results of our evaluation, and Chapter V describes how future Special Olympics organizing committees might use this information for planning. The appendixes include the survey questionnaires and copies of relevant documents.

CHAPTER II. RESEARCH METHODS

Design Considerations

We hypothesized that there would be measurable changes in attitudes towards Special Olympics and persons with mental retardation, once teachers or students had used the new curriculum. We further hypothesized that schools and districts with teachers who had participated in the Special Olympics Training Institute would have a greater involvement in Special Olympics and in the use of the curriculum.

Survey Questionnaires

The individual participating teacher is the unit of analysis in the study of training institute participants and in the survey of other teachers at participant schools. The school is the unit of analysis in the statewide survey of educators (principals or special education directors). In all these surveys, we asked respondents questions designed to elicit:

- Familiarity with the Special Olympics curriculum
- Attitude toward and perception of Special Olympics
- Knowledge of and experience with curriculum development
- Knowledge of and experience with curriculum implementation and evaluation

Field Test of Instrument

We tested the draft questionnaires on four teachers chosen to represent those who would receive the final questionnaire. Based on our analysis of their responses and comments, we filtered out or clarified confusing questions and terms, confirmed that the perception and attitude questions were valid, and determined the time required to complete the survey.

Sample Design/Survey Population

The survey groups consisted of the following educators:

1. Teachers who participated the Special Olympics Training Institute
2. Other teachers at the same schools as those who participated in the training institute
3. Principals and special education directors employed at schools in the same districts as teachers who participated in the training institute

Sampling Protocols

Population #1: Teachers who participated in the Special Olympics Training Institute

The School Enrichment Committee of the Special Olympics World Winter Games 2001 provided ISER with contact information for teachers who participated in the Special Olympics Training Institute. We interviewed—both before and after the Special Olympics World Winter Games 2001—all 41 teachers who participated in the Special Olympics training institute. These 41 participants represented 36 Alaska schools. The sample included one administrator and 6 teachers who represented 3 of the 36 schools.

Table 3 shows the distribution of the participating teachers by type of school. Of the participants, 39 percent were from elementary schools, 25 percent from high schools, 22 percent from K-12 schools, and another 11 percent from middle schools. The K-12 teachers were from small rural schools.

Table 3. Unduplicated Count of Schools With Teachers Who Took Part in the Special Olympics Training Institute

Type of School	Unduplicated Schools	Percentage of Total Schools
Elementary	14	39%
High	9	25%
K-12	8	22%
Middle	4	11%
Secondary	1	3%
Total	36	100%

Population #2: Teachers in the same buildings or at the same school campuses as teachers who participated the Special Olympics Training Institute

We used the *Alaska Education Directory, School Year 1999-2000*, published by the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development, and each school’s Internet site, to identify teachers employed at the same schools as those who participated in the Special Olympics Training Institute. ISER also contacted the schools whose teachers had participated in the training institute and asked for lists of teachers. When these telephone calls were unsuccessful, we checked the school Web sites for teacher lists and contact information. If this was also unsuccessful, we mailed the questionnaire to the school using a generic title for teachers we hoped to survey (e.g., “To the First-Grade Teacher”).

The total number of teachers at the 36 participating schools was approximately 1,000. This count excluded principals, administrative staff, resource and tutoring support personnel, BPO, custodians, librarians, counselors, and speech/language pathologists. Given a population of approximately 1,000 teachers, to achieve 10 percent accuracy with 95 percent confidence required a sample of 87 teachers. Selecting the first three randomly identified teachers at each of the 36 schools produced a final sample of 108 teachers.

Our random selection process had several steps. We first assigned a number to each teacher. Then we noted the total number of teachers at the school. Next, we used a random number table. We matched randomly selected numbers with the numbered list of teachers to identify our final sample.

We used that process to ensure that we got a random and unbiased sample. The sample frame was designed to meet probability-sampling requirements.

Population #3: Schools in the same districts as those with teachers who participated in the Special Olympics Training Institute

Using data from the *Alaska Education Directory School Year 1999-2000*, we first listed the school districts that had teachers who had participated in the training institute. We entered all the schools from the selected districts into a spreadsheet. We sorted the schools by grade level. We also listed and sorted the individual schools where training institute participants taught. We then calculated the percentages of schools at each level (elementary, middle, high, K-12) for the teachers who participated in the training institute.

Using the list of schools, we randomly selected schools to reflect the percentage of schools at each level with teachers who took part in the training institute. Our random selection process had several steps. First we assigned a number to each school within its particular group. Then we noted the total number of schools needed to reach the required percentage. Using a random digit chart, we selected a starting number and then counted out the schools until we reached a number that reflected the pre-determined percentage of schools at each level.

Our final sample consisted of 100 schools. We sent an initial mailing to the principal and the special education director of each of the schools. We felt that either the principal or the special education director would know if the Special Olympics curriculum had been used at the school. We also believed that our chances of getting at least one response from each school would be greater if we sent surveys to both the principal and the special education director.

Survey Administration

Sample #1: Teachers who participated in the Special Olympics Training Institute

In fall 2000, we e-mailed surveys to Special Olympics Training Institute participants. If they didn't have e-mail, or couldn't open the attachment, we faxed a copy. Our questions were designed to ascertain experience with and knowledge of curriculum development, implementation, and evaluation as well as to inquire about participant progress in implementing the Special Olympics curriculum (see appendix for copy of questionnaire).

We explained to teachers why we were collecting the data. We also assured them that participation was voluntary and that survey results would be made available in a summary format only. Respondents would be considered to have given their implied consent if they participated in the survey via e-mail or fax. (A copy of the fax is included in the appendix.)

A week later (or sooner, for teachers whose e-mail surveys were not delivered), we followed up with e-mail messages and faxes. When responses were slow in arriving, we also called teachers to complete the surveys. (Follow-up faxes and e-mails are in the appendix.)

