Welcome!

As the first year of the Region 1 Autism Education Consortium comes to a close, I would like to take a moment to reflect on the year. It has been a wonderful year! A lot has taken place in a short amount of time since the consortium was developed.

It has been such a fantastic experience for me to get out and meet so many of you in your schools. I have had the opportunity to visit many teachers and the students they teach. It is truly a highlight of my week when I get into the classrooms. I hope to continue to get out there and meet many more of you as we move into our second year.

The consortium has sponsored several staff development opportunities this year. Our distinguished presenters included: Carol Schall from VCU who presented on applied behavior analysis and data, Linda Bourdon from SECEP who presented on assessment and identification and Linda Hodgdon who presented on visual supports and strategies. All of the trainings were well attended and offered at no charge to our Region 1 member school division staff!

Strategic planning is an ongoing part of the consortium as we strive to improve services for students with autism. Other staff development opportunities have been planned that will continue to enhance programming for students with autism. The consortium will continue to support research based strategies through these staff development workshops.

It has been a pleasure to work with the board members from the consortium. It was due to the support of the board and their superintendents that has made everything possible that has happened this year.

You all work so hard and deserve the rest that summer is sure to bring! Enjoy your time off with your families and I look forward to seeing you all next year!

Carrie Radigan
Facilitator, Region 1 Autism Education Consortium

Working with families

Summer can be a long, long season when students are out of school. Parents are often looking for things for their children to do over the summer months. There are various things that children can do over the summer, but it is sometimes rather limited when they have a disability such as autism. Some children will go to summer school. Some will go to summer camp. Others may receive extended school year services. Whatever your students have lined up for the summer, teachers can help out by sending home a packet of things for their students to do at home. These can consist of paper pencil activities or things that they can do to work on social skills. Parents are sure to be appreciative!

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.
Get a Jump Start on Summer (and Fall)

Remember the feeling of craziness that you felt when you stepped into your classroom for the first time last August? Now, take a deep breath and enjoy how far your students have come this year! The school year is almost over and you will have new beginnings again in August. It is a great nervous feeling when your students walk into the classroom on the first day of school. You are so excited to see them after being away for so long. There is also anticipation in knowing that you will probably have some new students in the fall along with your returning students.

The following are some things that you can do now to help you prepare for the fall. It may take some anxiety away knowing that you have achieved some things already and you can in turn get ready for the new year with less on your plate.

The first thing that may be beneficial to all involved with your students is to do a file review and make sure that the educational files are in order. Go by what your school division wants your files to look like, but make sure that they are well organized. This will save you a ton of time in the fall as you are scrambling around looking for current I.E.P.’s and other important information that you know are buried within the volumes of information in the students’ current educational file. Many schools have this as part of their checkout procedures. If your school does not, it is still a good idea to take care of the files so that they do not continue to get worse as more information is added. One thing that may be of particular value for organizing the files is to use dividers to separate the sections (i.e. current I.E.P./Eligibility, Educational, Psychological, Social, Speech, Medical, Other…).

Another thing that would save you time in the fall is to start generating pictures that may be needed for communication systems and/or transition schedules. It is always nice for students to have nice new laminated transition cards in the fall. If you are getting some of your students back for the next school year then you will already have a pretty good idea of what they use for communication and transition. Once you have made all these new pictures, store them in a container so that they are easily found when you need them in August. Some teachers use coupon or recipe boxes to help store and organize the picture cards. However you decide to organize them, make sure that they are in a place that you can find them when you return to your classroom.

If you have time, think about what you might want to do the first couple days of school. If you want to do a back to school art activity then you can go ahead and get it ready. Or, if there is something different that you would like to put on your bulletin board it will save you so much time to organize the materials so that they are ready to pull out and put up quickly when you return. It takes so much time getting the room ready for students, and teacher work week is often filled with meetings, so whatever you can get done ahead of time will give you more time in August to concentrate on your students’ individual needs.

