Working for Kids!

THE UTAH SPECIAL EDUCATOR

September 2012 • VOL. 35 NO. 1
On The Cover:

We revisit and update the story and progress of Mason Johnson, from our Educator cover of December, 2010. Mason is now learning to read with the help of his mother and a cool reading app.

The Utah Special Educator accepts manuscripts, artwork and photographs on topics related to improving educational outcomes for school-age individuals with disabilities and learning challenges.

Submission guidelines and checklists for contributors are available online at http://www.updc.org/specialeducator/index.html. The editorial staff is dedicated to assisting contributors in the successful completion of manuscripts.

Please contact either Michael Herbert, Editor, michaelh@updc.org, or Ginny Eggen, Co-Editor ginnye@updc.org for consultation and assistance.

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WELCOME BACK! Your friends at the UPDC missed you, and hope that you enjoyed your well-deserved summer break. As a teacher, I like to start each school year with a smile on my face…then try to maintain it as long as possible. In addition to consulting my favorite sources regarding great evidence-based practices, I thought I would try a new voice, and see what Homer Simpson has to say about education. It turns out that Homer has much to share on the subject, however, not all of his wisdom is appropriate for sharing in this journal.

**Homer Simpson on the value of education**

“And how is education supposed to make me feel smarter? Besides, every time I learn something new, it pushes some old stuff out of my brain. Remember when I took that home wine making course, and I forgot how to drive?” Homer speaks some truth. Did you retain all that you learned in high school, in college? When new information is not linked to higher order questioning, thinking and application, students learn to regurgitate facts on a test, but then quickly forget much of what was learned. Shallow teaching and learning are exactly the ills that the Utah Core seeks to remedy. In this issue, we offer further rationale for delving deeply into the core, and teaching higher order skills. We offer many articles and professional development practices in this issue of use to working educators gearing up for the new standards.

**Homer and leadership**

“Mr. Scorpio says productivity is up 2%, and it’s all because of my motivational techniques, like donuts and the possibility of more donuts to come.” It would seem that Homer understands the value of reinforcement, but does not understand its relationship to productivity (or in our case, implementation of research-evidenced practices). Educational research confirms that schools and districts that rely on expensive motivational speakers to improve educational outcomes fail to make the gains they imagined, and their meager funding is wasted. So-called professional development is often entertaining, and participants leave with optimism and plans to use what they learned in some way. However, after such sessions, only 5% of participants implement the practice that was shared. To reach 90-95% implementation, teachers require guided practice, ongoing professional development, coaching support in their classes and strong administrative support. To read about how one district approaches systematic implementation of the most powerful teacher behaviors, read the article on Induction Competencies by Cache School district on page 38. Also take a look at the Bridging the Gap article from Nebo School District on page 18 about collaboration between general and special education.

**Homer and social skills?**

If something goes wrong at the plant, blame the guy who can’t speak English. Homer always speaks his mind, even if he is inappropriate or clueless. Social skills instruction for children and youth (like Homer) who require it remains an important skill set. Read the article from USU: Getting More From Social Skills on page 32.

**Homer on the value of data**

“Facts are meaningless. You could use facts to prove anything (that’s even remotely true!” “Students who graph their own data, or participate in “self-graphing,” demonstrate improved performance in academic (Digangi, et al., 1991) and behavioral (Bloom et al., 1992) areas.” –Devin Healey. Under Devin’s guidance, the UPDC has developed a valuable cross-platform app for data collection, and monitoring of student progress with a self-graphing feature. Read more in Devin’s article on page 26. Did I mention that this very cool app is FREE?

**Homer on transition**

“That’s it! You people have stood in my way long enough. I’m going to Clown College!” With Homer, it would perhaps have been a better fit for him (and safer for residents of Springfield) for him to attend Clown College rather than continue in his present position of nuclear engineer. Good transition planning takes into account individual students’...
strengths, weaknesses, preferences and requirements. Meaningful transition with success outcomes does not happen by chance, and teachers who understand and can apply the essential transition principles are valuable resources in their schools and districts. Utah State University reports on the progress of their innovative Transition Masters Degree program on page 48. If I were a district director interested in improving transition outcomes for youth with disabilities, I would seriously recruit graduates of this program.

Homer on language arts
“I can’t believe it! Reading and writing actually paid off!” According to recent CRT results, 8th grade students in Utah demonstrate 90% proficiency rates. Respectful, but not where we would like to be either. On a different test, the national NAEP Language Arts measure, Utah adolescents score much lower at 33% proficiency, and a lowly 5% for students with disabilities. The new Utah Core assessments are expected to be closer to the NAEP than the CRT. If true, we can predict a serious drop in proficiency scores in Utah. With adolescent literacy rates this low, we owe it to our students to teach them comprehension skills that generalize across subject areas, and truly prepare them to be college and career ready. For a great read on what an exemplary adolescent literacy program would entail, read the great article on page 58. For more information on professional development opportunities regarding adolescent literacy, contact Ginny Eggen at the UPDC.

Homer on numeracy
“Oh, people can come up with statistics to prove anything, 14% of people know that.” As low as our national adolescent literacy scores appear to be, they are even lower for mathematics. According to the latest NAEP results, the math proficiency rate for Utah youth is 28%, and is an extremely low 4% for students with disabilities. The positive news is that the USOE and the UPDC have stepped up their professional development offerings with a highly successful summer math series, and much more to come in the immediate future. Check out the article on Raising Math Proficiency on page 66, and see the short introduction to Becky Unker, new specialist at the UPDC with comprehensive experience in numeracy. Follow the link to the Essential Educator site to access new resources for the Utah Core and math.

Homer on behavior
“Lord help me, I’m just not that bright.” “Everyone but me is dumb.” If you follow the Simpsons, then it would seem obvious that Homer’s son Bart is the poster child for those kids that drive teachers crazy with his creative behaviors. Excuses for poor behavior are many, and are not correlated to cognitive ability. There are, however, correlations between behavior and academic achievement, and every educator could tell multiple stories of serious and persistent behavior difficulties that interfered with teaching and learning. Check out the article: The Power of Behavior Specific Praise on page 36.

Looking Forward
Aren’t we glad that Homer Simpson is not in charge of education policy? With our NAEP scores so low, it is clear that what is needed is not a further dumbing down of the curriculum, but a dedication to increasing rigor and a laser-like focus on those teaching behaviors that drive improved student achievement. With the implementation of the Utah Core, big changes are on the horizon. The UPDC is dedicated to Utah teachers in providing the best, most effective professional development possible. We work for you!

And finally, Homer gets in the last word:
“What’s the point of going out, we’re just going to end up back here anyway?” ■
It’s the start of a new school year, which always fills me with excitement. Although I no longer have summers off, the summer remains a signal of renewal, bringing with it the chance to reflect on the successes and needs of the previous year and plan! These plans, for me, include continuing to improve special education services to students with disabilities through support of effective classroom instruction including the use of assistive and instructional technology and focusing on ensuring our students with disabilities are prepared for college and career upon graduating or exiting the school system at age 22.

**College and Career Ready**

Our goal has always been to prepare students for life after school, whether they transition to post-school training, post-secondary education in a one, two, four year or more program, or a career. In order to assist students with disabilities to achieve these life goals, we need to ensure that they have access to high quality and appropriate specialized instruction, based on the Utah Core Standards. New supports at the State and Local Education Agency (LEA) levels have been added for school instructional staff for this purpose. These include intensive professional development on specialized Utah Core Standards math instruction, and funding for special educators to participate in a university cohort to earn the new Special Education Math Endorsement. Supports also include ensuring that accessible instructional materials are provided for all students requiring those materials, and providing a variety of opportunities for school staff to participate in transition planning professional development in conjunction with an assigned Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor to increase interagency communication and access.

In addition, school reform has been a hot topic over the last year with public opinion calling for reform and against it, but most seem to unanimously agree that students with disabilities should be included in any improvement plan. This fundamental idea is reflected in the new Utah Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Flexibility Waiver, which replaced the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) requirements required under ESEA. Utah’s new plan is based on Utah Core Standards, as well as the Utah assessment philosophy, accountability, and educator evaluations. AYP and U-PASS have both been replaced with the Utah Comprehensive Accountability System (UCAS), which includes the student achievement and growth of all students in a school. This is an incredible opportunity for special educators and related service providers to show the growth and progress that students with disabilities are able to make through the provision of specialized instruction. I fully anticipate seeing that progress will be reflected in both IEPs and formal assessment scores.

These are only a few of our accomplishments over the previous year and they enhance my anticipation over what we can achieve together during the 2012-2013 school year. As you head into your classroom and school this year, please take a moment to reflect on your own accomplishments and to identify an improvement goal for the coming school year. Will you select improving an instructional strategy, increasing instructional time, implementing a progress monitoring system in your classroom, including progress monitoring data or the Utah Core Standards in your IEPs, or...? The possibilities are endless and yet all improvement will have a positive impact on outcomes for students with disabilities.

Thank you for the work you do on behalf of students with disabilities and their families.

An electronic copy of this article can be found here: [http://essentialeducator.org/?p=13582](http://essentialeducator.org/?p=13582)
Our Shared Priorities

Glenna Gallo, Director of Special Education, USOE (Utah State Office of Education)
The Best Way to Predict the Future is to Continue to Invent It: Lessons, Expectations, Opportunities

Stevan J. Kukic, Vice President of Strategic Sales Initiatives, Cambium Learning/Voyager

For the last 30 years we have talked about the need for the system to embrace the needs of students at risk, including those with disabilities. From PL 94-142, to NCLB, to IDEA 2004, the world of education has been revolutionized to become one that includes the accountability for improved outcomes for ALL students. We have begun to talk seriously about providing interventions even before identification. The Response to Intervention (RTI) movement has reached its tipping point. Are we ready?

The purpose of this article is to remind us of what we have faced and accomplished in order to give us ideas for inventing an even better future for students with disabilities and those who serve and live with them.

It was my great honor to serve Utah as the State Director for At Risk and Special Education Services. Those 11 years were so rewarding. Working and playing with you, my dear friends, was such a joy. We accomplished much together. Momentum has maintained for professional development. Unfortunately, the state legislature chose to cut stop the progressive Families, Agencies, and Communities Together Initiative. Utah continues to innovate, no matter what happens from January to March at the State Capitol. Congratulations, colleagues.

Don’t let your ego get away from itself! There is much to be done. Let us start by reviewing the lessons of the history of services to students with disabilities in order to remind ourselves of our progress, new expectations, and the opportunities confronting us today.
Lessons

1. You must have people with great charisma and courage to start a revolution. When I arrived in Utah in 1978, I was greeted by the leaders of special education in the state. Woody Pace provided tremendous leadership as the state director. PL 94-142 had passed in 1975. The regulations were final in 1977. Woody had been state director for 21 years already! Because of him and the wonderful pioneers who were his colleagues, children were getting services well before the federal mandate was passed. Without a large measure of courage and moxie, no services would have been available.

2. It appears we need a mandate to really get moving. PL 94-142 gave the United States a mandate. We would provide a free, appropriate, public education to ALL students with disabilities eligible for special education. Thank God that this mandate also required a comprehensive system of personnel development. Utah, with its “never failing crop of children” (as Terrell Bell used to say), required consistent, careful use of all available funds as well as expert professional development so that all educators had state of the art skills. No state has done more with the professional development in special education than has your great state.

3. We will try to make science even when there isn’t any. I lived in DC in 1976. My first wife worked for the Director of the Bureau of Education for the Handicapped, the precursor to the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). One of her jobs that year was to travel the country to try to convince the LD researchers around the country to come to consensus on a new set of regulations for LD identification. In 1976, the Feds forwarded a draft set of regulations for LD identification which focused on an interesting concept – a severe discrepancy between IQ and achievement. When she returned from this journey, she reported that there was no consensus to change the regulations. Guess what happened? The draft regulations of 1976 became the final regulations in 1977. Utah literally spent hundreds of thousands of dollars to make the severe discrepancy work in a practical and scientific way. We should not be critical of ourselves that we have found recently, with the research of Jack Fletcher and others, that the severe discrepancy is not scientifically based. We should be critical of ourselves if we continue to focus on this concept for LD identification. Of course, special education policy rarely has been based on research. As Barbara Keogh so elegantly reminded us, special education policy is based on values and not on research.

4. NEVER underestimate the power of strategic action. Utah developed its strategic plan for special education in the early 1990s. This Utah Agenda directed so many innovations in the state. This Agenda brought us together. We made great strides related to planning, assessment, service provision, financial policy —and, we did it together.

5. NEVER underestimate the power of advocacy. For 12 years, I participated in the Utah legislative process. We accomplished so much in terms of funding and policy. Without the Legislative Coalition for People with Disabilities, we would not have been able to make the great progress we did. Oh yes, I will never forget the countless expressions of in system advocacy shown by so many of you.

Continued on page 10
6. NEVER underestimate the power of a small group of people. In Utah, you have been so fortunate to maintain consistent leadership, especially at the district level. Please continue to support the revolutionaries at the Utah Personnel Development Center. Nationally, I had the opportunity to be involved in the reauthorization of IDEA, which yielded PL 108 – 466 (IDEA 2004). As the chair of the Professional Advisory Board for the National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD), I helped provide leadership for the advocacy to change IDEA to allow districts and states to stop using the IQ/Achievement discrepancy and replace it with a Response to Intervention (RTI) approach. In 2002, NCLD gathered with 9 other organizations to find common ground on the issue of LD identification. This LD Roundtable included most organizations with an L or D or I in their names. We achieved common ground for the first time in the history of LD. The LD Roundtable agreed that IQ/Achievement discrepancy should not be used for LD identification. The LD Roundtable agreed that an RTI approach was a promising alternative. NCLD and the National Association for School Psychologists (NASP) (think about NASP doing this!) then took the lead and the result was the statutory option for the RTI approach. Then, 5 more organizations were added to the LD Roundtable (including those with CASE and NASDSE in their names) with the express goal of developing draft regulations to implement the RTI option. We again succeeded in achieving common ground. These draft regulations were submitted to OSEP. A very large majority of the language prepared by OSEP on the issue of LD identification came from the recommendations of the LD Roundtable. Now, we have an opportunity to revolutionize our services to these students in need.
**Expectations**

1. **No Child Left Behind (NCLB) has brought us to a table of high expectations for all students.** When NCLB passed in 2001, it set the structure in place for the achievement of students with disabilities to become an integral part of the accountability system of every district and state. No longer could a district fail to include these children in their testing. Data are disaggregated now so that school systems can evaluate their success with minorities including students with disabilities, students in poverty, and students who have Limited English Proficiency. A natural consequence of this inclusion is that special education is now under special scrutiny to help produce higher achievement for students with disabilities. Are we prepared?

2. **Past progress demands future successes.** Utah has an illustrious history in special education. Your strategic, consensus based strategies have enriched the lives of thousands of students, parents, and educators. Someone once said: Even if you are on the right track, you will get run over if you don’t keep moving. I hope it is true that Utah continues to move strategically, accountably, richly.

**Opportunities**

1. **RTI is a vehicle to bring the system together.** The RTI movement is one iteration of several models being used around the country that are labeled problem solving, three tiered models, and the like. Sharon Vaughn and her Texas Center for Reading and Language Arts have forwarded a three tiered model which suggests universal, research based core curricula at the first tier, strategic interventions at the second, and intensive interventions at the third tier. At Cambium, we call this model the All, Some, Few model. We suggest that a school is not complete unless it is safe, civil, and achieving for All, Some, AND Few students. We believe that even if a school uses the best research based core programs, there will be Some students who need more assistance. Even when Some of the students are provided that help there will be a Few students who need even more. Think about what has happened in the reauthorization of IDEA. Now, up to 15% of IDEA funds can be used for early intervening services. Now, districts and states can decide whether to begin to use an RTI approach to identify students as eligible in the category (LD) which represents ½ of the students served in special education. We have a chance to truly become a part of a single system of education designed to empower each student to become a caring, competent, and contributing citizen in an integrated, changing, and diverse society...Oops, I just lapsed into the poetry of the Utah Agenda for Special Education. Once a strategic actor from Utah, always a strategic actor!

2. **With NCLB and IDEA 2004 in place, special education must take its place at the single table of reform to fully develop a single system of education.** It is neither viable nor ethical, from my perspective, for special education to allow itself to remain a separate system. We must act, as Covey suggested, interdependently with the rest of education. For me, that means that we special educators must offer our expertise, our advocacy, our resources to the common goal of better outcomes for ALL students. ALL will never mean ALL until we special educators, experts in individualization, join arms with our general education colleagues, experts in content. At Sopris West, we have developed an initiative we call Closing the Achievement Gap (CTAG). The CTAG initiative promotes a single system of education centered on the goal of student achievement for each and all students. We suggest that this single system must address the following components: Assessment, Curriculum, Instruction, Positive School Climate, and Professional Development. These components will not coalesce into a coherent system unless nurtured by consistent, mission directed leadership. Note the graphic for CTAG.

The circle metaphor shows the interdependency of each component with the others. We have had success with the states including Arizona, Colorado, and Alabama, as well as with districts in Washington, Illinois, New Jersey, Idaho, and New York. As Michael Fullan taught us, school reform efforts are meaningless unless the gap is closed between the high achievers and the low. I would refine that challenge. I think the gap that must be closed is the gap between the low achievers and the standards each district and state have adopted.

Good and dear friends, our time is now. We must exert the kind of leadership that Jim Collins suggests in his book, Good to Great: Leadership must be mission driven and with no focus on ego. If we really are dedicated to high levels of success for students with disabilities, we must be the models of servant leadership, offering our successes, our resources, our research, our passion to build and refine the achievable dream of a single system of education, dedicated to post school success for each and all students. Utah has a superb history. Are you ready to use it in this fully inclusive way? It is question of will and not skill.

*An electronic copy of this article can be found here: http://essentialeducator.org/?p=13584*
Special education directors provide vision and leadership for students with disabilities and the educators who teach them in their Local Education Agencies (LEAs). They regularly make complex personnel, legal, and financial decisions. Directors also work to help teachers cope with paperwork and related compliance issues. They oversee hiring, professional development, student discipline regarding special education law, and numerous other program activities and administrative responsibilities. Few district administrative positions are as demanding as that of a special education director.

During the May 11, 2012 Consortium for Special Education, held at the Utah Personnel Development Center in Salt Lake City, two district special education directors were recognized. The recipients of this award exemplify excellence, dedication, and an unwavering passion for serving students with disabilities and their families.

Ted Kelly, Special Education Director of Provo School District was one of the recipients of the UPDC Outstanding Special Education Director of the Year Award.

UPDC Special Education Director of the Year Awards
Ted was honored with a beautiful plaque and special tribute. A former UPDC director said, “There are three things that come to mind for me when thinking about Ted’s contributions to the field: (1) Child-Focused. He knows what makes special education special and is passionate (and fearless) about educating the whole child. (2) Funding. No one has a better understanding of the complex world of special education finance. He works as a mentor to many new special education directors as they begin to navigate the financial jungle. (3) Technology. He is a visionary in the field of technology for education and knows the importance of providing support and training so that educators make the most of it.”

A Provo School District employee was also quoted as saying, “Ted works beyond what is expected for special education in Provo School District. He is passionate about the students and cares deeply for those he works with. He will stand up to anyone who he feels is discriminating against those who do not have a powerful voice. He becomes that voice!”

Ted, thank you for your influence in the lives of students with disabilities and the many people who serve them. We celebrate and appreciate your many contributions!

Lorna Larsen, Special Education Director of South Sanpete School District, is also a recipient of the 2012 Utah Personnel Development Center Special Education Director of the Year.

Lorna has served her community as special education director for 12 years. She began her career in special education 28 years ago. Lorna received a higher education at Utah State University, the University of Utah, and Southern Utah University. Her greatest joy comes from time with her family and new grandson.

