

Project CHOICES

Children Have Opportunities in Inclusive Community Environments and Schools

An LRE Initiative of the Illinois State Board of Education

Moira...An Extra Special Gift

In April of 1993, Moira Kathleen Morgan was born. With the exception of arriving three weeks early, her delivery was a typical one. This time though, one thing would be different. Twenty-four hours after her birth our family doctor and friend phoned and asked if he could stop by for a visit. When he arrived, he told us of his concern that Moira may have Down Syndrome. That evening we spent hours asking questions and gathering as much information as possible.

Interestingly enough, the thought never entered our minds that something out of the ordinary would occur. As we had felt with each of our children, the gift of a fourth little life was a wonderful blessing. As we would realize, this child would come to be an extra special gift not only for our family, but also for those with whom she would come in contact.

Moira started early intervention when she was five months old and continued until age three. Around the time of her transition into a preschool program, the question of her education became an obvious topic for discussion. As a mother of three other "typical" children and an educator with both a traditional elementary background and Montessori training, the idea of educating Moira in a general education classroom seemed out of the question to me. I was of the definite mindset that it just would not be fair for the other children, or for Moira, to always be lagging behind in an educational setting. It was during these transition years that my husband and I were part of a core group of parents who were founding an independent elementary school. Moira's three older siblings were attending this school, and at age four-and-a-half, Moira also started as part of the preschool program there. Thus began her initial introduction into an educational environment where her peers looked beyond her physical appearance and perceived "limitations." Moira was in a class with four and five year olds. Her adaptation to the environment was surprisingly effective and encouraging, and our views on an appropriate education for our child with special needs were changing. It was then that we started to explore our options in our local public school. The idea of change was bittersweet. Even the thought of Moira leaving the safe little cocoon where she made many friends was a scary and sad prospect. But we also were beginning to realize the need for Moira to have some individual help in the classroom; the assistance that we knew she needed to help her achieve the greatest success.

We visited our local public school, Ebinger, on the northwest side of Chicago, knowing what we had in mind for our daughter. Due to her successful preschool experience, we were firm in our decision to pursue an inclusive education for Moira.

(continued on page 11)



■ "Moira...An Extra Special Gift"

written by Beth Morgan
(Moira's mom)

July — 2003

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TEAM II

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Team II has seen the great success of developing long-term relationships and collaborative agreements with districts this year. In particular, our work with Valley View Community Unit School District # 365U has been very positive and exciting. We began last spring with a presentation to the district's special education task force, and in the summer held planning meetings with the central administration. The administration and Board of Education made a commitment to provide inclusive options in the district beginning in four of the elementary schools for the 2003-03 school year. They created new positions for four supported education teachers, an inclusion coordinator, and additional paraprofessionals as needed for the students who received their special education services in general education classes. In addition, the district appropriated money for staff development and substitute teachers so that common planning and collaboration meetings could occur on a weekly basis between the general and special education teachers, and aides. Parents were invited to attend these meetings on a monthly basis.

In addition to our on-going review and planning meetings with the central administration throughout the school year, Project CHOICES consultants have worked with each school involved. We attended the planning/collaboration meetings on a monthly basis in each school, observed students, met with teachers to problem solve issues, and spoke with parents. We have also provided staff development workshops and resources from our library and other sources. The district has arranged a monthly Networking Meeting with all of the supported education teachers which we attended as a support and resource. In planning for next year, we visited a middle school that will be receiving many of the 5th graders and began planning and staff development with the middle school staff.

In all, 28 students who had previously received their special education services in a separate environment are now receiving those services in general education classes using the general education curriculum! Parent/family involvement has increased by assuring that the family has been intricately and continuously involved in the plans for their child.

Plans for next year are to increase inclusive options in more schools. We are very excited and looking forward to continuing our relationship with the Valley View School District. It has been rewarding to be part of a district that is supportive, committed, and positive about making change. □

Technical Support Restructured (cont. from p. 12)

The new process we are using begins with gathering some demographic and baseline data from a school which requests our services. We then work with the staff to complete a needs assessment, identify desired outcomes, and activities. The plan also identifies the student outcomes that will be measured to assess the success of the plan. You can learn more about us and our technical support process as our web site at: www.projectchoices.org, or by calling us at 630-778-4508.

