

Partners

{ A newsletter from the Parent & Educator Connection for families
and educators of students receiving special education services }

PARENT—TEACHER RELATIONSHIPS

BY: CAROL ADEN

Before you know it, parent-teacher conferences will be right around the corner. In order for our kids to be the best they can be in school, it's never too late to develop a cooperative teacher/parent relationship for the best outcomes for our children. It's a "no brainer" that when there is more parent involvement with your child's education, the better your child will perform in school. Parent involvement and parent-teacher relationships will look differently for each and every family and it is important to realize that it is a shared responsibility in which both parents and teachers play such critical roles for the educational success of our kids.

Some great opportunities you may want to keep an eye open for to get involved at your child's school are:

Unpack your backpack days, open houses, fundraisers, ice cream socials, grandparent days, book fairs and class picnics. Volunteering in your child's classroom and going on field trips with your child's class is also a great opportunity to get involved.

Below are some tips on improving and maintaining critical relationships when it comes to communicating with your child's teacher:

Clear and appropriate communication between home and school is the root of successful parent-teacher relationships. Listen to what your child's teacher is saying and don't put up brick walls by assuming you won't like what you hear. It's important to keep an open mind even if your opinions are different from those of the educator. The more you listen and understand their perspective, the better position you will be in to agree or disagree. The important concerns that you have could be put in writing. Taking the time to write a letter or e-mail to make a request or ask a question helps you organize your

thoughts and lets educators know that this is an issue you take very seriously. Less critical concerns can be addressed at a time that is more convenient for both parties, e.g., mentioning it to your child's teacher before or after school when you are dropping off/picking up your child from school, or with a phone call.

Never miss a "parking lot" opportunity should you see your child's teacher out and about in the community to just say a simple, "hello, how are you doing?" Good communication between parents and teachers emphasizes that there is mutual respect between the school and the family, that there is shared responsibility for student success, that there are mutual goals for students, and that there is an appreciation for learning and doing well in school. By being involved in your child's education, it should be no surprise how they are performing in school when you receive their first and subsequent report card.

OTHER WORKSHOPS OF INTEREST IN THE AREA OR STATE OF IOWA

If you are looking for different disability workshops or conferences to attend, please check out the Parent & Educator Connection section of the Mississippi Bend Area Education Agency's website at:

http://www.mbaea.org/en/special_education/parent_educator_connection/conferences_workshops_events/

We provide stipends up to \$100.00 to families for conferences or workshops in the State of Iowa. For questions or concerns, please contact Carol Aden at the Mississippi Bend Area Education Agency at 563-344-6287.

PUTTING THE INDIVIDUAL INTO THE IEP

BY: JIM FLANSBURG, IOWA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Sharon Hawthorne will put a good teacher ahead of a good Individualized Educational Program any day. But there's a catch.

"A good teacher will have a good Individualized Educational Program," said Hawthorne, a 20-year special education veteran and consultant for the Iowa Department of Education for the last 19 years. Hawthorne knows a thing or two about IEPs. In addition to her extensive classroom experience, she was one of the lead educators to develop the statewide IEP.

So while she says the teaching dynamic is the most important tool in the classroom, the IEP cannot be an afterthought.

"IEPs are important," she said. "The IEP is a guide - it's a contract between the parents and the school. But vibrancy doesn't happen on paper, it happens in the classroom. The tool itself won't improve the student, what happens in the classroom will take care of that.

"But the IEP is important because it is the basis for identifying the child's needs, and determining what kind of services the child needs so that he or she can have access to the general education program and make progress."

At the very base level, an IEP needs to be updated at least once a year, and have input from the IEP team - parents, teachers, administrators and anyone who has assessed the child. Questions that must be addressed include:

What is the effect of the child's disability on the curriculum?

How does the child best learn?

An IEP is not done in cookie-cutter fashion; it is specifically designed for the individual child. The wording of the IEP is important, as well. Goals must focus on skill building, and should avoid general statements such as "will improve in reading." But good IEPs focus on student interest, as well.

