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Michael Behrmann, Ed.D.
Principal Investigator
mbehrman@gmu.edu

Lynn Wiley, Ph.D.
Director of T/TAC@GMU
hwiley@gmu.edu

Kay Klein, M.Ed.
Assistant Director of T/TAC@GMU
mklein1@gmu.edu

Nancy Anderson, M.Ed.
Special Education Policies and Procedures Coordinator
nanders7@gmu.edu

Bonnie Bell Carter, Ph.D.
Secondary Education Policies & Moderate Disabilities Coordinator
bcarter6@gmu.edu

Karen Berlin, M.Ed.
Autism & Severe Disabilities Coordinator
kberlin@gmu.edu

Sheryl Fahey, M.A.
Early Childhood Coordinator
sfahey@gmu.edu

Judith Fontana, Ph.D.
Curriculum & Instruction Projects Coordinator, ICT, SIM
jfontan1@gmu.edu

Kris Ganley, M.Ed.
Early Childhood Coordinator, Autism
kganley@gmu.edu

Soojin Jang, M.Ed.
Assistive Technology Coordinator
sjang6@gmu.edu

Estela Landeros, M.Ed.
Assistive Technology Coordinator
elandero@gmu.edu

Diane Loomis, Ph.D.
Transition & Curriculum Coordinator
dloomis@gmu.edu

Nikki Miller, Ed.D.
Curriculum & Instruction Coordinator
nmiller7@gmu.edu

Seunghun Ok, M.Ed.
T/TAC Online Coordinator
sok@gmu.edu

Dionne Paul-Wiggins
T/TAC Events Coordinator
dpaulwig@gmu.edu

Jackie Petersen, MLS
T/TAC Librarian
jpetersk@gmu.edu

Sandra Price
Administrative Office Support
spritecc@gmu.edu

Jeff Richards
Graphic/Web Designer
jricharc@gmu.edu

Judy Stockton, M.A.
Curriculum & Mild/Moderate Disabilities Coordinator
jstockt1@gmu.edu

Clare Talbert, M.Ed.
T/TAC Online Coordinator
ctalber1@gmu.edu

Northwestern Consortium T/TAC
This newsletter is a collaborative effort by the Northwestern Consortium of the T/TACs, which includes James Madison University, co-directed by Cheryl Henderson and Melinda Bright, and George Mason University, directed by Lynn Wiley.
The process of dropping out of school is not a new phenomenon. Each year, thousands of students exit school informally and most do not return. Moreover, certain groups of students are at greater risk of dropping out as compared to their peers. Students with disabilities are one of the most vulnerable populations for school dropout and are twice as likely to drop out as compared to their nondisabled peers. The highest dropout rates for students with disabilities exist among students with learning disabilities and emotional disturbance.

Dropping out is a process of disengagement that begins early, sometimes as early as elementary school. Students at risk of dropping out show signs of disengaging and pulling back from school long before they actually leave. Students disengage due to negative interactions with adults; academic classes perceived as irrelevant; and a lack of satisfaction during their high school years. As a result, students develop negative attitudes toward school. They skip classes or do not attend school altogether. Oftentimes, students earn low grades, are faced with academic failure, and engage in disruptive behavior. In addition, students who are at risk for dropping out seem less interested or concerned about school. They have low expectations for their own success and believe that those around them (i.e., teachers and peers) share their views and hold low expectations for them and their futures as well.

As educators and practitioners continue to seek effective interventions to prevent dropout, they must focus on identifying, monitoring, and addressing risk factors that are influenced by teachers (e.g., academic performance, peer and adult interactions, attendance, and behavior). As a result, teachers’ roles in dropout prevention are critical. Teachers have the opportunity to intervene naturally and frequently within their classrooms each day. Teachers can provide support and opportunities for students that buffer "push effects" that lead to dropout (e.g., academic failure; feelings of alienation and isolation; negative attitudes toward school; poor relationships with teachers and peers; and antisocial behavior). In this practice guide, evidence-based strategies and recommendations are provided that teachers may implement within their classrooms to maximize student engagement and buffer "push effects.

In order for teachers to effectively address dropout related factors, it is imperative to view the classroom within the context of three systems: (1) environmental, including adult interactions and peer relationships; (2) instructional, including both curriculum and instruction; and (3) behavioral, including expectations and rules. Within each of these systems are key variables that greatly affect students and their in-school experiences. When properly managed, these three systems work collectively to increase school engagement for students with disabilities.

Environmental Systems

Environmental systems consist of the physical setting, schedules and routines, and interactions and relationships. Students spend a large portion of their school day in the classroom. A safe and inviting environment facilitates learning, increases school attendance, and encourages students to stay connected and involved, both academically and socially. As such, it is imperative that students feel comfortable and supported while at school, especially in the classroom. Teachers can assist students by implementing the following recommendations.

Create a personalized and orderly learning environment. To ensure success, teachers should manage an organized, efficient, and functional learning environment. Students should be familiar with the classroom schedule and procedures. Classroom procedures and routines create structure and minimize negative interactions and inappropriate behavior, while providing continuity.

Build rapport with students. Teachers are not only role models, but also ambassadors—ambassadors of academic instruction, social skills instruction, self-esteem building, goal setting, and relationship building. Therefore, teachers should create welcoming environments that provide clear guidelines and multiple opportunities for success for all students, while considering individual student needs, including students from culturally diverse backgrounds. Make a commitment to ALL students.

Assist students with relationship building. Students at risk of dropping out report feelings of alienation and isolation due to poor relationships with peers and adults.
Students need to know that teachers care about them and their future. Students desire acceptance and a sense of belonging and approval from peers and adults. Students want teachers who listen to them and are concerned with what they have to say. Students often need assistance in building relationships in a variety of settings with both peers and adults. Their ability to build and maintain positive relationships is facilitated when teachers model and reinforce positive relationships with both peers and adults and frequently acknowledge positive interactions. Students also benefit when teachers highlight the importance of positive relationships both in and outside the classroom.

**Instructional Systems**

Instructional systems consist of student assessment, curriculum, and instruction. Before students with disabilities physically leave school, most have “academically disengaged” and are simply attending classes. For these students, dropping out is imminent unless they become actively and consistently engaged in the learning process. The following strategies can help teachers increase academic engagement within the classroom.

Assess a student’s skills and knowledge in advance. Identify the aspect of the curriculum or subject area that may cause difficulty for a student. When addressing “areas of need,” provide students with multiple ways to succeed academically and implement evidence-based interventions and strategies that ensure individual student success.

Identify the student’s goals and your goals for that student—set high expectations and provide support. Monitor student progress, identify potential barriers to success, and provide accommodations and support. Celebrate success!

**Make content meaningful and functional.** Provide rigor and relevance during instruction. The classroom experience needs to be relevant to the “real” world. Students must view their classroom experiences as both applicable and significant. Embed pertinent examples within daily academic instruction. Make content meaningful for ALL students. Be certain to include culturally relevant examples throughout the curriculum and provide culturally diverse students with equal opportunities to participate during instruction. Effective teachers teach the whole student and respond to individual needs. Effective teachers believe that ALL students can achieve and act upon their beliefs.

**Maximize time on academic tasks and minimize time on noninstructional activities.** Use instructional time efficiently, provide multiple means of engagement, and provide frequent reinforcement and acknowledgment. Maximize use of active or direct teaching procedures with groups of students.

“Emphasize the big picture.” Encourage and remind students often of the importance of academic success and how it relates to their future as productive adults. Highlight the need for achievement within the classroom and its connection to their future success in secondary transition, postsecondary education, supported employment, or independent living.

**Behavioral Systems**

Behavioral systems consist of expectations and rules; reward systems, discipline, and effective consequences; and a behavior curriculum and social skills instruction. Behaviors are prerequisites for academics, and effective teachers have high expectations for both student achievement and behavior. Oftentimes, students’ inappropriate behaviors result in academic failure. Problem behaviors coupled with academic difficulties or prior academic failure are key risk factors predictive of school dropout. However, a large number of students have not been taught specific schoolwide expectations or classroom rules and continue to experience academic difficulty, even academic failure. Classroom rules may exist, but students are not completely aware of when and how to effectively display these behaviors, thereby resulting in behavioral errors (i.e., inappropriate behavior). The following principles will guide teachers in effectively addressing behavioral concerns within the classroom.