Because our new process is based on long-term relationships with schools, we will have very limited ability to respond to new requests after the beginning of the school year. Now is an opportune time for you to talk to us about how we could work with you for the FY2003-2004 year. We look forward to talking to you soon! □

Support: What Does It Mean?

Valley View's Perspective:

In August, the Project CHOICES team came to Pioneer Elementary School in the Valley View School District to provide technical assistance as we began our journey on the road to inclusion. The Project CHOICES team met with the entire building staff to present an overview of the philosophy and benefits of inclusion along with strategies to implement these practices.

Project CHOICES provided teachers, related service providers, and program aides with much needed guidance as we began our team planning to fully include 11 students with severe disabilities. It seemed to be an overwhelming task, especially since the students would be arriving the next morning for their first day of school!

Fortunately, Project CHOICES became part of our team, providing us with ongoing training and guiding us through the process of establishing positive inclusionary practices. The

Project CHOICES team has assisted us in developing team planning and collaboration skills to strengthen the impact of inclusive programming opportunities for children. They have provided our teams with unimaginable support and guidance, imparting their vision of inclusion for all children. Our Project CHOICES partners have supported and encouraged us through the toughest of times as well as joined us in celebrating our students' successes. With their expertise in providing a myriad of program options and opportunities, Project CHOICES has assisted our district in opening the door for our children with special needs to be educated in an inclusive general education classroom.

I feel very fortunate to have the opportunity to implement inclusive education with the mentoring from Project CHOICES. It has been an amazing journey for all of us this year! □

■ "Support: What Does It Mean?"

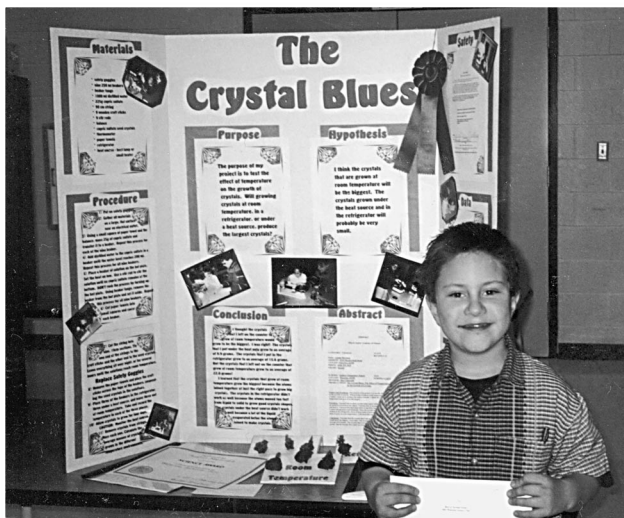
written by Patty Ferguson
Supported Education
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All submissions to our newsletters are welcome!

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Austin: A First Place Winner!



Austin is in the second grade at Zahnow Elementary School in Waterloo. He has participated in the Waterloo District Science Fair every year that he has been a student in the district. This year's second grade project compared the growth rate of crystals at different temperatures. He won the "Best of Second Grade" category!

Austin has struggled and faced many frustrations in his short three-year academic career. The success and recognition he receives for his projects boost his self esteem and are evidence of what he is capable of doing when given the proper tools. Since his first project in Kindergarten, Austin looks forward to choosing, developing, constructing, and learning about his project. He is already talking about building and comparing the strength of bridges for his third grade project!

TEAM TALK

■ “The Keys to Success”

written by Team III
Project CHOICES

■ “Putting Your Best Foot Forward”

written by Team IV
Project CHOICES

Job-Embedded Paraprofessional Development

presented by Jennifer
Sommerness


This information is targeted for school districts that have limited time and resources to train paraprofessionals. The Institute on Community Integration at the University of Minnesota has developed *Supporting Students with Disabilities in Inclusive Schools: A Curriculum for Job-Embedded Paraprofessional Development*.

