



A newsletter from the Parent-Educator Connection
for families and educators of students receiving special education services
Volume 22 Issue 1 Fall 2008

Creating Solutions: Skills to Effectively Resolve Differences

Last fall, the Parent-Educator Connection Program was planning and sponsoring a workshop to enable parents and educators to communicate in a more productive way. Because of illness, this workshop was cancelled. We thought this was such an important topic that we wanted to once again offer it to our community. The following article from Fall 2007 Partners will give you details about the workshop. The dates and times are correct. We hope to see all of you there!

Would you like to be able to communicate better with your child's teachers and other professionals? Would you like to learn what it takes to be a good listener? Would you like to be a real problem-solver? Well, here is your opportunity!

The Parent-Educator Connection is sponsoring a workshop on **November 19, 2008**, at the Mississippi Bend Area Education Agency, Bettendorf. The workshop will start at **8:30 A.M.** and conclude at **3:15 P.M.**

About the Workshop:

The goal of the workshop is to help parents be more effective in raising concerns regarding their student's education in a way that will contribute to the creation of solutions and increase the likelihood that parents and educators will work together collaboratively to resolve their differences in the best interests of the student. The workshop will also provide parents the opportunity to learn some of the core problem resolution skills that have been presented to educators in mediation skills training programs.

As a result of attending the workshop, parents will be able to use enhanced listening and communication skills to create more positive working relationships with educators and employ interest-based negotiation as a problem-solving tool.

About the Trainer:

Pat Carlson is an Associate Professor at Iowa State University in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction. She currently teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in special education. Dr. Carlson received her Master of Science degree in learning disabilities from Indiana University-Bloomington and her bachelor and doctorate degrees from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Her doctorate degree is in behavioral disorders and administration. She taught children/youth with learning and behavior problems for ten years in Iowa and Nebraska prior to coming to Iowa State University. Dr. Carlson is a special education mediator for the Iowa Department of Education.

Intended Audience:

Parents, educators and AEA staff.

Contact:

If you are interested in attending this free workshop, please contact Carol Aden at 563-344-6287 or 1-800-947-2329. Email: caden@aea9.k12.ia.us.



Inside This Issue!

	Page
Early Childhood Special Education Services	2
Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program for 4-Year-Old Children.....	2
Improving Communication	3
What's New in the Parent-Educator Library	4
What is Curriculum-Based Measurement?	4
Transition	5
Iowa Core Curriculum	5

Early Childhood Special Education Services

The Early Childhood Special Education Department provides a variety of services to families with children from birth to school age in cooperation with local school districts.

If there is a concern about a child's hearing, speech, vision, development, behavior, physical movement or there is a known medical diagnosis that affects a child's learning, parents or professionals should call the Mississippi Bend Area Education Agency.

A referral for assistance or information can be made by calling our offices.

In **Scott County**, call the Early Childhood Center at **(563) 344-6271 or 1-800-947-2329**;

in **Clinton County** call **(563) 242-6454**;

in **Jackson County** call **(563) 652-5621**;

in **Muscatine, eastern Cedar, and northern Louisa Counties** call **(563) 263-8476**.

There is no charge for our services.

What can you expect if you make a referral to the AEA's Early Childhood Services?

A secretary will take some basic information from you to better direct your call. Depending on your primary concern, a developmental screening or a hearing screening will be scheduled for your child. Based on the results of the screening, a variety of services may be considered by you and our team, which may include:

- Educational evaluation and intervention planning
- Speech-language evaluation and therapy
- Audiological services
- Occupational or physical therapy services
- Behavior management assistance
- Home teaching program
- Toddler language and play groups
- District classroom program
- Parent support and education
- Preschool consultation



A plan will be developed if your child needs help that we may be able to provide. The staff will coordinate services with other agencies that may be working with your child or will assist you in locating community services.

Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program for Four-Year-Old Children

From Iowa Dept. of Education website.

The Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program for Four-Year-Old Children was established in 2007 when Governor Culver signed House File 877. The purpose of the statewide preschool program is to expand the opportunity for Iowa's young children to access quality preschool environments and enter school ready to learn. With these newly approved programs, the state will be providing access to approximately 4,341 more 4-year-olds. We have several school districts in our AEA who are participating in this program.