Lorna is well respected among special education directors throughout Utah and among her staff and district leadership. Lorna has served as the Utah Council of Administrators of Special Education (UCASE) for six years, providing great opportunities for professional development in practice and policy.

We asked those special education directors who work closely with Lorna in central Utah to comment about Lorna’s leadership. Here are some comments:

“When I first became Special Education Director in the 2008-2009 school year, Lorna was designated as my mentor. Although some years have passed since then, I still regard her as my mentor and phone her regularly to ask questions or run an idea by her.”

“She is loyal to friends and staff. I admire that in her.”

“Lorna is always inviting districts in our region to participate in training. She is a resource for information and advice. There’s nobody quite like Lorna. I have come to value her as a professional and as a friend.”

“I value her knowledge, skills, and tenacity. She’s an advocate. I admire her courage when she feels someone needs saving.”

The Utah Personnel Development Center recognizes Lorna Larsen for her service to students with disabilities and those who serve them.

Congratulations Lorna!

An electronic copy of this article can be found here: http://essentialeducator.org/?p=13587
Mason loves numbers, letters, colors, and he especially loves nouns. He always has. When psychologists would ask me about how many words he knew, I had to answer, “Hundreds!” But, knowing the words, is very different than knowing how to use the words. He is just beginning to develop his language skills, and every once in awhile I will catch myself smiling and realizing that he just said a 5 or 6 word sentence. I smiled for days and boasted to all of the neighbors the day that he said to me, “Thank you for the purple popsicle, Mom.” Unfortunately, not all days, and not all sentences are as good as that one. Most of the time, I still have a little boy who comes into my room, yells words at me, and then waits for me to repeat them back to him. “Frogs!” Then silence, “Frogs!, “Frogs!,” repeated over and over and over again, until we finally acknowledge him by repeating the word, “Frogs.” Then, onto the next animal, “Snake!” It is a daily exercise in patience.

One thing that Mason has always struggled with is anxiety. He couldn’t open presents, for fear of what might be in them. Going to family parties or to grandma’s house would find him standing at the exit, “I want to go home, I want to go home, I want to go home!” This last school year, his teacher sent a note home saying that they were going to start sending him home, I want to go home, I want to go home!” This last school year, parties or to grandma’s house would find him standing at the exit, “I want to go home, I want to go home!”

It’s been two years since our family began our journey with autism. Mason, our sweet five-year-old boy has grown a lot over the last two years, and as parents, so have we. We have watched him and cheered him on as he has struggled with aspects of the disorder, and we have hoped, prayed, and pulled him along as much as we can. We have tried many different methods with him, some with great success, some as total failures. At the end of the day we usually hit the bed exhausted, and worn out; but with a satisfaction of knowing that we are doing a hard thing, and that our efforts are worth it.

He has struggled with aspects of the disorder, and we have hoped, prayed, and pulled him along as much as we can. We have tried many different methods with him, some with great success, some as total failures. At the end of the day we usually hit the bed exhausted, and worn out; but with a satisfaction of knowing that we are doing a hard thing, and that our efforts are worth it.

One thing that Mason has always struggled with is anxiety. He couldn’t open presents, for fear of what might be in them. Going to family parties or to grandma’s house would find him standing at the exit, “I want to go home, I want to go home, I want to go home!” This last school year, his teacher sent a note home saying that they were going to start sending Mason to the autism preschool class one day a week. He had not been progressing for the last few months, and was really beginning to struggle in school. He would stand at the door begging to go home, and worrying about any new thing that might happen in the classroom. He previously had been holding his own in the preschool that dealt more with speech delay, and not specifically autism. This was a big, discouraging step for us. We finally decided that it was time to ask about putting Mason on some anti-anxiety medication. We took him to our family doctor and talked about the things that we needed. He wrote out a prescription for a very low dosage of an anti-depressant that can be used for anxiety in children, but he warned that it could take weeks before we saw a difference. The change was almost immediate. Mason immediately began to grab his shoes and request going places. He enjoyed going to the store with us, and was always looking forward to going somewhere. We became regulars at the local fast food joint and would spend hours playing on the playground, just so we would have somewhere to go in the afternoons. He was able to relax and enjoy the world for a little bit, which for four years he had been unable to do.

When we returned to school after a three-week break, they also were able to see changes. Nearly every day the teacher’s note started with a comment such as “Mason had a great day today!” We went for several months without any negative comments, in contrast to nearly every day before the medication. He began to make progress, his communication skills improved, and he eagerly left for school most days, excited to see his friends and teachers.

When we were going through the process of diagnosing Mason, people would ask, “Does he have any sensory issues?” We responded negatively, and didn’t really even know what they were asking. Since then, we have begun to discover that he does have sensory processing difficulties and we have learned to cope with them. Mason loves small spaces, and he loves hard surfaces. He has taken over ownership of our laundry baskets. When playing on the computer, Mason will carry a laundry basket over to the chair and put it on the chair and then climb in the basket. He will crawl in any cubby or space that he can find himself in, and he loves it! He likes to shut himself into the small pantry or the bathroom to play games on his iPad. He will crawl in the shelf cubbies of the entertainment center. He gets into drawers and cabinets anywhere that he can find them. He went through a phase where we would put him to bed each night, go down to check on him 30 minutes later, and find he was gone. We would inevitably find him in the toy chest, with the lid closed, sound asleep on the hard, solid surface.

He also struggles with loud voices. If he has misbehaved and thinks there is a chance somebody might raise their voice he covers his ears, prepared to block out any loudness that might be coming his way. The running joke at our house (although we might not be joking—we actually did go look at them at a pet store), is that we will get Mason a dog house for Christmas so that he has a small safe place to go and hide. We have had to learn not only to help him cope with his sensory issues, but also to embrace them and become comfortable with the strange nuances and quirks that help define our child.
From a young age Mason has always engaged with technology; in fact, he often obsesses over it! We recently had to bolt the iMac down to the table, and the table to the wall because he has tried to take it with him on several occasions. He also loves the iPad. It has a calming influence on him, teaching him things with a patience and expertise that we have been unable to recreate elsewhere. He loves to methodically work his way through each of the menu items, pushing on the arrow to get to the next screen. We often tell people that the easiest way to teach Mason anything is to give him an app for it. A few months ago he started talking about coins. He didn’t know anything about the monetary value or what they were used for, so we bought him a 99 cent app. He spent a couple of days studying the app. He tried every possible solution, not only learning and memorizing the right answers, but also wrong answers, so that he could fully understand what the program was trying to teach him and know what to expect from each answer he might give. After learning all of the basic amounts and names of all the coins, he then progressed to counting and sorting the money into certain piles of value. After he had fully learned everything that the app had to teach him, he moved to paper, drawing and writing page after page of coins and numbers. In the third step to his learning process is found objects to “act out” the scenarios that he had learned. In the case of the coins, it was our piggy bank. All day long he repeatedly dumped out the coins and lined them up, piled them, counted them, and sorted them. This process is something he repeats over and over with each new subject presented to him. He has systematically worked his way through nearly every screen on pbskids.org, as well as several Dr. Seuss software titles that we have for our home computer. As a result of his love of technology, he has a wide knowledge base and very advanced skills in many topics compared to typical kids in his age group.

Teaching Mason to read has always worried us, as he has never been interested in books. It is nearly impossible to get him to sit and read a book with us. We were excited to find out that the Reading for All Learners series was coming to iPad. We were able to get a preview version, and help with the beta testing. It has been a hit! Mason is beginning to learn to read using the Reading for All Learners “Little Books Set 1” app, which will be released in late fall 2012 (http://iseesam.com). His love for the iPad has really helped him embrace reading. He loves to systematically click his way through the menus and see his completion progress in the “game.” In talking to his teacher this year at the local diagnostic kindergarten, she said that Mason will be one of the most advanced reading students that she has ever had. We have to attribute this to his love for technology and the amazing educational resources that are available at this time.

Continued on page 16
As we began the process of intervention and diagnosis, we heard the term “red flags” pop up in our conversations with service providers, educators, and psychologists. In racing, the red flag symbolizes stoppage in the race. In the race to help Mason develop into a happy well educated boy, our strivings and goals have been to keep him progressing, to keep him moving, and to make sure that his life and progress don’t fall short because of his red flags. Mason may not ever lead the race, or be the first one to cross the symbolic checkered flag (at least in comparison with a neurotypical child), but with strong supports and interventions at home and at school we think it is possible to keep him moving under green flag conditions—reaching and striving for his great potential in the race of life. We are endlessly grateful for the family, friends and educators who all give us the love and support that we need to help this special child.

An electronic copy of this article can be found here: http://essentialeducator.org/?p=13589
Autism’s newest voice has never spoken a word.

Carly Fleischman is a young adult with autism who has achieved international notoriety and is an emerging spokesperson for individuals with autism spectrum disorder. Carly is also non-verbal. All of her communication is via computer and augmentative communication devices. Carly is famous. She has been the subject of an ABC 20/20 report, featured on Larry King Live, and she has found an advocate in Ellen DeGeneres. Carly also hosts the blog “Carly’s Voice – Changing the World of Autism.” At school, she progressed from being full time in special education classes to taking gifted and talented classes. The book Carly’s Voice co-authored by Carly and her father, Arthur Fleischman, chronicles her family’s challenges and their amazing journey.

Carly is unique. While there are many inspiring spokespersons for high-functioning autism – Temple Grandin, Stephen Shore, John Elder Robison, and Liane Willey to name a few – Carly’s story provides a rare window into the dark and puzzling world of severe autism. Carly never developed the ability to speak or to communicate beyond making requests (usually requests for potato chips) until she was eleven years old and working with her therapists. She was not feeling well. She reached for her picture communication device, and typed “H-E-L-P, T-E-E-T-H, H-U-R-T” on the alphabet screen. Carly had been learning to identify images and colors. No one knew she could spell. That simple beginning opened the door through which a very different Carly Fleischman would one day emerge.

There are several important lessons for educators in Carly’s book. The first lesson is the importance of developing a system of communication. It is the paramount goal for children who lack the ability to communicate with others. The ability to type her thoughts completely changed Carly’s life. This provided her with interaction with others and the opportunity to have her behavior understood rather than judged. It brought Carly respect and gave her family the daughter they always knew was in there somewhere. Instead of a “low functioning” individual, they discovered a sassy, flirty, teen-ager with a delightful sense of humor. Second, there is a reason for behavior. Carly explains that the world as individuals with autism experience it is vastly different from the world experienced by neuro-typical people. Many behaviors seen as “inappropriate” and even “self-abusive” by the rest of world are a means of dealing with the overwhelming sensory issues a person on the spectrum experiences.

Third, it takes a tremendous amount of effort, patience, faith, and the use of evidence-based practices to realize the success that the family and educational team achieved with Carly. Even after typing her first three words, Carly did not understand the concept of controlling her environment through communication and was not willing to expend the huge effort it took to get her message out via keyboard. It required “tough love,” a lot of teamwork, and sound instructional programming to get Carly to the place she is today.

Fourth, Carly wants educators and the public in general to know that she is not alone. She was educated with other non-verbal students with autism and she saw in them the same “inner voice” she always possessed. Her advice to us is “never give up.”

Links
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YEhclo8oKeI&safe=active (ABC)
http://www.youtube.com/watch?NR=1&feature=endscreen&v=6aPav0uU8U8&safe=active (Ellen)
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=byNQD5T3Yq4&safe=active (larry king)

An electronic copy of this article can be found here:
http://essential educator.org/?p=13591
During the spring of 2009 our Special Education Department in Nebo School District recognized a “Perfect Storm” of possibility. For years we had struggled with misperceptions regarding Special Education and recognized the need for increased collaboration with our Gen-Ed friends. At the same time we were facing the first wave of economic struggles that would reduce budgets, force layoffs, and create furlough days for educators. The good news for us was the announcement of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funds. These funds were targeted toward one-time expenditures that would provide lasting results. We felt we had the perfect answer for spending a portion of the funds - A Bridge!

As the district prepared to notify teachers that they would have several unpaid (furlough) days, we were preparing to put money in teachers’ pockets and at the same time provide some professional development and support. We recognized that the idea of having Gen-Ed and Special Ed work together required a culture change and our efforts would be an ongoing commitment. We wanted first of all to “make a big splash.” We wanted to have a kickoff experience that would touch hearts and minds and begin a movement toward merging what we described as two continents.
Part 1
One of the first realizations we had was that our school district was too large to have all educators in one place for our initial experience. Lucky for us, we had two brand new high schools with beautiful auditoriums. The administrators at both Salem Hills and Maple Mountain High Schools were excited to share their facilities and offered a variety of supports. We wanted our experience to include ideas for how to support students with a wide variety of needs including autism, severe, mild-moderate, behavior and other challenges. We identified general education teachers who had been particularly successful in accommodating students with special needs and we recruited special educators who had a high level of passion. We decided on a theme: “Come Together by Collaborating for All Kids.” I found out that the Beatles were not the only artists who had recorded “Come Together.” I identified versions by Joe Cocker, Michael Jackson, Aerosmith, and others. We combined the music with very cool pictures of bridges to create a multi-media presentation that would greet participants as they entered both of our venues.

Our next task was finding a keynote speaker who would be able to hold attention, fuel passion, and begin our bridge building trek. We found him! Chad Hymas, a world-record wheelchair athlete and highly sought-after inspirational speaker truly fit the bill. I left a message for Chad and received a phone call late one night. I told him about our plan and he was incredibly excited. When I told him the date, he hesitated and then said, “Let’s make this work.” Making it work was an amazing coordination of events which would necessitate his departure from Minneapolis the morning of our event and would include the use of a small personal aircraft and some specialized ground transportation as well. Once Chad was contracted, we moved forward with our master plan. Along with the announcement that they would have furlough days, teachers received this news:

The Special Education Department is paying for all certified employees to work on September 25th. This day will be used to provide training regarding Special Education rules, policies, and procedures, and will specifically address the roles all educators play in addressing the needs of Special Education students. The theme for the day will be “Come Together by Collaborating for All Kids.” Chad Hymas, a world-record wheelchair athlete and highly sought-after inspirational speaker will address all certified employees in one of two venues. Secondary personnel will meet at Maple Mountain High School where Chad will be early on the agenda. Elementary personnel will begin their day at Salem Hills High School and will hear from Chad after he has finished at Maple Mountain. Watch for more details regarding this exciting experience as the date approaches.

As the day of the event approached I realized that nasal surgery I had scheduled weeks before fell just a few days before the big event. I decided to take the chance and get the surgery done since rescheduling of either activity was difficult. The surgery was surprisingly challenging for me and the day before our extravaganza I was miserable. As I walked into my assigned spot at Salem Hills High School I felt such incredible energy that I nearly forgot about the pain I was experiencing. Our events were synchronized so as to maximize Chad’s day. The timing had to be perfect and we had to rely on able chauffeurs to get Chad to the two presentations on time.

Our other presenters did a superb job of highlighting the challenges faced when trying to serve so many students with differing and sometimes demanding needs. Chad did an amazing job of tying it all together and left an impression that will be remembered for a long time. One other highlight was a dance performance by some of our students with special needs. This was the icing on the cake and prepared our educators for an afternoon at their individual schools where they could more specifically address how to bridge our gap.

One of our challenges was ensuring that our introductory activity would become a starting point for something greater and not a “one hit wonder.” We decided to gather specific information from each participant for the next step of our plan. We created a simple evaluation form aimed at identifying specific concerns and questions prevalent among the Gen-Ed group. We extrapolated the data by school and found that there were several varying issues that surfaced at each site. This led us to part 2 of our voyage.

Part 2
Following up with educators at 40 sites seemed daunting at first, but after analyzing our data we found some common threads. Most of our Gen-Ed friends had concerns and issues with Student Behavior, Autism, Speech Services, or the basic understanding of their role in the IEP and service delivery process. We scheduled a 45-minute presentation at each school. We wanted these follow up experiences to build on the passion and energy of our original bridge building, so we worked hard to prepare individualized presentations which addressed the specific concerns that surfaced at each site. We divided our district level special education staff into flexible teams who then had the responsibility to work together to do the presentations. We tried to be as accommodating as possible by meeting early morning, lunchtime, or after school. These follow up meetings were well received and opened up dialogue regarding many of the frustrations faced by our Gen-Ed friends. This led to Part 3!

Part 3
In nearly every one of our follow-up presentations we were able to identify key individuals who either had been very successful in working with students with special needs, or who wanted to be. We used this information to schedule additional supports which took several forms. Sometimes we had our district level experts come back for individual or small group support. In some instances we hired substitutes for our Gen-Ed friends and allowed them to visit other sites where they were able to learn new techniques and skills to assist them. We also organized some support groups and connected individuals across the district.

Part 4?
As we continue to work toward “bridging the gap” we are experiencing a cultural acceptance of both special needs students and those who directly serve them. We are finding that together we are much more able to address needs. Our administrators and other educators have been more willing to engage in dialogue, have been more accommodating to students, and more willing to hold special educators accountable as we work together to serve all students. We have new collaborative groups and plan further expansion in support of students with autism, behavior issues, and other areas of need. We still have a long way to travel, but our journey is much more enjoyable!

An electronic copy of this article can be found here:
http://essentialeducator.org/?p=13593
Utah Parent Center

Helen Post, Director, Utah Parent Center
Celebrating 30 Years of Parents Helping Parents!

The Utah Parent Center (UPC or Center) is an award-winning, nonprofit organization founded in 1983 by parents of children and youth with all disabilities to help other parents facing similar challenges throughout Utah. The UPC is Utah’s Parent Training and Information Center funded under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) by the Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education. Our programs also include parent consultants serving specific school districts (call us for more information about how we can work with your district!); the Family to Family Health Information Center funded by the federal Maternal and Child Health Bureau; the Family to Family Network; and Autism Information and Resources. The caring, competent staff of the Center utilizes an evidence-based parent-to-parent model to help many thousands of parents annually. Many educators and other professionals are also recipients of our high quality services. We value our partnerships with professionals, agencies and community-based organizations who have invested in many ways so that we can be successful in our mission to help parents help their children with disabilities to live included, productive lives as members of the community. We accomplish our mission by providing accurate information, valuable training, empathetic peer support, and effective advocacy coaching through a parent-helping-parent model of service delivery.

Accomplishments of staff of the Center during our last reporting year:

• **3,636 individuals** (3,014 parents, 595 professionals, and 27 others) were helped through **one-on-one telephone or email “consultations”** (intakes) averaging **34 minutes** in length.

• Attended and supported parents and teams in:
  • 143 IEP Meetings
  • 103 School Meetings (Parent, Team Meetings)
  • 4 Section 504 Meetings

• **15,037 individuals** (9,400 parents and 5,637 professionals) participated in 290 workshops, presentations, and the Annual Statewide Family Links Conference.

• **Served families from diverse communities** - overall 29% of those whose ethnicity was identified in data collection reported they were from minority communities with the largest group being Hispanic/Latino (16% of total for individual consultations and 40% of total for training participants).

• **Served families and others individually and in group trainings representing a wide range of disabilities with the highest percentage of a single disability category being Autism Spectrum Disorders (42% in activities and 48% for individual consultations).** (Many of the activities impacted professionals that work with individuals with all disabilities.)

• **More than 119,889 pieces of print and electronic information** were disseminated (includes handbooks, workshop handouts, brochures, CDs, DVDs), resource lists, Spanish information).

• **Representation of parents in 514 systems-level meetings and activities to impact services, policies, and procedures related to services for children with disabilities and their families.**

• **High quality, useful, relevant information, training and support to individuals contacting the Center. PTI (Parent Training and Information) project evaluation results were very favorable!**
  • **Workshops - 4.8 of a possible 5**
  • **Intakes - Average of 88%** said they received practical, useful, and relevant information that was high quality and helped them be more knowledgeable.