**Teach, model, practice, and reinforce/acknowledge classroom rules.** Rules should be stated positively and kept to a minimum. As a rule of thumb, limit classroom rules to a maximum of five. Do not simply post rules. Be certain to review rules persistently, making certain the rules remain relevant and students no longer need clarification. Apply rules consistently, considering the background of ALL students. Make certain rules are explicit, fair, and equitable.

**Teach social skills as a proactive approach.** Teaching social skills involves the following steps: (1) teaching, (2) modeling, (3) practicing and (4) performance feedback (i.e., providing feedback and positive reinforcement in the form of acknowledgment, and often times, rewards, both verbal and non-verbal. Specifically, both verbal acknowledgement and reward are stated positively and are behavior specific. In many cases, acknowledging and rewarding may be considered one in the same; however, often times, depending on the developmental stage or chronological age of the student and the specific
practices outlined within a program or school’s discipline plan, they may be viewed differently. As such, one may be preferred over the other. In either case, it is essential that students are positively reinforced during social skills instruction, once they have had a chance to model the specific skill, including an example and non-example. Moreover, performance feedback is essential and helps to ensure acquisition of skills.

Furthermore, social skills instruction teaches and reinforces replacement behaviors. Students learn appropriate behaviors when replacement behaviors are effectively taught. However, replacement behaviors must be consistently and persistently reinforced. Teaching social skills is the “unwritten curriculum” that, if not addressed, will greatly impede the implementation of the written curriculum. Teachers may also imbed social skills instruction within academic lessons through daily instruction.

**Provide multiple opportunities for practice and feedback.** To retain new behaviors, students must be given specific, positive feedback and opportunities to practice the behaviors. Students learn appropriate behavior in the same manner they learn to read—through instruction, practice, feedback, and encouragement. Re-teach as needed! Even though a specific skill was previously taught, multiple opportunities must be consistently provided students to practice. Multiple opportunities for practice increase the likelihood that the specific skill or behavior will occur more often. The additional opportunities to practice build fluency, during which, specific, positive feedback is provided to maintain and further reinforce the desired behavior.

Effective strategies implemented across environmental, instructional, and behavioral systems help ameliorate classroom effects faced by students who are at risk of dropping out. Teachers are invaluable and the implementation of effective classroom practices represents a key and vital dropout prevention strategy at the local level. However, dropout prevention is not primarily a teacher issue, it is a systems issue; whereas, school-wide systems should ensure success for both students and teachers. As such, teachers must receive support when implementing strategies within the classroom (i.e., across environmental, instructional, and behavioral systems) to effectively address dropout and related factors. Teachers’ efforts should not go unnoticed, but instead should be acknowledged, reinforced, and rewarded. As a result, teachers will feel empowered, as will their students.

**Contact Information**

For more information, contact:
Sandra Covington Smith, Ph.D.
Research Associate
NDPC-SD
864-656-1817
Email: sandras@clemson.edu

**Additional Resources**

Inside every student is a graduate: A boost can make the difference between dropping out or graduating. Retrieved April 10, 2007, from www.boostup.org/HS%20Brochure%20082806%20ENG.pdf.

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Transition Assessment and Students with Intellectual Disabilities: Resources and Strategies

Sponsored by Virginia Department of Education and Virginia Department of Education’s Training & Technical Assistance Centers

Thursday, December 3, 2009
Omni Hotel
Newport News, VA
Or
Friday, December 4, 2009
Four Points by Sheraton Manassas Battlefield
Manassas, VA

Mary E. Morningstar, PhD
University of Kansas

This training will offer participants an extended opportunity to learn about effective comprehensive approaches to assess students with intellectual disabilities during transition. Participants will learn about aligning assessment from the perspective of preparing youth and families to plan for the transition to supported adulthood. This will be accomplished by taking participants through a series of phases of assessment that start with determining the student’s and family’s vision for the future. Next, critical transition domain areas will be identified and specific areas for assessment will be addressed. The wide range of assessment approaches will then be discussed, with audience members involved in determining the most appropriate formal, informal, environmental and person-centered approaches to use. Participants will have hands-on opportunities to review several of the most current assessment measures and approaches used in the field. Adaptations and modification strategies will also be shared, as well as approaches for use with students with the most significant intellectual disabilities.

Schedule: 8:30 am-3:30pm (lunch provided)
Cost: FREE
Register online: www.ttaonline.org

Dr. Mary E. Morningstar is an associate professor in the Department of Special Education at the University of Kansas and Director of the Transition Coalition, a research and training center for the transition to adulthood and secondary special education for youth with disabilities. The Transition Coalition is designed to maximize transition professional development at national, state and local levels through online training and technical assistance. For the past several years, Dr. Morningstar has co-directed the KU Secondary/Transition Masters Program and the KU TranCert, (an online graduate certificate program in transition). Mary is also the Program Coordinator for the teacher licensure program in severe disabilities. In this role, she is merging her experiences as a former teacher of students with intellectual disabilities with her work in transition. She recently received a federal personnel preparation grant to train teachers in an online severe disabilities program.
The August 2009 Issue Brief of The Alliance for Excellent Education states that every school day more than 7,000 students nationwide become dropouts, which means that approximately 1.3 million students per year do not graduate with their peers. Those students who DO graduate with a high school diploma, on average, go on to earn higher salaries and enjoy a more comfortable and secure lifestyle compared with those who do not graduate. National, state, and local economies benefit from these graduates because they are able to earn higher wages, which means they have the ability to contribute through their purchasing power and payment of income taxes. Consequently, high school graduates are not only able to earn a more secure living for themselves, but they also significantly improve the nation’s ability to compete in an increasingly global economy. Unfortunately, in 2007, the U.S. ranked 18th in high school graduation rates compared with other developed countries (Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development, 2007).

The time to focus on increasing the graduation rates of students, including those with disabilities, is when they enter the school system at the pre-kindergarten level. At this point, they are developing a strong foundation for learning. Each successive school year, we help them build upon their knowledge and experience and prepare them for the following year. Ultimately, the major indicator of a successful educational system is the number of students who, after years of schooling, graduate from high school prepared for the workforce and/or post-secondary education. Thus, you can see that a student’s journey to high school graduation actually begins when he or she enters the doors of that first school building on that very first day of school.

What can we do? Guidance from a number of educational organizations suggests strategies for preventing student dropout rates by providing a high quality education that considers individual student needs. The National Education Association (NEA) developed a prevention and intervention plan that addresses the educational process that begins with the very early years of a student’s learning experience, continues through to secondary programs that focus on career and workforce readiness and ends with high school graduation. The entire plan is comprised of 12 strategies, some that involve changes to state policy, as well as an emphasis on greater involvement by communities and families in their public school systems. However, the strategies highlighted and discussed in this article are those that we, as educators, can use as we work in classrooms with our students. Although some of these require a significant investment of resources, time, and energy, each strategy is based on the premise that every child deserves a school with quality programs, qualified staff, and an environment that supports effective teaching and active learning. To access the full document of the NEA prevention and intervention plan, as well as other information related to dropout prevention, go to http://www.nea.org/dropout.

1. **Early Intervention Pre-Kindergarten Through Grade 12**

Provide high quality, universal preschool and full-day kindergarten, strong elementary school programs that ensure students are doing grade-level work, and middle school programs that give students access to algebra, science, and other foundation courses crucial to success in high school and post-secondary experiences.

It is important to keep in mind that each year of school brings an opportunity for teachers to provide an environment conducive to learning, where
social-emotional factors appropriate for the age of the students are considered and, when necessary, directly taught. A teacher also must ensure that each student is available for learning because tomorrow’s instruction will build upon today’s learning.

