

ANN HINKSON-HERMAN: Well, good afternoon. I'm Ann Hinkson-Herman from the PaTTAN center in Pittsburgh. And joining me is Judy Ball from our PaTTAN office in King of Prussia. And Judy and I are going to take some time today to talk to you about the Pennsylvania Fellowship Program. And we have a PowerPoint up here, and this was not online at the time that we put the rest of our documents on, but we are going to put it up there so you'll be able to access that at a later time. Okay?

So one of the things we want to do during this session is give you an idea about the Pennsylvania Fellowship Program. But we also want to put it in context of what we call our special education leadership initiative that we have in PaTTAN.

One of the goals that we have set for -- in PaTTAN for our special education leadership initiative is this idea of achieving balance. And what we really mean by that is that when we think about special education supervisors or directors in school districts or intermediate units, quite often you have this task of making sure that compliance is being met, right? That's a very managerial kind of thing. But also that we want to have good systems and effective practices in place. And that's where that leadership piece comes in.

So having been a past special ed director, I can tell you it's sort of this constant juggle, right? So one of the things that we design with everything that's in our special education leadership initiative is that we have this ultimate goal of always trying to make sure that we bring this balance to those two ideas.

So some of the things that you'll see happening and occurring as activities in the leadership initiative -- oh, I'm sorry, didn't realize that. If you could put it back. Thank you. So one of the things that we have done in any of our activities that we do, be it the PFP training that we're going to talk more extensively about, or webinars, or whatever the regional trainings may be, is that we always try to make sure that it is a balance. We never do just compliance kind of things, even though that's such a big part of your task. So you'll notice that in a lot of the topics and so forth that we cover in our workshops.

So when we look at our leadership initiative, Judy and I are the co-statewide leads for that. And we have folks in each of our three PaTTAN offices who serve on the initiative. And with that initiative, we have a variety of activities that we think help support special education supervisors in the field. One of them are webinars, and you can find those located on our PaTTAN website and advertised there. We still have two more webinars this school year, one of them being on adapted physical education, and

that'll be in May. And then we also have one that we are archiving on calculating the least restrictive environment. So you can look forward to those two the remainder of this year.

But typically, you'll see them noted on our website as brown bag lunch webinars. And we do that intentionally because if there's one thing we know, it's that special ed supervisors have crazy schedules, and you're always busy. So we have purposefully placed these webinars from 12 o'clock to one o'clock. So that way if you're eating your lunch, you can listen to a webinar and maybe kill two birds with one stone, right? So you'll see them listed as brown bag webinars.

A second thing that we have as part of our initiative is what we call M2M. It stands for mentoring to mastery. And that is our mentoring program that we offer for special education leaders. So we encourage anyone who is a new supervisor, and that might be in your first or second or even your third year as a supervisor, to take a look at our mentoring to mastery program that is on the webpage. And this is an informal way for a new supervisor to be paired up with a veteran supervisor to work through a lot of those kind of challenges and hurdles and systems that you have to work through.

So Carol Dee Mortell is in the audience. And Carol, I'll ask you just to kind of stand up and kind of wave so folks can see who you are. She coordinates that piece of the project for us, so I would encourage you today if you're interested, you know, talk with Carol after the session today and she would be glad to help you work through the application process. It's simple. One page and we get you hooked up with somebody who can -- who can help you out.

A third thing that we offer in our initiative is what we call our special ed leadership academy, and that is offered in the summer. It is offered at the very end of July. It's being advertised on our website right now, and registration will be open in the next month or so. And that is a week-long academy in which it is built specifically for special education supervisors.

And I would say the agenda is basically soup to nuts, maybe the best way to describe it. It's a little bit of everything. And it keeps in mind our motto of managing in balance. So there are some compliance kind of sessions about IDEA, Chapter 14, 504, special ed plans, all of these kind of things are typical sessions. But we also have leadership type of sessions, how to run effective emotional support plans and services, how to use assistive technology wisely, how to work with low incidence populations. It's just a verity of potpourri of topics. And it's all special ed supervisors, so it's nice to have a role alike type of conference where you could network and share ideas with other folks as well.

A fourth thing we have is our publication series. We have designed this year a new series that is specifically oriented to special education leaders. We have three volumes that have come out in this, and I'm going to show you. If you want to go to the next slide, thanks. We have one on working with paraprofessionals as a special ed supervisor. There's important things about hiring, what their duties look like, what kind of tasks we're asking them to do, how they're monitored. All of those type of things talk about -- talked about in this publication.

We have a second publication on educational benefit review, which is now part of the cyclical monitoring process. So it's pretty handy for you to take a look at what we call EBR, right, the abbreviation for it, to take a look at that process and see if it's something that you might do proactively to see whether your children are getting educational benefit review prior to the cyclical monitoring.

And then our third one is on suspensions and expulsions. In other words, alternatives to suspensions and expulsions, I should say. We want to make sure that our students with disabilities are not being suspended at a higher rate, certainly, than our non-exceptional peers. But also just ways that we could help keep those students in the school setting.

We once in a while will also have regional trainings that occur. And these are just on timely topics that might be germane to what is happening in the field at the time. So you can just look for those on our training calendar on our PaTTAN website as well.