Governor Culver said, "Every child in Iowa deserves the best start as they begin their educational journey. We are offering a greater number of Iowa's youngest citizens the opportunity for a solid beginning."

Districts applied for the competitive state grant to provide at least 10 hours a week of quality preschool instruction through collaborative community partnerships. A total of 161 school districts applied for the grant. The Iowa Department of Education selected the school districts to receive funding based on several criteria. Priority was given to high-poverty districts currently without preschool programs. Also considered were collaborative efforts with community early childhood partners and district size.

The 2008 legislature appropriated \$15 million for 2008-2009, which is the second school year the preschool program has been available to Iowa school districts.

If you would like more information on this program, please contact your local Early Childhood Center at the AEA.

Bettendorf AEA (563) 359-1371
Clinton AEA (563) 242-6454
Muscatine AEA (563) 263-8476



Improving Communication



TIPS FOR PARENTS

by Connie B. Fanselow
ASK Family Resource Center

Listen. Don't put up walls by assuming you won't like what you hear. Try to keep an open mind even if your views differ from those of the educators. The better you hear and understand their point of view, the better equipped you are to challenge it if you disagree.

Boil it down to the essentials and build from there. If you try to deal with too many issues, none get the attention they need, so prioritize. Focus on the most crucial points now and work your way down the list over time.

Put the really important stuff in writing. Taking the time to write a formal letter to make a request helps you organize your thoughts and evidence, creates a clear record, and lets educators know this is an issue you take very seriously.

Ask for clarification whenever you need it. Be persistent in asking questions and expecting good answers to them. It is very difficult to be comfortable in your own decisions or confident in the opinions of educators if you do not understand what they proposing for your child and why.

Expect and be open to full explanations of the reasons educators have for recommending a particular course of action for the child. If they have a well-developed plan for how they believe your child should be taught, they will be able to explain the plan to you in a way that makes it understandable to you.

Know your own emotional triggers. Do your best to think through situations that you know are upsetting to you and plan for how you can respond or calm yourself in the moment. Write down key points ahead of time so that if your emotional buttons get pushed you have something in mind to fall back on and help keep you focused.

Ask for time for careful consideration of the options when you feel you need it. Educators often complain that parents agree with them at meetings and then go home and change their minds. If you feel you need more time to make a decision, don't allow yourself to be pressured into instant action.

Give educators a chance. You will probably never get what you consider to be the perfect plan for your child, but recognize when it's time to give a reasonable plan a try. Just because you accept an offer, it doesn't mean you can't ask to make changes or try something else if it proves less than successful. Acknowledge their efforts.

Give things time to work. If you are frustrated by a child's lack of progress or have reservations about a proposed program, it's hard to wait to see improvement, but few techniques or strategies show dramatic change overnight. Most programs need time to test their effectiveness for an individual child. If the approach to learning is changed too often, your child may just become confused and you may not be able to identify what works and what doesn't.



TIPS FOR EDUCATORS

by Connie B. Fanselow
ASK Family Resource Center

Listen. Don't put up walls by assuming that you always know better than the parent. Be willing to take into account what works for them at home. The better you hear and understand their point of view, the better the chance for finding solutions that work for everyone.

Demonstrate to parents that you respect and value their unique expertise and their fundamental understanding of their own child and their child's needs.

Be prepared to fully explain your reasons for recommending a particular course of action for the child in a way that makes sense to parents. A parent who doesn't fully understand what you are proposing is very unlikely to agree to it.

Use language that is easily understood, but take care not to condescend or "talk down" to parents. They may not be fully versed in the same jargon you use professionally, and may need to have information reframed in a way that makes sense to them, but most people will tend to withdraw from a conversation if they feel they are being "insulted" for their lack of understanding.

Don't press for instant decisions from the parent. Ever wonder why parents seem to agree to things at a meeting and then change their minds as soon as they leave? It's because they feel pressured to make a quick decision—sometime even if they might have made the same decision after more thoughtful consideration. If they feel pressured into it, it doesn't feel like their decision. Give them time to come back with questions and gain more clarification if necessary.

Take your own emotions into account. You are the professionals, but that doesn't mean your emotional buttons aren't vulnerable too. Do your best to keep an objective viewpoint on comments you perceive as personal or professional criticism and not let the focus shift away from the child's needs because of the adults' feelings.

