Welcome!

In the teaching profession, there are arguably two times of the school year that are the most anticipated. The first is in September, when teachers are anxiously awaiting the arrival of the new group of students that will fill their freshly decorated classrooms.

The second time of the year that is greatly anticipated is the end of the school year. During the months of September-June, teachers work tirelessly to ensure that their students succeed in school. Yes, vacations are sporadically placed throughout the year, but even during these times teachers are often doing paperwork and getting ready for when school is back in session.

The 2009-2010 school year has been packed with staff development opportunities that many of you have taken part in. Teachers, paraprofessionals, speech therapists, school psychologists and administrators had many opportunities to increase their knowledge and expertise in how to better educate students with autism spectrum disorder. Hundreds of staff from the fifteen member districts took advantage of these high quality trainings.

The staff development trainings will continue into next year. Stay tuned for many wonderful trainings that will be coming our way.

Now is the time for teachers and staff to close out the year and get ready for a well deserved break. I realize that many of you will work summer school or provide extended school year services for students. However, make sure that you do get the chance to take some time out. Summer affords those in the teaching profession to remember why they choose to teach in the first place. Relax and recharge and I look forward to working with each of you next year!

Carrie Radigan
Facilitator, Region 1 Autism Education Consortium

“Your role as a leader is even more important than you can imagine. You have the power to help people become winners.”
- Ken Blanchard

Parent/Teacher Relations

While teachers are getting ready to send students home for the summer, parents are getting ready to spend the summer with their children. Children with autism often do better when provided a consistent routine and schedule. Summer is a long time without having the regularity of the bus picking them up and taking them to school. It may be helpful for teachers to send home items to help their students maintain routine. Here are a couple of ideas:

- Send home schedule pictures so that parents can set up a visual schedule at home. This may be most helpful for students that are already accustomed to using a schedule.
- Send home a packet of activities for parents to use at home.

See article later in this newsletter for more ideas.

Inside this issue:

- Tips to Closing Down the School Year: 2
- Shout Outs!: 2
- Upcoming events: 3
- Resources: 3
- Summer Activities for Teachers: 3
- Summer Time Activities: Fun and Educational!: 4

Special points of interest:

This issue focuses on how to help teachers close down for the summer. Summer activities are also explored.

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.
Tips to Closing Down the School Year

Are you a packrat? Do you have boxes of materials in your classroom that you don’t even know what the contents are? Are you changing classrooms in the fall? Is your classroom getting cleaned over the summer so you have to box everything up? If you answered “yes” to any of these questions then these tips are for you.

Tip #1: When was the last time I used this item? If there is a sheet of dust on the item then you don’t even need to answer this question. If it does not have monetary value - toss it! If you haven’t used it in the past school year, think about the reason languishing it in your cupboards. Did you forget to use it? Will you ever use it again? If you don’t think that you will ever use it again then go ahead and get rid of it. Chances are, you will never miss it.

Tip #2: Could someone else use these materials better than I? Remember sometimes materials are hard to come by, so you may not want to just get rid of things before thinking of your colleagues. Did you change grade levels and have held on to things that you aren’t using anymore? Is there a new teacher on your staff that would be thrilled to inherit your hand-me-downs to add to her small collection of items? At some schools, these items are placed outside of classroom doors and they become a free-for-all grabs situation. It feels good to give away items to others that may not have as much.

Tip #3: Is it just a piece of junk? No offense, but teachers are often scaven- gers. Classroom educators will snap up almost anything that someone is willing to discard. Just because something was available or free does not mean that you have to store it forever. If you accumulated some random item a few years back and haven’t used it then it is now time to get rid of it! You can do it. There is no need or probably no room in your classroom to keep such items.

Tip #4: Am I emotionally attached to this item? If something does not directly contribute to the learning of your students then it may hold some type of emotional attachment for you. It is ok to let it go. If you are truly limited on space then you may have to bid ado to such prized possessions.

Great! Now that I have cleaned out my clutter, what can I do to prepare for next school year?

1. Label all of your materials. Have you ever noticed that where you leave things in June is not where they end up in August when you return? One thing that might help is to inventory and label all of your boxes/items. Label your items with your name/school/program—whatever is appropriate. Label items that are personal possessions with your name and personal. That way there is no mistaking what was purchased with school funds and what actually belongs to you. If you are boxing items up then place an inventory inside the box and also write on the outside a general label of what is in the box. This will save you lots of time when you return!

2. Organize your student records: It will be a huge time saver if you have all of your important student information in one place. For instance, in a locked file cabinet, your students’ I.E.P.’s can be stored. You may have binders for each of your students that contains such information. Remember that personal information on your students should be locked up so that their information remains confidential. Be careful to remember where the key is though! Rule of thumb would be for you to keep a key and have someone in the office keep a copy.