So that's sort of the big context of the leadership initiative. It's there to strengthen the capacity of special education leaders and offer a variety of ways for special ed leaders to be with each other, to share with each other, and to learn about what they need to do in order to have effective systems.

So we'll go the next slide here, and we're going to talk specifically now about the Pennsylvania Fellowship Program, and we abbreviate it PFP because in special ed, we always like letters, right? So I'm going to call it PFP From this point forward. And I'm going to let you take just a minute to look down this slide at some of the goals for this fellowship.

And you'll notice no matter which one you are reading, they really all have a common theme. And that is that we want to strengthen the capacity of supervisors. It's a tough job. As I said, I had been one for a number of years, and you're having to work with building principals. You're having to answer to a superintendent. You have parents that you're working with. You have student -- students that you're working with, contracted services maybe through your intermediate unit or other agencies.

There's just a variety of stakeholders that special education directors are often working with. It's a pretty stressful job. So what we want to do is provide that support.

You know, one of the things that research has shown is that for people to get better and really ratchet up their skills, they need professional development that lasts at least 30 hours in length. So think about that. We've all been part of different staff development activity. I know when I was teaching, we did Mallon Hunter, so I was Hunterized. And then we were [inaudible] because we decided that was going to be the behavior plan. And then it was the next thing, and then it was the next thing.

And so we get a lot of one-day shots of things. Sometimes we even get a couple days of shots of things. But one of the things when we designed this fellowship program is we did not want this to be a one-day shot. We didn't want it to be a two-day shot. One of the things we wanted it to be was this ongoing professional development that would last for a period of time where we knew we could probably get 30 hours of professional development. Because we know that that is what researchers say will make a difference in how people can go back and do their job.

So the PFP is designed that there are ten sessions throughout the course of a school year, which is how long the cohort runs, for one year. The fellows in the program do not have to come to every one of those sessions because we know sometimes schedules dictate that you just can't be available. So the program is set up that you can come to eight of the ten sessions and still be a viable member in the cohort.

So we have designed the topics through a variety of means. So Judy, if we can flip, thank you. When you take a look at this, this is sort of what drives what the topics are that we cover during the course of the year in the fellowship. It's things that are common questions from the field that we get. Sometimes they're compliance oriented. Sometimes they're leadership oriented.

They are things that are timely in the news, a current issue or trend. So when we think about what's happening politically now, right, we know that No Child Left Behind is going to be reauthorized soon, right? The Elementary and Secondary Education Act. And when that does, we know that IDEA is going to be authorized soon after. So when IDEA is reauthorized, we could see that being a vital part of the fellowship that year. We don't know when that's going to happen exactly, but timelines matters. Because one of the things that the fellowship strives to do is to make sure that our special ed supervisors have their hands on the latest information of things that they're going to be responsible to do within their district.

We also -- if you go to the next page, one of the things that, although we may have some timely issues that we build in each year that look a little bit different, because we've had three cohorts now, we're in the midst of our third cohort, is that the hallmark of the program is that there are certain topics that are non-negotiable. They've got to be part of our session because we feel that they're critical aspects of good special ed supervision.

So when you take a look at this slide, you'll notice beyond legislation is there. So let me ask in the audience here, are some of you special ed supervisors right now? Little show of hands. Yeah? Okay, then I know that just like when I was there, nothing makes you happier than reading special ed law, right? The vital part of the job. So beyond legislation is a piece of it.

We take a look at due process cases. We talk with the Office of Dispute Resolution so we can strengthen our skills in working with families and parents. We also take a look at things like 504. Because as a special ed director, sometimes you're doing special ed and then you get to catch all these little things that kind of come around it, right? Gifted education, 504, Homeless Act, right? Different things. So we touch a little bit broader than just special ed sometimes.

The second is building in effective special education infrastructure. And I like to think of this I always talk about in a sense of programmatic landscape. But it sort of comes down to this question: do you know where your kids are? It's about least restrictive environment. It's about how many of your kids are in general education 80% or more of the time, how many of your kids are in other settings. Who's making those decisions, and do you have good decision making processes when you're sitting down to talk about IEPs and placement with parents and other team members?

So that infrastructure makes a difference because one year, you may have the need for autistic support to be a vital part of your programmatic landscape for your special ed services. Another year, depending on your district, you might be a very tiny district where maybe something else, maybe emotional support, becomes a needed service that you have to expand upon. It's always changing.

You know, the number of kids we have in certain programs and services, the types of programs we have, it's always sort of a changing motion. So knowing that infrastructure and what makes good decisions about what you design and how you implement those programs is a real hallmark of this fellowship program.

The third is a quality IEP process, right? We all know the IEP is the heart and soul of special education, so we take a lot of time to talk about, how do you orchestrate really good IEP processes? We

all could sit here and name the parts of the IEP. That's not the critical part. The important part is, how do we get all the right players around the table? How do we make good decisions that bring parents in as our partners? How do we make sure general ed has the skills when we're asking them to have students with disabilities in their classroom? So we take the IEP process, but we take it in a much, much broader context to how the different stakeholders have a part in it.