Recognize the urgency and frustration that parents feel about their child's educational progress. If you sense opposition from parents about continuing to pursue methods or strategies, or trying new ones because a student is struggling, it is probably because every day that things don't go well at school feels like precious time lost to a parent. Taking time to explore strategies may be necessary, but, in doing so, understand the parents' impatience and acknowledge their concerns about showing progress.

Keep in mind and be willing to acknowledge to parents that no matter how much you care about your students, the parents' investment in their child will always exceed yours. Sometimes it is important to say the things that seem obvious.





What's New in the Parent-Educator Library?

Richard Levoie in the DVD, *Motivation Breakthrough*, demonstrates six basic motivational styles and strategies for inspiring the most withdrawn and reluctant student. He explains how to tap into an apathetic or learning-disabled student's secret need for prestige, power, praise or reward.

Jason Kingsley and Mitchell Levitz, two young men with Down Syndrome, share their innermost thoughts, feelings, hopes and dreams and experiences growing up with Down Syndrome in their book, *Count Us In, Growing Up with Down Syndrome*.

Teaching Children with Down Syndrome about Their Bodies, Boundaries, and Sexuality by Terri Couwenhoven, M.S. Gives parents the background and confidence to speak to their children about their bodies, personal boundaries, privacy, sexuality, etc.

The book, *Teaching Gifted Kids in the Regular Classroom* by Susan Winebrenner, contains strategies and techniques teachers can use to meet the academic needs of the gifted and talented. The separate CD includes all the reproducible forms from the book plus others—more than 80 in all.

Community-based Vocational Training by Jill Wheeler shows special educators how to provide community-based vocational training to students with developmental disabilities.

The following materials are about Autism Spectrum Disorders. The first two are written for preschoolers.

My Social Stories Book by Carol Gray & Abbie Leigh White is a series of questions and answers about social and life skills. *More Than Words* by Fern Sussman is a step-by-step guide for parents of preschool children with Autism and other social communication difficulties.

A resource for teachers & parents is the kit *That's What's Different about Me* by Heather McCracken. It includes a DVD and manual plus five story/coloring books to help foster social understanding and respect for individual differences, particularly children with autism.

These books are also about autism.

Just Give Him the Whale! by Paula Kluth & Patrick Schwarz includes ways to use fascinations, areas of expertise, and strengths to support students with autism. *Girls Under the Umbrella of Autism Spectrum Disorders* by Lori Ernsperger, Ph.D. & Danielle Wendel.

Asperger Syndrome and Sensory Issues by Brenda Smith Myles, Katherine Tapscott Cook, Nancy E. Miller, Louann Rinner, and Lisa A. Robbins.

Perfect Targets: Asperger Syndrome and Bullying by Rebekah Heinrichs.

A Land We Can Share by Paula Kluth & Kelly Chandler-Olcott. Teaching literacy to students with autism.

How to Find Work That Works for People with Asperger Syndrome by Gail Hawkins.

Career Training and Personal Planning for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders by Vicki Lundine & Catherine Smith.

Realizing the College Dream with Autism or Asperger Syndrome by Ann Palmer.



What is Curriculum-Based Measurement?

By Cindy Laughead

You may hear the words "Curriculum-Based Measurement (CBM)" in your child's school in the coming year. What do these words mean and what do they have to do with your child? Curriculum-Based Measurement (or CBM) is a method of measuring and monitoring how a student is doing in a particular subject on the goals that have been established for him/her. Mississippi Bend AEA and many school districts have been using this method of monitoring progress for a number of years but will be expanding its use in the coming year to help even more students achieve their educational and behavioral goals. It is basically a way of

CBM

collecting and using information about your child's progress that will provide the data needed to make good decisions about their education. They will use graphs to create a picture of the data gathered to help all of the team understand how your child is doing on the goal that is being monitored. It can show when something needs to change in what is being done to help make improvements and when those interventions are no longer needed. This process works well because it does not interfere with the regular curriculum. The student is asked to do the things they are being taught. They are asked to read out loud and to solve some math problems. This means that the material they are given will look like what they are studying. Your child's teacher may discuss the results of this monitoring with you at an IEP or 504 meeting. If you have any questions about CBM, you can ask your child's teacher or AEA representative about it.



TRANSITION

W

hat is a Transition Advisory Board (TAB)?