2. Family Involvement in Students’ Education

Develop creative strategies that encourage families to be actively involved in their children’s education from preschool through high school graduation. Assist all families in becoming involved, including those in poverty, those from minority communities, and those struggling with other issues that may challenge a family’s support of their children’s academic, social, and emotional development.

Discover how each family might be able to become involved in their child’s education. Encourage any appropriate level of involvement without judgment and reinforce a family’s willingness to support their student.

3. Individual Attention for Each Student

Make sure that students receive individual attention in safe schools, in smaller learning communities within larger schools, in small classes, and in programs (summer, weekends, before and after school) that provide tutoring and review of school instruction.

Each of us appreciates recognition. Provide a supportive environment for each of your students by recognizing them for an individual accomplishment or effort, no matter how small.

4. Monitoring of Academic Progress

Use a variety of measures to monitor student academic progress throughout the school year. Use the data to ensure that students do not fall behind academically.

Involve the students in their own progress monitoring. Discuss the work they need to do to achieve a long-range goal and the benchmarks that indicate progress. Have them check and record their own progress and celebrate their achievement when they reach their goal. Some students may need to have “mini-goals” celebrated as enthusiastically as others celebrate their long-range goal.

5. Community Involvement in Dropout Prevention

Involve the greater community in activities that encourage students to achieve in academics and to graduate from high school. Promote family-friendly policies within organizations and businesses that make it easier for parents to attend parent-teacher conferences and meetings. Suggest opportunities for volunteerism and community-led projects in schools and, whenever possible, have middle and high school students participate in community-based, real-world learning experiences.

As a teacher, schedule individual school conferences for times that make it possible for the parents of your students to attend. Emphasize to parents how important it is for you to meet with them to discuss their child’s academic progress. During the conference, note any information about the family that might help you involve the parent more in some aspect of their child’s learning experiences.

6. Professional Development and Resources for Educators

Ensure that all personnel have the training and resources they need to prevent students from dropping out. Educators should have professional development that focuses on eliminating the factors that lead to student dropout. For example, training should be offered on the issues related to understanding the diverse needs of students, particularly those with disabilities and those at risk of dropping out of school.

Educators should have the resources and equipment they need to get their job done. These include current Local Educational Agencies (LEA)-adopted textbooks, appropriate hands-on learning materials, computers and related technology, and a safe, healthy teaching and learning environment.

7. Career and Workforce Readiness Programs for Students

Increase quality career education and workforce preparation programs in schools so that students understand the
relationship between school and life after graduation. Integrate the technology and instruction necessary for students to develop the skills they need to successfully achieve school completion and the foundation for reaching post-secondary goals.

8. Graduation Options for Students

In partnership with community colleges with programs in career and technical fields, as well as alternative schools, make an effort to expand the options for students to earn high school diplomas. Research the programs offering alternate options for graduation that may exist within your own school system.

9. Accurately Report Data on Dropout Rates

Monitor and accurately report dropout rates, gathering data on key student subgroups (i.e., gender, race, economic, disabilities, etc.). Use data on local and state benchmarks that support school completion and graduation to help guide instruction and educational activities within your school building.

Where can you begin? Use the resources that are highlighted in this edition of The T/TAC Telegram to learn more about dropout prevention and what you, given your role in the educational process, can do to support students. An article that may be particularly beneficial for classroom teachers is included in this newsletter. “Addressing Dropout Related Factors at the Local Level: Recommendations for Teachers,” written by Dr. Sandra Covington Smith, offers suggestions that are directly applicable in classrooms and schools. As previously stated, a student’s journey to high school graduation begins when he or she enters the doors of that first school building on that very first day of school. Our efforts to support all students in their educational journey will require a significant investment of resources, time, and energy, but the ultimate outcome has long-lasting consequences for each student and the greater community. By educating ourselves on ways to prevent student dropout, we are increasing the chances that our students will one day be part of the population of high school graduates who are successful, productive individuals in society with a variety of positive choices for their future.

Students who drop out of high school have fewer choices throughout their lives. Data indicates that high school graduates, when compared with those who did not graduate, contribute more to the economy and society through purchasing power, taxes, and civic participation such as voting, volunteering, and community involvement (Dianda, 2008). Attention to the challenge of supporting all students through to graduation requires a collaborative effort between government officials, state and local agencies and organizations, school districts and educational organizations, as well as, all other community entities interested in ensuring that our children develop into healthy, productive adults who have good choices for career and work and become contributing members of society.

References:


Newspaper headlines announce, and journal articles summarize, the characteristics of unsuccessful schools. These include low academic and behavioral expectations, staff who do not have access to effective professional development, and use of punitive discipline strategies without a school-wide system designed to inform students about how well or poorly they are performing (Jenson, Evans, Morgan & Rhode, 2006). Schools that are in disrepair, coupled with high rates of vandalism, are schools with negative academic and behavioral outcomes (Jenson, Evans, Morgan & Rhode, 2006). Malcolm Gladwell (2000), in his book, *The Tipping Point*, gives an example of the “broken window” phenomenon to highlight the dilemma that if one small window is broken it seems to give others permission to break all the windows.

The research is just as clear that strong instructional leadership coupled with high expectations, and a student-centered culture with data collection systems that support decision making, is a characteristic of successful schools (Jenson, Evans, Morgan & Rhode, 2006). The role of the principal as the instructional leader cannot be overemphasized. While leadership styles may vary, a principal must be decisive and engage in concrete actions to convey a vision for the school. Geoff Colvin (2007) in *7 Steps for Developing a Proactive School wide Discipline Plan: A Guide for Principals and Leadership Teams*, attempts to answer the question, “What does a principal do to provide support?”

Principals at successful schools encourage interventions that advocate high academic engagement, model and reinforce behaviors, and insist that teachers use evidence-based interventions. To establish a culture that supports proactive discipline and maintains high expectations, Colvin and Sprick (1999) identified thirteen strategies that are critical activities for principals to effect change in schools:

- Make a public statement of support
- Maintain standards
- Establish a leadership team
- Support the team members
- Guide the decision making process
- Take a leadership role in decision making
- Support the team meetings
- Provide recognition to the faculty and team for their work
- Serve as a point person for school-related groups
- Monitor implementation activities and provide feedback
- Review data and provide feedback regularly
- Ensure innovation is sustained
- Make a public statement of support

More importantly, successful schools support strategies designed to increase the number of students who graduate. The book, *Dropout Prevention Tools* (2003), by Franklin Schargel describes four categories of fifteen effective interventions:

- **Early Interventions**
  - Family involvement
  - Early childhood education
  - Reading and writing programs
- **Basic Core Strategies**
  - Mentoring and tutoring
  - Service learning
  - Alternative schooling
  - After school experiences
- **Making the Most of Instruction**
  - Professional development
  - Diverse learning styles and multiple intelligences

Let’s Change the Headline

Kay Klein, M.Ed., VDOE T/TAC at George Mason University
o Instructional technologies

o Individualized instruction

• Making the Most of the Wider Community

o Systematic renewal,

o Community collaboration,

o Career education and workforce readiness

o Safe schools

Schools must dedicate resources to create a safe and healthy school environment that will motivate students to stay in school and graduate. Teachers, administrators, families, and communities must embrace the philosophy of partnership and be committed to cleaning windows and repairing any cracks before they reach the tipping point.

References


Additional Resources ***


***These resources are available in the GMU Lending Library.
What comes to mind when you think of algebra? Solving equations in a high school class? Finding the value of $x$? More than likely it is not young children or elementary school. However, algebra is no longer the traditional course offered in middle school or high school, but “an established content strand in most, if not all, state standards for grades K to 12” (Van de Walle, Karp, & Bay-Williams, 2009, p.254).

Why is it important to focus on algebra? “Competence in algebra is linked to access to higher education, employment in better paying jobs, and, increasingly, the ability to earn a high school diploma” (Foegen, 2008, p.65). Therefore, algebra is potentially both a gate and a barrier (Lott, 2000). For many students, including those “with learning disabilities, developing proficiency in algebra represents a challenging, but necessary goal” (Foegen, 2008, p.65).