We also talk about ethical practices, right? Big topic because there are times where we're asked to do things in special education. For instance, what if you're asked to buy a piece of assistive technology equipment for a student and it's an expensive piece of technology? What if your superintendent says, we're not spending that? And you're the special ed director and you know that your student needs that piece of equipment. You get into these ethical dilemmas where you have to negotiate and figure out how to solve those problems.

So we talk about a lot of those kind of ethical situations. And you'll notice positive behavior practices. We have a lot of non-academic barriers that can sometimes inhibit kids from being successful, so we have sessions where we talk about different aspects. It could be behavior manifestations. It might be about functional behavioral assessments, having behavioral support plans be a positive part of a student's IEP. It might be talking about restraints and seclusion with students.

So it's a little bit different depending on some of the needs we have each year, but those five topics, you'll notice when we get into talking about the application in a little more detail, Judy's going to, you'll see these type of topics there. But others will be added as needed.

You'll notice here are some pictures from our actual cohort this year. This is cohort number three working away. One of the things that we vowed we would not do in this fellowship program is stand and deliver, or say and spray, or however you want to say it. It is not meant to be this delivery of massive amounts of content. It is meant to be an interactive format.

So one of the things we do, we have speakers who sometimes might be a PaTTAN person, an IU person, maybe an external presenter that we have come in. And they will share some information on these topics, but then we send people -- I'll come to your question, one sec. Then we have the fellows get into groups and discuss that and take that deeper, and learn from each other. Because the nice thing about having an interactive format is that somebody may have already had that challenge and solved it in a very unique way that may work for another person.

So we encourage a lot of dialogue every single session that we are together. It's more of an embedded kind of job professional development rather than just sitting and listening. So let me take your question, then I'll go on.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I may be getting ahead of myself, but when and where does the cohort meet?

ANN HINKSON-HERMAN: We're going -- yeah, we are going to talk about all those specifics. Judy is going to talk about that in the second part, sort of the nuts and bolts of how to apply, where it is, and what the dates are. So we'll get to that.

So you'll also notice in this format that we have what we call fellow to fellow. So occasionally, depending on the topic, if we have someone in the fellowship that we know has worked extensively maybe in the area we're talking about, they may even present to the group to share their ideas. So we use a lot of different interactive formats for folks to learn from each other, to share with each other, and to help each other over some of those unique situations. No special education situation ever seems to be quite the same, right? It's all a matter of how it is in context of the situation.

One of the other things that we really promote, and I think this is kind of the beauty of the PFP, is that it is a true community of practice. And when I talk about community of practice, it's more than just the days that the folks are sitting together as fellows. We have a wiki site that we put together for the people in the fellowship. And the wiki site provides all the content that we've covered, so that's always posted to it. But we have discussion threads where fellows can post questions to other fellows.

For instance, if a special ed director is in the process of hiring a new school psychologist for their district, they might pose the question, who has a great job description? Or who has great interview questions for hiring the school psychologist? They're swapping materials.

You know, there's no sense to reinvent the wheel when we have this cadre of people who can share with each other. So our motto is definitely steal from each other whatever you can during the course of this year, right? Why reinvent things?

So networking becomes a big part. So everyone has each other's email and sometimes shoot questions around that way. And we have two cohorts who have already gone through the year-long professional development, and we bring them back at times to mesh with the new cohort so that, again, more sharing can happen.

And the nice thing about this community of practice is when the candidates are chosen for the fellowship, and we have 52 in our current cohort, and we've had about 45 in each of the two prior cohorts, is the makeup of the group -- and I think we have a pin drop if you can flash forward, Judy. Thanks.

If you take a look at this, the pin drop shows you where our fellows are from. They are from urban, rural, and suburban school districts. They are from the north, the south, the east, the west, the central. They are new supervisors who may only have -- we have some that'll say, I've been on the job four days. We have some that have done it a couple of months, or a year or two. Those are our novices. But we have veterans who have 10, 12, 15 years.

That's the beauty of it, because the new supervisors can bring us a fresh set of eyes and some thoughts maybe right coming out of the classroom if that's where they've come from. And the veteran supervisors can share things that they have done that has worked in the past. So we don't want this to be all newbies or all veterans. It's a blend of -- a cross-section so that we can make sure we have really robust conversation that happens, really rich dialogue, and sharing of ideas.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: On the different symbols, you said you were in your third cohort now. There's three different symbols up there.

ANN HINKSON-HERMAN: Yes. Green is our current cohort three. Blue I believe is our second cohort. And green -- or pink I mean is our first cohort. What we did -- you'll notice that there aren't as many pin drops toward the top part of the commonwealth as you look at the map there. But remember, those are rural school districts too, so population-wise, it's far less than, say, right around Allegheny County, where I'm from in Pittsburgh. We have 42 member districts just in Allegheny County. So if there seems to be more pin drops, you have to remember there are a lot more school districts in those areas.

So this year's cohort met in State College for the majority of their sessions because we were reaching out to those northern tier districts who may not be able to come down to Hershey maybe or to Pittsburgh maybe. So we have changed the location. The first two years, we did it here in Hershey as the primary place. We do video conference during the winter months so that we don't have folks on the road, traveling. And then this year, our primary location has been State College so that we can help out our northern tier schools to participate. So we have a very nice cross-section.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Do you limit the number of people that are in the cohort?