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801-272-1051 or Toll free 1-800-468-1160

Check out the great resources on our website: www.utah-parentcenter.org

An electronic copy of this article can be found here:
http://essentialeducator.org/?p=13596
On Your Mark, Get Set, Go: Readiness Issues with Collaborative Teaming

“Meaningful, substantive, sustainable improvement can occur in an organization only if those improvements become anchored in the culture of the organization: the assumptions, beliefs, values, expectations and habits that constitute the norm for that organization.” DuFour, R., Dufour, R., & Eaker, R. (2008)

A shift to Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) is currently being advocated for within our schools. This systemic change in school culture certainly falls within the realm of school improvement. A basic premise behind these communities of learning is that all students can learn at high levels, and effective collaboration within teacher teams is where the rubber meets the road. Classroom teachers are ultimately responsible for meeting the needs of individual students and increasing student achievement. However, as schools look at becoming PLC’s and promoting collaborative teaming, many times the necessary preliminary steps to implementation are overlooked. Attention to the human elements of change and building the culture necessary to sustain that change are sometimes ignored before initiating collaborative processes. Effective teaming for school improvement and meeting the needs of all students doesn’t just happen because school leaders believe it is the right or even necessary thing to do. Schools and teacher teams must be ready to meet the challenges that functioning within a PLC will bring.
From Isolation to Collaboration

Until the PLC movement began to take hold in the early part of the 21st century, teachers for the most part worked in isolation. Collaboration was something that happened within the four walls of their classrooms and between their students when a particular learning activity called for “teamwork”. Meeting with other teachers to talk about what was working or not working with students occurred sporadically, if at all. Moments of temporary teaming took place between classes or before and after school if the subject just happened to come up during a casual conversation or urgency was felt because of significant student behavior issues. Teachers were accustomed to preparing instructional materials and lesson concepts on their own and this autonomy, for the most part, provided a measure of comfort once a teacher became entrenched in this practice. With the exception of the occasional performance evaluation conducted by their school administrator, teachers have been accountable only to themselves for what happens within their classrooms.

Movement from these practices of isolation to those of collaboration have proven challenging for school teams, to say the least. With the passing of NCLB (No Child Left Behind Act, 2001), this autonomy of purpose and practice is now being questioned. Collected data, and the story they tell about student performance, are becoming central to determining whether or not schools are passing or failing. The threat of sanctions for a school determined to be failing has resulted in a new sense of urgency in relation to student success. Where isolation is still a part of the established school culture, collaborative teaming to meet the needs of all students continues to be questioned by teachers. Untv these questions can be effectively addressed and teachers become committed to the practice of wanting to know whether or not student learning is truly taking place, increased achievement will continue to elude students of all abilities: those who struggle academically and behaviorally as well as those who need enrichment.

Establishing a Vision

In order to promote this needed change, school leaders have been encouraged to organize teachers into teams and to build time into the school day so that these teams can meet with the purpose of discussing student learning. However, there is an inherent danger in only making structural changes without considering the other important aspects of readiness. It has become apparent that one of the critical steps in the school improvement process is often overlooked or, perhaps in some cases, ignored. While leaders within state and local education agencies have good intentions as they move systematic change forward, the establishment of a clear vision as to how this can be achieved, at times, is not anchored firmly enough within the school culture. Without an anchoring vision, teachers will struggle to share a commitment for the strong team collaboration processes needed to sustain the change. McLaughlin and Mitra (2000) commented that when knowledge is absent in regards to “…why they are doing what they’re doing; implementation will be superficial only, and teachers will lack the understanding they will need to deepen their practice or to sustain new practices in the face of changing context” (p.10).

In 1982, Peters and Waterman introduced the concept of a “Ready, Fire, Aim” approach to running organizations in their book In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America’s Best-run Companies. The main concept was that administrators could spend too much time strategizing and planning every detail, while missing the benefits of learning by doing as the new initiative is being implemented. While there are advantages of moving forward without fully planning, action without a clear target and plan is simply reaction. Fullan (2011), building off of the work of Peters and Waterman concluded, “The insights boil down to the rather unexciting conclusion that if you want to be a successful change leader you have to create the conditions for people to experience the pressure and support of collective learning, and to do so in very specific, concrete ways” (pp. 61-62).

Many times in the literature on PLC’s the adage “Ready, Fire, Aim” is used to justify why it is important to begin the collaborative processes, even when everyone in the school community is not completely ready to implement the needed changes. As we have consulted in districts and schools, it has become apparent that this adage can be used to defend a lack of sufficient preparation for educators. The “ready” part of becoming PLCS does not always include time spent in motivating and engaging critical stakeholders in change processes essential to promoting fully functioning and sustainable PLCs. We assert that school leaders must commit to the “ready-ness” aspect of collaborative teaming. Only then will teachers become motivated and be willing to take the risks necessary to move forward.

Continued on page 24
Promoting a Culture of Change

It is said that a leader is someone you would follow to a place you would not go alone. In the article “The Human Face of Reform,” Robert Evans (2002) asserts, “Most advocates of restructuring treat reform as a product, but change must be accomplished by people” (p. 19). Teachers oppose reforms for many reasons including: comfort with the existing culture; apprehension about what the change really means; and, a knowledge that most proposed reforms are not new, but “resemble previous failed efforts” re-packaged with different sounding language (Evans 2003, p. 20). Teachers know that if they can stall long enough—this too shall pass. With this in mind, Evans (1993) counsels, “Because resistance is inevitable, the primary task of managing change is not technical, but motivational” (p.21). School leaders must be prepared to sufficiently support teachers in the change process; otherwise they may be reluctant to follow.

In Fullan’s book Motion Leadership: The Skinny on Becoming Change Savvy, he contends that there are nine principles embedded in the Ready, Fire, Aim concept. Within these principles he contends that leaders must focus on “behaviors before beliefs”. However, even Fullan recognizes that leaders need to introduce change incrementally and allow teachers to interact with trusted peers in a non-threatening environment. Bolman and Deal (2008) assert that change interferes with an “…individual’s ability to feel effective and in control...change disrupts existing patterns of roles and relationships producing confusion and uncertainty...change creates conflict between winners and losers and finally, change creates loss of meaning for recipients of the change.” (p. 396). Teachers must find meaning in the work they do with students everyday. This meaning is what allows them to remain motivated while facing the challenges that change will inevitably present. Evans (1993) notes that restructuring can cause teachers to worry about “losing status and influence, and even their job” (p. 20). Sufficient time must be allocated as teachers seek to understand the “why” behind the needed change and how their participation can affect student achievement. Attention to the psychological and emotional needs of participants in the change process is paramount. Otherwise, individual attitudes of resistance will manifest themselves and paralyze teachers into inaction.

As DuFour, DuFour and Eaker (2008) note in the opening quote, change must be “anchored in the culture of the organization” (p. 90). This anchoring is no easy task, because an established culture works to preserve the stability that its participants seek. Schein (1992) supports this contention by describing a culture as the part of an organization that is the “...least malleable and most stable” (p. 12). Like most organizations, schools “…accommodate in ways that require the least modifica-
tion because ‘the strength of the status quo—its underlying axioms, its pattern of power relationships, its sense of what seems right, natural, and proper—almost automatically rules out options for change’ (Sarason, 1990, p. 35). Collaborative teams must be encouraged to question the status quo. Only then will they come to an understanding of what their shared purpose should be. This new, shared understanding can motivate teams to move forward, even though they may struggle to define their place within that culture. Evans (2003) believes this requires a ‘focus not just on an institution’s need for reform, but on its readiness’ (p. 20). Without sufficiently attending to the necessary steps of readiness, teams will struggle to meet their charge of providing educational environments that promote high levels of learning for every student they serve.

Organizational Readiness

Organizational readiness, according to Weiner (2009) is a “shared psychological state in which its members feel committed to implementing change and are confident in their collective abilities to do so” (p. 1). This definition is similar to Bandura’s (1997) concept of collective efficacy in which school members have a shared belief in their collective abilities to plan and accomplish a change initiative. Organizational readiness, then, requires collective, coordinated behavior change by every member of the school community (Weiner, 2009). Evans (1993) outlines five dimensions that need to be addressed before teams will feel ready and motivated to enact needed reform. They include: the content of the reform, the faculty’s willingness and capacity for change, the strength of the school as an organization, support and training, and leadership (p. 20). Short summaries of these five dimensions are outlined in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Substance</th>
<th>The new goal must be desirable, feasible, and promoted by a trusted colleague. The content must be in-line with existing values, and the goals must be tightly focused and practical.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>Readiness is exhibited when staffs are flexible, energy is high, and when there is a vested interest in achieving the school’s goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting</td>
<td>Accepting new innovations is also dependent on the institutional readiness for change—a school culture that supports competence, morale and initiative, and has adequate resources and a positive political base.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>Technical support must be provided in the form of ongoing training, coaching, and practicing, with the attendant materials and supplies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Leaders are authentic, inspire trust, and are consistent, coherent and credible.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Issues of readiness that include attention to culture and the human aspect of change must be given appropriate attention and time so that collaborative teaming and organizational learning can be sustained. The following quote is prominently positioned above the doorway of a small Hawaiian bookstore:

“The unaimed arrow never misses.”

Educational leaders must provide the needed direction or target for teachers if the desired result is school improvement and higher levels of student achievement. Otherwise, they will be shooting arrows hoping that they will “hit” something that will move their change efforts forward. Perhaps the placement of the “aim” component in the “Ready, Fire, Aim” adage should be reconsidered. Perhaps we have been too quick to relegate it to the final position. Perhaps the preparation and readiness that is inherent in its definition should become a stronger focus within the PLC research and implementation in our schools. And, perhaps, the time for this focus is now.

An electronic copy of this article can be found here: http://essentialeducator.org/?p=13598

The final dimension in this table, leadership, is the key in making sure that the first four dimensions are in place. Evans (1993) emphasizes the primacy of authenticity in leadership. Authentic leaders are those who garner trust and respect by refusing to manipulate subordinates into action, but motivate them by investing themselves actively in the process (Badaracco & Ellsworth, 1989). Schein (1992) supports this claim by adding, “If the leaders of today want to create organizational cultures that will themselves be more amenable to learning, they will have to set the example by becoming learners themselves and involving others in the learning process” (p. 392). Sergiovanni (1992) frames authentic moral leadership into three categories: the head, the heart, and the hand. It is only when all three components are present that teachers will be willing to follow their leaders into the “uncertainties of change” (Evans, 1993, p. 21).
There’s an app for that!” This phrase, first used by Apple to market its iPhone, has since become a ubiquitous statement used to unveil nearly every app under the sun. It’s no wonder that we hear the phrase so often. There are over 500,000 apps in Apple’s app store and a comparable number in Android’s market, just to name the two biggest app purchasing stores. With all the apps out there it’s easy to feel overwhelmed by all of the options. It’s important to not get distracted by simple glitz and glamour of an app. You want something that makes your life more effective and more efficient; though it doesn’t hurt if it looks pretty good doing it too. I’m pleased to share with you the release of a new tool that will help you in effectively and efficiently monitoring student progress, and look pretty good doing it: PMFocus.org.

Research on the impact of the visual display of student performance data on student outcomes is abundant. Students who graph their own data, or participate in “self-graphing,” demonstrate improved performance in academic (Digangi, et al., 1991) and behavioral (Bloom et al., 1992) areas. This has been replicated for students with disabilities (Digangi, et al, 2002, Fuchs & Fuchs, 1986). Teachers graphing data has also been demonstrated to have a positive impact on students. As Fuchs & Fuchs point out, “When student data are charted rather than simply recorded, achievement improves approximately .50 of a standard deviation.” The importance of graphing has been identified as equally important in other areas of Applied Behavior Analysis (Tawney & Gast, 1984). Graphing “provides a detailed numerical summary and visual description of performance, and facilitates communication of program results” (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1986). The conclusion is clear: graphing data has a positive impact on student outcomes.

Progress Monitoring Focus is a new web-based application that allows the user to track student progress on any academic or behavior skill as defined by the user. A student’s response to instruction and/or intervention can be measured over time to aid the teacher and others on the educational team in making data-based decisions. The app is easy to use and lends itself to quick and easy interpretation of data. Some of you may be familiar with the Excel-based files “CBM Focus” and “PM Focus.” Those tools have been used in Utah as educators have more consistently monitored their students’ progress. While those can be helpful tools, the new PMFocus.org application does everything that the Excel files do, but with greater efficiency, power, and usability.

The use of this web-based system provides several distinct advantages over the Excel files and existing tools: usability, application, access, and collaboration.

Usability. The user is guided through the process with the system’s intuitive user-interface. You can enter screening data to identify struggling students, enter specifics on an intervention or several interventions being carried out with students, and enter progress-monitoring data to measure the impact of the interventions being implemented. It even has a timer and counter function for collecting many forms of observational data.
Application. The app can be used to enter screening and progress-monitoring data on any academic or behavior area for a student at any level. Built into the application are several academic standards (e.g., DIBELS and AIMSWeb for reading) or you can enter your own standards for comparison or screening. It can be used to measure progress of students receiving special education services (i.e., progress on IEP goals) or students receiving supplemental supports in the general education setting. It could even be used to collect data on teacher instruction or whole classroom behaviors.

Access. Users are able to access their data from anywhere that they have internet access; from another computer, another school, or another state. The app is accessible on mobile devices such as iPhones, iPads, Android phones and tablets, Kindle devices, and other devices with web access. Teachers can easily enter data on their mobile devices and go to their computers and have access to those same data. No double-entry of data is needed.

Collaboration. The PMFocus.org application allows an educator to easily and quickly share data with others of their choosing. A report can be emailed to another educator, a parent, or even the child. The report can be saved as a .PDF file or a .CSV file, which can be opened in Excel for easy access to the data for additional analysis or reporting. These features allow for greater collaboration among those invested in supporting the student.

Technology by itself does not change student outcomes. Assessment by itself does not change student outcomes. “Weighing a pig does not make it fatter.” But useful tools in the hands of educators invested in supporting students can allow for better data-based decision-making. The information provided allows educators to make adjustments in their instruction or interventions to achieve greater benefit for students. If you are looking for a tool to efficiently and effectively monitor student progress, I guess now is as good as anytime to say it: “There’s an app for that!”

An electronic copy of this article can be found here: http://essentialeducator.org/?p=13600
Every spring, as we gear up for fall enrollment (our fall enrollment starts April 1; for most charter schools, spring is "enrollment season"). I get questions from parents of students with IEPs who are interested in enrolling in our school. Many of these parents ask the same question, "Does your school offer (insert academic, behavioral, or related service here)?" These parents always seem surprised when I tell them yes. This is especially true for the parents who don’t live along the greater Wasatch Front area. Of course, some rural schools struggle with finding enough related service providers, so why should a parent from a tiny town in southern Utah be able to comprehend that we provide speech services to a student when our school is 300 plus miles away from where they live? The short answer is that IDEA law requires it. The long answer is that we have spent the last four years developing creative solutions to providing our students with everything they need in order to be successful in school, regardless of where they live in Utah.

One of the biggest problems we face as a special education team is the connotation many people have of the word virtual. Mirriam-Webster’s defines “virtual” as occurring or existing primarily online. That is the definition our school was founded on. That is not the only definition, however. “Virtual” can also be defined as simulated on a computer, as in virtual reality. Unfortunately, that second definition seems to be the prevalent connotation for many people; hence the reason some people think that we can’t or won’t provide “real” special education services.

In order to combat this perception, we work hard to make sure that we are doing everything a brick and mortar school would do, albeit with some adaptations (special educators love differentiation). Many of the things we do are exactly the same as a brick and mortar charter school. We have a room where we lock all of our special education files in steel filing cabinets. We have a special education office where we meet as a school team (we currently have nine special education teachers) to review files, conduct audits, collect scram info, and consult each other. We have a list posted on the filing cabinets of people who are legally allowed to access the files. We keep a record of access in the front of every file and we have someone whose job it is (we call her the special education registrar) to physically file any documents that need to be placed in a student’s folder. All of our evaluation testing is done in person, with the exception of some speech testing that is done by our virtual provider (more on that later). We have a school psychologist and a couple of other related services people who are willing to travel as needed to complete evaluations for our students. We have students in all three levels of special education service patterns: A, B and C. Due to the nature of our school, it is easier in some ways for us to mainstream students, especially for classes like history, art and music. This does not mean,
however, that every student should be mainstreamed for everything. FAPE and LRE are different for every student, and we do whatever the team determines is best for each individual student, just like other schools. We also have a small population of students who take the Utah Alternative Assessment. None of these things should sound that different from what any other charter school in the state is doing. However, this is where the direct similarities end for us, and the differentiation begins.

Because we have students (and teachers) all over the state, our IEP meetings are a mix of typical and differentiated. For the most part, IEP meetings in our school are held virtually. This is not to say that we will never hold an IEP meeting where everyone is facing each other across a table, but it is not common. Even if a parent requests that the meeting be held in-office (and some parents do), I cannot guarantee that every person on the IEP team will physically be in the room. A student in Tooele might have a teacher in St. George, and having that teacher physically attend an IEP meeting is a bit daunting. So, if a parent with a student in Tooele and a teacher in St. George requests an in-office meeting, I will gather as many local team members as possible in the office, and any team members who are more than an hour away will participate virtually, while I project the online classroom onto the wall with a projector so we can all share the experience.

For most of our IEP meetings we meet in the teacher’s online classroom and on one of our two special education conference lines. Our teachers use a program called Elluminate (also known as Blackboard) for their online classrooms. Elluminate features a whiteboard with text tools, graphic tools, and other interactive tools. Interaction permissions can be granted by the moderator (usually the teacher). These tools allow other participants to see and control various things in the classroom.

Our school requires that all IEP meetings have two components designed to help the parent feel more comfortable, and to make the meeting feel more like it would if we were meeting face to face. The first thing we require is that all school staff who log in identify themselves by name and title. That way, the parent knows who in the meeting is the general education teacher, who is the LEA, who is the SLP, etc. Since some of the people in the meeting, such as the LEA, may or may not be well known to the parent, we feel this is important. The other requirement is an IEP welcome screen. This screen should always be generic, with nothing identifying the specific student, but should have important information for the meeting, such as the date and the conference number that participants should call.

“"We have spent the last four years developing creative solutions to provide our students with everything they need in order to be successful in school, regardless of where they live in Utah.""
During the IEP meeting, we share the student’s Goalview IEP in real time. This allows us to make edits as we go, which we have found encourages parents to speak up and feel that they are part of creating a document, rather than being present at the reading of a document we have already created. We make sure that every staff person gets a chance to speak during the reading of the present levels for each student, and we encourage people to jump in as they see things they need to talk about during the rest of the meeting. One of the other things we find our virtual meetings allow is more general education teacher participation. It is not uncommon for us to have three or more general education teachers present at an IEP meeting for one of our secondary students. Frequently our general education teachers pull up progress plans for the student during discussions and actually show the student and the parent what the student is working on, and help formulate a plan to assist the student in the class (or just provide encouragement to the student for a job well-done). We also do signatures for the IEP online. Using Adobe Acrobat (we currently have version 10), we can use the apply ink signature tool to sign the document, and the moderator can share permissions to allow all participants in the meeting, including student and parent, to sign the document online. We can review and sign eligibility, initial placement, permission to test, re-evaluation data review, and age of majority in the online class as well. Elluminate even has a feature that allows us to push a document directly to someone in the classroom, so we can give the parent a signed copy of their IEP and other documents immediately following the meeting.

