Chapter 6
K–12 Educational Leadership and Autism

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ABSTRACT

The Center for Disease Control (CDC) estimates that about 1 in 54 children have been identified with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Autism occurs among all ethic, socioeconomic, and racial groups. With this nationwide prevalence, educational leadership, Principals, Vice Principals, and parents must be in a continuous state of learning about autism and the unique needs of their autistic learners. The chapter is dedicated to helping parents and educational leadership to understand each other's roles and responsibilities in regard to serving children and youth on the autism spectrum. First, the chapter will explore literature regarding unique leadership characteristics needed to support youth on the autism spectrum. Next, an overview of literature available regarding educational leaders' perspectives and strategies in supporting youth on the spectrum. Finally, suggestions and strategies for developing educational leaders that understand and cherish youth on the autism spectrum are given.

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever been asked to identify a great leader? When this question is posed, people often identify renowned people like George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Marie Currie, etc. But we often forget to realize there are great leaders quietly working in our communities. Some of these leaders are in our school systems working to guide our children through their learning journeys. The following chapter will discuss the unique and critical leadership role that K-12 administrator, principals and vice principals must fill to support youth on the autism spectrum in being successful in the formal school setting.

The Center for Disease Control (CDC) estimates that about 1 in 54 children have been identified with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) (2020). The CDC developed these estimates from data collected from health and special education records of children living in 11 communities across the United States. Interestingly the data shows 1 in 76 children in Colorado and 1 in 32 children in New Jersey to be diagnosed on the spectrum (CDC, 2020). So, this is an estimated number, but even as an estimate, the number is significant for educational systems. Autism occurs among all ethic, socioeconomic and racial groups. With this nationwide prevalence, educational leadership, Principals, Vice Principals, Superintendents, etc. and parents of children on the autism spectrum, must be in a continuous state of learning about autism and the unique needs of their autistic learners. The following chapter is dedicated to helping parents and educational leadership to understand each other's roles and responsibilities regarding serving children and youth on the autism spectrum. First, the chapter will explore literature regarding unique leadership characteristics needed to support youth on the autism spectrum. Next, an overview of literature available regarding educational leaders' perspectives and strategies in support youth on the spectrum. Finally, chapter author suggestions and strategies for developing educational leaders that understand and cherish youth on the autism spectrum.

EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP LITERATURE

Martin Luther King Jr said, "The function of education, therefore is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. Intelligence plus character- that is the goal of true education." Dr. King is one of the greatest leaders, activists and educators of all time. When we engage with Dr. King's words, we experience inclusive ideas that paint a picture of a world we all hope is possible. In this quote, Dr. King is describing educational ideals. Education should have the function of teaching each

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