ANN HINKSON-HERMAN: We do. We have 52 this year. We had over 100 applicants this year. In past years, we've also had over 100 applicants. I want to say we had 45 one year and 43 the other. It's close to that number.

We do it because what we don't want this to turn into is 100 people sitting in a workshop where you can't dialogue. You have to be able to ask the questions. You have to be able to get the group small enough. So let's say, for instance, we did a piece of a day of the fellowship on extended school year. ESY was our topic, our compliance topic.

So I shared information for about 15 minutes on the compliance end of ESY, how it's supposed to be done, the criteria, what the program service delivery models can look like. And then everyone broke into groups. And you never sit with more than six or seven people max so that you should really sit and say, what's your ESY program look like? Okay, how did you say no to a kid that everybody else wanted the child to quality, but you knew they didn't meet the criteria? What do you do in that kind of situation?

So you get to brainstorm the situations that are really occurring. You can't do it if there are a ton of people. So we would -- we hope that 50 will always stay our ballpark number for probably our highest amount that we would want.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: In that 50, is half of that 50 new people and half to that -- half as mentors and half as mentees.

ANN HINKSON-HERMAN: It's not -- they're mentors and mentees to each other. That we tried -- we tried to make it clear that it's not one group mentoring the other. Everyone's really learning, regardless of whether they're novices or veterans. The mentoring program is a little bit different. Once someone has been through the fellowship, they can become a mentor and then mentor new people.

But as far as the group split, we do take a look at that in the application selection process. We have a rubric that looks at where they're located from, the number of years. There's a number of criteria. And one of the things we hope to do is have a split. It's not always perfect, but it's pretty darn close. We count novices as anyone with three years or less, and then experience to be four years and up.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: [inaudible]

ANN HINKSON-HERMAN: Yes. We don't say no to anybody. Thank you. We just don't select certain people to keep the numbers what it is. So no one is ever rejected is our motto. You just might not be selected, only because it's never based on the criteria that we think someone isn't a good enough supervisor or isn't going to bring enough to the table to the group. It isn't that at all.

Because I'll tell you, by and large, and I've met hundreds of supervisors now, by and large, most of them are so good-hearted and running at just a pace to do all the right kind of things. So it isn't that we don't want to select people. We just want that group size to be workable, manageable, and be something that folks can learn from each other. So we're going to stick pretty close to that number.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: So if somebody doesn't get in one year, can you hold their stuff for the next year, or do they need to reapply?

ANN HINKSON-HERMAN: We do. And they can reapply.

JUDY BALL: We don't hold the stuff for the next year. You reapply and there's a question saying, did you apply before? Because, again, we're not rejecting you. We're just looking at where people are from.

ANN HINKSON-HERMAN: Yeah. So we'll -- on the rubric that we set up for us with the criteria, we actually have a place there that you will score additionally if you have applied in the past. And for the most part, I think the way it's worked out these three years is anyone who did apply one year and wasn't selected, we were able to get them in the very next year. We like to give preference to folks who are really trying to do that.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Again, I might be getting ahead of myself, but when does the date start for the new cohort?

ANN HINKSON-HERMAN: Judy's going to go over all the dates with you. I don't have them off the top of my head.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Forgive me for being overanxious.

ANN HINKSON-HERMAN: No. You know what? That just means that you are thinking about this, and that makes us say, yay.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I used to work for somebody who went through the cohort and [inaudible]. Now they mentor for other people, so.

ANN HINKSON-HERMAN: Yeah, and it's one of the expectations that we set forth is we put a lot of resources behind this. And the Bureau of Special Education has greatly supported this project. And they put a lot of money, time, personnel, you know, resources in general behind it. And our expectation is folks will grow and strengthen their capacity, which means in return that the outcome for kids with disabilities is going to be stronger and better.

And we would ask then that, as folks who went through the fellowship, that you would serve in a mentoring capacity for that M2M program in the future if we would ask you. That's one of our expectations and hopes. And most do, and it just -- it works out spectacular that way.

Okay, so Judy is going to talk to you about some of the -- and there's a couple pictures of our first two cohorts. We always make them take a group picture, right, so we can remember who they are. They're fabulous special ed directors, I'll tell you. Dynamite. So Judy is going to take you through a few of the specific nuts and bolts of applying for the next year, and then you're going to get to hear from one of our fellows who went through the program.

JUDY BALL: We actually had another fellow who was going to talk, but she didn't make it. That would have been Tammy.

ANN HINKSON-HERMAN: The weather in Pittsburgh wasn't cooperating.

JUDY BALL: And what I'm finding --

MAN: Just use the microphone.

JUDY BALL: What I'm finding is once you hit it, it'll change again, so you have to keep your eye on it. And then it seems stable. We always have trouble with the remote when we are here in Hershey and we don't know why. Okay. Oops, see, it's already forward, the schedule. There, okay.