For a large number of children, particularly struggling learners, their perceptions of mathematics as a subject and of themselves as mathematicians are formed well before they enter a formal algebra class (Foegen, 2008; Allsopp, Kyger, & Lovin, 2007). All too often, these perceptions are not positive (Koepfer, deBettencourt, & Braziel as cited in Foegen, 2008). Deborah Ball (2009) notes that “There is some evidence that babies develop taste for food by not having too narrow a palette when they’re being fed lots of different tastes when they’re little. Kids decide they don’t like math because they’ve had a diet of math that’s like eating cardboard. It’s not delicious, so they don’t like it” (p.57).

So, how do we broaden the math palette of young children to include algebra? What does algebra instruction look like in the early grades? Smith and Thompson (as cited in Yackel, 1997, p. 276) assert that “it is possible to prepare children for different views of algebra – algebra as modeling, as pattern finding, or as the study of structure – by having them build ways of knowing and reasoning which makes those mathematical practices appear as different aspects of a central and fundamental way of thinking.” Rather than thinking of algebra as a specific skill, content, or activity, the focus should be on the underlying thinking and reasoning of the students (Yackel, 1997).

The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) algebra standard specifies the understanding, knowledge, and skills that students should acquire. “Instructional programs from pre-kindergarten through grade 12 should enable students to:

- Understand patterns, relations, and functions;
- Represent and analyze mathematical situations and structures using algebraic symbols;
- Use mathematical models to represent and understand quantitative relationships;
- Analyze change in various contexts” (NCTM, 2000)

“Patterns serve as the cornerstone of algebraic thinking” (Taylor-Cox, 2003, p.15). Using patterns as a component of the foundation for algebraic thinking and reasoning is a logical fit for young children, who “are not only capable of noticing patterns but often use this skill naturally to make sense of their world” (Moses, 2000, p.5). “Even before formal schooling, children develop beginning concepts related to patterns, functions and other algebraic topics. They learn repetitive songs, rhythmic chants, and poems that are based on repeating and growing patterns” (NCTM, 2000).

The NCTM Principles and Standards (2000) include the following expectations for the understanding of patterns within the algebra standard:

In Pre-Kindergarten through Grade 2 all students should:
• Sort, classify, and order objects by size, number, and other properties.

• Recognize, describe, and extend patterns such as sequences of sounds and shapes from one representation to another.

• Analyze how both repeating and growing patterns are generated.

In Grades 3 – 5 all students should:

• Describe, extend, and make generalizations about geometric and numeric patterns.

• Represent and analyze patterns and functions, using words, tables and graphs.

In Grades 6 - 8 all students should:

• Represent, analyze, and generalize a variety of patterns, graphs, words, and, when possible, symbolic rules.

• Relate and compare different forms of representation for a relationship.

• Identify functions as linear or nonlinear and contrast their properties from tables, graphs, or equations.

As students progress through elementary school, they should be analyzing the structure of a pattern, how it grows or changes, and then developing generalizations using their analysis. Their investigations of geometric and numerical patterns should be expressed in both words and symbols (NCTM, 2000). In the middle grades, students’ study of patterns should emphasize patterns that relate to linear functions. Tables, graphs, words, and symbolic expressions should be used to solve problems (NCTM, 2000). Algebraic thinking can be fostered for all children in the early grades and beyond by appropriately increasing the challenge and complexity of tasks and by ensuring and promoting mathematical dialogue with follow-up questions (Taylor-Cox, 2003; Yackel, 1997).

By introducing algebraic thinking and understanding into the mathematics diet of young children, the opportunity to improve outcomes for all students will be enhanced. Not only will math be more delicious, the likelihood of success as they move into the future will be increased.

References


Adolescent Literacy and the Strategic Instruction Model (SIM®)

Judith L. Fontana, Ph.D., VDOE T/TAC at George Mason University
SIM® Professional Developer: Content Enhancement Routines

This article provides an overview of the Strategic Instruction Model (SIM®), a two-pronged approach to improving the academic achievement of secondary students, and outlines Virginia’s commitment to adolescent literacy via SIM®.

Routines and strategies have evolved from research out of the University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning.

Origins of the Strategic Instruction Model
Since 1978, the Center for Research on Learning at the University of Kansas (kucl) has developed ways to help adolescents who struggle in school. The focus has been on reading writing and learning. The goal is to dramatically improve the performance of at-risk students through research-based interventions.

SIM® is referenced in Reading Next (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006) as an evidence-based approach that helps teachers meet the needs of “at risk adolescents.”

(“Unit Map” adapted from Lenz, Bulgren, Deshler and Boudah, 1994)

Content Enhancement Routines
Content Enhancement Routines (CERs) are tools teachers use in partnership with students. They are an approach to planning and delivering instruction to an academically diverse group of students. The goals are to promote mastery of critical content, enhance background information necessary for literacy, organize content, and explore concepts that are critical to comprehension and learning. Teachers are encouraged to identify the critical content of their subject and use the routines to engage students in planning and learning.

A FRAME has been used to illustrate details on CERs. The FRAMING Routine is one of 13 CERs. For details and videos go to www.ku-cl.org/sim/content.shtml.

Figure 1. Content Enhancement Routines
Planning routines are most effective when used consistently and with fidelity through
The Learning Strategies Curriculum (LSC)

This component consists of evidence-based instructional strategies that target specific skills. There are eight categories of strategies (Figure 2). They are usually taught one to one or to small groups, teachers, who have recognized a systemic instructional concern, have recognized a systemic instructional concern have used LS class-wide to address the concern. The goal is to create independent learners.

Content Literacy Continuum (CLC®)

This model integrates research-based interventions including CERs and the LSC. Principles of successful institutional change are employed as schools move through the process of exploring, planning, implementing, and sustaining CLC® (Colombo, 2008). Learn more by visiting: http://clc.kucrl.org

Virginia’s Commitment

In 2004, VDOE was awarded a state improvement grant. The purpose was to address literacy improvements for all students at the middle and high school levels. One of the project activities has been to support the planning and implementation of SIM® and CLC® in four schools in the state. Liberty MS, Ashland, VA; Patrick Henry HS, Ashland, VA; Central Academy MS, Fincastle, VA and James River, HS, Buchanan, VA are currently serving as model/ demonstration sites. In spring of 2009 Culpeper MS and Culpeper HS were selected to begin the process of becoming CLC® demonstration sites.

For more information on CLC®, please visit http://virginia.kucrl.org

For information on how to bring SIM® into your school contact:

SIM® Professional Developer VDOE Region IV T/TAC: Judith L. Fontana at jfontan1@gmu.edu

SIM® Professional Developers VDOE Region V T/TAC:

Gina Massengill at massengk@jmu.edu and Judy Bland at blandja@jmu.edu.

References and Resources

Increasing numbers of young children are in settings where they can encounter mathematics in experiences that build on one another, expanding early understanding sequentially, in developmentally appropriate ways. Research on children’s learning in the first six years of life validates the importance of early experiences in mathematics for lasting positive outcomes.

Promoting Self-Determination and School Completion

Diane Loomis, Ph.D.
VDOE T/TAC at George Mason University

Promoting self-determination, or teaching students with disabilities to set their own goals and take control of their own lives, is fast becoming a hallmark of providing full and complete special education services (Karvonen, Test, Wood, Browder & Algozzine, 2004, as cited in Van Dycke, 2006). Research with people with intellectual or learning disabilities indicates that those with high self-determination skills are more likely to obtain employment and have more successful life outcomes (Wehmeyer, 2003; Wehmeyer, 1987). It is possible that students with disabilities who have higher levels of self-determination may also be more likely to graduate from high school.

Dropping out of school is a serious problem in education. It is an even more serious issue in special education. The dropout rate for students with disabilities is almost twice that of students without disabilities. Students with emotional or behavioral disorders and learning disabilities have the highest dropout rates at 51% and 27%, respectively. (Thurlow, 2002; Dunn, 2004; Scanlon, 2002, as cited in Zhang & Law, 2005).