The curriculum is organized into 7 manageable units of instruction that focus on the specific knowledge, and skills paraprofessionals need to acquire. The beauty of the curriculum is that it builds in opportunities for learning, practice, and coaching so that the knowledge they gain is immediately transferred into supporting students in classrooms.

For further information you can contact them at 612/624-4512 or visit their website at <http://ici.umn.edu>.

The Keys to Success

Team III is very fortunate to have the opportunity to work with Telpochcalli, a Chicago Public School, which is a member of the small school initiative program. The school offers a rich curriculum with best practices in literacy, math, science, and English/ESL instruction. They also host a resident artist program, which leads to fantastic artwork being seen throughout the building and grounds. We began to work with this team two years ago, and have become a part of the team supporting all students at this school.



Under the strong leadership of the principal, Tamara Witzl, the staff supports a variety of learners in many different settings. Using best practice strategies, the teachers create welcoming, successful classroom environments that, while they foster learning for all, are just a whole lot of fun! The staff participates in many activities that provide ongoing staff development, such as “Teacher Talk.” This is a strategy that provides time for all staff members to have the opportunity to observe in others’ classrooms, and then meet to brainstorm ideas and strategies for student success. This staff truly embodies the concept of a professional learning community, fostering comradeship and a strong sense of shared input and responsibility among all the staff members. Weekly, the grade-level clusters meet to brainstorm potential problems, as well as to plan for school activities, fund-raisers, and all types of activities.

Key to the success at Telpochcalli, we believe, is the strong parent and family component. Not only does the LRE team include a parent, the school staff truly values and seeks family input. At any time of the day, there may be parents in the building, along with siblings of the students, knowing they are welcomed and embraced. Project CHOICES has had the opportunity to work with many fine schools, and Telpochcalli certainly has been a fantastic addition to our “family” of schools. □

Putting Your Best Foot Forward

Since we know inclusion is a continuous process, listed below are questions that are helpful in planning for the new school year. Teachers who have actively participated in the process of inclusion can be surveyed or interviewed using these questions. This information can then be gathered during grade level, departmental, or LRE team meetings. Using a “3, 2, 1 format,” these questions help the team reflect, refine, and refocus in a positive way:

Reflection

What are 3 successes you’ve experienced?

Refining

What are 2 things you would do differently?

Refocus





What is 1 thing you want the upcoming teacher to know about the process of inclusion or about the student specifically?

...an easy method to ensure everyone has a voice in what’s working, what needs to be changed, and how it might be done. □

Coming next newsletter: How to Get to Know Students: Sharing Student Information

One of Us: Access and Equity for All Young Children

The Illinois State Board of Education has been leading a collaborative project called Access and Equity for All Young Children. The collaborative partners of the Project include the Department of Children and Family Services, the Department of Human Services, the Illinois Head Start Association, the National Lekotek Center, and the Governor's Office, Office of the First Lady. Support for the Project came from the National Association of State Boards of Education. The members of the Project have been working together to develop and coordinate cohesive state policies to ensure all children are ready to learn upon school entry. The guidebook, *One of Us*, is a product of the Access and Equity Project. *One of Us* was developed to address the specific policy issue of increasing local awareness and understanding of serving young children with disabilities in natural community and school environments. *One of Us* is intended to:

-  Build awareness of how the concepts of inclusion and collaboration are supported by multiple federal and state initiatives;
-  Increase understanding of the characteristics of high quality inclusion and collaboration;
-  Expand the number and quality of options available to young children with disabilities and their families; and
-  Encourage collaboration among individuals, settings, and agencies in providing inclusive services.

Rapidly emerging knowledge about children's early development and about the characteristics of home and community environments that foster optimal development and learning has led to many changes in early childhood services. The quality of services for all young children increasingly reflects this knowledge. For young children with disabilities and their families, change has also been linked to societal values about individual rights and community responsibilities. There has been an increasing emphasis on access to appropriate services and equity in receiving a free, appropriate public education. "Inclusion" is the term most commonly used to describe how services are organized to reflect these values. Inclusive education aims to foster developmental and learning outcomes that equal or exceed outcomes resulting from other intervention approaches.