Ann talked a little bit about the schedule. We meet on a somewhat monthly basis. And as she said, through the winter months, we'll try and do a video conference. And quite frankly, I miss my fellows through those months. Because the last time we were face to face was in November. Then we never meet in December. And then we have a video conference in January. We have -- and so they go to teach of the three PaTTAN offices. We had a video conference in February. And we are together here at the PDE conference because that's another one of the activities that we encourage our fellows to attend.

And what we did this morning is we had a pre-conference session this morning for them from 10 to 12 that was just for them. So in our schedule, it varies, but I do -- I do miss people. And then Ann had also said that we -- our first two cohorts met here in Hershey. And it's very nice. Ann always had to make the trip in the day before. Some of us got to drive in the day of. But we really did want to reach out to people who are so far away.

Because you will see -- and these are available at the end. This is the information packet and the application. And you do need to get, if you're with a school district, your superintendent's signoff on it. You know, an executive director for an IU or a CEO or COO if you're in a charter school or whatever. Because the travel costs are on you.

But this came out of a grant that we had applied for a little more than five years ago. And it was developed -- that's where the mentoring program came from. That's what we actually had written into the grant. Because we said keeping special education leaders is critical. Whenever there's turnover, and as you all know with regard to your teachers, whether it's special ed staff or whether it's general education teachers, whenever there's a lot of turnover, there's an effect on the students. You know, and how well they can do and all of that.

So there is a lot of turnover in special education. It's a hard job. And being a special education administrator is a very hard job, as are so many jobs in education, so I'm not saying it's harder than others, but it's a very hard job.

So we were doing the mentoring program and we said, you know what? Our purpose is to provide a mentor for a new leader so that they're going to say, okay, I can handle this job. I can do this. I've got some support here and all that.

But we said, you know what? Throughout the course of the year, we may be reaching or meeting the needs of a dozen people. We're not getting enough bang for the buck. So this is where this kind of came from. It's like we still wanted to keep our numbers down, but it's like we could work with 50 people, you know, up to 50 people.

Because 50 was our limit. We can work with 50 people at a time and build the skills of new leaders as well as veteran leaders. Because veterans keep applying, and the veterans also say, I really got a lot out of this. You know, you might have been doing the job a long time, but you're always going to learn something.

So you know, this is -- that's how that came about. So we meet regularly, but we want to keep it close Harrisburg because a lot of our speakers come from the Bureau of Special Education and PDE. And if you'll go to the next slide, Ann.

Another thing is there is always at least one bureau division chief in attendance at our meetings. Often when we were here in Harrisburg, we would have all three of them. You know, the one from the west, east, and central regions. When we moved up to State College, we've had at least one every single time. And they're there to answer questions because something comes up, we might be talking about ESY, and then some -- it's not so easy. It's not such an easy job.

So a question might come up, and either they can answer it or they're going to make sure it gets answered. So that's a real advantage to this program because you really have the ear of your bureau chiefs there to help.

And this year, when we started the cohort, which starts in September and we always start with two days, two consecutive days, the first day or the second day, a pen-link came out talking about the reevaluation process and when we have to -- and we walked in that morning and it's like it had hit. We're all like, well, wait a minute. And they're all abuzz with, what does this mean? What does this mean?

And Asaka Ferrell happened to be there. She was the bureau chief that was there. She was able to provide some more information, but also then to just get information. And we just kind of told the fellows, it's just like, okay, just hold -- you know, stay with us for right now, and we're going to find out and get you some answers with regard to that. Talk about timing, you know?

So the bureau people are there. And then the PDE conference is also an opportunity for the fellows to attend. Because you know, here at this conference, we have those national speakers who come in. You know, we don't bring national speakers in for the cohort. You know, it's us. It's PaTTAN. It's other fellows. It's bureau staff, Office for Dispute Resolution. You know, it's folks like that. But here at this conference, we get the national speakers.

And then it provides us an opportunity to get together. As I said, we had a pre-conference session this morning. And then tomorrow at lunchtime, they have the opportunity, they're not required, but they have the opportunity to grab their box lunches and we're going to meet in a room. And then they're going to hear from one of our parent consultants who's going to talk about being the parent of a child with a disability and, you know, working together and all of that.

Okay. At this conference, so you will see people who are sporting a purple ribbon that says PA fellow. So if you see that and you want to know more, you know, you say, I attended a session yesterday. Are you one of the fellows? They'll have that so you can recognize them.

When they graduate, they get a pin. Now this is not my pin because I did forget to wear my pin. And Becky, who's part of our fellowship team, lent me her pin and told me I had to give it back. The bird is for that early bird session that we have beforehand, and then the lunch.

So we try and give them an opportunity to get together and spend some time together and talk. They really do come together as a group and get to know each other.

Okay. They do have -- they are responsible for completing a project. It's an end of the year kind of a project. And what we do, though, is we try and tie it into whatever their professional goals might be. We're not trying to add more work into what they're doing. But if one of their goals has to do with decreasing the dropout rate of their students with disabilities and you're doing stuff around that, then you kind of present that to us as a project.

What was -- what were the things that you did? You know, did you send [inaudible] home? What did you do? And they share that kind of information. Because, again, there's so much knowledge within the room, and they've got a lot to share. So they do those types of things.

