Welcome!

Welcome to the spring edition of the Autism Quarterly newsletter. With the weather getting nicer outside, things are also warming up in the classroom. Teachers and students are preparing for standardized tests. Individualized Education Plans (IEP’s) are often due at this time of year. Alternate assessments (VAAP’s) are being completed. It is just a busy time of year. Here are some things to consider as you are trying to clear off your desk and get everything done that needs to be done:

Stay organized. This may be easier said than done, but it is so important. Try to keep materials in folders and tucked away in a place that is easily found. There are many meetings this time of year that may pull you out of the classroom. It will be easier on your substitute (and your students) if the work is easily found. Lesson plans will also help everyone stay on track.

Make yourself a to-do list. This time of year can be very overwhelming! Making a to-do list will help you prioritize by order of importance. Keeping track of due dates such as your students’ IEP’s will help you stay in compliance. It will also give you some satisfaction as you cross each completed task off of your list.

Take one day at a time. Try to make realistic goals for yourself as you conquer each task. For example, you may be finishing up the alternate assessment that two of your students are taking. Break it up in smaller chunks—much like we do with many of our students. One day may be finishing up math. Another day may be organizing the information and placing stickers on the pieces of evidence.

Always keep in mind what comes first on the priority list—the students. For, if not for them, there would be no priority list.

Carrie Radigan
Facilitator, Region 1 Autism Education Consortium

Working with families

This time of year brings many meetings. One of the most important things to remember is to make sure that parents are well informed. Often times, meetings take place and parents do not know what the meeting is about. Be sure to send home a meeting notification form for IEP meetings. If you don’t hear back from parents then follow with a phone call. Don’t rely on e-mail correspondence. Not everyone checks their e-mails regularly.

Another thing to keep in mind is making sure that parents fully understand what is being presented. Keep two-way communication open in case there are questions after a meeting. A little extra time explaining will go a long way.

A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops. ~ Henry Brook Adams

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Special points of interest:

- This issue focuses on information to help teachers work with students with autism and their families.
- Any information that readers would like shared is welcomed! Please contact Carrie Radigan at radiganct@vcu.edu with any ideas.
Did you know that using visual strategies can help enlist student cooperation? In Linda Hodgdon’s little book, “Ten Tried & True Tools to Turn Trials into Teamwork”, she outlines how to use visual supports to help decrease unwanted behavior while increasing desired behavior. The following are five ideas that are in the book:

**Give Choices:** Giving students choices will help them gain some power over the outcome. Even if the two choices are undesirable, the student may find it easier to choose one simply because he is able to make the decision of which one to choose. For example, if a student does not want to eat his lunch, give him a choice of two of the items. “Do you want an apple or a sandwich?” Objects, pictures and written words can be used to help the student understand from what he is choosing.

**Write It Down:** Writing down information that you want the student to do or to remember may help him follow through with the direction. Talk as you are writing and engage the student in the process. Linda suggests writing it down even if the student does not read. The writing may engage their attention. Draw pictures to help the student understand what is being asked. Keep it very simple. Having the student repeat back to you what was asked may help him process the information better.

**Give Time Limits:** It is difficult to understand time when you can’t see time. Make time visual by using calendars, clocks, timers, watches, etc. For example, rather than just telling a student that recess is in 5 minutes, set the timer and tell him that recess is in 5 minutes when the buzzer goes off. The timer tends to take on the role of authority and it can’t be argued with, so it has been a very effective tool to use with students with autism.

**Say It Once:** Often times when students do not initially follow a direction, there is a tendency to repeat the direction and to use more language. Unfortunately, what may happen in return is not only will the student not follow the direction he may in fact tune out the speaker. Linda suggests a three-step plan:

- **Look:** Get to the child’s field of view, make sure he can see your face and try to get eye contact.
- **Tell:** Give simple verbal direction and use visual supports. Speak slowly.
- **Wait expectantly:** Expect a response. Give him time to process the information. Resist over talking—use your visual supports.

**Slice Big Jobs Into Little Chunks:** Often times, tasks that we ask our students to do have many parts. Therefore, the task may not get completed. Breaking down the task and may help them successfully complete what was asked. Writing down all the pieces may help. The following is an example from Linda’s book:

- **Big Job:** Clean your room
- **Little Chunks:**
  - Make the bed
  - Put shoes away
  - Put trucks on the shelf

Using visual strategies and support may make everyone’s lives a little easier. Check out Linda Hodgdon’s website at [www.lindahodgdon.com](http://www.lindahodgdon.com) for many more ideas on how to use visual supports.

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**A Shout Out Goes To!**

A huge shout out goes to the administrators in Hanover Public Schools. They took the time out of their busy schedules to meet and learn more about autism. The turn out was amazing. It is great to see the interest in learning about how to educate students with autism!