Inclusion of young children with disabilities and their families in developmental and educational settings designed primarily for children without disabilities differs from inclusive practice for school age children because services for most young children are not a part of their local school systems. Instead, inclusion is achieved through collaboration. The purpose of this guidebook is to provide impetus to collaborative efforts that support inclusive practices in early childhood services so that the needs and priorities of young children with disabilities and their families are addressed as a matter of course within the everyday environments of all young children and their families.

A statewide training based on *One of Us* is now in the planning stage. The training will be coordinated through the training entities already established by each of the Illinois Partners and a training of trainers model will be utilized to efficiently and effectively reach all early education and care providers in the state. □



■ "One of Us: Access & Equity for All Young Children"

written by Pam Reising Rechner
Principal Consultant

Division of Early Childhood
Illinois State Board of Education

One of Us is now available for download from the ISBE website at: http://www.isbe.net/early_chi/PDF/oneofus.pdf.

Please contact Pamela Reising Rechner at 217/524-4835 or preising@isbe.net for more information.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) What it Means to You!

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 was signed into law in January 2002, with reauthorization scheduled in 6 years. The term Title I is often used when talking about NCLB because Title I is the largest elementary and secondary education program within the Act. Title I grants provide funding for remedial education programs for economically disadvantaged children in public schools. NCLB applies differently to Title I schools than to schools that do not receive Title I funds. However, this law covers all public schools in all states. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is currently being reauthorized with the intent to align with NCLB.

Accountability

NCLB requires Illinois to ensure that 100% of students meet or exceed the Illinois Learning Standards in at least reading and mathematics achievement by the end of 2013-2014. NCLB requires all students to be assessed, including students with disabilities, as had the preceding federal law. States must begin testing students in grades 3-8 annually in reading and mathematics by 2006. The tests must be aligned with state standards. A nationally-determined sample of 4th and 8th graders in each state must also participate in the National Assessment of Educational Progress testing program in reading and math every year to provide a point of comparison for state test results.

Science assessments will be required by 2007-2008. Students will be tested at three grades (once in grades 3-5, once in grades 6-9, and once in grades 10-12), as is the current system in Illinois.

States must bring all students up to the “proficient” level on state tests within 12 years. In Illinois, “proficiency” is test scores that meet or exceed state standards. Individual schools must meet “adequate yearly progress” (AYP) toward the goal of proficiency for their student populations as a whole and for four specific subgroups of students: 1) children with disabilities, 2) children with limited English proficiency, 3) children from racial/ethnic minority groups, and 4) children from low-income families. At least 95% of students in the school must take the test in order for the school to make AYP. If the school as a whole, as well as each of the subgroups, doesn’t make AYP, then the school will “fail.”

If a Title I school fails to make AYP 2 years in a row, its students must be offered a choice of other public schools in the district to attend. The district must pay for transportation, giving preference to the lowest achieving children from the lowest income families.

If the Title I school fails to make AYP 3 years in a row, the school must also offer supplemental educational services, including private tutoring, after school services, or summer school programs. The state will create and maintain an approved list of providers which have a history of success. Again, the district may give preference to the lowest achieving children in the lowest income families in the applicable schools which request supplemental services.

Title I schools which fail to make their AYP goals for four years may reorganize its management structure. The school may hire an outside expert for advice, implement a new curriculum or provide additional training for teachers.