One year we said, okay, it absolutely had to be connected to one of the state performance plan indicators. So people would do a project based upon, again, dropout prevention or increasing graduation rates. We had folks who did things on increasing inclusive practices within their LEAs, increasing parent engagement. How do you really get your parents engaged? Transition activities going on.

And our first year, we had a lot of people who did procedural manuals. So for last year, we were like, okay, we've had enough with procedural manuals. And the Dr. Sloan, who is our -- who oversees our group, decided that this year, she says, you know what? Some people, that may be where they are. They may be in a school where they really just don't have any written procedures and they just have to get that developed. And if that becomes something that they're working on and that's a part of their project, so be it. So it's kind of like, well, it doesn't matter that we're tired of seeing a lot of procedural manuals. That may be what the need is. So we're trying to make sure that it's based upon the needs of our fellows.

And then they have an option of presenting it to their fellows, to their fellow fellows, or doing a poster project. And this all comes about in our final time together, which is at the leadership academy in Bedford that Ann had spoken about.

So this year, we have a little more than half who have opted to do a presentation. So again, we're bringing -- I'll talk a little bit more about bringing them in early, but our leadership academy always starts around one o'clock on Monday of the week. So that Monday morning is when they will be doing their presentations with each other.

Some people, though, have also chosen to do -- wrong way, posters. And so we always have a reception at the leadership academy. And those folks who are doing poster sessions will be showing their posters, answering questions during the reception. So you know, if you don't want to stand in front of the group and speak, that's fine. You can do a poster session. So that's what we're looking forward to in Bedford at the summer academy.

For the academy, we have around 200 to about 230 participants every year. And as Ann said, for the most part, people who attend that conference are special education leaders. There may be some who are working toward becoming a leader, may not have a job yet in that capacity, but they're working toward that. So we have a lot of bureau staff who are there and we have special education leaders.

Unlike this conference with 1400 people registered last week, where we have so many different entities, we have teachers here, we have principals here, we have special ed leaders. When I said teachers, we have gen ed teachers and we have special education teachers. We have parents who are here. You know, we have a lot of different people representing all different perspectives at this conference.

The sessions at that conference, and we're not saying somebody couldn't come, but they're not designed for the other groups. They are designed for special education leaders. Very few national presenters. In fact, we haven't had any in a while. Well, we have Dr. Loujeania Bost, who used to be with the Bureau of Special Education here in Pennsylvania. And a couple of years ago, she went to the National Dropout Prevention Center down in one of the Carolinas. Clemson. Okay, and she's the director of that. And she comes each year because she talks about -- I mean, dropout, especially for students with disabilities, is such a big issue. And she talks about different things that can be done with that.

But we feel there's a lot of talent in Pennsylvania. And this year for our leadership academy, again, I kind of feel like we are really nurturing and growing our leaders. We have two former fellows who are going to be presenting at the academy this year.

One, I was looking for somebody to do a gifted session, and I know she had had this and has done good things with gifted programming in her school district. And I asked her, and about two days later, I got an email from another former fellow saying, hey look, we've been doing really good things with our gifted group. Could we do something at the academy? So sure, we want to have our people show their skills and things that they know and learn.

And then our fellows, we will ask them to serve as mentors. We don't have a whole lot of people who are asking for a mentor, so sometimes it seems like we have a lot, doesn't it, Carol? But it was a problem early on. It's like who -- we kept tapping the same people just because we knew them. Well, we have increased the number of people we know now. And our expectation is that if we asked you to be a mentor, that you would say yes, okay? You might say, could we go one more year, and then the following year, you know, I'd be happy to do it? And that's fine. But our fellows are a very present part of the leadership academy in Bedford.

So what we do is because we were working under the grant, and that's almost over now, because we had that grant money, we have had a little bit of money that we have been able to ask them to come in a day early to the Bedford academy. Because again, as I said, transportation stuff, that kind of stuff is on your district, is on you. But because we're asking them to come early and we have had money from that grant, we've been able to invite them to come in on that Sunday evening, where we have a graduation ceremony, we have a nice dinner, and that type of thing. And we pick up the room for that night.

So on that evening, we have our program. It's a recognition dinner. We have speakers. We usually have somebody from the bureau who speaks with them. Then we also have a couple of our fellows who we have asked to say a couple of words to their fellow fellows. We have a nice dinner.

And then we have what we call the amazing race. And they work in teams, and then they go around the different stations. I mean, we kind of take over the hotel, go around the different stations and have to answer some questions, and then come back. And there's no prize for the winning team. There is no prize. Sorry about that.

Okay, so this is graduation. They get a certificate. They get their pins when they graduate. We have a delightful time. That's us having dinner on the lawn. And then the next day, they have their pre-session and they do their presentations, and then they're kind of finished.

So this is cohort three. And I don't know who the other two fellows you think we have, but we have 50 here, 50. So as was said earlier, we meet -- we've met up in State College this year. And so here is our group of fellows. And the really amazing thing about this cohort, and I'm not saying that just because you're sitting here, Stu, the first two years, we always had -- the first two years, we had two people each of those years who midway through dropped out.

