

Who are we?

We are a group of Quad Cities-area parents, teachers, and community members brought together by the desire to support efforts that more fully include children with disabilities in our area schools. This quarterly newsletter is dedicated to enhancing the education of all our children by providing a place to celebrate successes and offering a forum to discuss the challenges associated with moving towards full inclusion.

IN

Inclusion News

Summer 2007

Call to Action

The mission of *IN* is to provide a forum for sharing ideas and resources related to inclusive education in Illinois and Iowa. To help us fulfill our mission, we welcome the following from you:

- ✓ Resources you've found helpful for parents and teachers.
- ✓ Success stories of inclusive experiences.
- ✓ Things you wish someone had told you sooner!
- ✓ Questions you'd like answered.

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We also are accepting donations to help fund future issues of *IN*. Checks can be made out to *IN* and sent to the above address. Thank you!

Stacey Skoning, Ph.D.
Editor

From the Editor

Stacey Skoning

I'd like to take a moment to reflect on the successful completion of two full years publishing *IN*.

In the past two years we have grown tremendously in readership. What began as a small group of interested parents and professionals in the local Quad Cities area has now reached across the country and into additional countries outside of the United States. We have addressed a variety of topics related to inclusion through the previous 8 newsletters. These topics have included collaboration, building a sense of community, post-secondary education, school choice, cooperative learning, and multiple intelligence theory among others. This issue addresses the role of paraprofessionals in inclusive education. Future issues will address the writing of inclusive IEPs and transition planning.

Approximately 1,000 subscribers in five countries now read *IN* quarterly. Within the United States, our readers extend from New England and Florida to Texas and California and live in almost every state in between. The number of individuals seeking information and resources reminds me how much work is left to be done if we are to include all children in general education environments and in their local communities.

For this reason, I have asked our steering committee to begin thinking more broadly. Clearly, the issues of importance to the Quad Cities area are also of importance to many readers in other parts of the world. We will be expanding our focus and our steering committee to meet these demands. Any readers interested in helping to determine the future focus of *IN*, are welcome to submit a letter explaining their interest to the editor.

Finally, the address for *IN* will be changing as of the next issue. As editor, I will be moving from Augustana College in Rock Island, IL to the University of Wisconsin – Oshkosh. I would like to thank both institutions for their support of this publication. Augustana College has provided two full years of support for the printing and publication of *IN*. The University of Wisconsin – Oshkosh has promised to do the same for at least one full year. We will be seeking external funding sources to cover printing and mailing costs beyond summer 2008.

Thank you for reading and for your continued support of *IN*.

The Role of Paraprofessionals

Stacey Skoning

The role of paraeducators in inclusive classrooms can be a critical component in the success, or failure, of our students with disabilities. For more than 10 years, Michael Giangreco (1997) and others have been writing about the roles of these assistants and the effect of their presence and proximity on students with disabilities. Having adults attached to children all day significantly impacts their inclusion in general education classrooms. Giangreco, Edelman, Luiselli, and Macfarland (1997) identified 8 ways that instructional assistants can interfere with the successful inclusion of students due to their close proximity. These include:

- (a) interference with ownership and responsibility by general educators,
- (b) separation from classmates,
- (c) dependence on adults,
- (d) impact on peer interactions,
- (e) limitations on receiving competent instruction,
- (f) loss of personal control,
- (g) loss of gender identity,
- (h) interference with instruction of other students (p. 7).

It is clear that when adults are always next to our students with disabilities, their peers and regular education teachers spend significantly less time interacting with them.

While these negative effects of pairing students with paraprofessionals can occur, they do not have to be the necessary outcome. Marks, Schrader, and Levine (1999) point out that the tendency for assistants to take on the kinds of roles that interfere with student progress and independence often result from "conflicting roles in meeting both the needs of inclusion students as well as those of general education teachers" (p. 315). In their study, they found that paraeducators

wanted the inclusion experience to be successful and saw their role as one of reducing the burden placed on the regular education teachers. In this capacity, they felt that they needed to manage both behaviors and academics in a way that would not require any additional involvement on the part of the regular education teachers.

Additionally, instructional assistants far too often are put in positions for which they are not trained. They are asked to modify curriculum and instruction when classroom and special education teachers have not met and planned well in advance. They also often are asked to be the primary communications hub between all of the adults working with the student (Marks, Schrader, & Levine, 1999). In this capacity, parents may view them as having all of the information and may interact with them to gain updates on their children's progress, rather than communicating with their children's teachers.