For the post-implementation survey in the spring of 2001, we used the same procedure. We were unable to complete a number of post-implementation surveys at that time. Consequently, we continued to follow up with these teachers through fall 2002.

Sample #2: Teachers in the same building or on the same grounds as teachers who participated the Special Olympics Training Institute

In the spring of 2001, we followed the same procedure we had used to survey teachers in sample #1 to survey those in sample #2. Surveys that we were unable to complete in spring 2001 we followed up on from fall 2001 through fall 2002.

Sample #3: Principals and special education directors at schools in the same districts where teachers took part in the Special Olympics Training Institute

In spring 2001, we mailed surveys to the principals and special education directors at the randomly selected schools in the same districts as the educators in sample #1. We conducted follow-ups via mail and telephone. Surveys that we were unable to complete in spring 2001, we followed up on from fall 2001 through fall 2002.

In an attempt to maximize the response rate among those in sample #3—whom we assumed would be the least motivated to respond—we shortened the survey. We also telephoned those who didn't respond and attempted to complete the survey on the phone. If respondents reported that they had not used the curriculum, we ended the interview.

Our methodology incorporated the strategies used to obtain high response rates in surveys—repeated attempts using second and third e-mail reminders and adding mail and fax follow-up to the initial email contact when e-mail contact was unsuccessful. The intent of this rigorous survey approach is to minimize non-response bias by first generating a non-biased sample and then following up to ensure a high response rate.

Survey Response Rates

Sample #1: Tables 4 and 5 show the response rate of teachers in sample #1 (i.e., those who participated in the Special Olympics Training Institute).

Table 4. Pre-implementation Survey of Training Institute Participants

	Number	Percent
Completed interview by telephone	33	82.5%
Completed interview by email	7	17.5%
Total Respondents	40*	100%

Response Rate: 100%

*We excluded from our sample one teacher who took part in the training institute but was working as an administrator.

Table 5. Post-implementation Survey of Training Institute Participants

	Number	Percent
Refusals	1	2.5%
R unavailable during the study	2	5%
R mailed survey back to us/we didn't receive/won't repeat	1	2.5%
No response/Unable to reach/telephone out of service	7	17.5%
Completed interview	29	72.5%
Total	40	100%

Response Rate: 72.5%

We were able to achieve a response rate of 100 percent, as shown in Table 4, for the pre-implementation survey; that was largely because we worked closely with the educators who participated in the training institute. We also contacted the participants soon after the institute. Thus, it was still fresh in their minds and their level of commitment to enacting the curriculum they had helped developed—and to the overall project—was presumably high.

By the following spring, that commitment had probably been eroded, as evidenced by the lack of response from seven of the original institute participants and the outright refusal from one. Nonetheless, the response rate, as shown in Table 5, was a respectable 72.5 percent.

Sample #2: Table 6 shows the response rate of the sample of teachers who worked in the same schools as those who participated in the training institute.

**Table 6. Post-implementation Survey of Teachers in Same Schools
as Participants in Training Institute**

	Number	Percent
Refusals	3	2.9%
Respondent unavailable during the study	1	0.96%
No response/Unable to Reach	32	30.7%
Completed Interview but Did Not teach Special Olympics Curriculum	47	45.2%
Completed interview	21	20.2%
Total	104*	100%

Response Rate: 65.4%

*Original sample was 108. Removal of duplicate entries and respondents that could not be matched to schools reduced sample to 104.

The most salient information in Table 6 is that of the 100 teachers from whom we received responses, 47 reported that they had not taught the Special Olympics curriculum. This is a central finding: *In the schools that sent some teachers to the training institute, less than half of all the teachers actually taught the Special Olympics curriculum.*

Among the 32 educators who did not respond, we can guess that many were unfamiliar with the Special Olympics curriculum. Thus, while we received responses from 68 of the 104 teachers in the sample, only 21—or 20 percent—reported using the curriculum. Keep that small sample size in mind in looking at the later tables reporting responses to survey questions.

Sample #3: Table 7 shows the response rate from schools in the same districts as those who participated in the training institute.

**Table 7. Post-Implementation Survey of Educators in the Same School Districts
as Participants in the Training Institute**

	Number	Percent
Refusals	0	0%
Post Office returned the survey as undeliverable	3	3%
No response/School closed/Unable to locate respondent	7	7%
Completed Modified Survey but Did Not Teach Special Olympics Curriculum	46	46%
Completed survey and curriculum taught in school	44	44%
Total Schools*	100	100%

Response Rate: 90%

*Original sample was 103. Removal of closed schools reduced sample to 100.

Among educators (principals and special education directors) from schools in the same districts as the participants in the training institute, 90 completed the full or a shortened survey (designed for those who had not taught the Special Olympics curriculum). Of those 90, 46 reported that the curriculum was not taught in their schools, while 44 said it had been taught. Recall, however, that these responses came from principals or special education directors, whose knowledge about implementation of curriculum in the classroom might be less than perfect.

Method for calculating response rate

We calculated the response rate as:
$$\frac{\text{Total \# of completed interviews}}{\text{Number in the original sample}}$$
 Minus (as applicable): respondents that could not be matched to schools or replicated in other samples (i.e., samples #1 & #2) or schools that had closed (i.e. sample #3)

Sample Weighting

Our first survey was of an entire group: teachers who attended the Special Olympics Training Institute. So we did not have to adjust that group to represent the entire population: it is the entire population, designated by “N” in tables throughout the rest of this report. But in our second and third surveys, we were able to survey only a sample of the entire group. So it was necessary to adjust the samples—as described below—so that they represented the characteristics of the entire group. Table 8 shows the overall population, our sample size—designated by “n” in tables in the rest of the report—and the weighted sample numbers.