IEPs are not the only thing we do in an online classroom. We also do our resource classes (pull-out classes for K-8, math and language arts resource classes for high school) in online classrooms. Most of our K-8 students have 2-3 pull-outs for 30 minutes to an hour each week for each academic area (so a student with math, reading and writing services could have 1 to 1.5 hours per day of special education pull-out). These classes usually have 2-6 students with similar IEP goals. We do some individual sessions as necessary, and we try to make sure that the younger the students, the smaller the groups. Our teachers use direct instruction methods, with the student practice done either on the whiteboard (students can solve problems on the whiteboard) or using a website such as Intensive Phonics. Our teachers can do web tours, videos, breakout rooms and more in their online classrooms. Students log in with their names, and can chat with each other in the online classroom, as well as with the teacher. Students can also use a microphone to speak in the classroom. All participant permissions can be added, removed, or adapted by the teacher/moderator. High School classes are also done in the online classroom, but generally are longer (1 hour, followed by office hours where the students can access the teacher for additional help) and have more participants, usually 10-15 students.
Related services are another area where we use a mixture of typical versus differentiated services. All of our related service providers are on contract; we do not employ any of them directly (which is common for charter schools). All of our related service providers, both face-to-face and virtual, are fully licensed in the state of Utah and have passed background checks. For students who live in the greater Wasatch Front Region, we have in-person services for speech, counseling, occupational therapy, and physical therapy. For students who may be homebound, or students who live in more rural areas, we have virtual, or online, service providers. Our virtual providers use either Elluminate or a proprietary program similar to Elluminate to provide services. Our school provides all technology and supplies required to access these services, including computer, webcam, software, and any supplies (such as a slant board, or headphones). We offer virtual speech, occupational therapy, physical therapy, counseling/behavior, and social skills therapy. One of the questions that frequently arises is who works with the students (especially younger students) when they are working with a virtual provider? For the most part, virtual speech and virtual counseling are autonomous. The providers adapt the activities to the age of the student. A learning coach (the person who helps the student at home, a requirement for all of our students, special education or not) will help the student log on, and the speech provider will direct the student through activities. For our virtual occupational and physical therapy, some of the activities do require help. We legally cannot require the learning coach to help. However, most parents (or grandparents, or siblings, depending on the family) are excited to learn new things and to be involved with what their student is doing. For those families where the learning coach cannot or chooses not to help with virtual services, we will make other arrangements on an individual basis if necessary.

I would never go so far as to say that our program works for every student. There are certain things that are necessary for any student, whether or not they have an IEP, to be able to succeed in a virtual charter school. However, many students with varying disabilities have found success with our program, and we will continue striving to improve and refine our service methods so that we can better serve current and future students to the furthest extent possible, virtual school or not.

An electronic copy of this article can be found here: http://essentialeducator.org/?p=13602
Every teacher has had the experience of teaching a student who exhibits difficult behaviors; the kind of behaviors that make it hard for the teacher to teach and hard for the student to learn. One popular intervention has been to provide the student with social skills training. Teaching students the social skills they lack is a natural choice for teachers because it is similar to how they teach academic skills. And yet, despite the natural fit, social skills training has not always been an effective intervention. Researchers have studied social skills training at every level of intervention. They have studied it as a Tier 1 class-wide or school-wide intervention, as a Tier 2 small group intervention, and as a Tier 3 individualized intensive intervention. At every level, the research has produced mixed and often unimpressive results (Gresham, 1998; Gresham, Sugai, & Horner, 2001). These results bring up an important question, “Should teachers and related service providers continue to use social skills training to address the problem behavior of students?” The remainder of this article will address this question. First, social skills will be defined along with the variety of problems that typical social skills programs suffer from. Second, a review of some of the research literature on Tier 2 social skills training will be provided. Finally, recommendations for improving social skills training interventions will be discussed.

**Social Skills Training**

Social skills are those behaviors that predict an individual’s access to reinforcing social contingencies such as popularity, peer acceptance, and affirming feedback from others (Caldarella & Merrell, 1997). So, social skills training is any instruction that promotes the social skills of a target individual or group helping them better access those reinforcers. The typical approach is to buy a social skills curriculum (there are literally thousands of them available on the market and can cost between $10 and $2,000), and teach the curriculum starting with lesson one and progressing sequentially through each. This approach is simple and straightforward, but it suffers from some serious flaws that compromise its effectiveness. First of all, a prepackaged curriculum may or may not address the specific deficits of the individual or group. If the curriculum does not address the deficits of interest, educators will spend precious time and resources teaching things students don’t need to know. Moreover, even if the curriculum does address those deficits, it likely also addresses additional skills that students have already mastered, wasting time and money on unnecessary instruction. A related problem is that social skills curricula typically do not include
tools for assessing what skills students are lacking. This is a major drawback because even if educators acknowledge that they may not need to teach every skill in a curriculum, they are still at a loss for deciding which skills to teach. Gresham et al., (2001) point out an additional problem with typical social skills curricula. Namely, they do not address the type of deficit. Gresham argues that students struggle to demonstrate appropriate social behavior because of an: (a) acquisition deficit, (b) performance deficit, or (c) fluency deficit.

An acquisition deficit exists when students cannot perform a certain skill because they have not yet learned the skill. For example, we do not expect kindergarten students to do algebra because they have not yet learned it. The same is true of social skills. Some students simply have not acquired certain skills important to function in school.

A performance deficit exists when students have learned the desired skill and can perform the skill, but choose not to because they can more efficiently or effectively acquire desired reinforcement by engaging in problem behavior. For example, a student can be taught to take turns on the computer; however, he may find that if he just pushes other students away from the computer, he gets more computer time in a more efficient manner. So, he is more likely to push a student than take turns. To correct a performance deficit, additional motivation for engaging in the appropriate behavior and reduced motivation to engage in competing behaviors is necessary.

Finally, a fluency deficit exists when a student has learned a target skill and can demonstrate the skill, but does not use the skill on a regular, or frequent enough basis. For example, a student may be taught how to start a conversation with other students. That student may be able to perform the skill in a role-play, but must think about each step, resulting in less production, and reduced use in real world environments where the skill is needed. To correct this deficit, adequate support must be provided for students to successfully demonstrate the skill in natural environments, including a slow removal of supports until they can perform the skill fluently in the natural environment. Understanding why a student struggles to perform a desired skill before teaching the skill is important to the success of any social skills training. Without this understanding, time and energy will likely be expended trying to treat the wrong type of deficit.

One final problem with many social skills curricula is that they fail to program for generalization (McIntosh & MacKay; 2008). Generalization occurs when a student learns a new skill and then performs that skill over time, in new settings that are different from the training setting, and in the presence of new people that were not involved in the training. McIntosh and MacKay indicate that the failure to achieve generalization is often due to insufficient practice opportunities, unrealistic training settings or scenarios, and neglecting to address student motivation to use newly trained skills.

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Although the significant drawbacks of typical social skills interventions should give us pause, it does not necessarily mean that social skills training is a lost cause. Tier 2 social skills training is particularly critical because it is (a) the most commonly used tier of social skills support, (b) it gives teachers an opportunity to efficiently prevent the type of serious problem behavior that interferes with learning, and (c) it prepares students who are not responsive to Tier 1 interventions to perform better in the future without the need for extensive additional supports.

**A Review of the Research on Tier 2 Social Skills Training**

Tier 2 refers both to the target population and to the characteristics of the intervention. First, Tier 2 interventions are primarily used with students who do not respond to Tier 1, school-wide (Universal) interventions. If Tier 1 supports are delivered effectively, this group typically makes up between 15% and 20% of the population. Characteristics of Tier 2 intervention include (a) delivery in small groups, (b) high availability, (c) low cost in terms of time and energy, and (d) sustainable with up to 20% of the school population.

A preliminary review of articles based on specific inclusion criteria resulted in identifying seven studies that reported the effects of Tier 2 social skills training. These studies were analyzed for methodological quality and for the strength of the intervention effect in order to identify the best available evidence related to Tier 2 social skills. This analysis led to some helpful conclusions and recommendations that can guide how we implement supports. Of the seven studies that met the criteria for review, four of them had good methodological quality and convincing effects.

One study conducted by Lane et al., (2003) included seven participants in grades 2nd through 4th and looked at the effects of teaching social skills on disruptive behavior, academic engaged time, and negative social interactions. The researchers used the Social Skills Intervention Guide curriculum and included one socially competent peer for each socially at-risk participant. The instruction was delivered in 30 min sessions for 20 total sessions.

A second study conducted by Marchant et al. (2007) included a total of three participants. One participant was in 1st grade and two in 5th grade. Unlike the other three studies, this study examined the effect of social skills instruction on internalizing problem behavior (e.g., isolation, social avoidance, etc.). It used lessons from the Boys Town Skill Streaming curriculum, but did not report the frequency or duration of instruction. Each socially at-risk participant was initially matched with a socially competent peer and later with a socially competent adult. The researchers also used a “Good Behavior Card” reward system in which the participants received reinforcement for engaging in the target behavior.

A third study was conducted by Miller et al., (2011) and included three participants in 2nd grade. The researchers in this study used the Boys Town Skill Streaming curriculum and taught 10 minute lessons in conjunction with regularly scheduled reading groups. These groups included both socially at-risk and socially competent students. The participants also used a self-monitoring card tied to reinforcement for appropriate behavior. The researchers measured the effect of social skills instruction on on-task behavior.

Finally, the fourth study conducted by Wu et al., (2010) included two Taiwanese participants in 3rd grade. The researchers used a curriculum that they developed to deliver social skills instruction and taught a series of 18 forty-minute lessons. They measured the effect of this instruction on conflict resolution, cooperation, and on-task behavior. The intervention also included a feedback and reinforcement system for encouraging appropriate behavior.

**Results**

The first thing noted in these studies was that three of the four used different social skills curricula and yet each intervention had a meaningful effect on student outcomes. This may suggest that the specific curriculum is less important than other factors in terms of effectively teaching social skills. In fact, one study used a curriculum that was developed by the researchers and was not commercially available. Furthermore, in each study the researchers modified the curriculum to fit the population they were working with.

The second important result is that each of the four studies utilized an effective teaching cycle when delivering the social skills instruction. This cycle included (a) explaining and demonstrating the skill, (b) having the student practice the skill with support, (c) fading the support while providing feedback, and (d) having the student use the skill in the setting where it will be needed.
A third finding is that three of the four interventions used behavior management strategies in addition to the social skills training. More specifically, these studies included a way to reinforce students for properly demonstrating the newly trained skills. Three of the studies (Marchant et al., 2007; Miller et al., 2011; Wu et al., 2010) also included strategies for decreasing competing problem behaviors and one study (Miller et al., 2011) included a way to help students monitor their own behavior.

Finally, all of the studies used a data collection system to guide decisions about the social skills training. The researchers collected data on what the target behavior looked like (e.g., recorded how often it happened during a 30-min observation) before they began the social skills training. Then they tracked the behavior to determine what effect the intervention had on the behavior.

**Implications for Practice**

In light of the results of these studies and the shortcomings of social skills training discussed previously, the following recommendations can be suggested. First, educators should conduct some type of assessment to determine what specific skills the student or group needs. There are several social skills assessment tools available, both commercially and at no cost (e.g., Social Behavior Assessment Inventory, Social Skills Rating System, Walker-McConnell Scale of Social Competence and School Adjustment, Social Skills Questionnaire, etc.). Conducting an assessment ensures that time and resources are not wasted on lessons and materials that are not necessary. Additionally, it is helpful to determine the type of deficit (i.e., skill, performance, or fluency) that the student or group is experiencing so that the intervention matches the specific needs of the students. This can be done by conducting an informal assessment of the students’ ability, willingness, and fluency to perform target skills in various settings (e.g., with the teacher, with other students, on the playground, etc.). If the students are experiencing an acquisition deficit, then direct instruction is appropriate. If it is a performance deficit then motivational strategies including reinforcement and extinction strategies are warranted. Finally, if it is a fluency deficit, supported successful practice should be the focus.

Second, if a commercially available curriculum is used, some adjustments are usually necessary to have the maximal positive impact. Educators may need to reorder the sequence of the lessons, leave some lessons out, or create lessons to address specific needs. Additionally, changes may need to be made so that the lessons conform to effective instructional practices (e.g., adding scaffolded practice opportunities to allow students to develop fluency with the skill). Other changes may be warranted based on the educator’s professional judgment.

Third, when selecting a social skills curriculum, check to see if it follows an effective teaching cycle. If it does not, you may be able to make the necessary modifications. This can be done by simply taking the skill from a particular lesson and ensuring that the instruction on that skill is delivered following an “I do”, “We do”, “You do” pattern. More specifically, you can select a skill from a curriculum and provide clear examples and non-examples of the skill, have the students practice the skill with layered support until they are fluent with the skill, and finally allow the students to practice on their own in the natural environment until they have mastered the skill. Furthermore, school staff may be able to develop their own lessons based on assessment following this effective teaching cycle. Doing so would allow a much closer match between instruction and student need, but may also increase staff member time investment.

Fourth, when educators are planning to implement a social skills training intervention, it is essential to build in ways of encouraging students to use the appropriate behavior and avoid the problem behavior. Reinforcement systems can be very helpful along with providing corrective feedback for behavioral errors. A reinforcement system could include tokens for appropriately demonstrating the skill, group rewards for meeting a performance criterion, or social acknowledgement for improved behavior. Corrections should be instructive, that is they should involve a review of the skill and opportunities to practice along with any reductive consequences.

Finally, before implementing social skills intervention, it is important to identify the specific behaviors that will be addressed, and regularly measure the behavior in some meaningful way to determine if the intervention is having the desired effect. This is especially important given the mixed results that social skills training has demonstrated in the past. Keeping data allows you to know if you are being effective and to make adjustments when needed.

**Conclusion**

Social skills training programs have suffered from some troublesome drawbacks that have compromised their effectiveness. However, results of the current review indicate that educators can do several things to improve outcomes: (a) assess the specific deficiencies that students have prior to delivering instruction and tailor instruction to those deficiencies, (b) teach skills using an effective teaching cycle including teaching in the location and with the people that are relevant to the skill, (c) teach skills that are most relevant to the student despite the curriculum order, (d) include additional behavior management strategies to improve motivation and accountability, and (e) keep and regularly use data to guide decision making about how to proceed with the social skills training. These recommendations represent some of the best available evidence to provide the best educational experience for students who struggle with social behavior challenges.

An electronic copy of this article can be found here: http://essentialeducator.org/?p=13604
Due to the influx of special needs children and youth into inclusive environments, teachers are challenged to meet the needs of students who display varying profiles and characteristics, particularly in regard to social, emotional, and behavioral factors. Behaviors cited by educators as being particularly troublesome include “attention problems, off-task behavior, difficulty with task completion, disruptions, lack of organizational skills, verbal and physical outbursts, passive and aggressive behavior, and poor social and interpersonal skills.” Social and emotional issues present difficulties for students related to their current experiences and future opportunities; they likewise present challenges for educators. Teachers frequently acknowledge they could better educate students if behavioral problems were not so prevalent in schools.

Many teachers feel they are insufficiently trained and supported to effectively handle challenging behaviors and circumstances. In fact, managing difficult student behaviors, whether academic or social/emotional, is one of the greatest concerns of teachers. As a result, requests for assistance in classroom management are relatively common. These appeals for help are motivated by the educator’s desire to teach.

Creating a quality learning environment is impossible in the presence of high rates of misbehavior. Research specifically indicates a correlation between effective learning environments and teacher behavior. Since the relationship between teacher and student behavior is reciprocal, it is important for teachers to recognize that as they control their own behavior, they potentially influence positive behavior in their students. The ability of a teacher to manage classroom behavior leads to increased learning time and improved student outcomes. To improve outcomes for all students, educators must acquire information and skills that will help them respond to a wide range of student needs.

In particular, the use of behavior-specific, contingent praise is documented as an effective teaching practice that consistently results in improved student academic and social outcomes. Behavior-specific praise (BSP) is defined as a verbal statement from the teacher indicating approval and description of a specific desired social or academic behavior exhibited by the student. Verbal statements also included a praise word (e.g., “great,” “appreciate,” “excellent,” etc.). Such praise, in order to be effective, must be sincere, personal, descriptive, and immediate: as well as directed to a person’s effort, or a strategy or rule, as opposed to an expression of evaluation of the individual.

Examples of BSP follow: “Sam, I appreciate the way you asked James to join you in the group activity.” “Jane, you did a great job helping Megan figure out that problem.” “Troy, you did an excellent job defining that vocabulary word. Now you will be able to understand the story!” Non-examples might consist of positive feedback not linked to specific behavior: “Great job!” “Super!” “Good.”

With the reported findings of these researchers, the question of interest becomes, “What is the effect of introducing BSP as a teaching tool and, in turn, what effect does it have on students’ behavior?” In an analysis of
literature addressing positive and negative outcomes of praise, it was concluded that behavior-specific praise of contingent behavior was effective in increasing student academic ability and social behavior. Praising expected behavior appears to increase the likelihood of compliance and successful demonstration of socially significant classroom behaviors. Additional benefits of teachers’ use of effective praise include improvement in on-task behavior, self-concept, and academic success. Therefore, providing positive feedback to students is a feasible classroom management strategy that can positively influence student behaviors.

Despite the fact that BSP is a no-cost, effective strategy to promote change in students, classrooms, and schools, significant evidence indicates that teachers rarely use this simple procedure in the classroom or other school contexts. So, the next question of interest is “How can we promote the use of praise?”

The use of a video camera to record lesson delivery is an example of another self-monitoring tool. This method allows the teacher to collect behavioral data while managing an instructional lesson. The method yields permanent product data, increasing the accuracy with which teacher behavior may be recorded. Performance feedback tools involving the use of video offer a reliable measure of teacher behavior and can be incorporated within efficacious follow-up procedures shown to increase the likelihood of treatment implementation.

One way to enhance the use of self-monitoring is to involve an instructional coach. As knowledgeable colleagues, coaches offer practical experience and share the responsibility for improving teaching skills and student outcomes. Performance feedback provided by an experienced instructional coach is an intensive intervention to inform effective teacher practice that includes the following elements: (a) self-reflection, (b) pre-conferencing with a review of self-reflection, (c) direct observation and data collection, and (d) post conference, including praise or corrective feedback on skill implementation. The advantages associated with having a coach may include modeling a specific teaching strategy upon teacher request and the additional opportunity to engage in collaborative problem solving.

If you, or your fellow colleagues, are among the educators who are overwhelmed with an array of special needs and/or behavioral challenges in your classroom, we invite you to explore the power of praise as one solution. Likewise, it will be vital for you to consider which method will best support your efforts to effectively and consistently implement praise.

An electronic copy of this article can be found here: http://essentialeducator.org/?p=13606
During the 2011-12 school year, the Cache County School District Special Education Department implemented an induction competency program for new professional staff in their first three years. The purposes of this article are to a) outline the rationale supporting this initiative, b) describe the elements of the competency program, c) provide initial outcomes of the model and finally, d) share induction coaches’ and new staff members’ early impressions of the competency model. In follow up articles we will track the progress of two new staff in the program (i.e. one teacher in their first year and one in the second year of teaching).

Supporting Rationale:

The rationale supporting implementation of our competency model has origin in a variety of discussions among our special education leadership. Below, we capture 10 of the most influential beliefs inspiring us to develop and implement this program.

Idea 1:
Student learning should be a powerful reinforcer for all teachers.

Idea 2:
Special education teachers’ self-efficacy may decline day by day under the erosive effects of frequent instructional failures and too little student success.

Idea 3:
Strong induction and continuous professional development is needed to sustain and even steepen the skill trajectories established during pre-service training.

Idea 4:
A critical developmental period exists in teachers’ acquisition and display of vital instructional behaviors.
Idea 5:
Teaching standards need to be operationalized into “observable teaching behaviors” which can be directly observed and quantified.

Idea 6:
Vital skills should be verified multiple times over several years in order to support long term maintenance.

Idea 7:
A permanent product can serve as a secondary method of verifying competency.

Idea 8:
Requiring competent displays of vital skills in the classroom establishes a contingency to ensure that skills learned in pre-service training transfer.

Idea 9:
Coaches and teachers need to maintain a strong focus on vital teaching behaviors in the classroom.

Idea 10:
Being respectful and efficient is important.

The overarching rationale inspiring the formation of this program is to ensure that students with disabilities are exposed to the highest quality instruction available, and by definition, “high quality” instruction is defined by student achievement.

