Welcome Back!

Welcome back to all of you for a new and exhilarating school year!!! This time of year is filled with anticipation. Teachers are anxiously awaiting the arrival of their new students and students are waiting for the school bus to arrive to take them to school after a long summer off.

Keep in mind that the hard work that you put in now will certainly pay off as the year progresses. Schedules may change as you get to know your students and their capabilities. That’s okay. Being consistent and positive will help you develop and maintain a nurturing learning environment in which your students are sure to flourish.

Get out there and meet your special and general education colleagues. It is important to not only build relationships with your students and their parents but also with the other staff in your school. You may find that these relationships will open up more opportunities for your students.

I am looking forward to working with each of you and your school districts again this year! Many of you attended summer trainings. I can’t wait to hear about how you and your students are doing.

We have many exciting things planned for this year. Look to the Region 1 Autism Education website at www.soe.vcu.edu/acc for upcoming events.

Have a wonderful start to the 2009-2010 school year!

Thanks!

Carrie Radigan
Facilitator, Region 1 Autism Education Consortium

Parent/Teacher Relations—You Can Do It!

Summer is over and the school year is just beginning. Remember to keep in mind that you are about to receive someone else’s child in your classroom. It is important to build professional relationships with your students’ families as they are entrusting you with their child. Hosting an open house or a getting to know you meeting after school may be your first step for developing a positive relationship with your students’ families.

Inside this issue:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inside this issue:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10 Ideas for Inclusive Classrooms</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shout Outs!</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upcoming events</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Forget About Social Skills</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tidbits from the TEACCH training</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Special points of interest:

This issue focuses on ideas for starting the school year off on a positive note. There are tips for inclusive classrooms. You will also find information on social skills as well as ideas from TEACCH.

Articles are always welcomed! Also welcomed are “shout outs” to your peers. If you would like to submit any information for future issues, please contact me at: radiganct@vcu.edu.
10 Ideas for Inclusive Classrooms

Supporting students with autism in the general education setting is an on-going struggle for many teachers. The following ideas have been adapted from the article “Supporting Students with Autism: 10 Ideas for Inclusive Classrooms” written by Paula Kluth (2005):

1. **Learn about the Learner from the Learner:** Talk to the student directly to find out more about his learning style. He may be able to give you valuable information about how he learns best. The information can be gathered in a variety of ways, such as through a survey or interview. For a student who is unable to converse or give you information, you can gain knowledge of the student by talking to his family or by observing him in the classroom.

2. **Support Transitions:** Many students with autism struggle with transitions. Here are some ideas that may help ease these transition times:
   - Give warnings before transition;
   - Use a transitional activity for the whole class such as writing in a homework book or singing a song (i.e. “clean up”);
   - Use a transition aid such as a picture or object to signify where he going next.

3. **Give Fidget Supports:** It may be a challenge for your students with autism to stay in their seats. Offering items that they can sit and fidget with may help them stay put. Some ideas are koosh balls, keychains, straws. Some students also enjoy drawing during their down times.

4. **Help with Organizing:** Even though some students with autism are overly organized others need help organizing their materials. They may need assistance finding materials or organizing their locker and backpack. They may also need a reminder to take home their homework at the end of the day. Teachers can help by allowing students to have a pack up time at the end of each period. Having a buddy help your student with autism write down assignments and pack up materials may be very helpful. Provide your students with checklists of what they need to pack up.

5. **Assign Class Jobs:** Many students with autism are comforted by predictability and routines. Having class routines and jobs can provide this type of structure. Plan jobs according to your students’ strengths. For instance if you have a student who is very good at organizing materials then have him collect items at the end of activities such as papers to be turned in to the teacher.

6. **Provide Breaks:** Some students need movement breaks periodically to accomplish optimal learning. Allow your student to get up and move around if necessary. Build in movement breaks into your teaching day. Walk and talk with a partner is one way to incorporate movement while also learning.

7. **Focus on Interests:** Students with autism often have specific interests. These are sometimes frowned upon in the classroom because the student may perseverate on their interest. However, it is okay, at times, to build this interest into your assignments. If the student loves to talk about cars then let him write about them. It is a win-win for everyone.

8. **Rethink Writing:** Writing can be a major source of tension with students with autism. Writing may be sloppy or even non-existent. Students may exhibit behavioral challenges when asked to write. Think of alternatives to writing. Some examples are using a computer to type assignments or allowing the student to dictate his ideas to a scribe.

9. **Give Choices:** Build in choices throughout the school day. It not only helps your students feel in control but also allows for more productivity. For example, “Do you want to use a pen or a pencil?”, “Do you want to read with a friend or quietly by yourself?”,

10. **Include:** Allow students to be around peers as much as possible to learn from example. For example, if you are working on social skills then have opportunities for them to be around others during social activities.

A special shout out goes out to everyone that attended the TEACCH staff development that was offered in August! It showed much dedication to come in to work for a three day training during your time off.