Weighting for Sample #2: Following the methodology described above, we selected three teachers from each school. To estimate the characteristics and attitudes of teachers in each of these schools, we weighted the sample so that the responses in each school are in proportion to the number of teachers in that school.

We calculated sample weights for each school, dividing the number of randomly selected teachers (3) by the total number of teachers in that particular school. In calculating statistics, we applied that quotient to the responses. We used this weight to estimate total population responses and the total weighted responses for the number of completed interviews. Our weights estimate a population size of 1,031 teachers. Our final sample size was 104.

Weighting for Sample #3: Earlier we described the method for selecting sample schools in the districts that had sent teachers to the training institute. Having one respondent from each school would provide us with a representative sample. But sometimes we received responses from both the principal and the special education director at a single school. At these schools, we weighted the answers from each respondent by 0.5. Our final sample size was 100 schools.

Table 8. Survey Population and Sample Size

	Teachers in Special Olympics Curriculum Development	Teachers at Same Schools as Participants	Schools in Same Districts as Participants (Principal or Special Education Director from a School)
Survey Population (N)	40 teachers	1,032 teachers	268 schools
Sample size (n)	N/A	104 teachers	100 schools
Weighted Population	N/A	1,031 teachers	N/A

CHAPTER III. ALASKA’S TEACHERS AND THE SPECIAL OLYMPICS CURRICULUM

Again, the questions ISER attempted to answer for the Special Olympics School Enrichment Program are the following:

- How widely is this curriculum used and by whom?
- What happens when you attempt to introduce this new curriculum into the schools?
- What are the perceived effects of the curriculum?

How Widely is This Curriculum Used and By Whom?

Implementation of the Special Olympics World Wide Games Curriculum

We asked straightforwardly if the curriculum had been implemented in the respondents’ schools. As Table 9 shows, 64 percent of participants in the Special Olympics Training Institute who completed the post-implementation survey reported that the curriculum had, in fact, been implemented. We do not know whether the 11 teachers who did not respond to the post-implementation survey taught the curriculum.

Colleagues of participants—teachers in the same schools who did not attend the training institute—reported a lower level of implementation. Only 35 percent said the curriculum had been implemented in their schools.

A similar proportion (33 percent) of those in our third sample—principals and special education directors in other schools in the districts where teachers had attended the training institute—reported that the curriculum had been implemented.

Table 9. Implementation of the Special Olympics Curriculum*

Respondents		Yes	No
Institute Participants	N=28	64%	36%
Teachers in Same Schools with Participants	n=21	35%	65%
Other Schools in Districts with Participants	n=85	33%	67%

*Actual question: “Was the Special Olympics curriculum implemented in your school?”

Note: Percentages based on valid responses only.

We asked a series of follow-up questions of those who reported that the curriculum had been implemented in their schools. Table 10 shows who was involved in making the decision to adopt the Special Olympics curriculum. Large majorities of the respondents from all three samples said they themselves were involved in such decisions. Participants in the training institute and their colleagues seemed to disagree about the principal’s role in making the decision to implement the curriculum. Whereas only 17 percent of the institute participants reported that the principal made the decision, nearly half (49 percent) of their teaching colleagues thought this to be the case. Fifth-seven percent of the principals and special education directors from schools in the same district as the participants also identified the principal as a decision maker.

Similarly, participants in the training institute and their colleagues disagreed about the role of the special education director. Only 17 percent of the participants identified special education directors as decision makers, while more than half (51 percent) of their colleagues did so. Few or none of the respondents from any of the three respondent groups mentioned the department heads, assistant or associate superintendents, curriculum specialists, superintendents, or school boards. Large proportions of each sample identified “others”—especially special education teachers and other teachers—as being involved in making the decision to teach the curriculum.

Table 10. Who Was Involved in the Decision to Implement the Special Olympics Curriculum?*

	Respondent Groups		
	Training Institute Participants	Teachers at Same Schools as Participants	Schools in Same Districts as Participants
Number of respondents who said their schools implemented the curriculum	(N=18)	(n=6)	(n=28)
Who took part in the decision?			
Self	89%	74%	76%
Principal	17%	49%	57%
School Special Ed Coordinator/Director	17%	51%	25%
Department Heads	6%	0	15%
District Special Ed Coordinator/Director	6%	0	18%
Assistant/Associate Superintendent	0	0	11%
Curriculum Specialist	0	0	6%
Superintendent	0	0	18%
School Board	0	0	2%
Other	50%	75%	67%

*Actual question: “Who – that is, people in which positions – were involved in the decision to adopt the Special Olympics curriculum?”
 Note: Percentages based on valid responses only.

We were particularly interested in the role classroom teachers played in the implementation process, since they are obviously critical to whatever is actually taught. As suggested by the number of respondents who chose “other” in the item above, the classroom teacher has the final say on what is actually implemented in the classroom. This point is well illustrated by responses to the next question (Table 11) about the roles classroom teachers played in adopting the Special Olympics curriculum. Three-quarters of the participants indicated that the decision to adopt the curriculum was the classroom teacher’s alone.

Table 11. Role Classroom Teachers Played in Implementing Special Olympics Curriculum*

Role of Classroom Teachers	Respondent Groups		
	Training Institute Participants	Teachers at Same Schools as Participants	Schools in Same Districts as Participants
	(N=17)	(n=6)	(n=25)
Made the decision alone	76%	66%	67%
Participated in making the decision	18%	0	33%
Were required to adopt the decision	0	0	6%
Other	0	34%	6%

*Actual question: "What role(s) did classroom teachers play in adopting the Special Olympics curriculum?"
 Note: Percentages based on valid responses only.

In addition to asking who was involved in making the decision to implement the Special Olympics curriculum, we asked whether the implementation was monitored. Table 12 shows the responses to this question. Nearly 80 percent of training institute participants reported that the implementation process was not monitored, and two-thirds of their colleagues concurred.