**Competency Program Elements:**

Our competency model consists of four elements including:

- a) General Competency Framework
- b) Extended Competency Descriptions
- c) competency check-off sheets
- d) coaching measurement tools

The general competency framework consists of five domains, each consisting of multiple teacher skills or competencies. Collectively, the domains are affectionately referred to as “Basic 4+1.” The “4” domains include skills essential to all educators: Classroom Management, Assessment and Data Collection, Effective Instruction, and Content Knowledge. The “+1” represents the domain unique to special educators, or the IEP Process, which serves as the hub of the special education wheel (see figure 1). The competency framework provides a brief description of the expected skills (approximately five) within each domain (see figure 2).

Each teacher and coach is provided with “expanded descriptions” of the skills under each domain (see figure 3 for an example).

Extended Competency Descriptions serve several purposes. Initially, as part of the development process, coaches, the induction leader, and Director of Special Education worked together describing what competent teaching behaviors look like. Expanded descriptions are the product of this collaboration, and in written form function to describe a competency. Behavioral drift is a recognized event for any professional who has attained a level of competency, and therefore, expanded descriptions also provide for collaborative discourse about “competent teaching” and for re-indexing a coach or teacher back to the skill described. Expanded descriptions also honor the knowledge and skills new teachers acquired in their pre-service training and bridge that experience with the expectations in our special education programs.

Each teacher and coach is provided with “4+1 Competency Check-off” sheets (see figure 4 for an example). Each domain has a corresponding sheet listing the skills to be displayed and evaluated as competent by the teacher’s assigned coach. Recognizing the challenge of managing time as a new teacher, each competency

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**Fig. 1**

**Fig. 2**

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David E. Forbush, Director of Special Education, & Sandra Cook, Induction Coordinator
sheet offers target dates by which new teachers should demonstrate competency of a skill. These dates were selected by importance to student learning and by the importance of the skill to a new teacher’s instructional success. For example the classroom management domain and individual skill items come earlier to support teachers in getting and keeping students’ attention during instruction, and securing targeted coaching if competency is not verified on schedule.

Finally, coaches are provided with “measurement tools” to assist them while directly observing a teacher and in determining if they are competent within a domain and across the specific skills in the domain (see figure 5 for an example).

**Competency Program Implementation:**

Implementation of the competency program is both formal and informal. In addition to the formalized programs listed below, coaches frequently visit and/or interact with new staff. Assistance is provided to help teachers resolve the daily emergencies as well as the common questions and needs of the teachers. Coaches keep a watchful eye on the types, frequency, and intensity of their teachers’ needs in order to plan for additional supports and fading.

Survival 101 is rigorous full day training for new special education professionals occurring before the start of school. The objective for the workshop is to ensure new staff members have an opportunity to develop peer relationships, are comfortable with the coaching staff, and have a basic knowledge of the functional requirements of their positions. This induction element is designed to support new staff in
surviving the first hours and days in the classroom. During Survival training, teachers receive copies of the Competency Framework and information about our expectations for them in each domain area. Direct instruction and modeling from coaches, activities and group discussion, and a lot of laughter fill the day.

**TIPS** (Teacher Induction for Professional Success) is a group meeting of first year special educators and coaching staff that occurs five times during the school year. Each meeting focuses on a competency area which is discussed in detail. Teachers receive the Expanded Description of the next competency to be passed off, as well as the Competency Check-off Sheet for that domain. The group then divides into small groups so new teachers can work with their coaches to discuss and plan application of the competency in their own settings and activities.

**Competency visits** are scheduled by individual teachers prior to established deadlines when they feel prepared to pass them off, or if they are struggling and want help. During competency visits, coaches set aside day-to-day “housekeeping” activities that often distract teachers and coaches. Coaches have a variety of observation and data collection tools that position them to share information in a systematic and coherent manner. When data demonstrate that desired levels of competency have been achieved, the coach signs the new teacher off on the competency check-off sheet.

**CHAMPS** is a ten-week classroom management course that is to be completed before the end of the special education teacher’s second year in the district. It is co-facilitated by two members of the induction team. The course curriculum used is Randy Sprick’s **CHAMPS: A Proactive and Positive Approach to Classroom Management.** The course is open to all district personnel and typically includes a cross-section of regular and special educators and paraprofessionals from all grade levels. This course provides our newer special educators with an opportunity to interact and problem-solve with others outside their specialty area and school.

**PLCs** are monthly, district-wide professional learning communities. In Special Education, each specialized group (i.e. elementary resource or speech-language…) meets with their coordinator. In these meetings, newer special educators develop working relationships with other new and more seasoned peers from across the district. Ideas are shared, curricular problem solving occurs, and professional camaraderie prevails. Additionally, teachers frequently use professional leave to visit each others’ classes to better understand how to implement the concepts discussed during PLC.

We recognize that new teachers require “scaffolded support” and that these supports should be systematically dismantled when appropriate. With systematic reductions in support, we can discern if teachers are able to demonstrate competent skills independent of their coach. In the first year, our model plans for intensive coaching, in the second year, moderate coaching, and finally, in year three, minimal coaching. By design, this allows our administration to determine “goodness of fit” of new staff with our instructional expectations and primarily with independent teaching in year three when long term contract decisions are made.

Continued on page 42
The overarching rationale inspiring the formation of this program is to ensure that students with disabilities are exposed to the highest quality instruction available, and by definition, “high quality” instruction is defined by student achievement.

Early Outcomes:

During the 2011-12 school year, work on individual competencies began at monthly TIPS meetings. September’s focus was on Assessment & Data collection with competency due by November 1. October TIPS covered IEP topics with competency due by December 15. Classroom Management was the theme in November, and competency was due January 15. January TIPS emphasized Content Knowledge and Effective Instruction with competency due February 15. As the Director of Special Education completed formal observations of staff members new to district for the year, one portion of the observation was a comprehensive review of progress achieved on the competencies. In total, all five new teachers participated in the competency program and were found to be making strong progress on completing competencies when visited. Additionally, at years end, part of teacher checkout was submission to the Director of Special Education copies of all competency checkout sheets. Review of these competency sheets show that preschool, life skill, and resource teachers were found to be competent across all competencies and associated skills during the 2011-12 school year as determined by their coaches. At this time, data have not been analyzed to determine if teachers hired in 2011-12 produced differential student outcomes compared to new teachers hired in prior years before implementation of the competency model. This review will be completed in 2012-13 and will provide useful but not confirmatory information about any differential effects upon student achievement of teachers identified as “competent” under the new model as compared to previous first year teachers.

New Staff and Coach Impressions:

New Staff:

Shalese Amott (Preschool): “I really liked it. It defined exactly what I should be working on. Having it written out and knowing somebody was going to come check on me in specific areas helped me hone in on what I should be doing. It helped to have Kellie [coach] come out on a regular basis to help me starting teaching.”

Aaron Denison (School Psychologist): “The best part for me was understanding the role of the special education teachers, what is expected of them, and how I can help them with their responsibilities. I learned about classroom management and alternative behaviors to replace inappropriate behaviors. Sometimes I would see things that teachers could do by focusing on positives instead of negatives. It gave me a well-rounded perspective.”

Jamie Hutchison (Preschool): “My favorite part of the competencies is it got my coordinator in my classroom a lot. I really appreciated that a lot. I liked the classroom management section because Kellie [coach] was able to give me some good tips as it applied to behavior management. I also liked the part about taking data because that was more towards the beginning of the school year and we were able to look at all my data folders and she could give me really good suggestions. It didn’t stress me out.”

Janine Jenson (Secondary Resource): “I liked it. What I would like to do now is to refresh my memory. I just pulled out my [induction] binder to go over it again. As a first year teacher, you don’t even know what to ask. This gives you an opportunity to think about things, and you bring things up that really helped. It gave me some structure and a map for my first year to have goals for things I need to learn and do. It breaks the elephant into pieces.”

Jamie Ravsten (Elementary Resource): “When you’re a first year teacher, those competencies seem really overwhelming at first. When they were done, I felt so much better about my skills. I’m now physically and mentally prepared and I feel really confident. I see why they are making us do this and I can see the wisdom in this program. I hope I can keep doing [competencies] myself after I have completed my first three years. They push you to be good.”

Sarah Stone (Elementary Life Skills): “The competencies gave me the opportunity to look back at the end of the year and see my progress. It also helped me to have a checkpoint to help me stay on track with what was expected of me.”

Coaches:

Sandi Cook (Elementary Resource): “It’s too easy to get so sidetracked with my other responsibilities and teachers’ individual crises that, often, I don’t provide the types and amounts of specific supports to my teachers that I later realize were needed. The competencies give me a framework and specific structure that I need as a coach, and I’m no longer driving blind. I know where I’m going and how I’m going to get there.”

Kellie Garcia (Preschool): “I think it was very beneficial being a new coach. It gave me a direction of where to start. I think it made me more effective as a coach. Some of the competencies needed to be tweaked a little bit to make them work for our needs.

Melissa Garside (Secondary Resource): “It was helpful because it clarified what we were working on and gave us something specific to accomplish.”
Future Directions:

We have not yet developed the competency skills associated with Content Knowledge but plan to identify and articulate these skills in writing during the 2012-13 school year. Additionally, with the program being in its second year, there is need for significant smoothing, largely in the area of developing a standardized lens through which coaches view and determine competency. Some variability is expected, recognizing that competent practice can differ somewhat across program types (e.g. life skills, resource, speech and language, preschool, etc.). Finally, we recognize that, “Teaching that looks good or presents as competent” is only validated by differential student learning. We will be following our data to ensure that the identified teaching competencies leverage student learning. Our measure is simple; student CRT data will improve incrementally each year. All in all, we are pleased with our achievements to date, but recognize the need for continued shaping and smoothing to ensure that the primary purpose of this program remains at the forefront (i.e. student learning).

Editors’ note: this article has been abridged from its original length. All charts and forms for this article can be accessed on the Essential Educator web page at: [http://essentialeducator.org/?p=13608](http://essentialeducator.org/?p=13608)
Improving Special Education Teacher Quality and Retention: A Utah Success Story

Ginny Eggen, Specialist, UPDC (Utah Personnel Development Center)
In the past decade, much attention has been focused nationally on the high rate of teacher turnover that is harmful to the education profession and ultimately students. “First-year attrition has been steadily increasing since 1994. After five years over 30% of our novice teachers have left,” according to the National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future (NCTAF).

A study published by the commission offers a warning that “the teaching career pipeline is collapsing at both ends.” Almost half of the teaching workforce nationwide is made up of individuals who are at or near retirement. Overall, teacher attrition nationally has not increased in recent years, in part due to many teachers delaying retirement during a recession. It is anticipated that this will change when the economy improves. According to the Albert Shanker Institute, there has continued to be a sizeable increase in new teachers leaving nationwide, especially in public charter schools. These statistics are something that Utah leaders in education must consider in planning for the future.

A major goal for the recently completed Utah State Personnel Development Grant Project (SPDG 2007-2012) was to recruit and retain highly qualified special education teachers. Funded through the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), the project has played a significant role in helping to support and retain new teachers over the last ten years.

A cadre of specialists selected by special education directors from throughout the state was trained in best practices of new teacher induction. They mentored each other and shared ideas, which led to the creation of a statewide induction network—USPIN (Utah Special Education Induction Network). A legacy of the grant is the successful induction programs for new special education teachers that have been set up in multiple school districts.

In September, the Utah Personnel Development Center will be launching a new website: www.usecnr.org (Utah Special Education New Teacher Resources) to provide a “one stop” place to access information for new teachers and the educators who support them (see article on p. 46 of this issue).

Another key project funded by the SPDG Project has been Running Start, a summer training week for new special education teachers. Personnel from SPDG and the Utah Personnel Development Center (UPDC) have partnered with induction coordinators from multiple Utah school districts and instructors from Utah State University to help new teachers to be as effective as possible in improving outcomes for Utah students with disabilities.

A form of Running Start has been offered for eight years. Originally, the program served only teachers who had been hired without a teaching license and were enrolled in an alternative licensure program. Starting two years ago, districts were allowed to send any brand new special education teachers to the week of training. The program involves teachers who work with students having mild/moderate disabilities and those who work with students having significant disabilities. Topics for Running Start include: 1) Introduction to Special Education 2) 7 Vital Teaching Behaviors 3) Effective Instruction & Lesson Planning 4) Behavior and Classroom Management and 5) Ready to Teach Strategies. Those teachers working with students having significant disabilities also learn about task analysis and discrete trial methodology.

68 new teachers and 37 coaches participated this year in Running Start, which was held July 30 to August 3. A critical part of Running Start is providing teachers with a mentor / coach who is trained to meet the needs of new teachers. Coaches selected by their districts are trained in instructional coaching and join the new teachers as they practice during the week. They also provide support for teachers during the school year by conducting classroom observations and helping teachers use data collected during observations to improve instruction. Another key aspect of the coaching model is to provide modeling for new teachers as they seek to provide effective instruction for students. Data collected by SPDG personnel indicate that teachers trained at Running Start demonstrate the vital teaching behaviors emphasized at the training in their classrooms at a high rate.

In recent years there has been a lull in hiring new teachers by school districts in Utah, mirroring the situation nationwide. This has been reflected in the composition of teachers attending Running Start. Four years ago, over 100 new teachers attended the week of training and all participants were involved in an alternative licensure program. This year, only 20 of 68 new teachers did not have a license from a higher education program.

Retention data for special education teachers in Utah for the past 5 years is positive. When the first SPDG Grant was implemented in 2007, less than 70% of special education teachers were teaching statewide after three years. In 2011, over 80% of special education teachers were still teaching after three years—Running Start teachers were retained at a somewhat higher percentage. Interestingly, there is little difference in retention for teachers who were hired without a teaching license—over 80% were still employed in Utah as special education teachers after three years as well. The retention rate in Utah over the 5 years of the grant is significantly higher than the national trend and constitutes a Utah success story!

If one examines demographics, it is apparent that within a few years there will again be a teacher shortage in Utah, especially in special education. It is likely that there will be a need for a larger percentage of teachers to be trained in an alternative licensure program to meet the needs of Utah school districts. The Utah Personnel Development Center, in partnership with the Utah State Office of Education, will continue to build upon the successes of activities that have been sponsored by the SPDG Project to recruit and retain highly qualified new special education teachers.

An electronic copy of this article can be found here: http://essentialeducator.org/?p=13611
“Brand spankin’ new” teachers are faced with many challenges and the learning curve can be steep! Finding valuable resources should not be one of those challenges.
Did you know that there is an innovative webpage for new special education teachers in Utah? “Brand spankin’ new” teachers are faced with many challenges and the learning curve can be steep! Finding valuable resources should not be one of those challenges.

The Utah Special Educator New Teacher Resource or USENTR.org was created to make your life easier by placing an unprecedented amount of high quality resources at your fingertips at one source. Personnel from the Utah Personnel Development Center and Utah State University have worked to identify key materials, resources and websites that can make a difference in your teaching practices and learning outcomes for students. UPDC Specialist, Tom Johnson, has assembled the web page that is designed to be a dynamic resource for all Utah educators.

Check it out! You will find these resources are easy to access, easy to use, and will assist you in the transition to becoming a highly effective special educator.

You can find USENTR.org \yü.sen-tør\ on the homepage of the Utah Personnel Development Center (www.UPDC.org) and the Utah State Office of Education Special Education webpage (www.schools.utah.gov/SARS/). You can also access the webpage directly by typing usentr.org into your browser: We hope that you and your colleagues will find this new site helpful in your quest for new and valuable resources for your classroom and your students with disabilities.

An electronic copy of this article can be found here: http://essentialeducator.org/?p=13614 ■
In the November 2010 issue of the Utah Special Educator, we announced the development of a masters-level, interdisciplinary Transition Specialist Program (TSP) at Utah State University. Nearly two years have passed and the TSP is flourishing, albeit with a few twists and turns along the road. The efforts of TSP transition teachers, faculty, and other partners are positively impacting the transition to postsecondary education and employment for youth with disabilities.

In this article, we provide an overview of the TSP and share our progress and lessons learned during Cohort One’s first year. This information, particularly our lessons learned, may be beneficial for transition teachers, as well as other special education teachers and administrators. Further, we conclude this article by announcing future opportunities for special education teachers who are interested in applying for Cohort Two.

**Program Overview**

The TSP prepares special education teachers licensed at the bachelor’s level by providing them an opportunity to earn their M.S. or M.Ed. in special education with a concentration in transition. The two-year, 39-credit program is endorsed by the State of Utah Office of Education and funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Education - Office of Special Education Programs. The TSP is unique on multiple levels. First, the mere fact that the topic of transition is included in the curriculum sets it apart from most other special education graduate degree programs. Specific transition topics include transition to postsecondary education; transition to supported/competitive employment; job analysis; job development; job placement; individual transition planning; self-determination; two-year, four-year, and technical postsecondary options; transition for youth with cultural, linguistic, and ethnic differences; and vocational assessment. Second, transition teachers have the opportunity to apply these transition topics in the field during two community-based practica. Third, the culmination of the coursework and practica is a transition-related thesis or project. Traditional special education topics are present in the TSP curriculum as well (e.g., behavioral and educational research, historical and legal foundations, effective practices with culturally and linguistically diverse students, etc.).

Another example of the uniqueness of the TSP is its interdisciplinary nature. Transition teachers work closely with rehabilitation counselors and other professionals (e.g., school counselors, college disability support staff, etc.) to facilitate the transition process. Further, rehabilitation counseling faculty teach three of the TSP courses. In these courses, transition teachers carry out individual and group projects with rehabilitation counseling students working on masters degrees. For example, they have conducted labor market surveys in their local communities and discussed issues related to employment of youth with disabilities with employers. This interdisciplinary experience is designed to punctuate the fact that professionals from several disciplines, particularly rehabilitation counseling, must be actively involved to ensure the successful transition for youth with disabilities. Plus, the experience provides transition teachers with valuable hands-on opportunities to develop relationships with these professionals.

**Progress and Lessons Learned**

The first cohort of transition teachers started in Fall 2011. They are from Wasatch Front area schools. Each transition teacher brings a unique range of experiences and interests. This range includes school settings (e.g., elementary school, middle school, high school, post-high) and job duties (e.g., district coordinator, resource teacher, life skills teacher, etc.). Further, there is nearly even representation between transition teachers possessing certification/endorsements in high incidence disabilities (e.g. learning and emotional/behavioral disabilities) and low incidence disabilities (e.g. severe intellectual disabilities).

This range of experiences and interests, as well as the inherent variability of the transition process, has resulted in a very exciting first year. Experiences included teaching students important employment skills (e.g. job interview strategies) and community skills (e.g. navigating public transportation), meeting with rehabilitation counselors and employers, and involving family members in the transition planning process. Some of the experiences were far from the transition teachers’ comfort zones. For example, they learned the art of job development, which involved going into the community to knock on the doors of employers in hopes of opening job opportunities for their students.

The development of a program like the TSP is fairly new for the field of special education. Thus, as we might have expected, lessons learned have been plentiful. In general, we have learned about the depth and breadth of challenges such as getting families involved in the transition of their children to adulthood, working with youth of parents who are undocumented, developing relationships with employers, managing tantrums in public places, and teaching a skill and collecting data in the community, among others. Additional lessons learned are listed below:

• In order for transition planning to be successful, students with disabilities need to be taught in community-based settings. But getting to and from the community at the same time as the teacher who has so many other responsibilities has created a daunting challenge. However, the challenge has stimulated creative “work-arounds.” More on that later.

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Somewhere on the Long and Winding Road:
The Transition Specialist Master’s Program at Utah State University
Somewhere on the Long and Winding Road...
“A partnership with family members must be formed in order to ensure continued transition planning and to support post-transition.”

- It is important for transition teachers to understand employer perspectives. In fact, as a result of their practicum experiences, two transition teachers joined local business/employer groups.