A Shout Out Goes To!

Congratulations to Megan Nunnally from Colonial Heights Public Schools. She received of teacher of the year for her school, Tussing Elementary School. Ms. Nunnally was chosen by her peers for this honor. Way to go Ms. Nunnally! You do a great job!

Congratulations also go out to each and every one of you that completed the Virginia Alternate Assessment (VAAP), the Virginia Grade Level Assessment (VGLA), or the Virginia Substitute Evaluation Program (VSEP) with your students. Give yourselves a pat on the back. While these assessments are often necessary alternatives to the Standards of Learning (SOLs) tests, they can be very time consuming.

Keep up the great work that you do and have a great summer!
Upcoming Events

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

The following are some of the staff development opportunities that are being sponsored by the Autism Education Consortium and are being offered at no cost to employees from member school divisions in Region 1.

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.

Andrew Bondy, co-creator of the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) is coming on October 12-13, 2009 to present a two-day workshop on PECS.

Carol Schall will be returning to us on November 3, 2009. She will be presenting on behavior.

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.ttaconline.org
www.vcu.edu/ttac
www.varc.org
www.autismpdc.com
www.autismva.org
www.researchautism.org
www.tonyatwood.com.au
www.lindahodgdon.com
www.paulakluth.com
www.nationalautismcenter.org
www.fpg.unc.edu/~autismpdc
www.tasksgalore.com
www.tinsnips.org

Here are a couple books to keep you busy during the summer months ahead:

- “The Teacher’s Pocket Guide for Effective Classroom Management” by Tim Knoster
- “The ADHD Autism Connection: A Step Toward More Accurate Diagnosis and Effective Treatment” by Diane M. Kennedy

Conferences this summer

Check out www.autismtrainingva.org for some great conferences that are coming up over the summer months.

In July, Tony Atwood is coming to Richmond. Dr. Atwood is a leader in the field of Asperger’s Disorder. He is a wonderful presenter with lots of ideas. He will be speaking on making friends and managing feelings.

Also in July, T/TAC and Commonwealth Autism Service are sponsoring a workshop on literacy-based interventions that support communication.

These workshops are not sponsored by the Autism Education Consortium, so there is a fee for attending them and you will need to register.
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.

Help! So much to do and so little time to do it!

With summer vacation quickly approaching, there are many things to do in preparation. I.E.P.’s are due, SOLs are quickly approaching, and your classroom will have to be packed up for the summer break. Setting a “to do” list may help ease some of the stress of getting everything done in such a small amount of time.

First, you may find yourself in a situation that you have 7 I.E.P.’s due all within the last three weeks of school. It’s ok. You can get through this! Summer will be here before you know it. Putting extra time and effort into writing and proofing your students’ I.E.P.’s will go a long way. Making sure that you have a good present level of performance to base the rest of your I.E.P. from is the place to start. Use data to help support each of your student’s present level. Double and triple check to make sure that you have correct dates on the I.E.P. Also check closely to make sure that service times are written correctly. It is a legal document, so you want to make sure that what is presented is done professionally.

Of course, while the hustle and bustle of I.E.P.’s is going on, your students may also be taking the SOL tests. Strategies have been taught all year long such as “slash the trash” to help your students be successful on the tests. Continue to review as needed and let your students know that you are behind them 100% to try to ease any test anxiety that they may be feeling.

Be sure to get your students ready for the summer. Organize folders for them if they have qualified for extended school year services, so that it is easier for whomever will be working with your students. It may also be helpful to put together notes about your students if they are attending summer school so that the teacher knows a little more about them.

Lastly, as June approaches, you may have received a memo that you need to pack up your classroom so that the floors can get cleaned over the summer or so that you can change classrooms in the fall. Labeling your boxes and placing an inventory in each box may help you when it is time to unpack the boxes and get ready for the new school year.

Have a fantastic summer!

The shortest way to do many things is to do only one thing at a time.

Richard Cech