Table 12. Did Anyone Monitor the Implementation of the Special Olympics Curriculum in Your School?

Respondent Groups	Number who said curriculum was implemented	Curriculum implementation was Monitored	Curriculum implementation was Not Monitored
Participants in the training institute	N=18	22%	78%
Teachers in Schools of Participants	n=6	34%	66%
Educators in Districts of Participants	n=27	36%	64%

Note: Percentages based on valid responses only.

Finally, we asked if the curriculum was modified after it was implemented. The number of valid responses to this question was quite small, making interpretation problematic. The data from the participants in the training institute suggest that most of them believe teachers did modify the curriculum, although a majority of their teaching colleagues disagreed. Principals and special education directors at other schools tended to agree with the training institute participants, that teachers did modify the curriculum.

**What Happens When You Attempt to Introduce the New Curriculum into the Schools?
Support for Curriculum Development and Implementation**

We asked the educators who attended the training institute about the level of support they received after they returned to their schools. Fifteen of the 29 institute participants (52 percent) for whom we have completed post-implementation surveys agreed that there were “people at either the school or district level whose jobs include supporting curriculum development and implementation” in their schools. This may appear to be a low number, until we remember that 23 institute participants came from small rural districts and schools that simply do not have the resources to support curriculum specialists at either the school or district levels. This proportion was confirmed by respondents in the other two samples—52 percent of both samples concurred that a curriculum-support person was available in their school or district.

We also asked respondents in all three samples about the roles that key school personnel played in curriculum development and implementation. As Table 13 indicates, more than half the training institute participants (53 percent) who responded to the survey and answered this question reported that the school special education director initiated development of the Special Olympics curriculum. Two participants identified principals, district special education directors, and curriculum specialists as initiators. In addition, one superintendent and one school board were reported as initiating the Special Olympics curriculum development effort.

Clearly, in most of the schools for which we have data, the school’s special education director was critical in initiating curriculum development. Some respondents also identified “others” who played roles in initiating development, most often colleagues and special education teachers.

**Table 13. Key Personnel Initiating Development of Curriculum
(Percentages of Respondents Who Identified Specific Person)***

	Respondents		
	Training Institute Participants	Teachers at Same Schools as Participants	Educators at Schools in Same Districts as Participants
Number of responses	(N=29)	(n=18)	(n=27)
Job Title			
Principal	25%	25%	18%
School Special Ed Coordinator/Director	53%	100%	20%
Department Heads	0	0	29%
District Special Ed Coordinator/Director	50%	26%	50%
Assistant/Associate Superintendent	0	0	100%
Curriculum Specialist	67%	0	33%
Superintendent	50%	0	100%
School Board	50%	0	50%
Other	50%	62%	76%

*Actual question: “Were there people at either the school or district level whose jobs include supporting curriculum development and implementation in your school? If so, ...who are these people and what role did they play in implementing Special Olympics Curriculum?”
Note: Percentages based on valid responses only.

In addition to asking about the role of various personnel in initiating Special Olympics curriculum development, we asked *who provided resources* to implement the curriculum. As Table 14 shows, teachers who took part in the Special Olympics Training Institute divided their responses almost equally among principals, school special education directors, department heads, district special education coordinators, and curriculum specialists. Other teachers almost unanimously cited school or district special education directors and principals. Other educators were most likely to cite principals, but more than half also named department heads. Teachers were the most frequent response in the category of “others.” Again, remember that the number of responses is small, when we divide them into categories.

**Table 14. Key Personnel Provided Resources to Implement
the Special Olympics Curriculum*
(Percentages of Respondents Who Cited Specific Person)**

	Samples of Respondent		
	Training Institute Participants	Teachers at Same Schools as Participants	Educators in Schools in Same Districts as Participants
Number of responses	(N=29)	(n=18)	(n=27)
Job Title			
Principal	25%	75%	65%
School SPED Coordinator/Director	28%	100%	20%
Department Heads	33%	0	57%
District SPED Coordinator/Director	25%	74%	50%
Assistant/Associate Superintendent	0	0	0
Curriculum Specialist	33%	0	44%
Superintendent	0	0	33%
School Board	0	0	0
Others	80%	100%	53%

*Actual question: "Were there people at either the school or district level whose jobs include supporting curriculum development and implementation in your school? If so ...who are these people and what role did they play in implementing Special Olympics curriculum?"
Note: Percentages based on valid responses only.

Perhaps the most critical question in this area is: Who among school personnel provided the support needed at the classroom level to *implement the curriculum*? Considerable research suggests that this is the place where the rubber meets the road in curriculum implementation (Remillard, 1999; Kliebard, 1989). Without classroom-level support, many teachers find it difficult to implement new curriculum, particularly in this age of standards, assessments, and accountability (Padulla, et al, 2003).

Keeping in mind that there is limited evidence the Special Olympics curriculum was widely used, see Table 15. It shows which school personnel provided support for implementing that curriculum. Teachers who attended the training institute cited mainly principals (75 percent), department heads (67 percent), curriculum specialists (67 percent), and the school special education directors (62 percent). Their teaching colleagues cited school and district special education directors. Other educators—our third sample—were far more likely to cite department heads. All three groups of respondents also cited “others” as providing support—including colleagues, counselors, and speech/language specialists.

Table 15. Key Personnel Who Provided Support for Classroom Implementation of the Special Olympics Curriculum* (Percentages Citing Specific Person)

	Respondent Groups		
	Training Institute Participants	Teachers at Same Schools as Participants	Educators in Same Districts as Participants
Number of respondents	(N=29)	(n=18)	(N=27)
Job Title			
Principal	75%	0	35%
School Special Ed Coordinator/Director	62%	100%	40%
Department Heads	67%	0	71%
District Special Ed Coordinator/Director	25%	74%	25%
Assistant/Associate Superintendent	0	0	0
Curriculum Specialist	67%	0	44%
Superintendent	50%	0	33%
School Board	50%	0	50%
Others	50%	100%	100%

*Actual question: “Were there people at either the school or district level whose jobs include supporting curriculum development and implementation in your school? If so ...who are these people and what role did they play in implementing Special Olympics Curriculum?”
 Note: Percentages based on valid responses only.