- Similarly, transition teachers must assess employer needs, as well as their “work culture.” This may be accomplished by conducting labor market surveys or through job development activities.

- A partnership with family members must be formed in order to ensure continued transition planning and to support post-transition.

- Involving rehabilitation counselors and other professionals, early in the transition process, leads to more effective and efficient outcomes.

- Conducting community-based job samples is an important step in the transition planning process. Job samples allow students with disabilities the opportunity to try a variety of jobs. This helps better align job types with the student’s interests and skills.

- Transition resource portfolios are important tools for transition teachers. These portfolios may include assessments, curricula and teaching programs, websites, etc. The portfolios may be valuable to school districts interested in strengthening their transition programs.

- It is important to engage school districts and other administration to support transition teachers’ community-based/non-school-site activities.

- Support from state agencies, school districts, and schools will be necessary to ensure that once the transition teachers graduate, their transition-related services are maximally effective. Building this support is one of the goals of the Utah Transition Action Team, which is an interdisciplinary group of professionals who meet regularly to initiate positive change regarding transition for students with disabilities.

**Employment Practicum Case Example**

During the employment practicum, one of the transition teachers worked with a student who had been previously characterized as “verbally aggressive, obnoxious, and unemployable.” After assessments to determine the student’s highest preference and best matched job (baker), the transition teacher set up a trial work opportunity at a local bakery. A variety of supports were set into place, including a functional behavior assessment and behavior intervention plan. Behavior problems decreased rapidly. The student proved to be highly motivated and well-liked by bakery employees. She arrived early, worked at the expected pace and quality, volunteered for new tasks, and maintained a steady pace. Bakery co-workers approached the transition teacher and insisted the student apply for a job. The practicum ended with the student’s completion of a job application. Hopefully our next communication with her will be to hear “I got the job!”

**Focus on Post-Secondary Transition**

We are expecting additional lessons learned during the Fall 2012 semester, which will include a transition to postsecondary education course and practicum (at a university, community college, or applied technology college). Anticipated topics include: models of postsecondary education, legal requirements and related case law, self-determination in relation to postsecondary education, the role of disability resource center staff, strategies for aligning special education document with the needs of postsecondary education, postsecondary education search and admissions considerations, academic accommodations, and assistive technology and universal design.

**Future Opportunities**

We are currently recruiting special education teachers for the second cohort, which begins Fall 2013. Now is the time to apply. The first review of applications will be conducted in March 2013. Accepted transition teachers who elect to enroll full-time will be supported with paid tuition and generous monthly stipends. Courses are held during evening hours, two nights per week to avoid conflict with a teacher’s day schedule. Further, courses are broadcast to selected Utah State University extension sites along the Wasatch Front (e.g. Ogden, Kaysville, and Salt Lake City). Unfortunately, the need for close practicum supervision/support prevents broadcast to rural sites, at least for now. Additional information, including an application timeline, is available on the TSP website: [www.transitionspecialist.org](http://www.transitionspecialist.org).

**An electronic copy of this article can be found here:**
Ringing school bells and big yellow buses are a sure signal that educators and students around the country are back in school for another challenging and, hopefully, exciting year. This fall, a projected 56 million students will be enrolled in the nation’s elementary and high schools. Nearly 13 percent of these students will be youth with identified disabilities, and approximately 25 percent of them who are entering ninth grade for the first time will be at risk of dropping out before their senior year. Keeping youth with disabilities on track for on-time graduation will be a major challenge for schools. As this new school year begins, the following five tips—abbreviated as PRIME—from the National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities offers some strategies for helping to keep your students on track.

Provide support and enrichment for marginalized students who enter high school with poor academic skills and other prevalent risk factors. Ninth grade has been identified as the “make it or break it year.” Nearly all youth will struggle to some degree when entering high school for the first time. For one thing, the landscape has changed, and students are faced with looming hallways, new schedules, seemingly endless course options, and extracurricular choices. In addition, they may be worried about fitting in, finding friends, and staying on track. Many students also enter high school already experiencing multiple risk factors associated with school dropout. Identifying marginal students early in the school year and providing them with specialized support can improve their chances of earning sufficient credits for promotion to 10th grade.

Strategy: Use your incoming student data to identify youth who are at risk for dropping out. For example, cross walk your data to identify the list of incoming freshmen who as 8th graders were absent more than 10 days, scored below basic on the 8th grade assessments for language arts and math, and had three or more office/disciplinary referrals (ODRs). This list will provide you with students to target for support and enrichment throughout the year.

Review and alter marginal policies that are counterproductive to school completion. Effective policies consist of clear, well-defined statements that guide district administrators and other personnel in developing guidelines to ensure that district missions, goals, and practices are carried out with efficiency and parity. Good policies consider ramifications of interrelated policies and can help eliminate confusion and promote school completion. However, frequently our schools, in an attempt to increase classroom safety and improve student responsibility, adopt policies that all too quickly slam doors in the faces of at-risk students and are counterproductive to increased graduation rates and lower dropout rates. Research consistently reveals that repeated use of exclusionary discipline practices have been identified as one of the major factors contributing to dropout.

Strategy 1: Make sure your zero tolerance policies do not go beyond the mandated requirements of zero tolerance. The “one strike you’re out” policy is leading to more suspensions and expulsions of students than in the past and is counterproductive, as it simply removes the problem behavior from the school and places it back into the community.

Strategy 2: Provide alternatives to credit loss when a student is passing the class but misses more than the required days of “in seat” time. Providing opportunities for students to recover credits lost will also increase their ability to earn credits needed to graduate.

Incorporate an early warning system as a core component of your school-wide data system to identify students’ distress signals. Some think students drop out randomly, rarely signaling they are in distress. In fact, dropping out is most often predictable. Research findings consistently identify that students are knocked off course from on-time high school graduation in grades 6 through 9 by the ABCs—attendance, behavior, and course completion.

Strategy: Queue your data system to flag students who are approaching critical thresholds. Pay attention to the ABCs of dropout prevention—attendance, behavior, and course performance. Recognize and act on student distress signals:

- Attendance: Students in grades 6-10 who miss 10, 20, or more days of school are sending increasingly loud distress signals.
- Behavior: Middle and high school students who get suspended need support to stay on track, as well as those who remain in school but consistently misbehave or lack effort.
- Course performance: Middle and high school students who receive an F, particularly in math or English, or two or more F’s in any course are falling off the graduation path. D’s and very low GPAs are also causes for concern.
Make it meaningful. The massive exodus from American high schools is not inevitable. Many students drop out due to difficult home or family circumstances. However, recent research suggests that even for these students, dropping out is also closely related to how schools operate, how rigorous they are, and whether or not students see that school has real-world relevance. While rigor and relevance are two of the new "three Rs," students are reporting a lack of rigor and relevance in their work. In two recent studies involving youth with and without disabilities, students reported that classes are not interesting, students do not feel connected to school, and students do not see the purpose or relevance in schoolwork provided by some teachers (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006). In fact, 66 percent of youth participating in a study of student engagement responded that they were bored every day in class.

**Strategy:** Provide multiple methods that involve work (career skills) and learning (academics), including discussions and debates, group projects, active participation, role-playing, presentations, and technology. Create a culture of growth mindset in the classroom. Praising students for the engagement of tasks, applied effort, strategies used, choices they made, and persistence they displayed yields greater long-term benefits than just saying "good job" when they succeed or get the right answer. Within a classroom culture that supports a growth mindset, teachers can design meaningful learning tasks that foster student engagement, resilience, and long-term achievement - thus ultimately leading to an improved likelihood that students will remain in school and graduate.

**Engage families.** To ensure that the students of today are ready for the careers of tomorrow, families and schools need to work together to promote engagement that is systemic, sustained, and integrated into school improvement efforts. Over 30 percent of research findings support the conclusion that engaging families in their children's education increases student achievement and decreases dropout rates. As such, effective family engagement must be a part of any district's school completion strategy. Creating partnership between parents and educators, with a concerted effort to move beyond involvement to active parent engagement, will require that schools know families, communicate effectively and respectfully with families, and demonstrate competence and commitment to the children they share.

**Strategy 1:** Communicate with parents about positive experiences with their child—not just the negative ones.

**Strategy 2:** For meetings or presentations that families cannot attend, provide options for them to access the presentation, such as a CD or video, or e-mail documents, and make sure they have the necessary technology.

**Strategy 3:** Have a variety of ways in which families may be involved. Remember everyone has a talent and one size will not fit all. Some families may not be able to attend class activities, but perhaps they could cook for a party or volunteer to make something for their child to bring to a party.

**Strategy 4:** Go beyond the bake sale. Recruit parents for committees and task forces to address issues related to school completion, such as attendance committees, behavior task forces, and school climate committees. Parents are invaluable sources of information about possible causes of dropout as well as what types of strategies are likely to help families overcome barriers to ensure that students attend school every day, achieve every year, and attain their life goals over time. While national information can offer information (redundant?) about likely issues and solutions, gathering insights from the parents of your own community is essential to grounding your efforts in local realities.

Remember - if we engage students on all levels with school and learning, monitor student performance, follow up with students and families when warning signs of disengagement emerge, and focus on successful school completion for all students, it is possible to positively influence students toward the successful completion of school.

Have a great year!

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**Editors Note:** A new partnership between The National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities (NDPC-SD), the Utah State Office of Education (USOE), and REL West aims to decrease dropout for students with disabilities by providing technical assistance and research support to a set of rural and urban schools with large numbers of students with disabilities, English learners, and families living in poverty. For more information, contact Susan Loving at the USOE at susan.loving@schools.utah.gov, 801-538-7645

**An electronic copy of this article can be found here:**
http://essentialeducator.org/?p=13620
Issue: Fewer students with disabilities in middle schools and high schools use accommodations than students with disabilities in elementary schools.

Defining the Issue

Accommodations are changes in materials or procedures that provide access to instruction and assessments for students with disabilities. They are designed to enable students with disabilities to learn without the impediment of their disabilities, and to show their knowledge and skills rather than the effects of their disabilities. While there is some controversy surrounding terminology (e.g., accommodations vs. modifications) and about the appropriateness of certain assessment accommodations (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1999; Thurlow & Wiener, 2000), in general there is an acceptance of the need for some changes in instruction and assessment for students with disabilities. Examples of common instructional and assessment accommodations are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Examples of Instructional and Assessment Accommodations*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional Accommodations</th>
<th>Assessment Accommodations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Materials/Curriculum</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Alternative assignments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Substitute materials with lower reading levels</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Fewer assignments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Decrease length of assignments</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Copy pages so students can mark on them</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Provide examples of correctly completed work</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Early syllabus</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Advance notice of assignments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Tape-recorded versions of printed materials</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methods/Strategies</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Highlight key points to remember</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Eliminate distractions by using a template to block out other items</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Have student use a self monitoring sheet</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Break task into smaller parts to do at different times</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Use study partners whenever reading or writing is required</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Secure papers to work areas with tape or magnets</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Present information in multiple formats</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Use listening devices</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Setting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Study cards</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Special lighting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Separate room</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Individualized or small group</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Extended time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Frequent breaks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Unlimited time</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Scheduling</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Specific time of day</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Subtests in different order</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Presentation</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Repeat directions</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Larger bubbles on multiple-choice questions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sign language presentation</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Magnification device</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Mark answers in test booklet</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Use reference materials (e.g., dictionary)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Word process writing sample</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Special test preparation techniques</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Out of level test</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is nothing about students with disabilities, nor about instruction and assessment that would suggest that the number of students with disabilities using accommodations should change as they progress through school. Are there other things occurring that might affect the number of students receiving accommodations? Are there constraints on the provision of accommodations that can be alleviated to ensure that all middle school and high school students who need accommodations receive them?

What We Know, Legal Considerations

When the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was reauthorized in 1997, accommodations (and modifications) in administration were addressed. In Section 300.347 on Individual Education Program (IEP) content, IDEA states that there needs to be...a statement of the program modifications or supports for school personnel that will be provided for the child—

- To advance appropriately toward attaining the annual goals;
- To be involved and progress in the general curriculum;
- To participate in extracurricular and other nonacademic activities; and
- To be educated and participate with other children with disabilities and nondisabled children in the activities described in this section.

Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1414(d)(5); 1414(d)(1)(A)(vii) Section 300.342 of IDEA also states that the IEP must be in effect at the beginning of each school year so that each teacher and provider is informed of “the specific accommodations, modifications, and supports that must be provided for the child in accordance with the IEP [Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1414(d)(2)(A) and (B), Pub. L. 105-17, sec. 201(a)(2)(A), (C)].

In addition to addressing accommodations and modifications in instruction, the Final Regulations for IDEA state that for assessments, the IEP for each child with a disability must include a statement of—

- Any individual modifications in the administration of state or district-wide assessments of student achievement that are needed in order for the child to participate in the assessment.

The term “accommodations” is also used in Section 300.138, which indicates that The state must have on file with the Secretary information to demonstrate that — (a) Children with disabilities are included in general state and district-wide assessment programs, with appropriate accommodations and modifications in administration, if necessary [Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1412(a)(17)(A)]

None of the language of the law indicates that the number of students with disabilities who need accommodations will change as students get older and move from one level of schooling to the next, although the specific accommodations that students need may change over time (Elliott & Thurlow, 2000).

Definitional Considerations

“Accommodation” is just one of many terms that have been used to indicate a change in instructional or assessment materials or procedures. Another frequently used term, “modification,” is generally (but not always) used to refer to a change in which scores produced are invalid or otherwise not comparable to other scores. IDEA uses both “accommodation” and “modification in administration,” but intends that the terms be viewed as comparable and inclusive. As stated in a memorandum from the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), “the terms as used in the statute and regulations are not intended to correspond with the evolving usage of these terms in the field of assessment...modifications in administration...should be viewed as a general term that would include both accommodations and modifications, as they are commonly used in assessment practice” (Heumann & Warlick, 2000, p. 8).

Research Considerations

Research on accommodations has increased dramatically in recent years, due in part to an infusion of funding from OSEP, but also due to dramatic increases in state efforts to include students with disabilities in their assessments, along with the need to study the potential effects of certain accommodations on test results (see Thurlow & Bolt, 2001). Most of this research has focused on assessment accommodations and their effects (cf. Tindal & Fuchs, 1999), rather than on the extent to which students are using accommodations in instruction and assessment. Survey research gives some indication of the extent to which accommodations are used during assessments. In a survey of
Accommodations for Students with Disabilities in High School

Martha Thurlow

approximately 400 teachers, Jayanthi, Epstein, Polloway, and Bursuck (1996) found that elementary school teachers identified several test accommodations as more helpful for students than did either middle school or secondary school teachers. In comparison to the ratings of middle school and high school teachers, they also indicated that many of the accommodations were relatively easy to implement. Still, this research did not indicate the extent to which teachers actually used accommodations, just their perceptions of them. Perceptions about accommodations do differ between the elementary and middle/secondary school levels. Lack of information about how accommodations are used in instruction and assessments is related to some extent to limitations in the availability of accommodations prior to the reauthorization of IDEA (Thurlow, Ysseldyke, & Silverstein, 1995). It is also related to difficulties states have encountered in merging information on accommodations into data collection and management systems that have many limitations (Almond, Tindal, & Stieber, 1997).

Following the reauthorization of IDEA and recommendations that states begin to collect data on the use of testing accommodations (Elliott, Thurlow, & Ysseldyke, 1996), several states implemented data collection mechanisms to do just that. By 1999, the National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO) found that 12 states had data available on the number or percentage of students using assessment accommodations during their state tests. In most states, accommodations are used by greater percentages of students at the elementary school level than at either the middle school or high school levels (see Thurlow, 2001). In all but two states, there is a downward trend in percentages across two or three of the school levels. For the 16 tests reflected in the table, the downward trend is evident in 95% of the possible comparisons.

What We Don’t Know

We do not yet know what is happening in the majority of situations in which accommodations are being used. Most of the data that we do have on use of accommodations is from assessments, usually state-level tests. Even so, we have a relatively limited number of states able to provide data on the use of accommodations by students receiving special education services. However, given these limited data, we do not yet have a real sense of why there are differences.

The survey data of Jayanthi et al. (1996) suggests that teachers at different grade levels do have different perceptions of the helpfulness and ease of administering many accommodations. Do these different perceptions translate into what is selected for students during assessments?

Is there any reason to believe that students with disabilities who are in the upper grade levels have less need for accommodations? Could it be that those students who most need accommodations are the students who have already dropped out of school, and therefore the percentages of students using accommodations drops simply because the ones left need fewer accommodations? Could it be that teachers’ perceptions influence their willingness to provide accommodations to students who may actually need them? We do not know the answers to these questions.

Perhaps most important is the question of how what we know (and do not know) relates to the accommodations that students receive during instruction. Most assessment guidelines speak of the need for an alignment between assessment accommodations and instructional accommodations (Elliott & Thurlow, 2000; Thurlow, House, Boys, Scott, & Ysseldyke, 2000). If students with disabilities are receiving fewer accommodations during assessments in the upper grades, does this also mean that they are receiving fewer accommodations during instruction? Is this justified? Do teachers at the upper grade levels face logistical barriers that make providing accommodations nearly impossible unless the student simply cannot function without them? The grades in which students with disabilities are involved in transition planning are the same grades in which we see declining numbers of students using accommodations. Does that mean that students are less likely to be aware of their need for accommodations because they are not being built into transition plans? If they are not built in during transition planning, do students leave school without any idea of their accommodations needs? And if so, what impact does this eventually have on their success in their postsecondary work or education?

What To Do Now

There clearly are many unanswered questions about the issue of declining percentages of students with disabilities receiving accommodations as they reach middle and high school. An important next step is to begin to answer some of the many related questions.

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An electronic copy of this article can be found here: http://essentialeducator.org/?p=13623
The Utah Personnel Development Center (UPDC) is proud to announce a new resource for special educators. Standards-Based IEPs is a free online course designed to provide a framework for developing Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance statements (PLAAFPs) and Measurable Annual Goals (MAGs) that consider student performance data sources and align with the Utah Core State Standards (which are the same as the Common Core State Standards). Those who complete the course will be able to:

- Gain an understanding of Standards-Based IEPs (SB-IEPs)
- Consider how development of SB-IEPs fit into the IEP Process
- Learn strategies for writing PLAAFPs and MAGs using student data and includes core standards
- Consider possible data sources
- Consider how SB-IEPs impact instruction

Three essential questions are answered as participants move through the course:

1) What is a Standards-Based Individualized Education Program (SB-IEP)?
2) How do I develop a Standards-Based IEP that is tied to the Utah Core State Standards, including relevant data that reflects present level of performance for the student and has specific, measurable, achievable annual goals?
3) How does a Standards-Based IEP impact instruction for students with disabilities and facilitate access to the general curriculum and progress toward the Utah Core State Standards?

The course makes reference to several national associations: National Center for Learning Disabilities, Common Core State Standards Initiative, National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) and Project Forum. References are also made to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The UPDC also worked with the cooperation of the Utah State Office of Education Special Education Services in the development of this course.
Why address standards-based IEPs now?

True, standards-based IEPs have been around for awhile. In 1997, federal law required students with disabilities access to the general education curriculum. The law states, “Over 20 years of research and experience has demonstrated that the education of children with disabilities can be made more effective by having high expectations for such children and ensuring their access to the general curriculum to the maximum extent possible” [P.L. 105-17 §601(c)(5)]. Spring forward to 2012. With the adoption of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in 47 states, general educators and special educators have an historic opportunity to examine standards together, aligning their vocabulary, instruction and expectations for students around grade level standards. Throughout the nation, teachers are attending training to become familiar with CCSS expectations. And, special educators are now using CCSS grade-level standards and present levels of academic performance (PLAAPFs) and Measurable Annual Goals (MAGs) to develop the instructional map for the students they serve. The process doesn’t need to be labored. A seven-step process for developing a SB-IEP is used in the new course. Simple strategies for writing PLAAPFs linked to grade-level standards, and MAGs can update an outdated IEP writing practice to a current standards-based approach.