"What are they interested in?" Hawthorne said. "Cars, dinosaurs? If a teacher can tap into a student's interest level, the student probably will be more motivated to work on the skills."

The IEP should also directly state how a student best learns, whether it's working alone, one-on-one or in groups. And it should list what the student is strong in - whether it is reading, math or even baseball - so that the teacher can combine those topics with areas that the student needs to improve upon.

Other areas of an IEP should include parental concerns as well as other considerations that may impact the IEP, whether it is medications or home concerns.

And, of course, all IEPs should have goals and progress monitoring.

"The goals should be measurable, monitorable and realistic," Hawthorne said. "And this is important: You want the goals to include high expectations. I think we can underestimate what a child can do. If you expect them to do poorly, they will do poorly, and if you expect good things, good things will happen. The goal should include more than a year's growth within a year—we need to do that in order to close the achievement gap."

Progress monitoring not only ensures that the student is meeting the goals, it also enables the teacher to change strategies if the child is struggling with the expectation. "Progress monitoring should be conducted at least once every two weeks for a daily teacher," Hawthorne said. "But then you need to use that information to ascertain if you're on the right track, or if it's necessary to make a change in your instructional approach because the child isn't making progress that was expected."

The IEP also needs to include any services the child may require, as well as whether the student will participate in district-wide assessments or need to take an alternate assessment. IEPs also need to address any physical or behavioral issues.

Pull-out time should also be examined in the IEP.

"The first choice is always the general education classroom, but on occasion, that may not be the right place," Hawthorne said. And finally, the IEP should list exiting special education. "We need to remember that special education is a service, not a destination," Hawthorne said. "We need to talk about exiting. What is John going to need to exit these services? The team should always be thinking about this. Special education is not a life sentence."

Are these on your IEP?

- Updated at least annually
- States specific goals, including more than one year's growth
 - Indicates high expectations
 - Specifies how child learns best
 - States student's interests
 - Includes parental concerns
- Determines what assessment will be taken
- Mentions physical and/or behavioral issues
 - States whether pull-out is necessary, and how much
 - Exit strategy

*These are in addition to other required items on IEPs.

MEET OUR NEW PARENT & EDUCATOR FACILITATOR RACHEL TERRY

My name is Rachel Terry, I am the new Parent & Educator Facilitator with the Parent and Educator Connection (PEC) at the Mississippi Bend Area Education Agency. I am honored to serve families in the Muscatine, L&M, Columbus Junction, Durant, Wilton, West Liberty, and Bennet school districts. Our primary role at the PEC is to provide support and resources to our families and educators of students with special needs. I am grateful for the opportunity to give back, as myself being the parent of children with special needs, I know how valuable having a support system can be. My oldest son is 16 and diagnosed with Autism, my middle son is 14 and diagnosed with ADHD. Both have reaped the benefits of having early interventions with the AEA and educational supports in their academic journey. Working together with educators as part of the team has been my primary focus since the beginning. I am truly grateful for the educators, teams, and specialists in our AEA that assisted us throughout the years to allow the boys to be where they are today. Their futures look bright as they plan for driving, college and careers, something we would of never thought possible in the beginning. The road was never easy, but nothing worthwhile ever is. Hope is a powerful thing, guided with a plan and a determination to constantly



move forward, together we can ensure success for our children.

You may contact me at the Muscatine office at (563)263-8476 or rterry@mbaea.org. If you would like to find out more about the PEC, please visit our website:

http://www.mbaea.org/en/special_education/parent_educator_connection

EACH AND EVERY CHILD NEWSLETTER

The world of special education is complex, challenging and, when done well, enormously satisfying for the educator, parent – and, especially, the student. Each and Every Child is a newsletter aimed at this particular audience; designed to inform, educate and challenge those who live and work within this field. The overriding goal is to end the achievement gap in the state of Iowa. After all, each and every child deserves the very best education.