By Carol Aden

A TAB is a Transition Advisory Board which consists of secondary and post-secondary educators, human and social service agencies, parents, community resource providers, and workforce development organizations who help support the transition of high school students with disabilities into adulthood. The TAB acts as a communication forum, identifies issues and gaps, attempts to find solutions and makes recommendations for change. Currently there are three TABs in the Mississippi Bend Area Education Agency region; one in Clinton County, one in Muscatine County and one in Scott County. The TAB is always looking for new members (especially parents) so if you are interested in joining and would like to attend an upcoming meeting, please see our website: www.aea9.k12.ia.us/tab , or contact Carol Aden, Parent-Educator Facilitator, at 563-344-6287.

Future TAB sponsored events include a Person-Centered Future Planning workshop (PCFP) which is a great transition planning tool.

Two of our TABs are organizing **PCFP workshops** to be held this fall. The first one will be at the **Eldridge Library on November 17th** (one morning session and one afternoon session) and the second will be held at the **Clinton Community College Technology Center in Clinton on November 18th** (one morning session and one afternoon session). The Muscatine TAB is considering doing a PCFP in the spring.

At these workshops, student-centered teams will work to clarify the student's values, capacities, gifts and goals. Teams will learn to create "maps" to show the student's vision for the future and other important areas such as strengths, preferences and background. Action planning will be put into practice to keep the team focused and moving forward on behalf of the individual. PCFP is a great way to begin or boost transition planning with individual student teams.

If you think you may know of a student, family or teacher who would like to get their team involved in this process, contact Carol Aden in Bettendorf (563-344-6287) or Kathy Anson in Clinton (563-242-6454).



Iowa Core Curriculum

By Barb Brunkan

On May 1, 2008, Governor Chet Culver signed Senate File 2216 requiring full implementation of the *Iowa Core Curriculum* in Iowa high schools by June 1, 2012, and Kindergarten through grade eight by 2014-15. The legislation establishes the essential content and instruction that each and every student must experience in:

Literacy – Shifts from a primary focus on reading and writing in English/Language Arts classes to the integration and practical application of all five literacy skills—reading, writing, speaking, viewing and listening

Mathematics – Shifts from memorizing and practicing facts and procedures to understanding and applying concepts, practices, and facts

Science – Shifts from lecture and over-emphasis on textbook readings to learning through actively investigating, designing experiments, questioning, exploring and defending conclusions

Social Studies – Shifts from lecture and recitation of discrete pieces of information to the acquisition of knowledge and skills associated with the economic, political, civic, and social forces that are relevant to the world in which students live

21st Century Skills – Shifts from a traditional system that may not include incorporation of these skills into curriculum for all, to one that requires that all students leave school prepared to succeed in the complex new 21st century. Essential concepts and skills sets include employability skills, financial literacy, health literacy, and technology literacy

What do parents need to know?

Parents are assured that the Iowa Core Curriculum:

- Sets high expectations for *each* and *every* student
- Provides rigorous learning for *all* students
- Provides relevance for *all* students
- Will support post secondary success for *all* students
- Defines the core learning for *all* students

What can parents expect?

With the core defined and implemented across Iowa, parents can expect:

- Increased focus on learning
- Changes in teaching approaches
- Targets from which to measure student progress in Special Education
- Raised and expanded expectations for special needs students



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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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Serving school districts: Bettendorf, Davenport, North Scott and Pleasant Valley

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Serving school districts: Andrew, Bellevue, Calamus-Wheatland, Camanche, Central Clinton, Clinton, Delwood, East Central, Northeast, Maquoketa and Preston

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Serving school districts: Bennett, Columbus Jct., Durant, Louisa-Muscatine, Muscatine, West Liberty and Wilton
Any one of them can also be reached by calling **1-800-947-2329**.

Tete Long, Bettendorf **563-344-6201** or **1-800-947-AEA9** **Email: tlong@aea9.k12.ia.us**

Director of Special Education



Websites of Interest

www.askresource.org .ASK Family Resource Center

www.lda-ia.org Learning Disabilities Association of Iowa

www.aea9.k12.ia.us Mississippi Bend Area Education Agency—This publication, **PARTNERS**, is available on this site. Click on Programs & Services. Next, click Special Education, then click on Parent-Educator Connection, and in the left column click on Partners Newsletter.



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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.