Summary of the Issue:

It is important to provide technical assistance and professional development activities for faculty and administrators so that these individuals will assure that a quality education for students with disabilities is available within their institution. The staff of twenty-one grants funded by the Office of Postsecondary Education submitted “promising practices” that they were implementing to improve the climate across their campuses. A matrix of promising practices was developed that describes the characteristics and intended outcomes of a variety of strategies that are being implemented across a minimum of 30 campuses nationwide.

Study Questions/Method:

- What are the characteristics of promising program models being implemented?
- What types of professional development activities are being implemented by the program models?
- Who are the critical stakeholders involved in model project implementation?
Findings:

- These promising practices were categorized into three broad areas: (1) assessing the climate of the department, college or entire institution, (2) administrator and faculty professional development, and (3) building capacity for institutional change.
- Approximately 20% of postsecondary grant programs provided self-advocacy instruction and support. Once students have the skills to understand what accommodations are needed for their disability, they can increase faculty awareness and cooperation.
- Nine of the twenty-one projects (43%) are infusing distance education into their professional development activities.
- Administrative and faculty directives, informing faculty of policies and institutional practices, are being used by seven (33%) of the projects.
- The majority of the twenty-one projects involve other faculty development units across their campuses, in addition to disability services providers.

Implications by Audience:

- Teachers, special education personnel, and principals need to explore and construct secondary education learning climates similar to those students with disabilities will encounter in postsecondary institutions.
- Need to identify effective methods of transitioning students with disabilities to postsecondary institutions in regard to climate, department development, and college.
- High school counselors and special education teachers need to inform students with disabilities about various services (e.g. distance education and informed faculty) available at postsecondary institutions to aid in their education.
- Need for students with disabilities to become skilled at requesting proper levels of support and accommodation.
- Secondary and special education personnel need to educate students with disabilities about attitudes and knowledge regarding students with disabilities in postsecondary institutions.

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