There are variables related to socioeconomic status, gender, ethnicity, and disability that are statistically associated with increased risk for dropout. These are generally not alterable. However, there are factors that affect students’ decisions to remain in school that are alterable. The most promising educational programs to promote school completion appear to engage students in schools by attending to these alterable factors of students’ lives. Such factors include a sense of belonging, internal locus of control, motivation to succeed, grades, reduced absenteeism, a positive school climate, and school policies to provide increased support when raising academic standards. (National Center for Secondary Education and Transition, n.d.).

Research indicates a link between self-determination and school completion. A study of rural high school students in general education showed that when students’ autonomy was supported they were more likely to persist in school, even though their achievement level was not high (Hardre and Reeve, 2003, as cited in Zhang 2005). How motivated students were and how competent they felt predicted both the intention to drop out and whether or not students followed through with that intention. In another study, Vallerand, Fortier and Guay (as cited in Eisenman, 2007) applied self-determination theory to a large sample of ninth- and tenth-grade urban students. When adults supported their autonomy, the students were subsequently more positive about their competence and autonomy, and they possessed higher levels of self-determined motivation. Students with the highest levels of self-determined motivation were more likely to intend to stay in school and ultimately did. Self-determination also positively influenced academic performance. This study found, as well, that greater feelings of competence and self-determination were stronger protection against dropout than actual academic performance. In a related study, McMillan and Reed (as cited in Zhang, 2005) found that some students who could be classified as “at risk” developed certain skills that led to success. They termed these students “resilient.” The most common characteristics of “resilient” students were high intrinsic motivation and internal locus of control, high educational aspirations, desire to succeed, self-starting behavior, taking personal responsibility for their achievements, a strong sense of self-efficacy, possessing clear, realistic goals, and optimism about the future. These are also characteristics of self-determination.

We do not yet have research data to confirm that higher levels of self-determination among students with disabilities leads directly to higher graduation rates. However, the research shows this to be the case among students in general education who are at risk. Importantly, research also shows that the factors related to dropout are similar between students with disabilities and those without (National Center for Secondary Education and Transition, n.d.) It is reasonable, therefore, that increased self-determination skills among students with disabilities may lead to increased graduation rates, as well.

We do know that educators can influence variables related to student involvement in education, and we know that addressing these factors can keep students in school. The Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) enables school systems throughout Virginia to increase self-determination skills of students with disabilities through the I’m Determined
One of the most visible approaches of these Virginia schools has been to involve students in the development of their Individualized Educational Programs (IEPs). When students take an active part in their IEP development and IEP meetings they learn and practice self-determination related to their school lives and plans for life after school. The I'm Determined website features two videos showing how student-led IEPs benefit all participants in the IEP process.

School districts receiving support through Virginia’s I’m Determined project have committed to developing self-determination skills early in the educational careers of their students. At state-supported annual conferences, teachers enthusiastically report on their efforts with elementary aged students. Sands and Doll (1996) and Ward (1998), as cited in Zhang 2005, agree with Virginia teachers that for high school students to become self-determined and to take control of the transition process, the fostering of self-determination is best started early in childhood. Nonetheless, videos on the I’m Determined website show that successful intervention to increase self-determination can occur at any age.

Funds are still available to interested Virginia schools through VDOE’s I’m Determined project. Contact John McNaught at mcnaught@jmu.edu for Region V schools, and contact Diane Loomis at dloomis@gmu.edu for Region IV.

References


http://www.imdetermined.org


Resources:
http://www.imdetermined.org

Printed textbooks are becoming less and less affordable. Current prices make them difficult to purchase, creating a struggle for schools that need to continuously update past editions and cope with the wear-and-tear of paper textbooks. With the constant increase of emerging technologies, electronic books are potentially the solution for schools with shrinking budgets to cut the costs printed books impose on them.

What is an electronic book? Defined by Wikipedia, e-books are “electronic text that forms the digital media equivalent to a conventional printed book sometimes protected with a digital rights management system (DRM)”. E-books are usually read on personal computers, smart phones, handheld devices, or e-book readers. E-book readers began to appear in the late 1990’s and are dedicated devices to read e-books on digital text formats such as PDF, TXT, and DOC. Wide use of the internet facilitates access to e-books that can be read online or downloaded to a personal device, either free or for a small fee, but much less than the price of printed books.

For students with special needs from Kindergarten to college level, e-readers facilitate reading because they can do things one cannot with a printed text. With the growing presence of technology in the classroom, many teachers find themselves with an ever increasing number of emerging technologies and a growing collection of talking books but little guidance on developmentally appropriate practice (Becker, 1993). In many schools, using the computer to read talking books and using interactive software to enable children to access and repeat word pronunciation and reread passages with the click of a mouse is not new. Moving from the computer to reading books on portable digital readers is one more step to allow students access to information anytime, anywhere.

Some activities teachers can do in the classroom with digital readers are similar to the ones they are already doing when using the computer for reading talking books. From a universal design for learning approach, not all students will use digital readers, but these devices are one more way to present information to students in addition to regular printed text, large print, on the computer screen, and/or on tape. In any case, students can read the story, look for words they already know and annotate those that are new, select words with the same sound, discuss about similar stories, etc. Digital readers allow highlighting and page marks. Some can even add sticky notes to the page. These tools can be used to remember specific information or highlight information for future reference. Teachers can take advantage of the differences in formatting, illustrations, and arrangements of the text between digital devices and printed text and have students highlight such differences and discuss their preferences. Because each page is presented in a different screen, students will have the opportunity to make inferences, draw conclusions, understand sequences of events, or figure out cause-and-effect when they engage in meaning-making across different segments of the story (Labbo, 2000). Asking students to explain how events from one screen relate to another may help them learn to make digital intratextual connections that support a metacognitive, strategic approach to meaning (p. 545).

Digital readers can be seen as another tool that can serve as a vehicle for engaging and enhancing literacy development in children from K-12, and for adult learners as another technological tool to enhance reading anytime, anywhere.

Resources for downloading digital books on mobile devices and computer-based tools to enhance reading.

UDL Editions by CAST: A collection of online books using Text Help to read out loud and balance challenge and support through for each learner.
http://udleditions.cast.org/

CAST UDL Book Builder: A site that enables teachers to create and share their own digital books to help students build reading skills.
http://bookbuilder.cast.org/

Project Gutenberg: The largest collection of free digital books maintained by volunteers.
http://www.gutenberg.org/wiki/Main_Page

Book Adventure: A free reading motivation program for children K-8 grades.
http://bookadventure.org/
Candlelight Stories: A collection of some content for kids including audio, video, and games to encourage reading http://www.candlelightstories.com/


Audible KIDS: Books for the IPod http://kids.audible.com/adkd/site/k/hp/LandingPgTemplate.jsp?BVUseBVCookie=Yes

International Children’s Digital Library: A library of books from all over the world http://en.childrenslibrary.org/

mobistories: Published children’s literature to be played in a varied number of mobile devices http://www.mobistories.com/


Read Write and Think: International Reading Association webpage that provides access to the highest quality practices and resources in reading and language arts acquisition. http://www.readwritethink.org/index.asp

StarFall: A webpage with lots of online reading materials for practicing reading skills http://www.starfall.com/n/level-a/learn-to-read/play.htm?

University of Virginia Library: Lots of free books to download on mobile devices or available for reading online http://www2.lib.virginia.edu/mobile/

References


Compared with their general education peers, families of students with disabilities are more involved in homework. Almost 20% of these families provide assistance with homework five or more times per week with most families helping with homework at least once a week (Newman, 2005). This assistance is necessary because students with disabilities have been found to have more problems with homework than their classmates (Berger, 2000; Gajria & Salend, 1995; Turnbull & Turnbull, 2001).