I would also like to take this opportunity to shout out to the Powhatan Autism Collaboration Team (PAC team). They are venturing out to do training for Cumberland and Buckingham County Schools. The PAC team consists of many members that include special and general education teachers, paraprofessionals, speech therapist, occupational therapist, parent, assistant superintendent and representatives from T/TAC.

A big thank you goes out to Colonial Heights for hosting the Carol Schall workshop in January. They provided coffee for this event.

Way to go Region 1!
Upcoming Events

The Autism Education Consortium is pleased to support on-going professional staff development activities for employees of participating school divisions.

On March 6, 2009, Linda Hodgdon will be presenting. Her workshop will focus on how using visual supports and strategies can help students with autism with communication and behavior. Ms. Hodgdon is coming to us from Michigan. This workshop is free to staff in Region 1 Schools. The workshop is scheduled from 8:30-4:00 at the Fulghum Center in Chesterfield County. Registration for this event is currently closed.

Roger Cox and Susan Boswell from the TEACCH program in North Carolina will be presenting a three-day workshop on August 11-13, 2009. This workshop has very limited seats and is only available to staff members in Region 1 schools.

A workshop is currently being planned for eligibility teams from Region 1 schools. The workshop will be used as a forum for eligibility teams from different school systems to come together and discuss eligibility of students with autism spectrum disorder. It is tentatively scheduled for September 28, 2009.

Please contact Carrie Radigan at (804) 828-4501 or at radiganct@vcu.edu if you have questions regarding any of these workshops.

Resources

It is easy to find websites specific to autism. They are all over the internet. Here are some of the websites that will give you information that may be helpful to you as you continue to work with students with autism:

www.doe.virginia.gov  
www.autismspeaks.org  
www.ttaonline.org  
www.vcu.edu/tta.org  
www.varg.org  
www.autismva.org  
www.researchautism.org  
www.tonyatwood.com.au  
www.lindahodgdon.com  
www.paulakluth.com  
www.nationalautismcenter.org  
www.fpg.unc.edu/~autismpdc

Here are a few books to keep you busy during the spring months ahead:

- “Solving Behavior Problems in Autism” by Linda Hodgdon
- “You’re Going to Love This Kid!” by Paula Kluth
- “The Ziggurat Model: A framework for Designing Comprehensive Interventions for Individuals with High Functioning Autism and Asperger Syndrome” by Aspy & Grossman

Internet Learning Modules

Autism internet modules are being developed that will allow one to learn about autism from the privacy of their own home. These internet modules touch on a variety of topics. Some of these topics are: Characteristics of Autism, Assessment, Structured Work Systems, Evidence Based Classroom Interventions and Evidence Based Social Interventions. These are just a sampling of what is available. The National Professional Development Center is leading the way in the development of these modules.

Think about all the people that you work with that may benefit from these learning modules. It is a quick and easy way to learn about autism and effective ways to work with students with autism.

Check out the modules on the internet at: www.autismininternetmodules.org.
The Autism Education Consortium established the Board of Directors in June of 2008. The consortium’s guiding principles are as follows:

1. Assist each participating School Division in the design and implementation of a comprehensive program of instruction and supports for children and adolescents with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

2. Focus will be on defining model services for students with ASD and supporting classrooms in which these model services are delivered.

3. Commitment to evidence-based practices that will result in documented outcomes for students with ASD.

4. Recognition that comprehensive educational programs for students with ASD will require that all professionals working with students with ASD will participate in on-going professional development activities.

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Tips for Alternative/Alternate Assessments

What is the Virginia Grade Level Assessment (VGLA)? What is the Virginia Alternate Assessment Program (VAAP)? Are they the same? Both the VGLA and the VAAP are state assessments that require a portfolio of student work. However, they are not the same thing.

The VGLA is an alternative assessment for students who would otherwise take the regular standards of learning tests (SOL’s), but for some reason they are not able to complete a test that requires them to give that much information at one time.

The VAAP is an alternate assessment that captures students’ progress toward meeting Alternate Standards of Learning (ASOLs). These students are not on grade level.

Both assessments require an IEP team review yearly to determine if a student qualifies for either assessment. Teachers of students who are taking either assessment collect pieces of evidence throughout the school year.

The following are some tips that may help teachers as they are putting together the portfolios:

- Organize the work clearly.
- Have work for each SOL/ASOL required.
- Remember to place a sticker on each piece of evidence.
- Clearly mark work with SOL/ASOL.
- Make sure all work is graded.
- Put in your student’s best work.
- Make sure that it is clear that it is the student’s work—Hand over hand is not allowed.
- Homework is not allowed, so if it says homework on the sheet but it is actually done at school, be sure that the scorers know that it was done at school.
- Make your deadlines and due dates.
- Get a second set of eyes to make sure that you have not missed anything.
- A checklist may be helpful to guide you through due dates and procedures.
- Keep up—Don’t try to do this at the last minute. It will be too overwhelming for you and your students.

For more information on assessments, you can visit the Virginia Department of Education at www.doe.virginia.gov.