

Bridging the Gap: Supporting Students with Mental Health Needs and Developmental Disabilities in the Special Education System

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Session Description:

As schools work to create more inclusive and supportive environments for all students, those with both mental health needs and developmental disabilities often face unique challenges that require targeted interventions and understanding. This presentation will explore effective strategies for bridging the gap between mental health services and special education programs. We will discuss the intersection of mental health and developmental disabilities, examining the specific needs of students who experience both, and how educators can adapt their approaches to address these complexities.

Learning Objectives:

1. Share free services offered to families in NM from OSEO and UNM-CDD NM START program.
2. Share collaboration techniques and behavior interventions offered to schools in a variety of meetings.
3. Highlight the importance of collaboration between educators, mental health professionals, and families to create a comprehensive support system.

Felicia Nevarez, MEd is an Education and Outreach Manager and the Therapeutic Coaching Lead with NM START in the Autism programs at the Center for Development and Disability within the University of New Mexico. She earned her Master's in Curriculum and Instruction: Autism Spectrum Disorders from Arizona State University in 2015, and a graduate certificate in Applied Behavior Analysis in 2019 from UNM. Prior to joining NMSTART at the CDD, Felicia was an Educational Consultant who provided technical assistance to education teams across the state of NM. In addition, Felicia has spent time supporting individuals with communication and behavioral needs while receiving treatment through in-patient medical settings. Lastly, Felicia enjoys volunteering her time as a coach for Special Olympics in southern New Mexico.

Michelle Tregembo, National Board Certified Exceptional Needs Specialist, Educational Leadership MA, K-12 Special Education BS, K-8 General Education BS, is a retired educator who served in many positions over 25 years including special education teacher, Peer Assistance and Review Teacher, Administrator, and more. She stood up the Office of Special Education Ombud in 2021, and has built a team of family advocates who offer free services to students and families struggling to navigate the special education system in New Mexico.