

Hawthorne Foundation / Hawthorne Country Day School

Responses provided by Giselle Colon, Sub-Teacher & ABA Therapist

The purpose of this project was to interview a professional at an organization, collect data, and gather insights that can be used for research or further data exploration and analysis. Since this was the initial phase of the analysis – whereby questions could be developed to help identify existing problems – the project does present some limitations. Those include the number of people available to interview and correspond with, as well as limitations in the collection primary data.

QUESTIONS

1. What activities do teachers at Hawthorne Foundation utilize to help special needs students learn?
2. What types of safety measures are followed to ensure the best possible outcome for teachers and students?
3. What are some of the biggest challenges parents and teachers face with regards to special needs individuals?
4. What types of training do teachers need prior to working with special needs individuals?
5. What courses are teachers required to take while working with special needs individuals?
6. What kinds of incentives or Wellness benefits programs are put in place for teachers at Hamilton?
7. What are the individuals age ranges? What types of disabilities do the individuals have?

Overall, these questions generated thoughtful responses with potential to adequately address issues from the administration, parents, and/or legal guardians. It allowed me to better understand the level of difficulty that exists in these high stress environments where trial and error serves as the foundation for the work involved.

SUMMARY OF RESPONSES

To summarize, my questions revealed that the Department of Education, Board of Education, daycare, and private establishments adhere to different guidelines when dealing with Autistic individuals. The government agencies follow strict guidelines and curriculums, while private establishments create customizable curriculums which are geared towards the autistic individual's needs and parent's goals. The

programs for private establishments are usually designed by the Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA). Since these questions were specific to Hawthorne Foundation, I learned it is a facility that is considered a last option for those with severe autism. The students' ages range between 3 and 21 years old. Teachers who are looking to enter the field receive most of their training on site and are required to take three courses (Bully Prevention, Child Abuse, and The Dignity for All Students Act) when actively working in the field. The Department of Education also requires agency training for Paraprofessionals and substitutes, however, most of the training and experience received is hands-on.

There are some conflicts associated with measures followed during crisis situations. For example, the Department of Education requires all establishments to contact law enforcement or security guards, enforce suspension, employ an appointed psychologist, and/or enforce counseling. Measures implemented by private institutions first try to deescalate the situation by removing objects and potential environmental triggers before contacting law enforcement. This tactic of utilizing law enforcement is a preventable measure for the establishments to avoid liability and lawsuits.

Some of the biggest issues for parents are not having their thoughts or concerns reflected by the Individualized Education Program (IEP), and not being understood by teachers and staff administrators. Teachers also lack support from staff administrators and feel that parents are not held accountable. From their perspective, the parents control the administration.

This initial research was a wonderful project that allowed me to better understand the level of difficulty that exists in these high stress environments where trial and error becomes the foundation for the work involved. One other thing to note, which served as an add-on during the conversation, was the incentives or Wellness benefits provided to teachers. I discovered that they were minimal at best. Staff is required to take time off about every three months and only given small benefit incentives such as discounts to health facilities and stores like BJ's. No benefits are given to Paraprofessionals or substitutes.

INITIAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Please keep in mind that all these responses can be quantified based on the size of the groups, number of unique or common incidences, age ranges, and outcomes. Since this is an industry that is learned through hands-on experience and therefore reliant on trial and error, they would benefit from utilizing strategic or

operational dashboards to organize and track data. Outcomes are difficult to measure without available historical data. The performance metrics are largely dependent on staff and the types of methods they employ in various situations. The dashboard can compare the number of crisis incidents overtime and see what methods used by staff have been contributors to the rise or fall of those incidences.