How can I enroll in the SB-IEP Course?

Individuals can enroll through the Self-Enrollment Option. Log-in is required and information entered will be saved over multiple sessions (Available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days per year; start and stop anywhere). Go to: www.updc.org/sbiep to enroll.

Another option is the LEA Facilitated Version. LEAs can contact Tom Johnson, UPDC Technology Specialist (tomj@updc.org), to set up a custom professional development experience. A Facilitator’s Guide is provided and gives information on the re-licensure points available at the completion of the course with 80% mastery on course quizzes.

Is this the same SB-IEP training I received last year?

Over 300 special educators in 22 districts participated in on-site training last school year. Several teachers have asked for a refresher course as they revise the way they write IEPs. The on-line course is a place teachers can go to revisit the step-by-step process for writing SB-IEPs. Consider one comment from a veteran teacher. He said, “I wish I could go back and re-write all my IEPs using this method.”

The new online Standards-Based IEP course will certainly benefit teachers as they no longer have to grapple with what’s needed to write compliant PLAAPFs and MAGs. Anything that can help organize information and reduce the time spent in the actual writing of PLAAPFs and MAGs will benefit the student by freeing up precious instructional time for teachers. The UPDC welcomes your feedback as you work through the modules. Let this experience work for you and your students!

An electronic copy of this article can be found here:
http://essentialeducator.org/?p=13626
The quote above reminds us that literacy skills in the 21st century are more essential than ever for success in education, work, citizenship, and our personal lives. However, far too many older students and adults do not have the necessary reading and writing skills to succeed in post-secondary education or the ever-increasing number of jobs that require strong literacy skills.

**What is Adolescent Literacy?**

The term “adolescent” can be misleading – adolescent literacy is not limited to teenagers. This label is used to describe literacy skills for students in grades four through twelve. The axiom that through grade three, students are learning to read, but beginning in grade four they shift to reading to learn (Chall, 1983), sums up why grade four is a logical place to make the jump from early literacy to adolescent literacy.

Adolescent literacy encompasses the skills that must be taught to all students so they can meet increasingly challenging reading and writing demands as they move through the upper grades, as well as what needs to be done for those students who fall behind. Literacy instruction in upper grades should be addressed on two levels:

- Instruction for all students embedded in all subject areas that focuses on vocabulary, comprehension, and writing about content – this is often referred to as “content literacy.”
- Supplemental and intervention instruction for struggling students delivered in an intervention setting that focuses on decoding, fluency and language structure, as well as additional instruction in content literacy skills.

**Comprehension Instruction**

A number of recent adolescent literacy research reports have emphasized the importance of explicit instruction of comprehension strategies that is embedded in content-area instruction. Beginning in the middle grades, reading in content areas becomes longer, more complex, and more full of content. It also becomes increasingly more varied in vocabulary, text structure, purpose, and style (Heller & Greenleaf, 2007). Every academic subject has different ways of using written materials to communicate information, which means being literate may mean different things in differing contexts and content areas. One of the main conclusions of Literacy Instruction in the Content Areas is that comprehension (including before, during, and after routines), word-level, and writing strategies are best taught in the content area classes using challenging, content-rich texts.

In 2008, the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) published the practice guide Improving Adolescent Literacy: Effective Classroom and Intervention Practices (Kamil et al., 2008). The report made five recommendations about improving practice, provided a review of the evidence supporting each recommendation, and offered suggestions for how to carry out the recommendation. One of the recommendations was to provide direct and explicit comprehension strategy instruction:

> “Reading is the key. Without it, the instructions for playing Monopoly, the recipe for Grandma’s lasagna, The Cat in the Hat, the directions to the job interview, the Psalms, the lyrics to Stairway to Heaven – all these and a lifetime of other mysteries large and small may never be known.” (Kansas City Star newspaper)
Teachers should provide adolescents with direct and explicit instruction in comprehension strategies to improve students’ reading comprehension. Comprehension strategies are routines and procedures that readers use to help them make sense of texts. These strategies include, but are not limited to, summarizing, asking and answering questions, paraphrasing, and finding the main idea (p. 16)."

To carry out the recommendation, the report suggests that teachers select carefully the text to use when teaching a given strategy, show students how to apply the strategies to different texts, use direct and explicit instruction for how to use comprehension strategies, provide the appropriate amount of guided practice, and make sure students understand that the goal is to understand the content of the text.

What Content-Area Teachers Should Know About Adolescent Literacy (National Institute of Literacy, 2007) also addressed comprehension instruction in the content classroom. The report describes comprehension as “the process of extracting or constructing meaning from words once they have been identified. Comprehension varies depending on the text being read. Good readers are purposeful, strategic, and critical readers who understand the content presented in various types of texts. Content-area teachers should incorporate the following comprehension strategies into their content-area instruction: generate questions, answer questions, monitor comprehension, summarize text, use text structure, and use graphic and semantic organizers.” (p. 18)

Which Strategies Should be Taught?

The National Reading Panel (2000) identified several comprehension strategies as being most effective for improving comprehension, and later research has supported these recommendations. They are described below:

- Comprehension monitoring. Readers approach text with a sense of purpose and adjust how they read.
- Use of graphic organizers (including story maps). Readers create or complete graphic or spatial representations of the topics and main ideas in text.
- Question answering and generation. Readers ask and answer questions before, during, and after reading. They learn to consider what type of question is being asked according to a framework and to anticipate test questions they may be asked.
- Summarization. Readers select and paraphrase the main ideas of expository text and integrate those ideas into a brief paragraph or several paragraphs that capture the most important propositions or ideas in the reading.

Cooperative learning. Students learn strategies together through peer interaction, dialogue with each other, and with the teacher in whole-group activities.

Research has also shown that although each of the strategies is beneficial when used alone, instruction is even more effective when several strategies are combined together. The National Reading Panel (2000) found that when used in combination, the use of strategies can improve the results of standardized comprehension tests.

Professional Development for Strategy Instruction

A major finding of the National Reading Panel (2000) was that professional development is essential for teachers to develop knowledge of comprehension strategies and to learn how to teach and model strategy use. The RAND Reading Study Group (Snow, 2002) noted that studies have underscored the importance of teacher preparation as a way to deliver effective instruction in reading comprehension strategies, especially when the students are low performing. In their report Literacy Instruction in the Content Areas, Heller and Greenleaf (2007) note that one of the challenges of improving student content literacy skills is the scarcity of ongoing, high-quality professional development for teachers. They note that research has shown, however, that when teachers do receive intensive and ongoing professional support, many content area teachers find a way to emphasize reading and writing in their classes.

Summary

For many middle and high schools, it may require a great deal of time, effort and expertise to develop school-wide literacy plans that include the provision of explicit comprehension strategy instruction for all students. This challenge is worth taking – there is an urgent need to improve the literacy skills before students move on to college and career.

References available upon request

Editors’ note: The UPDC hosted 50 educators from across Utah this August, who were trained to use the Key Comprehension Routine strategies outlined in this article. This workshop was very successful, and we anticipate hosting future trainings during this academic year. For more information regarding the KEYS Comprehension Strategies, go to: www.keysoliteracy.com. For more information regarding future adolescent literacy professional development opportunities, contact Ginny Eggen at: ginnye@updc.org

An electronic copy of this article can be found here: http://essentialeducator.org/?p=13629

Adolescent Literacy: The Need for Comprehension Strategy Instruction

Joan Sedita, Founding Partner Keys to Literacy
Core Academy for Teachers of Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities – It’s Our Turn Now

Cathy Longstroth, Specialist, UPDC (Utah Personnel Development Center)

I gave the General Education Core Academy a try. I attended during two summers and had a great time. The presenters had a trove of materials and exciting ideas for teaching the Utah Core Standards; they even had an appendix at the back of the binder for adapting the ideas for students with disabilities. However, there was one problem. I taught students with significant cognitive disabilities (SCD) and the core curriculum concepts, even with the adaptions, were way out of reach for my kiddos.

Things have changed. Not only do Utah general education and mild-to-moderately disabled students have a new core – The Utah State Common Core – there is a new core for students with SCD. Our new standards are linked to the Utah Common Core and are called the Utah State Common Core Essential Elements. With this change in mind, the Utah State Office of Education (USOE) and the Utah Personnel Development Center (UPDC) decided it was time for a Significant Disabilities Core Academy. This was held in June, 2012 with fifty teachers from across Utah attending. The teachers were given a storage bin with great materials to help them get started implementing the new ideas.

Barb Hegland from Hartvigsen School in Granite District presented on teaching grade level literacy to students with SCD. She used the book, The Giving Tree, by Shel Silverstein as an example.

Eric Slaymaker, also from Hartvigsen, presented on smartboards in the classroom. He also presented on websites that work especially well for students with SCD.

Christine Timothy from USOE taught us how to do a quick assessment of math skills and other ideas from the book, Teaching Math to People with Down Syndrome and Other Hands-On Learners. She provided all the materials to conduct a brief math assessment.

The new Utah State Common Core has a strong emphasis on reading informational texts. Sue Somson and Kat Winch from Jordan Valley School in The Canyons District taught literacy skills using AbleNet’s Focus on Math and Focus on Science series. AbleNet generously donated books for all participants.

Students with significant cognitive disabilities can participate in and enjoy the discovery of scientific experiments. Glenna Roundy and Beau Burmingham from Kauri Sue Hamilton School in Jordan District demonstrated surface tension, high and low pressure, and other exciting science experiments that can be done in any classroom.

Cathy Longstroth from UPDC demonstrated developing basic math understanding using Numicon math manipulatives.

Cindy Myers from Salt Lake City School District presented on math manipulatives that teach base ten and place value with an emphasis on money skills. She used the new curriculum, KP Mathematics to teach this session.

Jolene Shimada from Hartvigsen School in Granite District and Cathy Longstroth kept the group engaged in math games that teach. We rolled dice, freed the animals, played SKUNK, and explored tactile dominoes.

When surveyed on the usefulness of the material that was presented, the response was that 97% of information was useful for teachers of students with SCD. 53% of the information was “very useful.” Some of the teachers commented that they could hardly wait for school to start in the fall so that they could use the ideas and the materials.

All in all, it was a great opportunity to share ideas, become more familiar with the standards and Essential Elements of the Utah State Common Core and explore the possibilities of teaching our students in this exciting era.

An electronic copy of this article can be found here: http://essentialeducator.org/?p=13632
of Students with Significant Our Turn Now
DLM and EE...What? Dynamic Learning Maps (DLM) and the Essential Elements (EE)
How will assessment change?

Currently students with significant cognitive disabilities are assessed using Utah’s Alternate Assessment in English language arts, math and science. Utah joined a consortium with twelve other states to develop the new Dynamic Learning Maps Alternate Assessments in English language arts and math. These new assessments will be administered in 2015-2016. Teachers of students with significant cognitive disabilities may be asked to participate in developing and piloting test items prior to test administration. When opportunities for participation in this effort arise, special education directors will be notified.

How will Instruction change?

The Essential Elements in English Language Arts and Math will be released in draft form in September 17. These Essential Elements will become the grade level standards by which students with significant cognitive disabilities will be instructed. Multiple examples with a range of complexity for the standards will be provided at each grade level. Educators will want to begin preparing their students to take the DLM assessment by providing instruction based on the Essential Elements.

Where to learn more?

The Utah State Office of Education and the Utah Personnel Development Center will provide more information and professional development about Dynamic Learning Maps and the Essential Elements. Beginning in the fall of 2012, there will also be professional development online through the Utah State Office of Education website http://www.schools.utah.gov/sars/ and the Dynamic Learning Maps.

An electronic copy of this article can be found here:
http://essentialeducator.org/?p=13634
The Critical Need for Providing Early Visual Language to the Deaf Child

Research has indicated that the language areas of the brain have no preference for language input and that the most accessible pathway for full access to linguistic information for many deaf children is through the visual channel. A visual language, such as American Sign Language, is a natural language system, functions independently from spoken language, and has a fully developed grammatical system. Delay in acquiring a first language produces poorer overall language performance, and without complete access to language during early development, it is difficult for deaf and hard of hearing children’s language acquisition to be on par with that of hearing children.

American Sign Language (ASL) is often withheld from deaf children in the belief that it interferes with speech development. However, there is no evidence that using American Sign Language with deaf and hard of hearing children hinders or prevents spoken language development; in fact, proficiency in ASL has been shown to positively influence spoken language development and the development of English literacy in deaf students. Language is the driving force that facilitates spoken language, not the mode of communication.

A 10-year research synthesis by Marc Marschark on the language development of children who are deaf directly addresses questions related to the use of a visual language. For example:

1. It is important to note that there is no evidence to suggest that the early use of gestures or signs (ASL) by deaf children hampers their development of spoken English.

2. The available evidence indicates that, on average, deaf children who learn sign language (ASL) as preschoolers show better academic achievement and social adjustment during the school years, and superior gains in English literacy.

3. Most investigations of language development in children who are deaf have examined the development of either sign language or spoken language, but not their possible interaction. Preliminary findings suggest that programs that combine sign language (ASL) and spoken English (bilingual education programs) may prove more effective than programs that use either spoken or sign language alone. In other words, sign language and spoken language should not be considered as mutually exclusive alternatives, but as potentially complementary strategies for encouraging language development in deaf children.

Studies conducted by Christie Yoshinaga-Itano, and others, further suggest that there is a critical period for language development in the first years of life, and a longer critical period for speech development through the preschool years. The focus on language accessibility during the early months of life, therefore, becomes the top priority.

With this thought in mind, it only seems logical that a multi-sensory approach should be utilized. Certainly, deaf children acquire language in their own unique ways; but multi-sensory approaches to language acquisition ensure that when one pathway is less effective, another pathway can be utilized as an avenue for language learning. Early research in bilingual education...
found cognitive benefits from learning two languages; bilinguals have been shown to have greater cognitive flexibility and greater sensitivity to linguistic meaning than monolingual children. Children who are deaf have the possibility of experiencing similar cognitive benefits from learning American Sign Language and a spoken language through print and listening, as well as speaking, when appropriate.

There are linguistic and educational benefits of learning both American Sign Language and spoken/written English. Deaf children can acquire two languages simultaneously when adult language models follow language allocation strategies, where the amount of exposure to a spoken/written language is increased as the child first acquires visual language competence. ASL can function as a first language, which supports the learning of spoken/written English as a second language. On the whole, bilingual research has shown that fluency in a first language is a strong predictor of second language skill: competence in a second language is a function of proficiency in a first language.

Certainly, early language learning has ramifications for academic achievement. Deaf and hard of hearing children underperform in comparison with hearing children of similar ages in most content areas, and especially in the areas of reading and written English. This has not changed regardless of the use of various communication methodologies, and the invention of new hearing technologies.

Despite uneven outcomes, some cochlear implant teams are now advising families of children with implants to participate only in auditory-verbal therapy, and in doing so, are ignoring the enormous potential of a visual pathway to learning. The lack of early and fully accessible visual language exposure may be a contributing factor to the low levels of reading achievement in the deaf population. Delay of full language access can also have a negative impact on not only cognition and academic achievement, but on social and emotional health, as well.

In contrast to children using auditory-verbal therapy, most children from deaf families enter school having already acquired a complete first language as infants and toddlers. These children tend to perform similarly to what is expected of hearing children at the same age. Given signing adult language models, deaf children with hearing parents can also acquire visual language competence and become literate.

Hearing parents of young deaf children should be given an understanding of the critical need for providing early visual language for their child. These parents are often placed in an untenable position regarding educational and communication methodologies. Research and common sense suggests the following:

1. All linguistic input from birth should include visual input, auditory input, use of signs, gestures, facial expressions, voice, and whatever will facilitate early communication with the child. The deaf child should not be denied any means of communication that will facilitate the development of language.
2. Early accessible communication interaction between the infant and parent is absolutely necessary for the child to acquire language. No matter how much hearing loss the child has, visual input assures the child’s early accessibility to communication and language.
3. Early accessible communication directly affects the brain wiring necessary for the child’s language development. Meaningful interactions from birth that are repeated and accessible result in the formation of “neural language connec-

tions” that stay in place. Neural connections that are not used (inaccessibility to language) are eliminated.

4. There is a difference between acquiring a language and learning a language. A deaf child exposed only to a spoken language, even with a hearing aid or cochlear implant, is not necessarily able to naturally acquire the language necessary to achieve native fluency that will ultimately lead to literacy in the English language.

5. All input from birth provides opportunities to see how the child responds to auditory and/or visual input. The idea is not to “choose a method for a child” but to allow the child to let us know the best and most successful ways to communicate with him or her. This can only be done in the context of “all input” – to see how the child responds best to auditory or visual input or a combinations of both, then to follow the child’s lead.

6. For children who might be receiving a cochlear implant, “all input” from birth, including the use of signs, provides assured language input and an assured language base during the early months of life. A strong early visual language base can only help the child with continued language and speech development.

7. All input from birth provides time for parents to learn more about communication methodology possibilities and other issues related to their child being deaf without losing accessible language input. It is not simply a matter of presenting communication methodology choices to parents.

Often parents report they have been given communication choices, but in reality have been given one or only a very few “informational presentations.” When presented with options soon after the diagnosis of deafness and expected to make immediate either-or choices, hearing parents most typically choose “speech,” because they are hearing parents, and expect or want the child to act, think, and speak as they do. At the time of diagnosis, when hearing parents are typically frightened and confused and hearing perspectives and values, if speech is offered, of course speech is the option that will be chosen.

Hearing parents deserve to have opportunities to explore issues related to early language accessibility and acquisition presented in a non-rushed, non-pressured way in a supportive, trusting environment. This can be accomplished by having early interventionists who assist the parents in investigating ways of maximizing all avenues of communication and learning. These early interventionists should assist the parents in learning about the culture of the Deaf and American Sign Language, arranging to meet Deaf persons and Deaf mentors and other parents in order to discuss common problems and solutions. In short, to be given information, insights, and skills that will help them provide early, full and accessible communication and language for their child in ways that will most appropriately optimize the child’s communication and language development, and to wholeheartedly accept and take great pride and joy in their child who is deaf.

The deaf child should be offered a quality educational program that will truly prepare him/her to compete as an equal in the hearing world. This does not mean or suggest that the adequacy and success of deaf children be measured by how closely they resemble their hearing peers, but that they are educated to become successful Deaf human beings, not imitations of hearing people.

An electronic copy of this article can be found here: http://essentialeducator.org/?p=13637
According to the most recent CRT and NAEP Assessment results, scores for Utah students who are receiving special education services in elementary and secondary mathematics are declining. With the implementation of high stakes testing and the ever-constant need for students to be able to compete with students worldwide the test scores of all students are under scrutiny.

Historically, mathematics instruction for students with learning disabilities and at-risk learners has not received the same consideration and scrutiny from the research community, policy makers, and school administrators as has the field of reading. A review of the ERIC literature base (Gersten, Clarke, & Mazzocco, 2007) found that the ratio of studies on reading disabilities versus mathematics disabilities and difficulties was 5:1 for the years 1996-2005. This was a dramatic improvement over the ratio of 16:1 in the prior decade.

The question then becomes how do we increase the math skills of students receiving special education services?

The first variable that should be addressed is the teachers’ belief that all students can achieve in mathematics. In order for all students to succeed in mathematics they need to know that we believe they can be successful in mathematics. The teacher plays an important role in helping students develop the confidence they need to succeed. Another important factor in improving math scores is that many special educators have not been adequately prepared to teach mathematics, either through their formal education at a university or through an alternative teacher-licensing program. Most special educators rely on the way they were taught math to teach their own students. With the implementation of NCLB in 2001, the math scores for all students were brought to the forefront. Now every student was accountable for making progress in the math curriculum.