In sum, many in each of our survey groups agreed that school special education directors were key players in initiating and supporting the Special Olympics curriculum. Beyond that, responses among the groups were mixed, with institute participants far more likely to name principals and the other survey groups most likely to cite various “others.” Again, remember that we are reporting small numbers of responses.

Organizational Support for Special Olympics Curriculum Implementation

We also wanted to know whether there were organizational supports for implementing the curriculum in the participating schools and districts. The questions described above focused on the support of individuals; those reported below look at collective support.

As Table 16 reflects, the responses varied among the groups of respondents. Only 31 percent of teachers who had attended the training institute—and who, presumably, had the most invested in the curriculum—reported that there were organizational supports for implementing the curriculum. Nearly half their teaching colleagues and educators in other schools reported having such supports.

Table 16. Were there Organizational Supports in Your School or District that were Helpful in Implementing the Special Olympics Curriculum?

Respondents		Yes	No
Participants in the Training Institute	N=29	31%	69%
Teachers in Schools of Participants	n=19	49%	51%
Educators in Districts of Participants	n=24	46%	54%

Note: Percentages based on valid responses only.

As a follow-up, we asked just those who said they did receive organizational support to report the sources of that support. Table 17 shows responses of those who attended the training Institute; Tables 18 and 19 report responses of the two other groups we surveyed.

Table 17. Which Organizational Supports Were Helpful in Implementing the Curriculum?*
(Responses of institute participants: N=9)

Organization	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	A lot	Very
Committee or group for Special Education	44%	22%	0	0	22%
Resources for implementing new curricula	33%	11%	33%	22%	0
District/school policy supporting Special Olympics curriculum	56%	0	33%	11%	0

* Actual question: “Were there organizational supports in your school or district that were helpful in implementing the Special Olympics curricula? If so . . . how helpful were they?”

Note: Percentage based on valid responses only.

As Table 17 shows, even where organizational support was reportedly available, it wasn’t very helpful, in the eyes of most of those who attended the training institute.

Table 18, which reflects the responses of teachers in the same schools as the institute participants, seems to tell a slightly different story, although the number of valid responses was very small. Only 4 or 5 teachers answered this question. They tended to be a bit more positive about the helpfulness of various organizational supports. Half the respondents reported that the local committee for special education was very helpful. Nearly 80 percent thought the district or school policy supporting the Special Olympics curriculum was “somewhat” or “a lot” helpful.

Table 18. Which Organizational Supports Were Helpful in Implementing the Curriculum?*

(Responses of teachers at same schools with institute participants)

Organization		Not at all	A little	Somewhat	A lot	Very
Committee or group for Special Education	n=5	13%	0	17%	21%	50%
Resources for implementing new curricula	n=4	16%	62%	22%	0	0
District/school policy supporting Special Olympics curriculum	n=4	0	20%	63%	16%	0

* Actual question: "Were there organizational supports in your school or district that were helpful in implementing the Special Olympics curricula? If so . . . how helpful were they?"

Note: Percentage based on valid responses only.

Table 19, showing how educators at other schools within the same districts rated organizational support, is also based on a small number of responses—only 15—which renders any conclusions suspect at best. These respondents were the most likely to report that district or school policy supporting the Special Olympics curriculum was helpful.

Table 19. Which Organizational Supports Were Helpful in Implementing the Curriculum?*

(Responses of educators in same districts as institute participants)

Organization		Not at all	A little	Somewhat	A lot	Very
Committee or group for Special Education	n=16	29%	8%	25%	4%	21%
Resources for implementing new curricula	n=15	18%	62%	22%	0	0
District/school policy supporting Special Olympics curriculum	n=15	0	18%	14%	32%	23%

* Actual question: "Were there organizational supports in your school or district that were helpful in implementing the Special Olympics curricula? If so . . . how helpful were they?"

Note: Percentage based on valid responses only.

Community Support for Curriculum Implementation

We also recognized that community support could help teachers implement a new curriculum. Consequently, we asked respondents a series of questions similar to those we asked about organizational supports.

Interestingly, more respondents from all three samples reported community support than had reported school organization support for implementing the Special Olympics curriculum (Table 20). More than half of all three samples reported community support.

Table 20. Community Support for Implementing the Special Olympics Curriculum *

Respondents		Yes	No
Participants in the Training Institute	N=29	55%	45%
Teachers in Schools of Participants	n=19	65%	35%
Educators in Districts of Participants	n=26	72%	28%

*Actual question: "Were there resources or organizations that helped implement the Special Olympics curricula?"

Note: Percentage based on valid responses only.

We followed up this question with a question about which specific community organizations offered support (Table 21). Not surprisingly, a majority of the participants in the training institute identified the Special Olympics World Games and Special Olympics Alaska as supporting implementation of the curriculum. Their colleagues in the same schools and educators in the same districts concurred with this appraisal, but significant numbers also identified parent groups, the PTA, civic organizations, and businesses as well.

**Table 21. Community Organizations Supporting the Special Olympics Curriculum*
(Share of Respondents Reporting Support)**

	Respondents		
	Training Institute Participants	Teachers at Same Schools as Participants	Educators in Same Districts as Participants
Number of Respondents	(N=16)	(n=94)	(n=18)
Organizations			
Civic organizations (Rotary, Lions, others)	13%	41%	39%
Businesses or corporations	25%	41%	39%
Special Olympics Alaska	56%	53%	67%
Parent groups	19%	40%	39%
Special Olympics World Winter Games	75%	80%	53%
PTA	31%	48%	33%
Other	31%	34%	36%

*Actual question: "Were there resources or organizations in the community that helped implement the Special Olympics curriculum?"