(continued on page 7)

- **“No Child Left Behind”**
written by Deb Kunz
Statewide Parent Consultant
for Project CHOICES



- **SDE-National Differentiated Instruction Conference**
“Theory into Practice”
July 20-23, 2003
Cleveland Convention Center
Contact: 1-800-924-9621 or
www.differentiatedinstruction.com
- **Early Childhood Assessment Conference**
“Spotlight on Assessment”
Aug. 7 & 8, 2003
Four Points Sheraton,
Fairview Heights
Contact: Kathy Hollowich
(618) 397-8930 ex. 170
- **Sharing a Vision**
“Windows of Opportunities”
Sept. 29, 30 & Oct. 1, 2003
Crowne Plaza
Springfield
Contact: Susan Ferry
(217) 824-4776
- **Natl. Assoc. for the Education of Young Children**
Annual Conference & Expo
Nov. 5-8, 2003
Chicago
Contact: Conference Dept.
1-800-424-2460 ex 11211
- **TASH Conference**
“Possibilities...”
December 10-13, 2003
Chicago Hilton
Contact: 1-800-482-TASH

No Child Left Behind (cont. from p. 6)

If the Title I school fails for five consecutive years, the principal and staff may be replaced.

There are additional sanctions for non-Title I schools as well. The premise is that all children are tested, all schools are held accountable.

New Parent Choices/Options

Schools must inform parents of their right to request information about their children's classroom teacher(s) and paraprofessional staff. Parents can learn about teachers' state certification status and college degrees/majors as well as the qualifications of paraprofessionals providing services to their children.

Schools using Title I funds must provide parents with notification if their child has been assigned to, or has been taught for four or more consecutive weeks by, a teacher who is not highly qualified.

Schools using Title III funds through NCLB to provide services to limited English proficient students must tell parents that their children have been identified as limited English proficient and in need of services. The schools must also provide information about the services to be provided and their children's level of learning.

If a student becomes the victim of a violent criminal offense while in or on the grounds of the public school he or she attends, the school district must notify the student's parents of their right to transfer their child to another, safe public school within the district.

Public Reporting Requirements

School and district performance must be publicly reported annually in district and state report cards. Individual school results will be on the district report cards.

Teachers who teach core academic subjects in a program supported by Title I funds, and hired for 2002-2003 and thereafter, must be highly qualified. All teachers by the end of 2005-2006 school year must be highly qualified. An Illinois teacher is "highly qualified" according to federal law if the individual meets all the criteria for an early childhood, elementary or secondary or special (or special pre-K through age 21) certificate, holds the certificate(s), and is teaching in the corresponding subject(s) and grade level(s). Final details on the qualifications are being developed.

New paraprofessionals paid by Title I funds in a targeted assistance school or in a Title I schoolwide school, performing instructional duties, must have completed two years of college or pass a test. Paraprofessionals already employed have until 2006 to meet these requirements. The requirements for persons who work with students with disabilities differ depending upon the situation. Paraprofessionals who provide instructional support must meet the definition of "highly qualified." Paraprofessionals who solely provide personal care services do not have to meet the definition of "highly qualified," no matter what their funding source may be. □



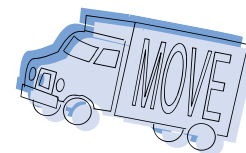
Project CHOICES office is moving!

After July 16, 2003,
Project CHOICES will
be located in a new
office.

Our new address will be:
SASED/Project CHOICES
1500 S. Grace Street
Lombard, IL 60148

As of publication date,
we didn't have our new
phone number, but we
can still be reached at
(630) 778-4508.

Check our website:
www.projectchoices.org
for the most up-to-date
contact info!



Resources for additional information on NCLB are:

ISBE Home Page: www.isbe.net

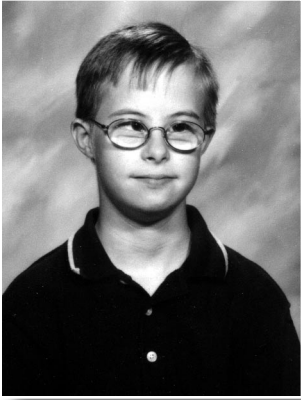
ISBE No Child Left Behind Page: www.isbe.net/nclb

U. S. Department of Education Home Page: www.ed.gov

No Child Left Behind home page: www.nclb.gov

Project CHOICES Staff Success Stories!