While educators and researchers agree that family involvement is associated with academic progress (Bempechat, 1992; Newman, 2005; Warger, 2001; Zellman & Waterman, 1998), the passage of federal initiatives, the emphasis on inclusion, and high-stakes testing have renewed interest in instructional practices, including homework (Epstein, Munk, Bursuck, Polloway, Jayathi; 1999). According to Edward Polloway, researcher at Lynchburg College, “homework has taken on a position of significance in American education.” (as cited in Warger, 2001, p.3).

The need to enhance the effectiveness of homework has a ripple effect throughout the educational-societal spectrum. Because students with disabilities have more difficulties with homework, it appears logical that improving their performance on homework can increase their academic achievement which can result in more positive life outcomes. Therefore, as educators and families, it is important to be aware of what research says about homework and family involvement.

In 1999, with the help of general educators, special educators, and families of students with disabilities, Epstein and colleagues identified five problematic areas of school-home communication about homework. They are:

- Initiation of communication
- Timeliness of communication
- Frequency and consistency of communication
- Follow-through
- Clarity and usefulness of information

Factors complicating these problems areas include (Epstein, et al., 1999):

- Lack of time and opportunity to communicate
- Lack of knowledge and understanding by one or more parties (e.g., general educators unaware of students’ needs, special educators and/or parents not understanding the design and expectations of the curriculum, etc.)
- Differing attitudes and abilities for improving student homework performance
- Differing views on the importance of homework
- Too many students on teachers’ caseloads

A review of recent literature revealed a wide range of strategies to improve school-home communication and make homework more effective. These strategies are listed below:

1. Require the use of a homework calendar, planner, or subject notebook (Carr, 1999; Epstein, et al, 1999; Warger, 2001).
2. Establish a homework assignment and return routine at the beginning of the year (Wagner, 1999).
3. Provide a list of suggestions to parents on how they can assist

4. Ensure that students and parents are informed on the policy for missed and late assignments, extra credit, adaptations (Warger, 2001).

5. Use technology, i.e., Blackboard, email, homework hotlines to publish course syllabi, homework, quizzes, tests, projects, and resources (Epstein, et al., 1999; Jayanthi, Sawyer, Nelson, Bursuck, & Epstein, 1995; Warger, 2001).

6. Make clear and appropriate assignments (Warger, 2001).
   a. Ensure that homework is neither too difficult nor too lengthy; otherwise, it will be resisted.
   b. Explain the assignment thoroughly.
   c. Write the assignment on the chalk or white board and leave it there until the due date and provide periodic reminders.
   d. Begin homework in class, check for understanding, and provide assistance if necessary.
   e. Allow students to work on homework together.

7. Teach study skills (Bryan & Sullivan-Burstein, 1997; Warger, 1999)
   a. Directly teach:
      • Study and organizational skills necessary for homework completion
      • Good note-taking skills
      • Memory techniques
   b. Demonstrate how to develop a sequential plan for completing long-range or multi-task assignments.

8. Explain the purpose of homework (Carr, 1999) and relate it to the real world (Warger, 1999).

   a. Complete any needed adjustments to the assignment before it is sent home.
   b. Allow for alternative response formats (e.g., audiotape answers, parents act as scribes, draw a picture, oral auditory presentation rather than written essay).
   c. Monitor the homework of students with disabilities closely and provide prompt corrective feedback.
   d. Reduce the length of the assignment.
   e. Provide a peer tutor or create a study group.
   f. Provide learning tools (e.g., calculators, word processors).
   g. Offer one-to-one assistance when needed.
   h. Provide an extra set of textbooks for use at home.

10. Provide school-wide after school teacher support to give extra help with homework (Warger, 1999).


Homework itself is a communication tool because it lets families know what their children are learning in each class. However, it can be used not only to inform families regarding instruction, it also can alert both teachers and families of potential problems. Teachers can indicate the approximate time needed to complete homework and if it takes students longer than the expected time, it is a cue to all parties to investigate and remedy the problem (Carr, 2009; Council for Exceptional Children, 2009).

While the strategies listed earlier are the most frequently noted or most highly ranked, other authors and researchers have suggested additional, useful strategies. For example, assigning a study-buddy or homework pal so students can exchange contact information will give them an additional resource to confirm an assignment or seek additional clarification (Sotelo-Bumberg, 2009). Some educators have found that graphing homework completion and return increases homework productivity (Wagner, 1999). The graphing can be done in the planner or at home.

Many educators report that they use the planner/calendar as a communication device or tool as well as an assignment log. Both families and teachers write notes or questions in it which can prevent homework problems from escalating (Bryan & Sullivan-Burstein, 1997; Wagner, 2001).

Because students with disabilities typically have more difficulties with homework, the family-child interactions can be more stressful (Bauer & Shea,
Therefore, families need information and guidance on how to be involved with homework (Newman, 2005). As noted earlier, a list of suggestions at the beginning of the year on how families can assist their children with homework is an important strategy (Epstein, et al., 1999; Newman, 2005; Warger, 2001). Establishing the expectation that children complete homework daily is essential (Sotelo-Bumberg, 2009). Families can emphasize the importance of homework by establishing routines (Carr, 1999). Providing a time and place free from distractions for homework is the fundamental element in a homework routine. Also, it is important to allow for breaks that are individually appropriate for each child (Sotelo-Bumberg, 2009). For example, pair each homework task with a favored activity or allow for breaks according to time on task. By saying to your child “Tell me about your homework” instead of asking if s/he has homework, you will elicit more information which can help families determine what type of assistance is appropriate. Reviewing your child’s homework before s/he places it in a backpack (Carr, 1999), can not only detect errors before the return of the assignment, but misunderstandings of concepts or faulty reasoning can be addressed early. Each day, help your child estimate how much time is necessary for homework as soon as s/he arrives home from school. This plan will ensure that there is enough time reserved for homework before bedtime. In addition, assist your child with long-range assignment planning. Break assignments into smaller segments with due dates and monitor completion (Carr, 1999). Also, too much homework or homework that is too difficult takes a toll on families of students with disabilities (Warger, 2001). So, it is important that homework be appropriate for the age, grade, and skill levels of students. Therefore, be sure to communicate your observations to your child’s teachers.

Current educational reforms have resulted in renewed interest in homework as an instructional practice (Epstein, et al., 1999). Educators, students, and families all have a stake in making homework more effective. It affects not only school accreditation but student life outcomes. Because students with disabilities have additional homework needs (Newman, 2005), it is incumbent on all parties to try to make homework more effective by utilizing strategies that have shown to enhance school-home communication and increase homework productivity.

References


Headlines of unemployment or underemployment are not new for adults with autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) and/or intellectual disabilities (ID). Reports from the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, list unemployment rates for adults with ASDs and ID as low as 3%, to the most optimistic report of 12% (2009). Further analysis of this data reveals that even within this 3-12% range, the majority of individuals are underemployed, working part-time at best. Overwhelmingly, researchers have found that it is not a lack of job skills that inhibits the employment of graduating students with ASDs and ID. Ann Huang of the School of Education at Duquesne reports, “Most students are able to get the jobs done. It is the social skills and challenging behaviors that are the big concern. Instead of just focusing exclusively on vocational skills, we must place a higher emphasis on social skills, as well as daily living skills.” (as cited in Kindergan, 2009).

Early interventionists have effectively shown that the earlier diagnosis and treatment begins, the better the outcomes for students with disabilities. It is for this reason that transition planning for positive post-secondary outcomes begins as soon as a child receives a diagnosis and becomes a recipient of special education services. Instruction of individual IEP goals in conjunction with either the Virginia Standards of Learning or Aligned Standards of Learning is offered to reach the same ultimate goal set for all students -- to become a responsible, contributing, and successful member of a community. It is for this reason that educators from the earliest years through high school are encouraged to embed and link academic instruction to meaningful life skills and relevant social routines for students with disabilities. Young children who learn the importance of following directions, interacting with others, completing tasks, checking their work, and asking for help are learning critical skills needed in the workplace. Similarly, learning and practicing skills in the environment in which they occur is important. Elements of community-based instruction can be an integral component of an IEP even in the elementary school years. When a student reaches the transition years of high school, community-based instruction should not be an option, but a priority so that students have opportunities to use and apply skills learned in the classroom in their naturally occurring settings.