Are you receiving the Each and Every Child E-Newsletter? If not, sign up for a free subscription to the Iowa Department of Education E-Newsletter, Each and Every Child, by contacting the following:

Jim Flansburg with the Iowa Department of Education:
Jim.Flansburg@iowa.gov

To see previous e-newsletters of Each and Every Child, please go to their website:
<https://www.educateiowa.gov/each-and-every-child-newsletter>



PARENT WORKSHOPS

The Parent and Educator Connection Program will be conducting parent workshops throughout the 2014-2015 school year. The workshop focuses on Positive Solutions for Families - Eight Practical Tips for Parents of Young Children with Challenging Behavior and is scheduled on the following dates:

November 6, 2014

YWCA - Clinton
317 7th Ave S
Clinton, Iowa 52732
6:30 - 7:30 p.m.

To register, contact Kathy Anson at
563-242-6454 or kanson@mbaea.org

November 19, 2014

YMCA - Muscatine
1823 Logan Street
Muscatine, Iowa 52761
7:00 - 8:00 p.m.

To register, contact Rachel Terry at
563-263-8476 or rterry@mbaea.org

February 26, 2015

Mississippi Bend Area Education Agency
729 21st Street
Bettendorf, Iowa 52722
6:30 - 7:30 p.m.

To register, contact Carol Aden at
563-344-6287 or caden@mbaea.org

April 16, 2015

Maquoketa Library
126 S. 2nd St.
Maquoketa, IA 52060
6:30 - 7:30 p.m.

To register, contact Kathy Anson at
563-242-6454 or kanson@mbaea.org

We are also sponsoring another workshop:

MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID TRAINING BY DAWN KNUTSON, SCOTT COUNTY KIDS

The course teaches participants the risk factors and warning signs of a variety of mental health challenges common among adolescents, including anxiety, depression, psychosis, eating disorders, AD/HD, disruptive behavior disorders, and substance use disorder. Participants do not learn to diagnose, nor how to provide any therapy or counseling - rather, participants learn a core five-step action plan to support an adolescent developing signs and symptoms of mental illness or in an emotional crisis. Learn about local resources and services. This course is interactive. Participants will receive a Youth MHFA manual. Located at: *Mississippi Bend Area Education Agency | 729 21st Street | Bettendorf, IA 52722*

Registration is taken online at: <http://www.solutionwhere.com/mbaea/cw/showcourse.asp?2579>

ASK A PARENT ADVISOR: TEACHING REAL FUNCTIONAL LIFE SKILLS

POSTED IN BACK TO SCHOOL SPECIAL 2014

Question:

My son, who has Fragile X syndrome, just transitioned from elementary to middle school. In elementary school, he was in a regular classroom and learned along with his friends and peers. His middle school is now telling me that it is important for my son to be taught "life skills," which would be done in a different, special education classroom. Of course I want my son to learn life skills, but I also want him to learn about math and science, develop his reading skills, and keep making friends. But, based on the school's recommendations of what he needs to be learning, I am worried if I don't follow their advice, my son might not learn these important life skills his middle school keeps talking about. Do you have any advice about life skills?

Answer:

These are great questions and it's important for us, as parents, to be critical consumers and continue to advocate for what is right for our kids! You are not the only parent out there who has experienced a similar situation! The topic of life skills is, in fact so critical that we decided to bring in Mary Schuh, a colleague and expert in the field, who can share some current research and a fresh outlook with us. We think this article from Mary will help answer some of your questions about life skills and school placement!

TEACHING REAL LIFE FUNCTIONAL SKILLS

BY GUEST AUTHOR MARY SCHUH

Close your eyes for a moment and think about the most important skills you use to navigate through your day. What comes to mind? Is it the way you neatly make your bed? Cross the street? Provide the correct change when you purchase your morning coffee? Answer "yes" or "no" to basic questions asked of you? Or perhaps getting yourself dressed or using the microwave to heat up your lunch? I'm doubtful these are the skills that come to mind.

In the world of special education, we used to think that making a bed or change for a dollar, folding a napkin, and learning to prepare simple foods were important life skills that students with disabilities needed to learn. We also believed these skills were best taught in a segregated, functional, life-skills classroom and through community-based experiences separate from their peers without disabilities. Are these really the authentic life skills we want students to learn, practice, and realize in their lives?

