Welcome!

Another school year is coming to a close. I am sure that this finds you all winding down after a very busy time of year. The spring is full of end of the year meetings as well as testing. This is the time to reflect back at what you all have accomplished this school year.

By now, you are probably finishing your students’ Individualized Education Program (I.E.P.). The Virginia Alternate Assessments have been turned in and are in the process of being scored. The Virginia Standards of Learning Tests are underway. Your job now is to continue to offer the support to your students to help them through the last few weeks of school.

Many of you have taken advantage of the numerous training opportunities offered this year. We have come a long way in Region 1 and continue to strive to learn and implement research based strategies to aide students with autism be successful. This year alone, staff development opportunities on Picture Exchange Communication (PECS), Literacy, Inclusion, Social Skills, Transition, Evidence Based Strategies, Quality Behavioral Competencies, and Assessment have been offered free of charge to staff of Region 1 Schools. These trainings were well attended and your students are sure to benefit from all you have learned.

The Region 1 Autism Education Consortium will continue to offer high quality staff development opportunities. Look for information on upcoming events in this newsletter as well as on the Consortium’s website at: www.soe.vcu.edu/aec.

You all deserve a pat on the back. Your dedication continues to show. I hope you all have a wonderful and relaxing summer!

Carrie Radigan
Facilitator, Region 1 Autism Education Consortium

To accomplish great things, we must not only act, but also dream, not only plan, but also believe.
~Anatole France

Parent/Teacher Relations

The summer months can be a fantastic time but it can also be a trying time for parents of children with autism. It may be beneficial for teachers to send home learning packets for their students to work on over the summer. These packets can include things such as academic work. The academics should be on previously mastered material so that parents aren’t expected to teach their children new skills over the summer. Also, the activities can be fun. For example, if students like to color then send home color by number or other such math worksheets.

Along with the academic materials, send home a list of activities that are available over the summer months. Check with local museums to see if they run specials for children with disabilities. The Children’s Museum often offers special events. Your research is sure to help your students have a fun and safe summer!

Inside this issue:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bringing Literacy to Life</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>On-line Seminars</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting Prepared for the Summer</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Special points of interest:

This issue focuses on how to help students with autism spectrum disorder learn literacy skills as well as help teachers get ready for the summer and fall months.

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.
During a recent visit to A.P. Hill in Petersburg, Virginia, the teacher, Ms. Page was conducting a reading group activity that was so much fun. The students had gone to a local circus for a field trip. They learned all about the circus prior to the visit. Activities were done that showcased the animals and the clowns. When the class visited the circus they were surprised to see that there were not any clowns.

Ms. Page was disappointed that her students did not get to see clowns at the circus, so she put together an activity that they could not only work on their reading skills but also be able to experience what it is like to be a clown.

First, she chose a book about clowns. This book outlined step by step how clowns make themselves look like clowns. The students read the book together. They read and answered comprehension questions along the way. The name of the book was “A Clown Face” by Kira Freed.

When they were done reading the book and completing an assignment based on the story they had read, Ms. Page got out something special for the group to experience. She had brought in make up for the students to be able to transform themselves into a clown. The book went step by step on how to put on the make up. The students read each page and then got to put on the make up. Ms. Page even let the students make her up.

Not only was this an awesome reading lesson, but it turned out to be a wonderful social skills activity. The students worked together to make up each other’s faces. They also had to wait their turn to use the paint. They all had a fantastic time as they turned themselves into clowns.

The lesson to be learned here: think out of the box when teaching your students. A little creativity and hands on learning goes a long way. These students learned new vocabulary and improved their fluency and comprehension skills all while having a great time!

A great big shout out goes to the school districts of Richmond City and Henrico County Public Schools. They both will be working with the new VCU Autism Center for Excellence to help improve services for students with autism in their districts. Congratulations!

