Welcome Back!

Welcome back everyone! Here’s hoping that everyone has had a wonderful and refreshing summer and that you are feeling energized for the new school year.

We are looking forward to a very busy year! This year, we will be focusing on training for paraprofessionals. As you may know, House Bill 325 was passed into law and requires that all paraprofessionals who work with students who have autism be trained in behavior management. The Virginia Department of Education (V-DOE) along with Virginia Commonwealth University developed a comprehensive set of learning competencies that paraprofessionals need to accomplish. Please see page 2 for more information. In addition to the summer training that the Consortium provided, we will be offering two more face to face training opportunities during the school year.

We are also pleased to offer other high quality trainings throughout the school year. So stay tuned!

I hope that you all have started the school year off fantastically!!! It is going to be a great year. Over the past six years, many of you have attended trainings sponsored by the Region 1 Autism Education Consortium and I am confident that your students will continue to benefit from your dedication and training.

Have a wonderful start to the 2013-2014 school year!

Thanks!

Carrie Radigan
Facilitator, Region 1 Autism Education Consortium

"Optimism is the faith that leads to achievement, nothing can be done without hope and confidence."

~ Helen Keller

Parent/Teacher Relations

The start of a new school year is often hectic both in school and at your students’ homes. Be sure and start the school year off on the right foot. You may want to schedule a time to meet with each of your parents. Maybe you had a back to school day or meet the teacher time already. If you haven’t then invite your students’ parents in for a quick meet and greet. This is sure to start your year off on a good note.

One way to get to know your students better is to send home a questionnaire. Ask questions like favorite subjects, favorite foods, toys, etc. Ask if they have any dislikes, allergies, medications. This will help you gather important information about your students. It will also help you determine things that may be motivating for each student.

Special points of interest:

This issue focuses on the required paraprofessional training. Also, a brief summary of the new DSM-5 criteria is included in this issue.

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.
New Paraprofessional Training Requirements

On April 18, 2012, House Bill 325 was approved by the governor. It read as follows:

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. That the Code of Virginia is amended and reenacted by adding a section numbered 22.1-298.3 as follows:

§ 22.1-298.3. Students with autism spectrum disorders; training required of personnel.

By September 1, 2014, each school board shall ensure that aides assigned to work with a teacher who has primary oversight of students with autism spectrum disorders receive training in student behavior management within 60 days of assignment to such responsibility. School boards may provide such training to other employees, including transportation employees.

The Board of Education shall provide training standards that school divisions may use to fulfill the requirements of this section.

2. That the Board of Education, in consultation with Virginia Commonwealth University, shall develop online training that school divisions may use to fulfill the requirements of § 22.1-298.3 of the Code of Virginia. Such training shall be made available to local school divisions free of charge.

So, what does this mean for local school divisions?

Training competencies were developed by the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) and the Virginia Commonwealth University Autism Center for Excellence (VCU/ACE). These training competencies were adopted by the VDOE on January 13, 2013. They can be seen in full at:


Local school divisions have been given the responsibility of determining which paraprofessionals need to be trained on the competencies. According to the new training requirements, if paraprofessionals are working with students with autism then they would be required to have training by September 1, 2014.

The VDOE are in the process of approving training standard guidelines. These guidelines will include suggestions for who should be trained. The guidelines have not been released as of this writing.

Although the VDOE has put out the training competencies that must be met, they have not specified how school divisions must have their staff trained. There are several options that staff have been able to take advantage of. Some of these are:

- Paraprofessionals can take the online course that is being taught through Virginia Commonwealth University. These courses are being offered on a monthly basis.
- Virginia Commonwealth Autism Center for Excellence has offered some face to face trainings. These trainings were for very limited numbers.
- School divisions can also opt to train their staff. The only requirement is that they make sure that they train on the competencies.
- The Region 1 Autism Education Consortium has also offered face to face trainings. A large training was offered last month. There will also be two trainings offered during the school year.

See page 4 for more information

A Shout Out Goes To!

Over the summer months, three staff development opportunities were offered through the Consortium. First, in August a three-day Paraprofessional training was conducted. We welcomed 145 paraprofessionals from around the region. This intensive training was very well received and showed the dedication of our staff to come in during their summer vacation! Also in August, we held a training for teachers. This training covered how to manage and work with paraprofessionals. Fifty teachers were in attendance.

Lastly, Anne McGuire and Christine Reagan from Division TEACCH, UNC, Asheville, conducted a two day training on structured teaching. We had 46 teachers attend.

