



BE *the* CHANGE

◆◆ How a SPED Fellow ◆◆
Academy Mentor-Coach
Works Toward Eliminating
Barriers to Student Success



All students deserve an education that prepares them for postsecondary success and a lifetime of unlimited opportunity. By designing and delivering standards-aligned instruction, Louisiana educators lead **the nation** in raising expectations for what all students can learn and achieve. The challenge is to eliminate barriers to student success by building a seamless support system. Achieving this vision requires all educators – from school system leaders and principals to classroom teachers – to embrace policies and practices that guarantee high-quality educational experiences for the most vulnerable learners.

The Department's **SPED Fellow Academy** instills the next generation of special education leaders with the knowledge and skills they need to lead and sustain change. It is integral to ensuring Louisiana school systems continue to have well-equipped special education leaders. We recently sat down with **Dr. Sheila Lockett, Executive Director of the Department of Exceptional Children for Caddo Parish Public Schools**, to discuss her role as a mentor-coach for the SPED Fellow Academy, how she plans on supporting her fellows and best practices she recommends to provide an equitable and appropriate education for students with exceptionalities.

As a veteran special education leader, Dr. Lockett has been supporting students with exceptionalities throughout her career. In her current role, she uses focused planning to transform current practices from conceptual to operational. Her goal is to ensure students are prepared to be independent, productive and positive contributors to society.

"We want students to be engaged through collaboration, communication and teamwork involving all stakeholders within our community," said Dr. Lockett. "We utilize a policy and approach that can effectively and efficiently prepare students for college and career readiness."

“OUR GOAL (AND MY DESIRE) IS FOR ALL OF OUR STUDENTS TO BE SUCCESSFUL TO THE GREATEST EXTENT POSSIBLE IN WHATEVER CAPACITY THEY ARE IN – IN WHATEVER THEY CAN DO.”

"This will allow students with exceptionalities to reach their true potential as they transition throughout life."

To be a special education leader, Dr. Lockett believes one must be passionate about what they do. She stresses the importance of establishing one-on-one relationships with students and their families.

"It's not about compliance and laws," said Dr. Lockett.

“IT'S ABOUT ENSURING OUR KIDS RECEIVE EQUITY AND EQUAL TREATMENT.”

"While the laws exist, our hearts and our work reflect what it is these children need to be successful. The work comes in being able to accommodate for their individual needs and make appropriate modifications. We must determine what each child needs in order to address the regular education curriculum and then provide the tools necessary to be successful."

With a desire to create and implement long-term change, Dr. Lockett recently became a mentor-coach for the SPED Fellow Academy to support the next generation of special education leaders and to provide them with the tools needed to improve instructional leadership and increase influence in the SPED field. Dr. Lockett enjoys getting to know her fellows and being able to provide authentic support as they embark on this journey together.

"I want to get to know my fellows and be face-to-face with them, even if that means utilizing an online platform given today's circumstances. I consider these fellows (and the mentor-coaches) to be family," said Dr. Lockett. **"I want to know how I can support them, how they are doing as schools continue to reopen, if they are comfortable in their learning environment and what will this look like to them as the year goes on."**

The SPED Fellow Academy is a year-long, comprehensive development program for novice special education leaders across the state. Mentor-coaches work with their fellows to help them effectively implement newly-acquired knowledge into current practices.

"I'm excited to help and assure the fellows that we are in this together. We are a team of support that can help get the work done," said Dr. Lockett. "It takes alignment of that support; it takes varying types of communication to really build into the work. What may work for one may not work for all. But what works for one can be shared and distributed. This enables all of us to build a multitude of resources that we can then tailor to meet our specific needs (and make it comply with state and federal regulations)."

Mentor-coaches serve fellows by providing as-needed check-ins; delivering targeted resources and support to fellows based on their development; providing guidance and support in problem-solving challenges that they experience in their current job functions; and facilitating self-reflection and growth.

"The SPED Fellow Academy is designed to provide a lot of training, coaching and a community of practice," said Dr. Lockett. "Special education is a world of change. Through the academy, we plan to build knowledge and essential skills into our SPED fellows, so they'll know how to sustain change and how to think differently."



DR. SHEILA LOCKETT
DEPARTMENT OF EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN
CADDO PARISH PUBLIC SCHOOLS



Dr. Lockett is looking forward to the year ahead. Reflecting on the work she has done (and continues to do) to improve individual student outcomes, she advises her SPED fellows and other special education leaders to **"let the focus be the focus."**

"At the end of the day, it comes down to one question: have we made a positive impact in the lives of our children? That's what I'm here for. That's what we're all about. I believe all special education leaders have a heart for the work. As long as we continue to provide free public education to all students, we will accomplish our goals."

Learn more about the **SPED Fellow Academy**, and visit the **Students with Disabilities webpage** to access tools and resources to support students with disabilities.