Note: Percentages based on valid responses only.

In sum, respondents in all categories felt that community organizations, particularly Special Olympics World Winter Games and Special Olympics Alaska, supported their efforts to implement the Special Olympics curriculum.

Barriers to Implementing the Special Olympics Curriculum

We also asked respondents about the barriers they encountered in trying to implement the Special Olympics curriculum. As Table 22 shows, significant shares of all the groups we surveyed said they encountered barriers. Nearly 8 out of 10 teachers who attended the training institute acknowledged barriers. Nearly as many of their teaching colleagues (75 percent) and a smaller share of other educators (61 percent) shared that view.

Table 22. Were there Barriers to Implementing the Special Olympics Curriculum?

Respondents		Yes	No
Participants in the Training Institute	N=28	79%	21%
Teachers in Schools of Participants	n=19	75%	25%
Educators in Districts of Participants	n=28	61%	39%

Note: Percentages based on valid responses only

We then asked about specific barriers to putting the curriculum in place (Table 23). A majority of teachers who attended the training institute identified several circumstances that posed barriers to putting the Special Olympics curriculum in place. Not surprisingly, 68 percent reported that they lacked time to work with colleagues—a common complaint among teachers. More than half (55 percent) identified as barriers their preoccupation with the benchmark tests or the HSGQE (High School Graduation Qualifying Examination); the rigidity of the regular curriculum; and their lack of time to integrate the Special Olympics curriculum with the regular curriculum. Nearly half (46 percent) identified their colleagues’ lack of knowledge about the Special Olympics curriculum as another impediment.

Other teachers at the same schools most commonly cited the same barriers. By contrast, other educators (principals or special education directors) in the same districts were less likely to cite most barriers—but more than 60 percent agreed that teachers lacked the time to integrate the Special Olympics curriculum with the regular curriculum.

In sum, most institute participants and their colleagues reported that lack of time was a barrier to implementing the Special Olympics curriculum. Significantly, nearly 3 out of 10 teachers in the same schools as the institute participants indicated that the curriculum was not available from their schools—despite the efforts of the Special Olympics School Enrichment Committee to distribute the curriculum across the state. This response deserves attention, because only those who had used the curriculum answered this question—meaning they must have obtained the curriculum from some source other than their own schools (from the Internet, for example).

**Table 23. Barriers to Implementing the Special Olympics Curriculum
(Percentages of Respondents Citing Specific Barrier*)**

	Respondents		
	Training Institute Participants	Teachers at Same Schools as Participants	Educators in Same Districts as Participants
Number of Responses	(N=22)	(n=14)	(n=17)
Barriers			
Preoccupation with benchmark tests or HSGQE	55%	58%	18%
Rigidity of the regular curriculum	55%	58%	18%
Lack of time to work with colleagues	68%	61%	42%
Lack of time to integrate SO curriculum with regular curriculum	55%	52%	61%
SO curriculum was unavailable	0	28%	18%
Principal lacked knowledge of SO curriculum	18%	12%	18%
Principal didn't support SO curriculum	36%	0	12%
Colleagues lacked knowledge of SO curriculum	46%	32%	24%
Colleagues didn't support SO curriculum	27%	15%	24%
Parents lacked knowledge of SO curriculum	36%	11%	6%
Parents didn't support SO curriculum	23%	0	12%

Note: Based on percentages of valid responses only.

Perceived Effects of the Special Olympics Curriculum

We also asked respondents their views about the effects of the Special Olympics curriculum on students. Because we were unable to conduct focus groups with students as we had planned, we have no data from students to triangulate with the teachers’ perception data.

Our first question was global: “Did the curriculum address students’ perceptions and misconceptions about mental retardation or disabilities?” Not surprisingly, given their high level of investment in the curriculum, all but one participant in the training institute answered “yes” to this question. All their teaching colleagues who responded supported that view. All but one of the educators from within the same districts agreed. Keep in mind that this is self-reported data.

The Special Olympics curriculum, as we described earlier, had specific content goals. So we asked respondents whether they believed the curriculum as implemented addressed those goals. Table 24 shows responses to this question.

**Table 24. Did the Special Olympics Curriculum Address the Core Content Goals?
(Percentage of Participants Reporting Goal Addressed)**

	Respondents		
	Training Institute Participants	Teachers at Same Schools as Participants	Educators in Same Districts as Participants
Number of Responses	(N=18)	(n=3)	(n=23)
Core Content Goals			
Improving attitudes toward people with mental retardation	83%	100%	89%
Recognizing accomplishments and capabilities of people with mental retardation	72%	100%	73%
Recognizing barriers to full participation in life people with mental retardation face	61%	37%	64%
History of Special Olympics	56%	31%	86%
Special Olympics events	67%	100%	86%
Other	27%	31%	23%

Note: Percentages based on valid responses only.

Large majorities of the respondents from all three groups said the curriculum addressed attitudes toward people with mental retardation; accomplishments and capabilities of people with mental retardation; and Special Olympics events. But because we have only three valid responses from one of our samples—teaching colleagues of institute participants—we can conclude nothing from their responses. Overall, a majority of those who wrote the curriculum—the participants in the training institute—thought it addressed all the core content goals, and other educators from within their districts appear to concur.

Respondents in all three groups agreed that the curriculum activities were developmentally appropriate and that the content was clear.

We also asked a series of “yes” or “no” questions about what teachers and other educators believed about the students’ perspectives on the curriculum. Nearly all respondents answered “yes” to a series of questions about whether they thought students understood the concepts, found the curriculum relevant, and so on. The questions are available in the questionnaire (questions 17a – 17g) in the appendix.