Austin Kremer:



Austin Kremer
son of Ann Kremer,
Consultant, Team II

Honor roll breakfast! What a treat to attend. I had no idea what it would be like, as this was the first time our 7th grader had been invited. This breakfast is for students and their parents who have made honor roll first or second quarter. Each student was named by his or her homeroom teacher and received a certificate and ribbon declaring his/her achievement. Our son received a large applause as he accepted his certificate.

Why such a big deal about a seemingly commonplace event? Our son, Austin, is 12 years old and has Down Syndrome. Austin has worked hard and earned his B average. He has studied about cells and mitochondria, he has read books like *Maniac Magee*, he has studied the revolutionary war, and he has progressed in his math skills. He is learning and growing. Austin is making a path for other students, as his school never before had anyone attend who had Down syndrome. His biggest success was when the principal told me Austin had learned as much from the school as the school had learned from him!

I know Austin is not the only one who is making a path. I see it everyday in the schools we visit. I see students, families, administrators, members of the community at large, and educators blazing the trail for people with disabilities. Austin is just one trailblazer, but his hard work has gotten him far. And I am the proud parent of a student who made the honor roll. Way to go Austin!

Tim Herzberger:



Tim Herzberger
son of JoAnn Herzberger,
Former Consultant, Team II

To all of those people who educated and befriended Tim along the way – the fruits of your labor! With gratitude to all school board members and administrators who had the vision, inclusion facilitators who listened, teachers and assistants who set goals and educated Tim, and friends who made him part of their circle:

~ The GATEWAYS program at the North Allegheny School District (similar to Project CHOICES) in Pennsylvania, where Tim was one of the first students in the state to be included (the word was “integrated” back then!) in his home school, general education classrooms with the supports he needed in Kindergarten and 1st grade to be successful...

~ Winfield #34 School District (a Project CHOICES site) where Tim was included in general education classrooms, educated by excellent teachers, and happily involved in just about everything from 2nd through 8th grade...

~ Neuqua Valley High School in Indian Prairie School District #204 (a Project CHOICES site) where Tim continued to be included in interesting classes with some wonderful teachers, had great work experiences, and led an extremely active social life thanks to Best Buddies and Peers in Action.

Tim began his post-high school career by working at R & M Enterprises in West Chicago, where he does a variety of tasks including clerical duties, cleaning, and working in the warehouse. R & M imprints school logos onto clothing and personalizes incentive items. Please support them if you have need of these services!

Tim is fulfilling a dream of his by taking an acting class at the College of DuPage. He would also like to take classes in cooking to prepare himself to live as independently as he possibly can.

Tim would not be who he is today and accomplished what he has without being educated with his nondisabled peers – and friends.

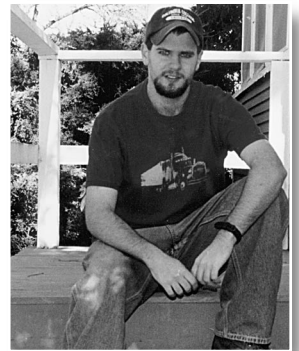
Project CHOICES Staff Success Stories! (cont.)

David Toney:

Watching my son walk down the aisle last year to the strains of “Pomp and Circumstance” to receive his Associate’s Degree from Lincoln College...seeing the relief on my son’s face this May as he finished the final exam of his junior year at Columbia College in Chicago: dreams that 18 years ago I never thought would have been realized. When David was identified at the age of three as having learning disabilities, I had no idea what was in store for him and for our family. I had so many questions, so much I didn’t understand, and so many fears wondering what his future held in store for him.

I knew, as a former teacher and a parent, that the best education for David would not be in a self-contained special education classroom. Few people were talking about what we now know as “inclusion,” but I knew that David would learn from his peers and needed to be in a general education classroom. We have been very lucky because the people involved in David’s education (from elementary school through college) have believed in and supported inclusive options for him. Both the elementary and the high school districts in West Chicago worked collaboratively with us to insure that David’s education would meet his needs in the general education classroom. Sometimes they experimented with how best to provide David services; there are no “pat” answers. Most of the time they were successful and when they weren’t, they tried something else. I had thought that after David graduated from high school, we would never find a support system within a college setting to help David achieve successfully. Wow, was I wrong! David has found great support both at Lincoln College and Columbia College.