With this in mind, all educators can accurately view themselves as contributors to the transition process. The following table is offered as a means to help all school personnel see the connection between skills taught early on and the tremendous importance they hold to post-secondary employment and independent living for students. These are skills that can be taught and enhanced throughout the school years.

(see table #1 on opposite page)

Equally important to academics is direct instruction in life skills and everyday routines. These include, but are not limited to:

(see table #2 on opposite page)

Temple Grandin, an adult with an ASD, and currently an associate professor of animal science at Colorado State University, has stated, “It is really important to make sure that a person gets trained in an employable skill.” (1999, as cited in Davis, 2008). Looking at jobs holistically to determine what academic and social skills are necessary helps school personnel at every level see that skills students learn from early intervention services to kindergarten through high school are relevant and significant for students to achieve positive post-secondary outcomes.

References


Kindergan, A. Autism students hone life, work skills. Herald News, July 21, 2009

### Table #1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Skills</th>
<th>Some Vocational and Independent Living Applications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time concepts</td>
<td>Knowing what time to be at work, take break, leave; managing time and tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABC’s; alphabetical order</td>
<td>Working with mail, filing, use of library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numbers; numerical sequencing</td>
<td>Reading addresses, making deliveries, filing by numbers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money: coins, bills, credit cards</td>
<td>Managing own money, completing personal shopping, paying bills,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Working as a cashier, bookkeeper or accountant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measurement and fractions</td>
<td>Grocery shopping, doing laundry; cooking, food preparation, construction, landscaping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matching/Sorting</td>
<td>Sorting recycling, laundry, food, newspapers, matching addresses for deliveries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>Using lists, following directions, completing forms and paperwork, using recipes, filling orders</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Adapted from [http://www.iidc.indiana.edu/irca/adultoptions/SkillsFuture.html](http://www.iidc.indiana.edu/irca/adultoptions/SkillsFuture.html))

### Table #2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill Type</th>
<th>Application</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Skills</td>
<td>Interacting with co-workers, adapting to changes in routine, people or assignments, asking for help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic Skills</td>
<td>Cooking or preparing breakfast, lunch, dinner; washing and folding clothes, dusting, vacuuming, shopping, putting groceries away</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical and Recreation skills</td>
<td>Throwing and catching balls, swimming, riding a bike, maintaining an exercise plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household repair skills</td>
<td>Hanging a picture, painting, using tools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational skills</td>
<td>Keeping and using a schedule, lists, phone numbers; maintaining a calendar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation Skills</td>
<td>Using public transportation, reading a map</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survival Skills</td>
<td>Using basic first aid, how to call a doctor, how to protect oneself</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Adapted from [http://adaptedaquatics.net/adapteddocs/Domestic%20Skills.pdf](http://adaptedaquatics.net/adapteddocs/Domestic%20Skills.pdf))
Policy and regulation updates often seem like a "revolving door" of information. For the special education community, especially, this door spins out information, changes, and updates frequently. The following updates offer information on both federal and state policies.

**Virginia**

This past summer the Virginia regulations were finalized, and this Fall, workshops around the state were offered to school personnel, parents, and others interested in information about the new regulations. If you could not attend a workshop, or if you want to read about the updates, the following resources are recommended.


This website provides contact information for inquiries and resources related to the updated regulations including the new One Page Fact Sheets on Developmental Delay; Transition Services; Intellectual Disability; and Severe Disability.

**Coming Soon:** Parents Guide to Special Education 2009. This document will be posted online later this year. It will include the new Virginia Regulations update. To view it, check VDOE’s website (http://www.doe.virginia.gov/VDOE/sess/), or contact the Parent Involvement office at 800-292-3820 for information.

**National Policy**

At the federal level, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 is currently being reauthorized. In 2002, the last reauthorization of this bill was titled No Child Left Behind.

**“Listening and Learning” Forums** are offering the public time to provide input about changes to the ESEA. By the end of the year, these forums will have allowed input from all 50 states. The forums are being held in the Barnard Auditorium at the department’s headquarters in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Building, 400 Maryland Ave. S.W., Washington, D.C.

The dates and times for upcoming ESEA stakeholder meetings are as follows:

- Wednesday, November 4 2 p.m. to 3:30 p.m.
- Friday, November 20 1 p.m. to 2:30 p.m.
- Wednesday, Dec. 2 2 p.m. to 3:30 p.m.

For more details on the Listening and Learning tour, please contact the US Department of Education at:

**Phone:**
1-800-USA-LEARN
(1-800-872-5327)
Spanish speakers available
(se habla español)
TTY:
1-800-437-0833
**Website:**
http://www.ed.gov/

**IDEA 2004, or What is it being Called Now?**

- The Senate is offering a bill called the *IDEA Full Funding Act*.
- The House is offering a bill called the *Everyone Deserves Unconditional Access to Education Act* or the EDUCATE Act. *This Act is nearly the same bill as the Senate’s version, but it is offering a new part, a pay-as-you-go requirement.*

The main update to this bill is that it would allow regular increases to IDEA federal funds thus providing full funding for educating the special needs students by FY2015.
Resources on Dropout Prevention

This issue of the T/TAC Telegram focuses on keeping all students in school so they can develop into healthy, productive adults who have a variety of good choices for career and work and who are contributing members of their community and the nation. While this seems a formidable challenge and one that involves a significant investment of energy and resources, it also requires an effective collaboration between government offices and agencies, school districts and educational groups that support them, and community businesses and organizations. There is a large body of research, best practices in action, and related information available online on dropout prevention. Here are a few resources that you may find helpful.

**America’s Promise Alliance**

1110 Vermont Ave., NW, Suite 900
Washington, D.C. 20005

http://www.americaspromise.org

This cross-sector partnership was founded in 1997 with General Colin Powell as Chairman. Today it is chaired by Alma Powell. It is comprised of more than 300 corporations, nonprofits, faith-based organizations, and advocacy groups that work to improve the lives and educational outcomes for children. One of their top priorities is ensuring that all young people graduate from high school prepared for college, work, and life.

**Communities in Schools**

2345 Crystal Dr., Suite 801
Arlington, VA 22202

http://www.cisnet.org

The mission of Communities in Schools is to connect community resources with schools to help young people successfully learn, stay in school, and prepare for life.

**The Everyone Graduates Center**

Located within The Center for Social Organization of School at Johns Hopkins University

http://every1graduates.org

The mission of the Everyone Graduates Center (EGC) is to develop and disseminate information important to enable all students to graduate from high school prepared for college, career, and civic life. On their site, you can download a document entitled *The Graduation Nation Guidebook*, written by Robert Balfanz and Joanna Fox from the EGC and John Bridgeland and Mary McNaught from Civic Enterprise. It was commissioned by the America’s Promise Alliance and contains current research and proven practices that offer guidance to communities on how they can end their dropout crisis and prepare all their students for success in college and careers. It is updated every six months.

**The National Center for Education Statistics**

Institute of Education Sciences
U.S. Department of Education
1990 K Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20006-5651

http://nces.ed.gov

The NCES is the primary federal entity for collecting, analyzing, and reporting data related to education in the U.S. and other nations. The activities of the NCES address high priority education data needs, provides consistent, reliable, complete, and accurate indicators of education status and trends, and report timely, useful, and high-quality data to the U.S. Department of Education, the Congress, the states, education policymakers, practitioners, and the general public.
The National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities (NDPC-SD)

Located at The National Dropout Prevention Center/Network at Clemson University

http://www.ndpc-sd.org

NCPC-SD was established in 2004 by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) as part of OSEP’s Technical Assistance and Dissemination Network. It was created to assist states in building capacity to increase school completion rates for students with disabilities. Specifically, it seeks to design/select and implement effective, evidence-based interventions and programs to address dropout among this population. There is research and information on this site tailored for state education agencies, local education agencies, parents, and students.