To avoid these pitfalls, regular on-going communication is needed between all parties involved. Giangreco, Smith, and Pinckney (2006) point out that system-wide change is needed if we are to provide more inclusive support for children with disabilities. Their study suggests that there is an over-reliance on one-on-one assistants to support children with disabilities and suggests a shift away from assigning paraprofessionals to individual children. By fading individual support and shifting the focus to classroom support, interference with teacher ownership and peer interactions as well as unnecessary dependence on adults may be reduced, while time with general and special education teachers may be increased.

A systematic shift that includes clear

job descriptions, ongoing professional development, and regular communication as a team, would go a long way to providing more inclusive support for the students with the most significant disabilities in our schools and allowing them to participate more fully with their typical peers in our general education classrooms.

References:

- Giangreco, M.F., Edelman, S.W., Luiselli, T.E., Macfarland, S.Z.C. (1997). Helping or hovering? Effects of instructional assistant proximity on students with disabilities. *Exceptional Children* 64, 7-18.
- Giangreco, M.F., Smith, C.S., Pinckney, E. (2006). Addressing the paraprofessional dilemma in an inclusive school: A program description. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities* 31, 215-229.
- Marks, S.U., Schrader, C., Levine, M. (1999). Paraeducator experiences in inclusive settings: Helping, hovering, or holding their own? *Exceptional Children* 65, 315-328.



IN Book Store

IN now has an on-line book store.

Recommended books on inclusion are available through our book store. Go to our web site at www.inclusion-news.org and click on the link.

Once on our bookstore page, you'll find a link to amazon.com. If you order ANYTHING through this link, a percentage of each sale will be sent to IN to help support the continued publication of our newsletter.

Happy shopping!

The Autism Acceptance Book by Ellen Sabin

This resource was shared by one of our readers.

Laurie Lomba of Moline, IL, shared that if her daughter were still in the primary grades, she "would certainly be adding 'The Autism Acceptance Book' into [her] IEP...it gives the regular education teacher a compass - as well as all others who just don't 'get it.'"

The First Midwest Regional Conference on Autism Spectrum Disorders and Inclusion

This conference is being sponsored by the Autism Society of the Quad Cities and will be held on the campus of Augustana College, Rock Island, IL – April 19-20, 2008. We look forward to a full slate of nationally recognized speakers including Temple Grandin, Tom Wassink, Paula Kluth, Dennis Debbaudt, Kate McGinnity, Nan Negri, and Andy Paulson.

The call for proposals is now available at www.autismqc.org.



Upcoming Issues of IN

Future issues of IN will address the following topics:

- Writing inclusive IEPs
- Transition services

Our readers are always welcome to submit articles. Articles may be submitted electronically to Stacey Skoning, editor. All submissions will be reviewed for possible publication. Please send them to:

staceyskoning@augustana.edu.

Learning...Continued from p. 4

However, once hired, there is training available for their associates. They receive training on school policy and procedures. There also is training to go over the IEPs of children with whom they will work and specific goals related to the associate's role and the program or classroom structure in which the children are placed. There are no formal on-going training programs offered, but if the right opportunity arises, associates may attend

training that would directly help them meet the needs of their students.

Pleasant View Elementary School is working to support its students with disabilities in general education classrooms. While some children still are pulled-out to special education classrooms for portions of the day, administrators, teachers, associates, and parents are working together to provide more inclusive options for support.

Learning by Example

Recently, Mary Johnson, a member of our steering committee, was able to converse with Mr. Don Dehner, principal of Pleasant View Elementary School in Pleasant Valley, IA, to discuss the role of instructional assistants in his school.

Dehner explained that in the past, associates were assigned to specific students with significant disabilities, but that they try not to do this any more. Instead their associates are assigned to teachers or programs where they facilitate the learning process of the children in that school setting as defined by their IEPs. In this way, students are less likely to develop dependencies on one adult in their environment and staff positions depend less on the enrollment of particular students.

The goal of Pleasant View's associates is to support the greatest level of independence for

the students within the school environment. This is accomplished through open and trusting relationships with the teachers with whom they work and ongoing communication as they work with the students. Associates should assist rather than becoming the teachers for their students.

The kind of support provided to each student varies, but Dehner explained that this is determined through the IEP process. A matrix entitled "Student Support Services Elementary Planning Guide" is used during IEP meetings to determine how much support is needed and what kind. Several areas are reviewed including safety concerns, assistance with basic functions, extent of curricular modifications, interaction and engagement with peers, and the needs of the child across academic periods of the day. Plans also are established at this time targeting areas for increased independence and how



Pleasant View Elementary School

this will be facilitated by the associates working with the student.

When asked about the required education or training of associates in his district, Dehner stated that there are no minimum education guidelines in Pleasant Valley. Instead they try to evaluate each candidate as an individual. They do not want to miss some very good candidates due to a college background requirement.

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