The key through all of David’s schooling has been the support of individual teachers (too numerous to thank here) and their willingness to think “outside the box,” be flexible, and to never waiver in the belief that David could be successful in general education classrooms. With their help, David has found tremendous success. This summer, he will begin his first job in the field of his college major, photography, and will begin his senior year next fall at Columbia. Because of David’s hard work and the support of educators, we know his past successes are only just the beginning of a future filled with dreams come true.



David Toney
son of Barbara Toney
Public Information Specialist

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Sean Segroves:

PFC Sean Segroves, Army National Guard, graduated from Heritage High School in May 19th, 2002. That sounds like such an ordinary statement, but it means so much more. Sean, like many children, has a learning disability not quite severe enough to warrant formal special education services, but still severe enough to make learning some subjects a challenge. But Sean had a great advantage—his younger brother, Shane, was one of the first children included at his school, beginning a change in the way services were delivered, and a change in the way teachers thought about disabilities. Due to this change, Sean was able to receive resource services in high school even though he didn’t have the appropriate “label.” The school provided help, and, with much work at home, Sean graduated. Today he is the primary caregiver for his brother Shane, attends college, continues to serve in the National Guard, and has a wonderful life.

Inclusive schools do this: provide help to all students, not just kids with IEPs, reminding us all that inclusion does lead to a better society, not just for kids with disabilities, but for all people.



Sean Segroves
son of Mandy Segroves,
Consultant, Team III

EVENTS

Let's Reach Everyone Mardi Gras Parading through Education January 31, 2003

The third annual, "Let's Reach Everyone" Institute was held on January 31, 2003 at the Naperville Holiday Inn.

Once again, Chicago Public Schools and Project CHOICES collaborated to offer this Institute to CPS staff and other interested professionals. Attendees began the morning with breakfast and the keynote speaker, Richard Baker. They then chose to attend one of nine workshops offered. On these two pages, you see a glimpse of the presenters and their topics.

Mark your calendar for this year's LRE Institute which will be held on January 30, 2004 and the Holiday Inn Select in Tinley Park.

Highlights of the Institute include a presentation by the Wavelength comedy troupe entitled, *Seven Habits of Highly Ineffective Educators*, as well as sessions on positive approaches to discipline, differentiated instruction, early childhood, legal issues facing families, high school inclusion, paraeducators, second language learners, and more!



*Keynote speaker,
Richard Baker*
"Not Judging a Child by His Disability" —
The difference in advocating for inclusion



Dr. Rich Villa
Inclusive Practices



Dr. Richard Curwin
Reaching Difficult
Students



Dr. Jacqueline Thousand
Effective Collaborative
Practices



Danette Erickson-Meyer
Learning Disabilities &
Second Language
Learner Acquisition



*Dr. Lora Tyson &
Dr. Maureen Kincaid*
(not pictured)
Reading Initiative and
Literacy



Cindy Sanders
The IL Alternate
Assessment System

Visit our newly redesigned website and sign the guestbook while you're there!
<http://www.projectchoices.org>



Let's Reach Everyone Mardi Gras (continued)



Dr. Lisa Dieker
Meeting the Needs of
Middle & HS Students



Bart Pisha
Universal Design for Learning—
Meeting the Challenge of IDEA



Jennifer Sommerness
Job-embedded
Paraprofessional
Development

Moira...Special Gift *(cont. from page 1)*

During that past year-and-a-half we were encouraged not only by how well she did, but also how accepting her peers were toward her. We witnessed the openness and acceptance that children have towards each other.

The concept of inclusion was relatively new for Ebinger, but in September of 1999, Moira began kindergarten in an inclusive setting. Moira had a one-to-one assistant who worked in the classroom, helping her whenever necessary but always encouraging her to be as independent as possible.