Another shout out goes out to everyone who has attended workshops and training throughout the year. Your professionalism shows as you continue to learn how to best serve your students with autism using research based strategies. Not only have many of you attended staff developments offered by the Region 1 Autism Education Consortium, but several of you have taken advantage of online courses and classes through Universities. Way to go Region 1! Keep up the good work!
Upcoming events

As we approach the summer months, staff developments are busily being planned. Look for more information on the Consortium’s website: www.soe.vcu.edu/aec.

Model Classroom training will be offered again this summer. The dates are July 26-28, 2008. This three day training will cover topics such as structure, visual supports, communication, behavior and data. This training also features a live classroom run by a master teacher. There are a very limited number of slots for this very informative training. There is no charge for this training. The training will be held at South Anna Elementary in Hanover County.

There will be two opportunities for paraprofessionals to learn more about autism. The first training will be held on August 4, 2011. This full day training will be held from 9:00-3:30 at the Fulghum Center in Chesterfield County. Participants will learn about reinforcement, communication and visual strategies. There is no charge for this training and lunch will be provided.

Lastly, Hanover County Public Schools and the Region 1 Autism Consortium are pleased to offer a paraprofessional training on August 31, 2011. The training will include team building activities and information on topics such as social skills and behavior. Lee Davis High School will be the location for this training.

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.vcuautismcenter.org is the website for the VCU Autism Center for Excellence.

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.ttaconline.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

For summer reading pleasure, check out Temple Grandin’s book The Way I See It: A Personal Look at Autism and Asperger’s

On-line Seminars now available

The VCU Autism Center for Excellence (VCU-ACE) now has on-line seminars available for your viewing. Go to their website: www.vcuautismcenter.org and click on “Training” at the top of the page. Currently, they have ten seminars available on various topics. The first seminar covers an overview of autism spectrum disorder. The characteristics of autism are broken into different seminars and include information on communication, social skills and secondary characteristics. There is also a seminar on autism and employment. Each seminar lasts for about 20-30 minutes and it is filled with valuable information.

The website also offers information on free webcasts. The webcasts will be running throughout the summer months. The next one is scheduled for June 14, 2011 at 3:30. The title of Sam Odom’s presentation is “Research Based Intervention: Ensuring Program Quality for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder”.

Lastly, VCU-ACE has an on-line course that is available. This two week course is free for participants to take. However, they have limited spaces available so check out their website for information on when to register.

This website may make it easier for school staff to share valuable information with others in their building.
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.

Getting Prepared for the Summer

Summer is fast approaching and teachers are busily getting things ready for the break. Some students are taking the summer off and others are going to summer school or getting extended school year services. Some teachers are changing rooms for the next school year. Some schools are getting repairs done so everything needs to be packed up. Whatever is going on in your school life, here are some tips that may make your lives and your students’ lives easier in the fall.

- Get a jump start on the new school year by making fresh communication/visual pictures. Print them and laminate them now and cut them out over the summer. It is amazing how much teenagers enjoy cutting out lamination. It is so much fun to pull out nice new laminated pictures for new schedule boards and communication books.
- If you are using file folders in your classroom, it might be helpful to print some before the school year ends. Again, your teenagers will find it fun to color in the pictures. You can accumulate quite a library of tasks.
- Be sure to gather information needed for your students to help make for an easier transition into the next school year. Whether they are just going next door to a new teacher, going to another school level (i.e. elementary to middle) or even moving away, thoughtful planning is sure to be appreciated by the new teacher. Consider doing a quick write up on each of your students that has items on it such as favorite activities, reinforcers, and foods. You may want to include a sample of the student’s work. Also, if your students have communication books they should follow the student to the next class. The new teacher will be grateful for any information you have to offer.

- Inventory everything! When you pack up your boxes, place an inventory in each box that outlines what is in the box. Also, label each box with a quick summary of what is inside. If you number your boxes, you can do an overall inventory sheet that lists what you have in your room. It is amazing how often boxes get shifted around and end up in someone else’s classroom. Also, mark your furniture so you can easily find what belongs in your classroom.

These tricks as well as many that you have of your own will help you settle a little easier into the next school year.