A more generic and better understood view of functional life skills are those skills that assist us in managing and living a better quality of life. These are the skills that help us accomplish our dreams, live to our full potential, and exist as contributing members of our communities. There is no definitive list of functional life skills, and certain skills may be more or less relevant depending on life circumstances, culture, beliefs, age, geographic location, etc. A broader, more widely, accepted definition of important life skills are those skills that allow us to:

- *Get along well with all kinds of people including individuals whose backgrounds and experiences are different from our own.*
- *Develop and maintain friendships and meaningful relationships.*
- *Work collaboratively with others.*
- *Identify, learn, and practice passions, interests, and talents to assist in making important life decisions such as career choices and motivating hobbies.*
- *Show up on time and be prepared for whatever is required.*
- *Communicate thoughts, ideas, opinions, and feelings in ways that are clearly understood.*

Read material that is stimulating and/or provides opportunities to learn.

If we can agree that the above list is more representative of "functional life skills" than making a bed or change for a dollar, where might be the best place for students to learn these skills? Thirty plus years of educational research informs us that by immersing students in the richness and diversity of an inclusive educational experience, students are more likely to learn important life skills such as communication, literacy, appropriate social behaviors, and following typical routines and schedules. An inclusive educational experience throughout one's academic career naturally provides adequate role models, age appropriate instruction, access to engaging information, high expectations, and the opportunity to learn about and get along with the diversity that makes up the human experience.

So where do students with disabilities learn skills like making a bed and change for a dollar? These skills can best be taught in the environments and typical routines in which they are most likely to be used. How many different ways can you think of to teach someone how to make a

bed during typical routines (assuming educational teams believe this is a high priority for learning)? When we open our minds to creative possibilities for teaching and learning, and rely on routines that are typical for all students, the possibilities can be endless. For example, learning to make a bed is best taught in the morning after a person wakes, or during camp or an afterschool/weekend/summer job or volunteer opportunity at a hospital or nursing home. Making change for a dollar can happen in the school store, purchasing lunch or snacks in the cafeteria, or in a marketing class in high school.

Lifelong habits of learning and working are inherently promoted and developed through participation in typical educational experiences and traditional rites of passages. These experiences lead to connections, career and educational opportunities, increased social relationships, and a greater likelihood for entering adulthood as valued, contributing members of communities. Students with disabilities and their families must actively begin planning for the future well before the end of high school. For all students, setting goals and having positive dreams evolve out of a wide variety of school experiences including classes, extracurricular activities, internships, community service, relationships, and after school jobs. Inclusion and participation in school activities helps students better understand what they want for their future.

After 30 plus years of research, we are learning that not only are students with disabilities learning more and learning faster when they are educated in the general education classroom and typical routines with support; students without disabilities are also excelling in schools where All Means All.

Mary Schuh, Ph.D. has been with the Institute on Disability at the University of New Hampshire since its inception in 1987, working to coordinate family and consumer leadership development and educational systems change in support of inclusive schools and communities. She directs the National Center on Inclusive Education and is a member of the SWIFT (schoolwide integrated framework for transformation) Leadership team.

About The SWIFT Center Where All Means All
SWIFT (Schoolwide Integrated Framework for Transformation), a national K-8 Center, provides academic and behavioral support to promote the learning and academic achievement of ALL students in their neighborhood schools and general education classrooms, including students with disabilities and those with the most extensive needs. Get involved with SWIFT by signing up for the email list, connecting via the SWIFT Talk Community of Practice, liking SWIFT on Facebook, and following SWIFT on Twitter and Pinterest to learn how school communities across the country are benefitting from SWIFT Center resources.

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CONTACT US

The Parent & Educator Connection provides support and resources for families and teachers. For more information please contact the Parent & Educator Facilitator in your service center.

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The mission of the Mississippi Bend Area Education Agency is to improve teaching and learning for all students through active partnerships and assertive leadership in a climate of mutual respect.

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