

Project CHOICES

CHILDREN HAVE OPPORTUNITIES IN INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENTS AND SCHOOLS
An LRE Initiative of the Illinois State Board of Education which includes the CHOICES/Early CHOICES Grants

Something Old, Something New: Access and Equity for All Students

By: Nancy Spejcher and Ruth Henning

Education and best practices in curriculum and instruction are not static; they remain in a constant state of change. We, as educators and parts of systems, keep growing and improving to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student population. In 1985, education in Illinois grew when Project CHOICES was created as a result of our State Board of Education signing on to participate in a federal statewide systems change grant; by 1988 Project CHOICES' charge became assisting schools in developing skills of staff to educate all children with their same age peers in their home schools.

Now, in 2008, the Illinois State Board of Education is participating in another federal statewide systems change grant in which Project CHOICES will again play a major role as one of the partners under the Illinois Statewide Technical Assistance Center (ISTAC). Illinois is one of five states that received a five year State Implementation of Scaling-up Evidence-Based Practices (SISEP) grant. The focus of SISEP is developing the state capacity for large scale implementations of evidence-based practices, with fidelity, and good outcomes for students. The federal SISEP Center will work, in collaboration with existing state technical assistance centers, to maximize benefits to states and maximize the use of resources in each state.

Project CHOICES and the other projects under ISTAC will support the collaborative efforts for school improvement through District Leadership Teams and District and Building Level Coaches. The hope of ISTAC is to simplify the technical assistance processes for districts, so we all work smarter rather than harder; and, accessing support from the various projects becomes less duplicative for districts. The areas of school improvement that have the potential to ensure good outcomes for all students include:

- Leadership
- Family Engagement
- Data-Based Decision Making
- Universal Screening
- Progress Monitoring
- Standards Aligned Curriculum
- Evidenced-Based Practice
- Differentiation of Instruction and Curriculum for Academics and Behavior
- Team-Based Implementation
- Sustainability
- The Three-Tiered Response to Intervention Model
 - *Universal* interventions being preventative and proactive addressing academic and behavioral needs of 80-90% of students.
 - *Secondary* interventions meeting the needs of 10-15% of students who are at risk of academic and behavioral failure.
 - *Tertiary* interventions are intensive for the 5% of students who need wrap around services and multiple approaches and supports to ensure academic and behavioral successes.

Universal + Secondary + Tertiary = academic and behavioral success for 100% of students.

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The 9th Annual Project CHOICES LRE Institute

January 23, 2009
Holiday Inn
Tinley Park, IL

Contact Sandy
630-629-0551

or visit [www.
projectchoices.org](http://www.projectchoices.org)

Inclusion: An Administrative Perspective

By: Tammie Henry, Superintendent
Raccoon Consolidated School District #1

As superintendent of a small rural school that provides an inclusive environment, I am frequently asked how we have managed to implement such an educational model. Although the answer seems rather elementary, I am convinced the three primary reasons for our district's success in the world of inclusion is universal training, building capacity and administrative support.

As a district, we chose working with Project Choices as a response to NCLB. The Board of Education supported this choice and we began our plunge into inclusion with a year of intensive district wide training. The first hurdle we faced was "getting everyone on the same page". We spent considerable time as a faculty learning what inclusion looks like, sounds like and feels like. We also learned what it is NOT! We had professional development each month focusing on differentiated instruction, accommodations/modifications, and co-teaching. We did all of this ground work before we moved any of our students. When we implemented the project the second year, our teachers were well versed in the inclusive model. They still had questions; we still had to work out kinks. But there was not fear, reluctance or trepidation on their part. They were ready and willing to embrace the students with special needs into their classrooms.

Throughout our year of training and each subsequent year, we have striven to "build capacity" with our teachers. We worked extremely hard to create a cohesive, supportive, collaborative unit. We PLAYED together on a regular basis. We provided activities during our professional development that encouraged them to communicate and begin to think of themselves as a team. We square danced, went bowling, had pot lucks, gave compliments, did scavenger hunts, and had office chair races down the hall. Our teachers learned to laugh together and support one another. I know this step sounds kind of "touchy feely" and some might think it is the step to skip. DON'T! This step was and is essential to our success. Inclusion requires communication. Communication does not happen without preparation. Building "capacity" to communicate laid the ground work for professional communication to occur.

At the end of the school year, I asked my teachers why they thought we were successful in the implementation of inclusion. Overwhelming, they responded that administrative support was essential. Administrative support includes providing common planning time, adequate staff, continuing professional development and requiring accountability. My teachers trust that I will support their efforts and make sure we are all moving in the same direction. I believe a least restrictive environment of instruction is beneficial for all students. My team knows I believe this, and they have confidence that they will be supported.

Our small district is far from being an inclusion expert. We are still learning; we are still tweaking the system each day as needed. Although it isn't perfect everyday, we are pleased with the fact that our students have access to the regular curriculum on a daily basis. They are succeeding and growing stronger in the classroom. We have every intention of continuing our journey and getting better at inclusion because it is best for all of our students.

Books 2 Read

Building Successful Partnerships

Foreword by Dr. James P. Comer
Copyright 2000 National PTA

*A practical resource focusing on implementing the six National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement.

Change Leadership: A Practical Guide to Transforming Our Schools

By Tony Wagner and Robert Kegan

*This book provides insights and examples on how to implement successful systems change in your school district.