Similarly, we asked a series of “yes” or “no” questions about teachers’ experiences with the curriculum—whether it could be readily implemented, for example. Again, the responses were overwhelmingly positive (see questions 18a – 18f in the questionnaire).

Only when we asked about outcomes and assessments of student learning did we find much variation (Table 25). Teachers who took part in the training institute disagreed with their colleagues on all questions related to assessments. Those who didn’t take part in curriculum development tended to be more critical. Again, we have relatively few responses to these questions, so the results should be interpreted with caution.

Table 25. Share of Respondents Who Answered “Yes” to Questions on Outcomes and Assessments

	Respondents		
	Training Institute Participants	Teachers at Same Schools as Participants	Educators in Same Districts as Participants
Number of Responses	(N=16)	(n=20)	(n=24)
Did the assessments facilitate student reflection on their own learning?	93%	30%	76%
Did the assessments include measurement tools, such as rubrics?	56%	30%	44%
Were the assessments clearly tied to student outcomes?	78%	30%	15%

Note: Percentages based on valid responses only.

Evaluation of the Summer Special Olympics Training Institute

Finally, we asked only those who participated in the training institute to evaluate their experience. Table 26 shows their responses to a series of questions. Clearly, participants found the institute itself useful in multiple ways.

Table 26. Participants' Evaluation of Special Olympics Training Institute (N=29)

Evaluative Statements	Negative or Very Negative	Neutral	Positive or Very Positive
The opportunity to gain new knowledge and understandings of Special Olympics and special needs students	0	0	100%
The opportunity to work with university and other experts	0	7%	93%
The opportunity to work with colleagues	0	3%	97%
The opportunity to develop curriculum	0	38%	62%
The opportunity to reflect on your own teaching practice	0	7%	93%
The opportunity to reflect on how well special needs students are served at your school	0	14%	86%
The opportunity to learn more about curriculum development	0	3%)	97%

Note: Percentages based on valid responses only.

CHAPTER IV. DISCUSSION OF EVALUATION RESULTS

Based on the survey data we've just discussed, here we summarize our answers to the evaluative questions the Special Olympics School Enrichment Program posed.

How Widely is This Curriculum Used and By Whom?

About two-thirds of the participants in the Special Olympics Training Institute reported that the curriculum they had developed was being used in their schools. Given the competition for teachers' time, particularly in the age of standards and assessments, this result is an accomplishment.

Yet, only about a third of their colleagues—other teachers in the same schools as the institute participants—reported that the curriculum was in use. We are at a loss to explain the discrepancy between the reports of participants and that of their colleagues.

Our tendency is to place greater faith in the reports of the institute participants because—given their investment in creating the curriculum—they are likely to have paid greater attention to its fate. On the other hand, their investment in the curriculum might make them more generous in their evaluations. The reports of other teachers in the same schools as the institute participants are reinforced by the responses of other educators in the same districts—only a third of those educators reported that the curriculum had been implemented in their schools.

Again, because of their central role in creating the Special Olympics curriculum, most participants in the training institute saw themselves as making the decision to implement the curriculum and carrying the decision through. The picture that emerges from the data is one in which the participants—sometimes with the help of the school special education directors, curriculum specialists, department heads, and principals—took the lead in implementing the curriculum. Other policymakers at the district level did not appear to be involved. This is consistent with the view that teachers themselves largely determine what curriculum is actually taught. Some of the educators in the participating schools did report that teachers were required to adopt the curriculum—roughly a third of those who responded to the item, or less than 20 percent of those who reported that the curriculum was used in their schools said teachers had been required to use it.

By and large, no one monitored the implementation of the curriculum. Therefore, even in schools where teachers may have been required to adopt the curriculum, no one seems to have checked to see if and how the curriculum was used.

What Happens When You Attempt to Introduce the New Curriculum into the Schools?

School and District Level Support for Curriculum Development and Implementation

About half the schools that sent teachers to the summer training institute reportedly had staff whose job it was to support curriculum development and implementation. As we have already noted, 17 of the 40 teachers who attended the training institute were from urban schools. The remaining 23 were from relatively small rural districts, most of which lacked the resources to employ curriculum specialists.

Our respondents disagreed about the organizational support for implementing the curriculum. More than two-thirds of those who participated in the training institute reported that there was little organization support for the curriculum. A bit more than half of those in the other two groups we surveyed reported that there was organizational support. Again, it is difficult to know what this discrepancy means. As we argued above, it could reflect the heavier investment that institute participants made in the curriculum. Consequently, they may have had higher expectations that were frustrated by what they viewed as insufficient organizational support.

Not surprisingly, most respondents reported that the principals, school special education directors, department heads, and curriculum specialists provided support and resources for implementing the curriculum. Respondents also mentioned colleagues, counselors, and speech or language specialists as supporting implementation. Perhaps the central issue is who among school personnel provided the support needed to implement the curriculum at the classroom level. The principal can play a vital role in encouraging teachers to teach particular curricula. Although the teacher has the final say, principals can strongly influence teachers' decisions and muster resources to support implementation. Considerable research suggests that this is the place where the rubber meets the road in curriculum implementation (Remillard, 1999; Kliebard, 1989). Without classroom-level support, many teachers find it difficult to implement new curricula, particularly in this age of standards, assessments, and accountability (Padulla, et al, 2003).

Community Support for Curriculum Development and Implementation

A majority of respondents from all three samples reported that there was community support for implementing the Special Olympics curriculum. They identified the Special Olympics World Winter Games national and Alaska organizations as providing support.

Barriers to Implementing the Special Olympics Curriculum

Large majorities from each group of respondents said they had encountered barriers in attempting to implement the curriculum. And these data may significantly underestimate the barriers to implementation, since we asked the question only of those who had implemented the curriculum. The barriers reported by our respondents—who implemented the curriculum despite these barriers—may well have been sufficient to discourage many others from implementing the curriculum at all.