Another important factor in raising math scores is the constant modifications made to the core curriculum. Since NCLB in 2001, Utah has been through two revisions of the core standards and is about to enter a third. This creates confusion and uncertainty for teachers about what they are responsible for teaching the students. The core has always contained too many standards and objectives for a teacher to teach thoroughly in a school year. This has contributed to producing students who are not sufficiently prepared to compete with their peers worldwide. The partnership of the special educator and the general educator is crucial. Working together more judiciously will benefit students and their teachers.

Now that we know the variables what can we do to solve the problem?

We need to take the teachers on a math journey of their own. We need to instill within them the confidence that they can learn to teach math differently than the way that they were taught. We need to give them a full understanding of the core curriculum, which would include the appropriate pedagogy and the progression of the skills being taught.
To assist educators with this process I have created a vertical alignment of the core standards. This alignment allows the educator to better understand the learning progression of specific skills and is helpful in determining the prerequisite skills a student is missing when creating an intervention.

Another document that educators will find helpful is the Multi-Tiered Systems of Support Flowchart. This chart maps out how to best utilize the teaching partnership between the general and the special educator. The chart demonstrates how the use of consistent assessment of our students’ learning misconceptions can be identified early and corrected with an appropriate intervention.

Improving numeracy outcomes for special education students requires understanding the foundations of the problem, strategies for enhancing both cooperation between teaching peers and innovative use of outcome-based techniques, and finally detailed assessment to evaluate progress. We are at a critical juncture in moving toward balancing numeracy education with other subject areas. Progress in this effort will continue to escalate as long as educators understand the teaching variables, the necessity of cooperation, and the need to assess student progress.

As the newest staff member of the Utah Personnel Development Center I am dedicated in assisting Utah special educators on their own personal math journey. One outcome of the journey will be improved math scores for students with disabilities. Another outcome that will be achieved is for special educators in Utah feeling more confident in their own ability to teach and to see the beauty of mathematics. The UPDC recognizes that a “one size fits all” is not a practical or promising approach to personnel development. We want to implement an approach that allows us to meet the diverse needs and skills of Utah’s educators. In order to accomplish this, the UPDC will create a statewide special education math advisory committee made up of math educators, math specialists, and math leaders from local/state education agencies and universities. The advisory committee will understand local needs. They have access to best practices in mathematic instruction, and have experience in helping develop and deliver effective professional development. The UPDC will offer three different approaches for professional development; universal, targeted, and intensive.

**UPDC Universal PD Approaches:**
- Numeracy resource on the UPDC website
- Math summer series information and follow-up articles on the UPDC website
- Monthly math help desk (Math Wimba Classroom)
- Online quarterly newsletter (Essential Educator, iBook and PDF)

**UPDC Targeted PD Approaches:**
- Six teacher exchange days: half-day face-to-face follow-up to the summer math series. These will be held in locations around Utah. The purpose is to allow discourse between teachers as to what is working, what is not, and problem-solving to improve student outcomes in mathematics.
- Math workshop series in summer of 2013
- Regional professional development training

**UPDC Intensive PD Approaches:**
- Multi-tiered system of supports (2012-2017 SPDG)
- Individual LEA math training

I look forward to beginning this math journey with each of you!

Editors’ note: all charts and aids mentioned in this article can be accessed and downloaded on the Essential Educator website at: http://essentialeducator.org/?p=13639
This past summer, multiple math professional development opportunities were available to Utah teachers. The Teaching and Learning Department at the Utah State Office of Education (USOE) offered Core Academies throughout the State. The Special Education and Teaching and Learning Departments at the USOE in partnership with the College of Education at the University of Utah offered a numeracy project focusing on improving math content and pedagogy skills of special and general education co-teaching teams who work with struggling middle school learners. The Utah Personnel Development Center (UPDC) offered professional learning experiences focused around effective instructional practices for teaching students with learning disabilities.

The UPDC is in full support of the Utah Math Core State Standards. Why the emphasis on instruction or the “how”? We believe the State Standards “define what all students are expected to know and be able to do, not how teachers should teach” (Archer, 2012; Woodward, 2012). This article describes the development of the UPDC summer math workshops, participants’ comments about their experience, and next steps.

**How was the Math Summer Series Developed?**

In collaboration with multiple school districts (Provo, Granite, Davis, Weber, Tooele, South Summit, Alpine, and Washington), the UPDC developed a math summer series for teachers of students with disabilities, emphasizing how students can meet the Standards. This three-day series was offered this summer during June, July, and August in six locations around Utah. About 300 hundred special educators participated.

The most important question that was addressed during the workshop was: What should specialized instruction in math look like so students with disabilities will progress in the Utah Core State Standards?

Activities in the workshop centered around how students ought to engage in learning mathematics. Student engagement strategies were taken from the following sources:

*Effective Mathematics Instruction, 2008 (National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities (NICHCY)*

*Mathematics Instruction for Students with Learning Disabilities or Difficulty Learning Mathematics: A Guide for Teachers, 2008 (Center on Instruction)*

*Accessible Mathematics: 10 Instructional Shifts That Raise Student Achievement, 2009 (National Council of Supervisors of Mathematics)*

*Eight Standards of Mathematical Practice, 2011 (National Common Core State Standards Initiative)*

The workshop was not a sit-and-get activity. Student engagement strategies were modeled to participants. Participants then practiced strategies in small groups. Each participant then developed and delivered a mini-lesson applying what they had learned.

**What Are Participants Saying About Their Experience in the Summer Series**

*When it comes to instruction, what did you find most valuable during the workshop?*

“Showing how to incorporate math naturally with everyday examples...solving the problem is more important than getting the answer.”

“Hands on!!! Covered things I can do in the class and ideas to work on to implement the core.”

“Collaborating with other special education teachers, exchanging ideas and getting new strategies in teaching math.”

“The most valuable thing was learning a variety of instructional strategies for teaching math.”

“How to create a good lesson plan and the "how to" in preparing my classroom for various on-hands activities!”

“Learning so many different ways to connect with my students in real world application practices.”

“I am excited to share multiple strategies and activities with the faculty at my school. These strategies will help ALL students.”

“Watching the demonstrations and then practicing the implementation of strategies learned at the workshop.”

“It was a great hands-on training with a lot of practical materials.”

“So many wonderful resources were offered as well as plenty of interaction time with instructors and other attendees.”

“Exchanging ideas, becoming even more comfortable with the new core. I really liked that it was a workshop for special education teachers.”

**What is a practice that you will now implement in your teaching?**

“I will incorporate more hands on, real-world experiences throughout all stages of learning in every math concept. I will also not be afraid to give students the answer to start out with and help them focus more on the process.”

“Teach with manipulatives and provide more time for the students to model their answers.”
Math and the Utah Core Standards

“Use the concrete-representational-abstract (CRA) strategy to build conceptual knowledge in my students.”

“Base my lessons on the grade level common core.”

“I will ask students to justify their answers and create a language-rich classroom.”

“Simple daily reviews, using whiteboards. Pre-teach math vocabulary that students are learning in class.”

“#1. Review, Preview, I do it, We do it, You do it, closing. #2. Teach math vocabulary explicitly.”

“Use the various templates for students’ white boards (e.g., number line, coordinate plane). Throughout each math lesson, I will ask/use many “why?,” “prove to me,” “explain to me,” “how do you know?,” “demonstrate in a picture” as students give answers and solutions to math problems.”

“During "study hall" I have concentrated more on getting the work done and the formulas rather than the process because of time restraints. I will have student verbalize the process more. I will also stress that making mistakes is part of the process and is OKAY!”

“Why do we need the sleeve protector with all the different kinds of paper? I love the sleeve protector with all the different kinds of paper inside to use as a personal white board. I plan on using the activities in my classroom.”

Where Do We Go Next?

Our end result is to improve the mathematic performance for students with disabilities. The most important school factor in accomplishing our end result is improving teacher instruction in the classroom. We have a renewed focus to supplement LEAs in building capacity and sustainability when it comes to providing effective mathematic instruction to students with disabilities. We recognize that many LEAs across Utah have “bright spots” when it comes to math performance and personnel development. Here are two critical steps that the UPDC has taken to support educators in their mathematical instruction to students with disabilities.

One, on July 1, 2012, the UPDC welcomed a new educational specialist, Beck Unker. Prior to coming to the UPDC, Becky served as a math specialist in Granite School District. Becky Unker. Becky’s passion and expertise is in evidence-based mathematics instruction. Her knowledge, experience, and friendly nature make her a real asset to the UPDC and LEAs throughout the state. As a math specialist, she has developed materials aligned to effective instruction and RtI for K-8 and provided staff development to both special ed and general ed teachers (K-12). She has served on state math committees and presented at state and national math conferences.

Two, we are in the process of creating a state-wide special education math advisory committee made up of math educators, math specialists, and math leaders from local/state education agencies and universities. The advisory committee will understand local needs, they have access to best practices in mathematic instruction, and they have experience in helping develop and deliver effective professional development (PD).

As for the Math Summer Series, we have some specific follow-up activities. They include:

• Math Summer Series Resources on the UPDC website (all handouts, materials, sample lesson plans, articles, and web resources)
• Monthly Math Help Desk (Math Wimba Classroom)
• Six Teacher Exchanges: Half-day face-to-face follow-up to the summer math series. These will be held in locations around Utah. The purpose would be to allow discourse between teachers as to what is working, what is not, and problem-solve to improve student engagement in mathematics.

In conclusion, what we teach in mathematics has been defined clearly by the Utah Core State Standards. Helping our students with disabilities in Utah to achieve success in the core standards requires we implement evidence-based instructional practices. At the UPDC, we will do our best to be relentless in supporting LEAs in their staff development efforts in the area of mathematics instruction.

An electronic copy of this article can be found here:
http://essentialeducator.org/?p=13642
Teachers across Utah (general and special education) expressed concerns about instructing struggling learners, including students with disabilities, in the Utah Core Standards-Mathematics (UCS-M). Special education teachers were particularly concerned about their limited background training in mathematics content and content based pedagogy; while general education teachers were concerned about their limited background training in pedagogy for struggling learners. Finally, the concern of the Utah State Office of Education/Special Education Section (USOE/SES) was that all learners deserve strong content and pedagogy in mathematics. Instruction in cooperative teams, as part of a continuum of alternative placements, can be a powerful means to ensure student success. With these stakeholder goals in mind, USOE/SES joined with the University of Utah’s Urban Institute of Teacher Education and the Special Education Department. The goal was to help collaborative teams of general and special educators increase their pedagogical content knowledge in 6th through 8th grade UCS-M and increase the effectiveness of co-teaching teams. Out of this working partnership came the Numeracy Middle School Mathematics Research Project.

The USOE/SES provided the funding to train 23 special education teachers (including one special education director) and 15 general education teachers in the 6th-8th grade UCS-M Content and Practice Standards. The University of Utah developed the courses, the research parameters, and provided the instructors, Margarita (Maggie) Cummings, Patricia Matthews and Kaitlin Bundock. The project focused on a) mathematics content in the 6th-8th grades UCS-M, b) content based pedagogy, c) teacher efficacy, and d) co-teaching pedagogy for students that struggle in mathematics. All teachers were pre- and post-tested using assessments developed by the Learning Mathematics for Teaching Project (LMT) from the University of Michigan.

The LMT was selected for this project because it is specifically designed to measure growth of mathematical teaching knowledge. During the first course, teachers were pre- and post-tested on rational number skills using LMT RN 2008 forms A and B. Scores were standardized according to LMT specifications. Special Education teachers scored .423 below the mean on the LMT while general education teachers score .592 above the mean; the standard deviation for special education teachers was .846 and for general education teachers was .776. On the post-test special education teachers scored .115 above the mean while general education teachers scored 1.001 above the mean with a standard deviation of .776 and .827 respectively. Below are the analyses of these data.

Pre-test Analysis

A univariate analysis indicated that special and general education teachers had a difference in their content knowledge base when they started the project. It is important to note that the pre-test was given before any mathematical content knowledge was given.

Post Test Analysis

Another important preliminary finding was a significant difference between the means on the post-tests for both groups. A univariate analysis showed statistically significant differences between the two groups’ post-test scores which indicates that special and general educators ended at different levels of mathematical knowledge for teaching.

Analysis of growth:

Next, attention was turned to examining increases in both groups pre- and post-measures. The standard deviation increase for special educators was .538 while it was .521 for general educators. To determine if there was statistical significance in this increase, a repeated measure analysis was completed. It indicated a statistically significant increase for both special and general educators.

Comparison of growth of both groups:

Finally, a check was done to determine if there was a statistical difference between increases in each group. It was concluded that there was not a statistically significant difference in the increase of math content knowledge by teacher type. This means that even though general educators outperformed special educators on the pre- and post-test, each teacher group’s math content knowledge increased at a similar rate. This seems to indicate that the training is equally beneficial to both special educators and general educators.

Conclusion:

Given that general educators came into the Numeracy Project with more mathematics training due to licensing requirements, the fact that they started with higher LMT scores is not surprising. What is an especially relevant finding is that both groups’ math content knowledge increased at similar rates indicating that intervention of a content-based pedagogy within the context of the UCS-M Practice and Content Standards is equally beneficial for both special and general educators. This increase in general and special educator’s math content knowledge will benefit all learners including students with disabilities.

An electronic copy of this article can be found here: http://essentialeducator.org/?p=13644
Numeracy Project:
Improving Special Educators’ Content and Content-Based Pedagogy in the Utah Core Standards-Mathematics
In Case you Missed the Utah Special Education Law Conference...
The Utah Special Education Law Conference was held on August 6-7, 2012 in Ogden. Over 900 education professionals, advocates, and parents from Utah and surrounding states attended the two day conference, which provided an opportunity to participate in discussions around the Individuals with Disability Education Act (IDEA) requirements, recent national court case decisions, and U.S. Department of Education and Utah State Office of Education technical assistance. Here is a quick summary, in case you missed this exciting and informative professional development opportunity!

- Dr. Larry Shumway, State Superintendent, welcomed the attendees and discussed the Utah State Board of Education’s Promises to Keep for public education. These promises set a high educational standard for all students in Utah, including those with disabilities, and include:
  - Ensuring literacy and numeracy for all students;
  - Providing high quality instruction for all students;
  - Establish curriculum with high standards and relevance for all students; and
  - Requiring effective assessment to inform high quality instruction and accountability.

- The “Year In Review” keynote session reviewed over 70 national court cases from the last year. We discussed increases in disputes regarding bullying/disability harassment, seclusion and restraint, RtI and child find, and updates to 504 Guidance from the Office of Civil Rights.

- In Utah, State Special Education Director Glenna Gallo has priorities of improving school to post-school transition planning, preschool LRE and outcomes, and math instruction/outcomes for students with disabilities. These priorities were reflected in conference sessions that addressed collecting, reporting, and using Utah Preschool Outcomes Data (UPOD), preschool LRE, transition and employment law, new Part C Regulations, and the Utah Core Standards.

- The Utah Personnel Development Center (UPDC) demonstrated the newly developed free online professional development module “Standards Based IEPs,” which is available at: www.updc.org/whats-new. This module contains up to four hours of customized professional development to describe ways to utilize the Utah Core Standards throughout the IEP process, which will allow students with disabilities meaningful access to the general curriculum.

This is only a brief description of the topics covered. For access to the presentation materials, please visit http://schools.utah.gov/sars/A-Z-Directory.aspx

- IDEA Boot Camp
- Discipline of Students with Disabilities: The Key Rules and regulations from Removals to MDR
- IEPs: Getting Content Right
- Bullying: Legal Issues and Practical Strategies
- Online Schools, LEAs, Programs and IDEA
- Early Childhood Transition Requirements and the new Part Regulations: What is the same? What is different?
- Everything You Need to Know about Independent Educational Evaluations
- LRE and Placement Under the IDEA
- Ins and Outs of Procedural Safeguards
- Cases and Commentary on Child Find
- ESY – What is it? Who Needs It? Who Provides It?
- Legal Issues involving Students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing
- Schools and Parents Behaving Badly: Who’s Being Unreasonable and Does it Matter?
- Effective IEP Meeting Documentation
- Legally Defensible Strategies and Placements for Behavior
- 504: What’s New
- The Woodcock Johnson and Beyond: Evaluation and Eligibility Issues
- Making Your Point: Communicating Important Special Ed Legal Concerns to Principals
- Educating Preschool Students in the Least Restrictive Environment
- Private Placements: Who Is Responsible? Parents, Districts, or the State?
- Compliance Monitoring Mythbusters
- School Nurses
- Section 504 Advanced Issues
- Transportation as a Related Issue
- Elements of Legally Defensible Transition Planning
- Standards Based IEP Training using the new online module
- A Special Education Primer for Charter Schools: What every new [and experienced] Charter School needs to know about how to avoid special education stumbling blocks (Part One)
- Early Childhood Standards
- Transportation Administrator (1st Hour)
- Sensitivity Training (2nd hour)
- Conducting State Complaint Investigations
- Assignments, Team Debriefing, and Planning

An electronic copy of this article can be found here:
http://essentialeducator.org/?p=13647
New Face at the UPDC!

Becky Unker (formally from Granite School District) has joined the specialist staff of the UPDC. Becky is a special education math specialist who brings a wealth of experience in math curriculum. Ms. Unker is well qualified to assist school districts in their mathematics improvement efforts, having completed dual majors in special and elementary education, and she holds additional endorsements in ESL and K-6 math.

To contact Becky, phone her at: 801-363-0822, or email at: beckyu@updc.org

Brain Injury Alliance of Utah, TBI Conference

Who Should Attend: Individuals with brain injury and their families, health care professionals, educators, psychologists, social workers, case managers, SLP’s and other service providers.

When: 10/11, 2012
Where: South Towne Exposition Center, Sandy, Utah
What: Featuring Jeff Kupfer, U. of Denver
Registration and Information: 801-716-4993

Thinking Outside The Box: Annual CCBD Conference

What: Utah CCBD Annual Conference
Who Should Attend: Special educators, behavior specialists, school psychologists and others interested in improving behavioral outcomes for children and youth
When: 9/28, 2012, 9:00am-4:00pm
Where: Rice Eccles Football Stadium Tower, U of Utah
What: Thinking Outside the box…So you Don’t Have to put Your Kids Inside the Box! Key presenters Melisa Genaux, M.Ed., & William Jensen, Ph.D.
Cost: Registration fee schedule online at: utahccbd2012.eventbrite.com
Registration Information: Register online at: utahccbd2012.eventbrite.com

USOE Sponsors Statewide Early Childhood Conference

Who Should Attend: Parents and persons working with birth to six population within Utah, including early intervention, Title I, special education teachers, para educators, related service providers, day care providers, and administrators.
When: 11/1-2, 2012. 8:00am to 4:00pm both days
Where: Provo Marriott Hotel, 101 W., 100 N., Provo, Utah
Cost: The only cost is $15 a day for parents and day care providers
Registration Information: Registration closes 10/15/2012.
Register at: http://earlychildhoodeducationconference.eventbrite.com
Questions? Contact Aileen Pace at: ececreg@schools.utah.gov

17th Annual Conference on Advancing School Mental Health

Who Should Attend: Parents, educators, researchers, and professionals working with students with mental health issues in schools.
When: 10/25-27, 2012
Where: Salt Lake Marriott Hotel, Downtown SLC
What: School Mental Health: Promoting Positive Outcomes for Students, Families, Schools, and Communities
Registration, cost and information at: http://csmh.umaryland.edu/Conferences/AnnualConference/index.html

Utah CEC First Annual Great Pumpkin Run

What: 5K and children’s 1 mile run. Proceeds benefit Utah CEC
When: October 6, 2012; 5K at 9:00am, Fun Run at 9:30am
Where: Wheeler Historic Farm, Murray, Utah
Cost: Registration fee schedule online at: utahccbd2012.eventbrite.com
Registration and cost Information: Register online at: http://viawest5kforcec.eventbrite.com
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