Thank you all for giving your time during the summer! We continue to learn and grow in Region 1!
Upcoming events

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

Our first paraprofessional training will take place in the fall. Participants must attend all three training dates to satisfy the requirements of House Bill 325. The dates are September 26, October 17, and December 5, 2013. Dr. Kira Austin and Mona Pruett of VCU/T/TAC, Anne Overcash of Pyramid Education Consultants and Carrie Radigan will be your presenters for this intensive three day training. This training will be held in Colonial Heights at the Technical Center and is limited to 50 participants. Please visit www.soe.vcu.edu/aec and click on the events tab to view the flyer.

On November 5, 2013, Dr. Pamela Crooke will be joining us to conduct a one day staff development on Social Thinking. Dr. Crooke works very closely with Michelle Garcia-Winner. The training will be located at the Henrico Theater.

Dr. Kira Austin will be providing a one day training for teachers on how to manage paraprofessionals. This training is a repeat of the summer training that Dr. Austin did in August. The training date is December 4, 2013 and will be at the Fulghum Center in Chesterfield County.

Dr. Vincent Carbone will be coming to us for a two day training scheduled for January 30-31, 2014. Dr. Carbone will be presenting on ABA and how to implement research based strategies in our classrooms. This free training will be at the Henrico Theater. More information to come.

All of the above mentioned staff development opportunities are offered free of charge to staff members of Region 1 Schools. More information will be available on the Region 1 Autism Education Consortium website www.soe.vcu.edu/aec. Please contact Carrie Radigan at (804) 365-8127 or radiganct@vcu.edu (preferred) if you would like to register for any of these events or if you have with any question.

Photo from 8/14/13
Dr. Kira Austin

Resources

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

T/TAC has a plethora of information on various disabilities. You can go to www.ttaonline.org or www.vcu.edu/tac.org.

VCU’s Autism Center for Excellence, www.vcuautismcenter.org

Autism Council, www.autismtraining.org

Here are some other websites that you may find helpful:

www.doe.virginia.gov
www.autismspeaks.org
www.asacv.org
www.autismva.org
www.dotolearn.com
www.mayer-johnson.com

www.researchautism.org
www.tonyattwood.com.au
www.findahodgdon.com

Check our Thomas A. McKean’s book:

Soon Will Come the Light: A View From Inside the Autism Puzzle (1994)

DSM-5: It’s Officially Here

On May 18, 2013, after approximately two years of discussion, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) released the new version of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders (DSM). The newest version, DSM-5 has come with much controversy over the new definition of Autism.

Where will we see differences? For the time being, in the schools, finding students eligible for special education services will not change. Most likely, schools will still be using the same checklists as previously used to consider if a student was eligible for services under the identification of autism. However, clinicians may be using the DSM-5 as they are diagnosing children as having autism. The differences in the DSM-4-R and the DSM-5 are as follows:

- There are now two areas of deficits which are social/communication and restrictive, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities.
- Individuals are rated on a severity scale: Level 1 (Requiring Very Substantial Support), Level 2 (Requiring Substantial Support), Level 3 (Requiring Support).
- Early onset is still part of the definition but no specific onset before age three is listed.
- Asperger’s Disorder, Pervasive Developmental Disorder (Not Otherwise Specified), Rhett’s Disorder and Childhood Disintegrative Disorder are no longer part of the umbrella of Autism.
The Region 1 Autism Education 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.

Paraprofessional Training Standards

As previously stated, training standards for paraprofessionals working with students with autism spectrum disorder were adopted by the VDOE on January 10, 2013. These standards were developed to satisfy the requirements of House Bill 325.

The competencies cover eight areas:

1. General Autism Standards
2. Behavior Standards
3. Communication Standards
4. Social Skills Standards
5. Comprehensive Instructional Programming Standards
6. Environmental Structure and Visual Supports Standards
7. Sensory Motor Development Standards
8. Independence and Aptitude Standards

By receiving training on these competencies, paraprofessionals will better understand how to work with students with autism. The following are some examples of some of the competencies:

⇒ Under General Autism Standards, paraprofessionals will learn the range of characteristics, abilities and learning needs that may be present.

⇒ The behavior standards include observing behavior and taking data and using proactive strategies to decrease the likelihood of occurrences of behaviors.

⇒ Communication standards include implementing evidence based practices to promote choice making and to teach expressive and receptive communication skills.

⇒ The social skills standards will help paraprofessionals learn how to help provide students with opportunities throughout the day to work on social skills.

⇒ Paraprofessionals will learn what a task analysis is under the comprehensive instructional programming standards section.

⇒ The environmental structure and visual supports section teaches how to use daily schedules and visual supports to help students with autism.

⇒ Sensory motor development standards teaches how the basic sensory system may impact learning.

⇒ Lastly, the independence and aptitude standards will help paraprofessionals learn how to provide opportunities for students with autism to work on becoming more independent.

This is just a sampling of the comprehensive training standards that can be viewed in full at:
http://www.vcuautismcenter.org/documents/