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Exceptional Student Interview Summary

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For our assignment on exceptional students in a CTSO I chose to interview the previous DECA advisor at our high school, Sandy Murin. I would have loved to interview a student or parent to get their perspective, but since it is summer it was hard to track one down with limited time. Sandy had some great insight for me although I noticed there were many similarities that I have also experienced in the general education realm.

To start I asked Sandy if she had many special needs students in past DECA groups. She indicated that it varied from year to year. Most students she had were either on a 504, IEP, were English language learners, or foreign exchange students. Every year she had at least a few incredibly advanced students that she was able to push to high levels. Most DECA members on a 504 or IEP loved being involved in most aspects of DECA, but choose not to compete. Once in a while when these kids have competed they are allowed modifications or accommodations on aspects of competition. For example, they might be given extra time on a test, have the test read to them, or given additional explanation on a role play.

There are many benefits for a special needs student who is a member of a CTSO. Sandy mentioned they learn a lot of real life and job readiness skills, speaking, communication, interpersonal skills, and to work with a team or group. For example, they get a lot of practice organizing a presentation and then being able to present a portion of it with their team. Additionally, this can be a huge benefit to other students in the CTSO learning to work with others who may have different abilities and skill sets then their own. Students with special needs will benefit from learning to lead and follow on different committees within the CTSO. For example, the Make-A-Wish assembly at Capital is a valuable project for everyone involved. There are many different groups and sub groups that form to make the assembly come together. Students may work in creating the set for the assembly, promotions, sales, or creating posters to advertise. There are a wide variety of ways for them to get involved and be part of something that makes a big impact on our community and school.

As for different modifications and accommodations in the classroom, Sandy said this can be the tough and stressful part of having a special needs student in your class. Sandy had one particularly tough student a few years ago with downs syndrome. Some of her accommodations included printed notes every day, longer time on assignments, and assigning her a partner to further help with instruction. The parents were involved with almost every aspect of this students schooling which was a good thing and a bad thing. Many times work went home and came back looking as though a college student had completed it. But, on the positive side, students really enjoyed working with and helping this student on daily assignments, tasks, vocabulary, etc. Sandy mentioned that sometimes you need to shift your student expectations and grade them based on individual growth in the classroom. For Sandy, the most challenging aspect of having a student like the one described above is the additional time it takes in lesson planning and lesson preparation, but at the end of the year looking back it was a rewarding experience to have been a part of this students journey and growth.

Some of Sandy’s favorite students have been English language learners and foreign exchange students. They are usually good at bringing in marketing and other real life experiences from their own countries that can enhance lessons. It is great for students in the United States to hear how things are done elsewhere and its fun for these students to share and compare how things are done in their countries.

After chatting with Sandy I found that teaching students with special needs is similar in any kind of academic content. You always need to be aware of modifications and accommodations set forth in an IEP or 504 and follow them accordingly. Communication with parents and special education teachers is always advised, especially if doing something off campus or something in addition to normal class time. While having students with special needs can sometimes be more work for the teacher it can be a rich experience for all involved and can be a very special aspect to a CTSO.