One, her job just became -- the assistant superintendent had left and she had assumed those duties, and she just said, I can't. So you know, I mean, there are good reasons for doing it. This cohort is still totally intact, and that's pretty amazing.

I'm going to turn it over to Stu in just a few minutes. He's just going to talk a little bit about his experience with the cohort. He's in this year's cohort. And we also have the -- I'm going to mention the dates in a moment. We also have then the information packet and the application. Here, you can take it now. This is the first official putting it out there.

But regarding dates, the application has to be submitted by August 9th. And what that provides is it's a real tight turnaround, but if somebody hasn't seen it yet and they aren't aware of it and all of that, if they're at the Bedford academy and they hear about it, they get interested, it still gives them a very tight timeline, but time to get their application signed by their whoever is in charge and submitted to us. Question?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I'm pushing my luck in asking another question. I'm looking into doctoral programs. Do you have anybody who's done both this program and a doctoral program, or do you see that being too much?

JUDY BALL: At the same time? We did -- oh yes, yes, Sean. Yes. Susan, yes. We do have people. I have -- we did have a person this year who was originally accepted. And he did decide -- he's from the west. I forget who it was. He said, I've just started the doctoral program. But his reasoning was we do alternate our nights that we meet. We go with either a Tuesday, a Wednesday, or Thursday. And we try to stagger those because you might always have a board meeting on a particular night. There were too many nights where he had a conflict that he was going to have to be in class.

As I said, we're not putting -- probably the hardest thing put on you is the travel piece. If you live in Erie and you're coming here, that takes a lot more time than if you live in King of Prussia and you're coming here. You just drive in for the day, we start at 10 o'clock, you're done at 3:15 or whatever. You've got a regular kind of day. People from Erie, it's a lot more time intensive for them.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I'm from IU 16, so that's not quite the center of the state, but it's doable.

JUDY BALL: Yeah, yeah. So I mean, that's -- we're not -- you don't have -- you don't have homework. I mean, we'll give a reading assignment to talk about as a discussion, but it'll be like, you know, a chapter or two in a book that you've gotten. You know, it's -- we don't -- we're not trying to fool ourselves that we're some college or graduate program.

And then even with regard to the projects, it's like this isn't something we expect you to be doing outside of your job. It's something you should be doing, and then just be sharing with the other fellows what you did or what you found out. Or you know, I really thought that this was going to change things and it didn't. Well, that's important information to have too, so to share those types of things.

So we have the application up here and the information packet. The deadline for submitting the applications, and they do need to be submitted by the August 9th date, because then we do get together, we go through them, and we use the rubric that Ann talked about. And we notify those who have been accepted by August 23rd.

And what we do is we send that in an initial email saying, you have been selected. Are you still interested? Because maybe they've changed jobs in the meantime and they're not going to be able to do this now. So are you still interested? And that's where the one who -- with the doctoral program. He said, as I look at it, I'm not going to be able to do it. He may reapply then this year.

But then that opens up some slots. And so then we send out more. Because really, Janet -- Dr. Sloan says we're not rejecting anybody. You just may not have been selected this time. We don't like to select two people from the same school district or from the same -- if they work for the IU, from the same IU, in the same year because we want to -- we want to share the information and we want to reach out as far as we can.

And we had one of our fellows this year, three of them applied from the same school district. We took the one and she tried very hard. She kept going, but can't we -- if we pay -- if we do -- you know, and it's like, no, our purpose is for you to bond with others. Because frankly, you're going to stick with the ones you know and you're going to sit there together.

And I thought about this when you were talking, Ann. We will -- we sometimes will let them choose where they want to sit. Sometimes we put the nametags out, we want to mix them up. Sometimes we will have them line up smallest school to largest, and line up around the room and then count off because, you know, if I'm from a Philadelphia school district and you're from a charter school, and we're kind of discussing something, sometimes there's not a whole lot we've got in common for that particular topic.

So depending upon our topic, we want to get the larger districts together. You know, we might group you by IU folks, agency people, charter schools, and then a bunch of school districts. You know, so -- because it depends upon what the topic is.

Okay, I'm going to stop talking and I'm going to invite Stu to come forward and to just have him say a few words about the fellowship program that he's participating in this year.

STU: Okay, thank you. I don't know why they asked me to speak because I'm very quiet and very reserved, very shy. But in all honesty, I probably had the least amount of experience of our cohort because I've never had any formal training in special education. I became a vice principal in the state of Maryland in 1996 and was thrown into dealing with special ed students who were basically dealing with discipline problems.

And from that, I, in becoming a principal and now director of federal programs and the supervising principal, I got more and more involved in special education, to the point that I am the LEA designee for the district. That being said, this is a program that will benefit you so much. You will never be bored. It is not one of those conferences where you find yourself checking emails constantly or not paying attention. Everything that's presented is pertinent. And as I said, it's very up to date.

We were at the Bedford Springs last year, and there were two presentations on the teacher effectiveness initiative. One was a Tuesday afternoon, and the next one was Wednesday morning. And I attended the one Wednesday morning and it started out with if you know anybody who was here Tuesday afternoon, tell them to forget everything we told them because from Tuesday afternoon to Wednesday morning, things have changed.