Also, thank you to Mike Asip and Dr. Judith Marco for hosting the TEACCH training in Chesterfield County. Your hospitality and commitment to improving services for autism is much appreciated!
Upcoming events

The fall months will bring several professional staff development opportunities that are being sponsored by the Region 1 Autism Education Consortium.

On September 28, 2009, a workshop focusing on educational eligibility is being held at the Richmond Technical Center. This training is for eligibility teams within the region. One team is being invited from each of the fifteen school districts in Region 1. There is no cost for this training opportunity.

In October, Andrew Bondy from Pyramid Consulting is coming to us to deliver a two-day training on picture exchange communication system (PECS). Dr. Bondy is one of the creators of PECS. This training is open to staff from Region 1 schools. The training is on October 12-13, 2009. It will be held at the Deep Run Recreational Center in Henrico County. There is no cost for this training.

The Autism Diagnostic Observation Scale (ADOS) is an evaluation tool that many clinics and practitioners are using to aid in the identification of children with autism. The Region 1 Autism Consortium is pleased to offer two trainings focusing on how to use this tool. Dr. Donald Oswald will be training teams from around the region. The dates for the trainings are October 28 and 30, 2009 and November 11 and 13, 2009. Both of these trainings are currently full. Oak Knoll Middle School in Hanover County will be hosting both of these trainings.

Lastly, Carol Schall will be coming back to us on November, 3, 2009 to speak about behavior and positive behavioral supports. This will be held at Dinwiddie High School from 9-3:30.

Please contact Carrie Radigan at (804) 828-4501 or radiganct@vcu.edu with any questions.

Resources

There are numerous resources available. Here is a brief list of some of them:

www.autismtrainingva.org is a wonderful website. It is the website for the Virginia Autism Council. Trainings are listed as well as other resources such as college courses on autism and tuition reimbursement.

T/TAC has a plethora of information on various disabilities. There are on-line courses and information about trainings and workshops. You can go to www.ttaonline.org or www.vcu.edu/ttac.org.

Here are some other websites that you may find helpful:

www.doe.virginia.gov
www.autismspeaks.org
www.varc.org
www.autismva.org
www.dotolearn.com
www.mayer-johnson.com
www.researchautism.org
www.tonyattwood.com.au
www.lindahodgdon.com

Don’t Forget About Social Skills

Social skills is one of the main areas in which individuals with autism struggle. Therefore, we need not ignore it when making programming decisions. Acquiring acceptable social skills may help our students with autism be more successful now and with future employment.

Jed Baker, author of No More Meltdowns, outlines a four step model in dealing with meltdowns. They are as follows:

- Accepting and appreciating your student. Have realistic expectations and build a positive relationship with your students. Try to avoid power struggles and control your own anger.
- De-escalating a meltdown. Once you are in the middle of dealing with a meltdown, try to get out of it by using distraction.
- Understanding why a meltdown keeps occurring. Look for a pattern or trigger to help decrease the likelihood of the behavior occurring again in the future.
- Creating plans to prevent meltdowns. Once you can pinpoint what is causing the meltdown then you can put things in place such as teaching skills to deal with the triggering situation or by using rewards.
The Autism Educational Consortium established the Board of Directors in June of 2008. The consortium’s guiding principles are as follows:

1. The Consortium will assist participating school divisions in designing and implementing a comprehensive program of instruction which utilizes evidence-based practices that will result in documented outcomes for students with autism spectrum disorder.

2. The Consortium will support the implementation of high-quality services for students with autism spectrum disorder in member school divisions.

3. The Consortium will recognize that comprehensive educational programs for students with autism spectrum disorder will require that all professionals working with these students to participate in on-going professional staff development activities.

A few weeks ago, trainers from the TEACCH program in North Carolina visited us to train staff members from the 15 school districts in Region 1. Here are some ideas that may be helpful for you to consider as you are getting your classrooms ready for students:

- Use furniture to make physical boundaries in your classroom to help structure different areas of the room. Your room may be broken into areas such as independent work, group, leisure/centers, computer, etc. Having “areas” in your classroom will help your students transition more independently.

- Use schedules to help your students understand the flow of his/her day. Schedules can look differently according to student ability. For instance, one student’s schedule may have pictures of each activity while another student may just have written words to let him know what is coming next.

- Structuring up your students’ work tasks will help them become more independent. Again, the structure needs to be gauged according to what the student can handle. One student may have containers to separate all of the pieces of his work task (i.e. pegs in each hole of an egg carton) to help him be more successful at the task. Another student may just need his work organized in folders to let him know which work to complete.

- Build in reinforcement throughout your students’ day. Reinforcing activities can be disbursed throughout the day so that a more difficult task is followed by a more preferred task.

- Teach play skills. Students with autism generally need to be taught how to play with others. This may entail teaching using simple turn taking activities to teach “my turn, your turn” or it may entail teaching social communication such as asking a friend to play. Whatever the level of your students it is important to work on social skills as these are skills that will help your students throughout their lifetime.

- If one of your students is in a crisis, remember to reduce your language that you use with him. Also, stay calm during the crisis. If your anxiety increases so will your student’s. Once the crisis is over, process with your teammates to try to pinpoint what triggered the behavior.