Moira's kindergarten year was very successful. Her teacher, who had formerly worked in the special education area, was extremely supportive and knowledgeable. She knew and believed that Moira was best served in this environment. Her natural attitude also helped the other children to see Moira as a valuable part of the classroom. This early acceptance helped to lay the foundation for the years to come.

As all parents of children with special needs can attest, the challenges of education can be difficult. What I have especially learned is that the best way to build relationships with schools is to keep the lines of communication between parents and the school open. Being respectful but believing what we know to be best for our child can go a long way.

The ongoing willingness of the general education teachers to work with the paraprofessionals in modifying the curriculum and making the proper accommodations necessary in the classroom continues to be the key to success. Personally, my family and I are grateful to the school and organizations such as Project CHOICES for their commitment to exploring the ways in which our children can be educated in the least restrictive environment. We are looking forward to continuing this successful working relationship, one that will help our daughter Moira. □

Sharing a Vision
"Windows of Opportunities"
Sept. 29, 30 & Oct. 1, 2003
Crowne Plaza
Springfield

Sharing A Vision has emerged as Illinois' premier statewide early childhood conference by bringing together over 2,000 participants from Illinois and neighboring states who share a common vision for young children. Scheduled events and speakers creating "Windows of Opportunities" include noted author and public speaker Barbara Coloroso and Ralph Covert, a Chicago-based singer and songwriter.

This year's conference also features a full array of workshops offered by noted early childhood specialists and educators and parents who will address topics such as Sensory Integration and Sensory Processing, Assistive Technology in Early Childhood settings, Work Sampling in Illinois, Inclusion, Seizure Disorders, Early Intervention, Student Portfolios, Building Creative Learning Environments, Curriculum, Literacy, Social/Emotional Development in Young Children and Linking Curriculum and Assessment in Early Childhood Classrooms.

Registration cost is \$130.00 for the three days. There is a reduced fee of \$105 for early bird registrations and for parents. Individuals who register the day of the conference will pay \$180.00.

For more information contact: Susan Ferry,
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sharingavision@aol.com

From the Coordinator's Desk: Project CHOICES Technical Support is Restructured

■ From the Coordinator's Desk:

**"Project CHOICES
Technical Support is
Restructured"**

written by Ruth Henning

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Project CHOICES is operated by the School Association for Special Education in DuPage County under a grant from the Illinois State Board of Education. Approximately 92% (\$886,000) of funding for the project is from federal sources.

Our process for working with schools has been restructured and we are finding that it works very well. During the past school year we have transitioned from the informal process we have been using for several years in which we responded to any request from schools. We are now using a more formal agreement process with schools and districts. There are at least two relatively inter-related reasons for these changes.

The first is that the outcomes we have been able to identify from the work we have done with many of you over the past several years have been almost entirely process related. We have provided workshop presentations and facilitated your planning and problem-solving related to improving or increasing inclusive options for students and young children. We have also shared resources and facilitated networking between schools. These kinds of activities can be a very useful part of staff development to support change in schools. But there has not been a coordinated effort to gather data on how these processes are tied to improved outcomes for children and youth.

This leads us directly into the second reason for the changes we have made at Project CHOICES. As many of you know, the Illinois State Board of Education has developed a plan for improvement as part of the Federal monitoring of states' compliance with IDEA. In this plan, titled *Illinois Continuous Improvement Plan for Special Education (CIP)*, the ISBE has developed five goals intended to improve educational outcomes for students with disabilities. Project CHOICES, like other technical assistance initiatives in Illinois is being directed by the ISBE to demonstrate how our efforts are impacting achievement of these goals and outcomes for students.

Although we are specifically an "LRE initiative" we have aligned our efforts with 4 of the 5 goals: **Goal 1:** improved outcomes, **Goal 2:** education in the least restrictive environment, **Goal 3:** teachers and related service staff prepared to teach in the LRE, and **Goal 4:** increased parent participation. To read or copy the complete plan, you can go to <http://isbe.net/spec-ed/PDF/CIPRevised2-03.pdf>.

(continued on page 2)

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