Check Out These Sites:

- * <http://teacher.scholastic.com/professional/assessment/studentprogress.htm>
Question and Answer about Best Practices in Assessment
- * www.cild.info
A resource for awareness campaigns that provide resources for education, employment, housing, immigration and other outreach services to people with and without disabilities.
- * http://www.fpg.unc.edu/news/highlight_detail.cfm?ID=796 A New Podcast Answers Basic Questions about Inclusion in Early Childhood. Brenda Dennis, discusses inclusion in the 7th episode of FPG Voices.

“Something Old, Something New: Access and Equity for All Students”

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Working with, and through, District Level Teams and District and Building Coaches helps empower administrators, teachers and support staff to evaluate and change practices, reallocate resources, collect and analyze data for decision making and problem solving. This system benefits everyone and leads to good outcomes for students and their families!

Project CHOICES looks forward to working with your District Level Team and Coaches to support your district in becoming the place where all students experience access and equity to grade level curriculum, instruction and peers with support at the Universal, Secondary and Tertiary levels. Technical assistance can occur onsite, online, through planning and networking regional meetings, e-mail and through other creative ways available.

For more information visit:

www.projectchoices.org, <http://www.is-tac.org>,
and www.scalingup.org

Hopes and Dreams

By: Mary Wyman, Springfield, IL



When asked to write an essay describing the hopes and dreams my husband and I have for our daughter with Downs Syndrome, I found myself spending a great deal of time reflecting on what we envision for her life. It was a bit humbling to realize that at some point in the past five years I have become so engaged in helping Rachel reach mile stones, obtain goals, and advocating for her needs that I had lost sight of the big picture – our hopes and dreams for her life. I am filled with a sense of irony; after all it was with optimism in our heart that we named our beautiful baby, Rachel Hope.

After much consideration I realize that the hopes and dreams we have for Rachel are much like those we have for our other two children. I want Rachel to be accepted for who she is, and ultimately have a satisfying social network. I dream that she will support herself with work that she enjoys, and that she will be happy and independent. I would be delighted if she were to find a partner she loves and who loves her. And finally, I pray that others recognize that their life is better for having known her.

Bright Ideas

“Book Bags”

Create 3-4 bags containing a book and 3 activities to go with the book. Each book should have a different reading level based on reading groups. The activities are differentiated by skill level and learning style. On a rotating basis, students take home a bag for a week. The student completes 1-3 activities. The books and activities are changed throughout the year.

By: Bill Peters, Consultant

“Using Tech”

How can we take advantage of all the I-Pod and MP3 players we see our students using? Audacity is a free, easy-to-use audio editor and recorder for most computer operating systems. Teachers can use Audacity to record and edit test reviews, record chapters or short stories for students to download as podcasts. Students can create podcasts as a way to demonstrate their learning. Available at: www.audacity.sourceforge.net

By: Ann Kremer, Consultant



Expanded Post-Secondary Education Opportunities for Students with Intellectual Disabilities

By: Ann Kremer

The Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 was signed by President Bush in August. Here are a few of the highlights for students with intellectual disabilities:

- Allows students, who are attending programs designed for them in higher education, to be eligible for Pell Grants, Supplemental Educational Grants, and also Federal Work-Study Programs.
- Authorizes the development and expansion of high-quality, inclusive model transition and post-secondary programs.
- Authorizes the establishment of a center for the new model and a national center to provide support services for the colleges, the students with disabilities, and their families.
- Helps colleges to recruit, retain, and graduate students with disabilities.

The Higher Education Opportunity Act contains numerous provisions regarding the preparation of educators for all ages to use the principles of UDL (Universal Design for Learning) in their practices. UDL provides flexibility in presentation, demonstration of knowledge and skills, and in student engagement. It also reduces barriers, provides appropriate accommodations and supports, challenges, and maintains high achievement expectations for all students.

For more information on Universal Design for Learning visit: www.udl4allstudents.com and www.cast.org

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Last Thoughts . . .

Let the Games Begin: Teachers as Coaches

By: Julie Schackmann, Consultant

A new school year is off to a great start with much enthusiasm regarding the use of teacher coaches in school districts across the state of Illinois. Project CHOICES has a new process whereby we work with district and building coaches. CHOICES consultants visit districts and buildings on a quarterly basis, but it is the designated coaches that provide the knowledge, skills, and support as needed and necessary so that all students are successful.

As school districts have realized that traditional staff development formats such as one-day training workshops do not transform actual classroom practice, they have begun to explore other avenues for professional development. According to research, a coaching model leads to higher student achievement and teacher satisfaction (Wong & Wong, 2008). An onsite coach, who is part of the school community, provides staff assistance with problem-solving and decision-making. School districts are finding that a coaching model is a cost-effective and efficient way to build capacity.

The major responsibility of a coach is to help maximize the personal and professional potential of all staff members. Coaching needs to be work based, opportunistic, readily available, and reflective (e.g., debriefing discussions). Spouse (2001) described four main roles of a coach: supervision, teaching while engaged in practice activities, assessment and feedback, and provision of emotional support. After decades of research on training teachers, Joyce & Showers (2002) began to think of training and coaching as one continuous set of operations designed to produce actual changes in the classroom practices of teachers. One without the other is insufficient.

The staff at Project CHOICES looks forward to supporting school districts in creating successful coaching models that will positively impact all staff and students.

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Staci Garvin and Maria Martinez, Editors

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