3. Get items ready for next year for your students and classroom. It is so nice to come back to a classroom with fresh items such as new schedules and communication pieces or new bulletin board pictures. Consider printing, copying and laminating now. You can always cut these out during the summer. It will give you (and maybe your children too) something therapeutic to do over the summer.

A Shout Out Goes To!

Domenico “Nick” Bonnecorsy of Hanover County Public Schools has been named by ARC as this year’s Raby Outstanding Teacher. Mr. Bonnecorsy is a teacher at Oak Knoll Middle School.

Megan Nunnally, a teacher of students with autism in Colonial Heights Public Schools received a certificate of appreciation from Fort Lee. The certificate was signed by the Fort Lee Garrison Commander and was presented to Ms. Nunnally by one of Fort Lee’s soldiers.

Congratulations to you both!

I would also like to send out a special shout out to all of you that touch the lives of individuals with autism spectrum disorder - teachers, paraprofessionals, speech therapists, occupational therapists, administrators, parents, etc. Your students are so lucky to have such dedicated staff!
Upcoming events

We are pleased to announce a wonderful training opportunity that is scheduled for July 20, 2010. Jed Baker, Ph.D. of New Jersey will be coming to present on behavior and social skills. Dr. Baker is the director of the Social Skills Training Project, a private organization serving individuals with autism and social communication problems. This workshop will be held at the Fulghum Center, 4003 Cogbill Road, Richmond, Va. 23234. The training is being provided for staff members of Region 1 Schools. It is free of charge and lunch will be provided.

A workshop is being planned for November 2, 2010. Prompting and reinforcement will be the focus of this training. Stay turned for more information on this staff development opportunity.

On November 29-30, 2010, Andrew Bondy, Ph.D. and Lori Frost, M.S., CCC, SLP will be coming to present a two-day training on the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) that they co-created. The location of this intensive workshop will be provided soon.

Stay tuned for more information. These events as well as others will be listed on the Consortium’s website: www.soe.vcu.edu/aec.

If you have any questions regarding staff development opportunities, please contact Carrie Radigan at radiganct@vcu.edu or (804) 828-4501.

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

Check out A Treasure Chest of Behavioral Strategies for Individuals with Autism by Beth Fouse, Ph.D. and Maria Wheeler, M.Ed. This book provides an abundance of ideas on how to use behavior management techniques to help your students succeed.

Summer Activities for Teachers

So, if you think that you might be a little bored this summer and want to keep up your training here are some things that might stimulate your learning.

- T/TAC will be offering trainings for very low cost at various times throughout the summer. Go to www.autismtrainingva.org for more information. You can also go to the T/TAC website for more information and training opportunities. T/TAC on-line also offers modules that you can do on many topics including sensory, organizational strategies and augmentative communication.

- On-line training is also offered through the National Professional Development Center at http://autismmpdc.fpg.unc.edu. They have on-line modules that are on a variety of evidence based topics.

- Don’t forget to stay tuned to the Region 1 Autism Consortium’s activities. Mentioned above is a training on July 20, 2010 by Jed Baker on social skills. There will also be other trainings offered during the summer such as model classroom training and paraprofessional training.

Happy learning!
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.

As summer is quickly approaching, families of your students with autism may be looking for ideas of what to do over the summer. Even if students are attending summer school it doesn’t hurt to offer additional ideas to work on over the long summer months.

Many of you may already put together packets of work activities for your students to do over the summer. Here are several other things that you may want to share with your students’ families:

- **Give parents a list of activities that are happening in the community.** For instance, check with local recreation facilities or museums to see if there are any special events happening this summer. You could give them a nice calendar that lists the upcoming events. Check with your school districts’ parent/teacher resource staff to see if they already have this available.

- **Encourage parents to build in reading and writing into everyday activities.** For example, they can have their child write out a grocery list, find the food in the grocery store and then read the recipe as it is being prepared. Another example is having them read the directions of a game that they are going to play. Go to www.pbsparents.org for other ideas.

- **Help parents plan ahead for the fall:** Find out what topics students will be working on for the next school year. Share these with the parents and suggest some activities that might help pre-teach some concepts. For example, if the student is going to learn about Ancient Greece, see if there is a museum exhibit or movie that might help him learn some of the material.

- **Read, read and read some more:** Encourage parents to take their children to the library. They offer many things such as summer reading incentive programs, reading to children days and also a huge assortment of wonderful books to read!

- **Don’t forget online sites:** Students with autism often seem to enjoy working on the computer. There are so many sites to go to that are not only fun but educational. Give your students’ families a list of appropriate sites that your students may enjoy. The Smithsonian Museums have fun things for kids to do online. There are numerous math sites such as www.funbrain.com.

These are just a few ideas that may be beneficial for your students over the summer.