The most commonly mentioned barrier to implementation was *lack of time to work with colleagues*. Closely related was *teachers' current preoccupation with the benchmark tests and the HSGQE (High School Graduation Qualifying Examination)*. This finding is consistent with national research on teachers' responses to the standards, assessment, and accountability movement. Alaska is a state in which the assessment represents high stakes both for the individual student and for the school. Students who fail to pass all these parts of the HSGQE will not receive a fully-endorsed high school diploma. Schools that do not show constant improvement in their students' test scores are subject to sanctions and could, eventually, be reconstituted. The pressure is particularly intense in rural schools, where students have historically scored lower than their urban counterparts on standardized tests.

Padulla and his colleagues (2003) carried out a national survey of random sample of over 4,000 teachers. Eighty percent of teachers in states like Alaska—with assessments that are high stakes for both students and schools—agreed that teachers are under so much pressure to improve test scores that they have little time to teach anything not immediately relevant to the assessment tests. This helps explain why more teachers did not implement the Special Olympics curriculum. The adage that “teachers teach what gets tested” may be truer today than ever before, because of the advent of high-stakes accountability systems. Because the material on the Special Olympics curriculum was not part of the assessment, it was unlikely to be taught—regardless of how well it may have comported with state standards.

Other barriers that respondents mentioned frequently were the rigidity of the regular curriculum, lack of time to integrate the Special Olympics curriculum with the regular curriculum, and their colleagues’ lack of knowledge about the new curriculum. Less frequently cited were lack of support from principals, colleagues, and parents; parents’ lack of knowledge about the Special Olympics curriculum; and principals’ ignorance about the new curriculum.

These results suggest that this may be a particularly difficult time to try to implement any curriculum—regardless of its quality or moral weight—that teachers don’t see as being tied directly to improving students’ scores on the state assessments. And the barrier to introducing new curricula posed by the assessment and accountability systems is in addition to the more traditional barriers teachers face—such as lack of time for collaboration, existing curricula that are viewed as inflexible, and finding the time to blend the new with the old. Taken together, these are formidable barriers indeed.

What are the Perceived Effects of the Curriculum?

Because most of these data come from the teachers who participated in the training institute and, consequently, are highly invested in the curriculum, we must regard them with some skepticism. Our inability to conduct focus groups with students means we do not have data on what students learned, independent of teachers’ perceptions.

Unsurprisingly, a majority of teachers who helped develop the curriculum believe that students learned what the curriculum was intended to teach—that students’ attitudes toward people with mental retardation improved; that they recognized the accomplishments and capabilities of people with mental retardation; that they understood the barriers to full participation in life people with mental retardation face; and that they learned about Special Olympics events and the history of Special Olympics. Institute participants also believe that assessments, which were part of the curriculum, accomplished their goals.

Other respondents largely agreed with the institute participants, although the number of valid responses is often too small to let us to draw conclusions.

Finally, participants in the summer training institute were very positive about that experience.

CHAPTER V: FUTURE SPECIAL OLYMPICS AND CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

One interpretation of these data is that investing considerable resources into development of curriculum about Special Olympics with the expectation that the curriculum will be widely implemented may not be a good use of resources. Few schools in Alaska appear to have actually implemented the curriculum.

Support within schools and districts for such a curriculum appears to be spotty, at best. In addition, educators who do want to see the Special Olympics curriculum implemented face formidable barriers that are not easily overcome. The policy environment—i.e., high-stakes tests and accountability systems—generates some of these barriers, and some appear endemic to working conditions in schools, including lack of time for collaboration and for blending new with existing curricula.

But another interpretation of our data is—given the barriers the curriculum developers and implementers faced—we should be surprised that any of the participating educators managed to implement the curriculum. Alaska is among the few states with state assessments that are high-stakes for both schools and students. Under other policy circumstances, teachers may feel less pressured and more capable of entertaining other ideas for the curriculum.

Based on the Alaska case, we would suggest considering other strategies for achieving the goals set for the curriculum.

Replacement units: Some states, such as California, have had some success with attempts to reform the curriculum—in this case, mathematics—by having teachers develop replacement units (Wilson, 2002). Integrating a new unit into an existing curriculum may pose far less of a challenge to teachers than attempting to institute an entire curriculum. This would involve creating units that specifically target the skills and knowledge tested on the assessments.

School-based professional development: Professional development workshops with little in-class follow-up and support are widely regarded as an ineffective approach to changing either how teachers teach or the curriculum they teach (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Little, 1994). A professional development program that could be delivered at the school level and including in-classroom follow-ups during the year might be much more effective in bringing about changes. Such a professional development program could be created in conjunction with the replacement units described above.

Assembly presentations: Another possibility would be to develop a presentation that could be offered as part of school assembly programs and delivered by Special Olympics staff. Such an approach might reach a larger number of students and would not rely on teachers who are already feeling under the gun.

Adopt-an-athlete: As the various Iditarod Sled Dog Race programs have demonstrated, students find a personal connection to an athlete very compelling. Prior to a Special Olympics event, students from specific classrooms or schools could be connected to individual athletes via technology—e-mail, video or audio-conferencing, or Web logs, for example. Students could learn about their athlete’s training regimen, interests, hobbies, and more. After this personal connection was made, students could link the less personal information—the history of the games, barriers to full participation, and so on—to someone they know. In others words, they would have a context—a relationship with an athlete—for the abstract information in the curriculum.

No doubt many other strategies existed beyond those suggested here. And to state the obvious: any strategy must be tailored to the historical background and cultural and political environment of the schools, educators, and students. In sum, the relatively low rates of implementation that we found appear to be much more a reflection of the formidable barriers that even the best-designed curricula face, than of the quality of the Special Olympics curriculum or the training.

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