We were in State College when we found out about issuing NORPs when you were doing the permission to evaluate. So you know, it's very up to date and it's very pertinent and it's very job-related. And these ladies are fantastic. They will work with you. I had an issue in my district with Access money.

And I posted something on the wiki. And within a day or two, I had five fellows respond. And then I believe it was at the next presentation, we had somebody there to discuss Access money.

So these folks are going to give you a whole bunch of information, things that you probably already knew, but are tweaked; things that you didn't know; changes that are being made. It's definitely worthwhile and I wholeheartedly endorse the idea of applying for it. Not only do you get five days in State College and you get to come to Hershey and you get to go to Bedford Springs, but you get to meet a number of colleagues across the state and you get to develop that network of support. And I think that's the biggest thing that comes out of this.

So please, if you are interested, do not hesitate. Take the app. Get with your superintendent. And you will find it to be one of the most worthwhile presentations, conferences, staff developments, whatever you want to call it, that you'll be involved in. So keep that in mind, and hopefully we'll see you next year at this time. I think they're -- I think they're actually putting me on like on-the-job training interview. I think they want to hire me full-time, which I would love to do. But anyway, do you have any questions for me as a fellow? Okay.

ANN HINKSON-HERMAN: Any other questions that we didn't address? Anything? Yes?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: [inaudible]. I am a parent of an autistic child. I am a special education teacher and transition coordinator, and I am doing my internship as a special ed supervisor. So do you accept -- like should I wait until everything's done? Can only special ed supervisors apply? How does that work?

JUDY BALL: Yeah. Okay, and in the application here, it says you are invited to apply if you have a full-time professional special education administrative position, okay? The endorsement of your employing organization, a commitment to discover, and so on. Because that is key because of the discussion.

And I'll tell you, we did have one person that was in our cohort last year who wasn't acting in that capacity. It was very quasi. You know, she wasn't an administrator, but they had her doing a lot of things. And although she enjoyed it, she -- and she was very honest with us. She said, I don't think I got what I could have gotten out of it because there was so much she didn't know. She didn't experience it. She didn't live it. Yeah, it didn't apply.

So I would suggest you wait. And then as Ann had said earlier, one of the other things on the application, we are looking at number of years as a special education administrator. And we do say special education too because then we're looking at veteran and new. And then there's the question: I

applied to the 2012-2013 PFP. Because we really do want -- if you didn't get chosen this past year and you applied, then by all means. And then let us know that you had applied.

Because even though I still have all of the applications, we're not going back through and seeing whether or not, you know, you applied before. It's here. I mean, and then it's like, oh yeah, I do remember that name. But we -- you know, we're not -- it has nothing to do with, oh, I don't think that person would be -- it's not about that at all.

The other thing is when we go through it the first time, we then share those names with the bureau advisors, who then know these people. And you know, they come back like, oh yeah. You know, and -- you know, they're not rejecting anybody either. They're just looking at who we've chosen. Okay, yes?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Is your application process first come, first serve in terms of if there's multiple people from the same area?

JUDY BALL: No. Okay? In fact, we had that come up this year too because the one person said, but I put mine in before him. We're not -- they have to make it by the deadline, but we're not stamping who comes -- which one comes first.

When we have multiple people, though, often -- in fact, we did do that this past year. Dr. Sloan will send an email, like let's say it's a school district, to the superintendent saying, you have -- you know, you have three supervisors who have applied. You've signed off on it. We won't take all three of them. Which one do you want us to take this year?

And that person may make it based -- make that decision based upon she's the newest, so I think she would benefit. Or I think she'd have a lot to -- we don't know. I mean, that's totally up to them. But we'll go back and we'll say, okay, we can't take these three. Who do you want us to take this year? So we do do that. But no, the keeping track of which came in first, especially since it's over the summer and we just can't, so. Okay, any other questions?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Are the -- are the conferences all year-round? Or are they just during the school year?

JUDY BALL: School year. Other than Bedford leadership academy. That is in July. The 22nd to the 26th, I think, this year. It's in July. Next year, it's the following week. It's the last week of July. But everything

else, we start in September. And what we've done in the past, and we're planning for next year, is two consecutive days in September because we want you to get to know each other.

So we do the two days and we have dinner that night. And again, you get to know each other then a little bit better. But what that allows us to do is we don't start our sessions until about 10 o'clock, 10:15, something like that. And we go till about 3:00 or 3:15 to allow for the travel, to get there. But then the second day, we start early because we're all there. And you know, if you didn't stay at the hotel, you're local then. And then we start early and get out the next day.

So in this application, there is the proposed calendar. And we're pretty much set with that. We've talked with the hotels. As I said, we're bringing it back to Hershey next year. We checked out other hotels. This place gave us the best prices. So you know, even -- you know, checked other hotels you might think might be cheaper. These folks work with us very well and they offered us the best prices. And anything you want to finish with?

ANN HINKSON-HERMAN: No, if you have other questions, Judy and I are certainly here at the conference the rest of the week. So if you have other questions once you look at the application, track us down or anyone who has the purple tag. They can answer some questions about the fellowship for you.

JUDY BALL: Anything else? We hope you'll consider applying. Don't hesitate to contact us, email or phone also.