The National Education Association

Washington, D.C.

http://www.nea.org

The mission of the NEA is to advocate for education professionals and to unite members and the nation to fulfill the promise of public education to prepare every student to succeed in a diverse and interdependent world. NEA works to accomplish this by using the energy and resources of its 3.2 million members to improve the quality of teaching, increase student achievement, and make schools safer, better places to learn. There is an abundance of information and research available on or from the site related to dropout prevention.

Solutions for America

Healthy Families & Children

A web site of The Pew Partnership for Civic Change at The University of Richmond

http://www.solutionsforamerica.org/healthyfam/dropout_prevention.html

This site offers a wealth of research and best practice on solving tough community problems, one of them being preventing student dropout from high school. It links to a number of valuable resources such as The Silent Epidemic: Perceptions of High School Dropouts and Too Big to Be Seen: The Invisible Dropout Crisis in Boston and America.
The Kellar Library at George Mason University’s Kellar Institute for Human disAbilities is also home to the T/TAC lending library collection. The library is open Monday through Friday from 8:30 am to 4:30 pm. Come see us when you are on the Fairfax campus! Can’t make it to campus?? No worries. The library will come to you! Most library items may be ordered via our online catalog and mailed to your home or school address. For more information about the library and its services see our website at http://www.kellar.gmu.edu/library.

The library has received many new materials. Check our online catalog at http://kihd.gmu.edu/library to request them. Listed below are just a few of the many new items we have available for checkout.

7 Steps for Developing a Proactive Schoolwide Discipline Program

Ancient Egyptians [CD-ROM]

Animals of Cold Lands [CD-ROM]

Assessment: Gathering Meaningful Information

Assistive Technology: Access for All Students

Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder: What Professionals Need to Know

Best Practices to Help At-Risk Learners Beyond F.A.T. City [DVD]

Blended Curriculum in the Inclusive K-3 Classroom

Classroom Management: Creating Positive Outcomes for All Students
College Success for Students with Learning Disabilities

Complete Directory of Large Print Books and Serials

Co-Teach!

Differentiated Coaching

Differentiating Instruction with Menus: Math

Differentiating Instruction with Menus: Math Middle School Edition

Dropout Prevention Tools

Evidence-Based Interventions for Students with Learning and Behavioral Challenges

Explorers [CD-ROM]

Fostering Independent Learning: Practical Strategies to Promote Student Success

From Clunk to Click: Collaborative Strategic Reading

Good Questions: Great Ways to Differentiate Mathematics Instruction

Helping Students Graduate

Individualized Supports for Students with Problem Behaviors

Instructional Coaching

It's So Much Work to Be Your Friend [DVD]

Life Cycles [CD-ROM]

Managing Noncompliance and Defiance in the Classroom

Math Skill Builders Class Manager [CD-ROM]

The Motivation Breakthrough [DVD]

Please Stop Laughing at Me

Positive Behavioral Supports for the Classroom

Practical Ideas that Really Work for Students with ADHD Preschool through Grade 4

Preventing School Failure

Reading Problems: Assessment and Teaching Strategies

School-Based Interventions for Students with Behavior Problems

Simon S.I.O.: Sounds it Out Individual Phonics Instruction Stage 1 [CD-ROM]

Simon S.I.O.: Sounds it Out Individual Phonics Instruction Stage 2 [CD-ROM]

Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing

Strategies for Organization [DVD]

Sustaining Professional Learning Communities

Teacher-Tested Classroom Management Strategies

Teaching Children with Autism in the General Classroom

Teaching Strategies for Inclusive Classrooms

VB-MAPP (Verbal Behavior Milestones Assessment and Placement Program)
Students who drop out of high school have fewer choices throughout their lives. Research on the issue indicates that students who do graduate with a high school diploma, on average, go on to earn higher salaries and enjoy a more comfortable and secure lifestyle compared with those who do not graduate. Our communities benefit from these graduates because they are able to earn higher wages, which means they have the ability to contribute to the economy through their purchasing power and payment of income taxes (The Alliance for Excellent Education, 2009).

Students actually begin their journey to high school graduation when they enter the school system at the pre-kindergarten level. We start to support their academic development by providing them with experiences that build a strong foundation for future learning. With each successive school year, we continue to build upon student knowledge and experience in order to prepare them for the following...
year. In the end, one of our biggest indicators of a successful educational system is the number of students who graduate from their high schools prepared for the workforce and/or post-secondary education.

Data provided by the National Educational Association (2009) indicates an estimated 30% of high school students drop out before graduation, which means that over one million students fail to graduate every year. This data also points to some critical consequences of having students drop out of high school before graduating with a diploma.

- Studies indicate that each class of high school dropouts costs the nation more than $200 billion in lost wages and tax revenues, as well as the additional expense for social support programs.

- Students who drop out of high school have an earnings disadvantage that often remains with them throughout their lives.

- Approximately 64% of high school graduates (who are not in college) are employed, compared with approximately 47% of high school dropouts.

- The majority of inmates at state and federal prisons never completed high school.

In 2006, Civic Enterprises interviewed high school dropouts and asked what might have encouraged them to stay in high school through graduation. They provided the following factors:

- Emphasizing student understanding of the connection between school and work
- Providing real-world learning experiences
- Making school more relevant and engaging
- Providing more help to struggling students (Healthy Families & Children, 2009)

How can paraprofessionals help to prevent dropout? You can learn about ways that you might be able to help students understand the importance of staying in school. Use the web resources in this newsletter to read about dropout prevention strategies. Become knowledgeable on specific things that you can do within your role in the school and the community. If we can decrease the number of high school dropouts, we will be increasing the number of individuals who can look forward to being successful, productive members of society with a variety of positive choices for their future.

References:


Conferences

NOVEMBER


November 30-December 2: VSTE Annual State Technology Conference, Hotel Roanoke and Conference Center, Roanoke. Visit vste.org/se3bin/clinetgenie.cgi for information.

DECEMBER

December 2: Building on the Foundation Part 1: Targeted Behavior Strategies and Progress Monitoring
This workshop focuses on using a functional approach when designing more targeted interventions to reduce problem behavior. Examples of interventions that will be covered include teaching social skills, progress monitoring, self-management techniques, and acknowledgement systems. Location: William & Mary Graduate Peninsula Center, Newport News, VA (Registration begins at 8:30am.) Visit: education.wm.edu/centers/ttac/profdev/2009-12-02-skill-building.php

December 4: Manassas: Transition Assessment and Students with Intellectual Disabilities: Resources and Strategies
This training will take place at the Four Points by Sheraton in Manassas, VA. This training will offer participants an extended opportunity to learn about effective approaches for developing a comprehensive approach to assessing students with significant disabilities during transition.
December 16: 2009 Leadership Series for Administrators: Preparing Leaders for Effective Special Education (Three Day)
Target Audience: School-based administrators who are responsible for supervising special education services
Description: This three part series (December 16, 2009, January 20, 2010 and February 24, 2010) will provide tools, resources, and networking opportunities for school-based administrators to create a successful inclusive environment that supports students with disabilities. Visit education.wm.edu/centers/ttac/profdev/2009-three-day-leadership-series-for-administrators.php.

FEBRUARY

February 1: Paula Kluth, Ph.D - A Land We can Share: Teaching Literacy to Students with Autism.
During this interactive session, Paula will explain how many learners have been excluded from reading and writing experiences that are inclusive, rich, challenging, and meaningful. She will discuss trends in literacy instruction for those with autism labels and examine how teachers can respond to communication differences, sensory differences, movement differences, and learning differences during literacy lessons in their inclusive classrooms. Visit: ttac.odu.edu/_public/file/Paula%20Kluth%2002%2010.pdf

February 10: An Overview of Secondary Transition Requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA)
To educate target audiences concerning IDEA transition regulations and State Performance Plan Indicators 1, 2, 13, and 14 so they are equipped to support the implementation of these requirements. Location: Jamestown Settlement, 2218 Jamestown Road, Route 31 S. Williamsburg, VA 23185
Visit: education.wm.edu/centers/ttac/profdev/index.php