

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



Eighth Graders Learn Acceptance

By Deb Fornoff

There are many reasons inclusion is important for students with challenges. Learning alongside peers provides a more effective and meaningful education. Inclusion provides the opportunity for relationships to develop that are so important to the quality of our lives. Good role models motivate all of us to do our best. One of the most important outcomes of inclusive education is that students with disabilities become valued members of their communities - *they belong*. This is something that cannot be achieved when students are segregated.

At Washington Middle School (District 52) in Washington, Illinois, students in the 8th grade class elected Max Norris to give the graduation address. Max is a leader. He is a good student and is liked and respected by both his classmates and his teachers. Max and the rest of the 8th grade class at WMS have shared experiences, classrooms, and teachers with students with disabilities, including Brad Fornoff, since kindergarten. Brad's 4th grade classroom was featured in the Success Stories section in the Winter 2002 CHOICES newsletter. How do we know that inclusion has made a difference for Brad and his classmates? (See "Acceptance" page 3)

New Year, New School For CHOICES

By Ann Kremer

Teachers from Proviso East and West High Schools learned about inclusive classrooms and accommodations to better support students with disabilities in the general education classroom. Project CHOICES North Team came together on January 20, 2006, to present to most of the staff at the two high schools. Proviso Township High School District just began working with Project CHOICES to develop a Collaborative Agreement for Technical Support to work with the two high schools during the 2006-07 school year.

The North Team invited two successful young adults with disabilities, Bridget Brown and Barry Wasik, to co-present with them. Bridget, a young woman with disabilities who just graduated from an inclusive educational program presented on Accommodations and Modifications. She shared how she researched and completed a research paper on Segregation and Civil Rights. Bridget is currently attending The Technology Center of DuPage studying Child Development. Barry, a young man with developmental disabilities who is included in his community and work, shared his life and how important it is to make the least dangerous assumption about learners. Barry has worked at HyVee independently for the past six years in Peru, IL, and presents on inclusion. Both of our guest presenters were an inspiration and provided participants with a vision for inclusion.

October 2006

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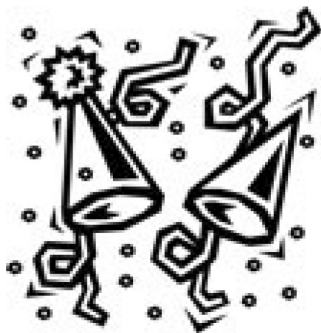
Let's Celebrate!

Rich Township High School District #227 has dramatically increased their co-taught classes in core subjects for their students. They are continuing to offer training on the subject for the staff.

East St. Louis District #189 has expanded their efforts to include more students with disabilities in general education classes in the 06-07 school year. Project CHOICES will be collaborating with the high school and all three middle schools this school year.

Rockford District #205 has disbanded their middle school self-contained classrooms and their 9th grade self-contained classrooms. Project CHOICES will be training their staff this fall in order to implement a co-teaching model.

Tibbot School's teachers, collaborated to student who was behavior issues. a plan that made it student and for his classmates.



training their staff this fall in order to implement a co-teaching model. (CUSD #365) administrators, and parents ensure the success of a experiencing some Together they developed work for the individual

Caldwell School (District #299) has included ALL students with more significant cognitive disabilities at the junior high level in the 06-07 school year.

Raccoon School (District #801) has provided services to all students who qualify for ECSE in the school they would attend if they did not have a disability. These students have come back to Raccoon!

Prairie du Rocher (CCSD #134) has increased the percentage of time students are being served in LRE, and they will expand co-teaching in order to support them in the 06-07 school year.

Shields School (District #299) has shown enthusiasm about working with CHOICES, and both teachers and administration set high expectations for all their students.

Valley View School District (CUSD #365) has expanded their work with CHOICES in the 06-07 school year to include their two high schools.

Cicero District #99 has begun blending their pre-school programs. CHOICES will support administration, teachers, and parents to become a more inclusive district.

Project CHOICES Consultants

North Team

*Nancy Brown
Cheryl Crosby
Staci Garvin
Ann Kremer
Maria Martinez
Bill Peters
Al Smith*

South Team

*Jolene Drew
Susan Raso
Julie Schackmann
Mandy Segroves
Pandora Taylor
Chris Wasik*

Project CHOICES Administrative Staff

*Ruth Henning
Project Coordinator*

*Sandy Naruszewicz
Administrative Assistant*

*Sue Barkman
NIU Administrative
Assistant*

*Nancy Speicher
Information Specialist*

*Joy Warner
Support Staff*

*Amy Atherton
Office Clerk*

Acceptance continued from pg. 1

Read the following excerpt from Max's graduation address:

“Most of us have been together since kindergarten and first grade, so all of us have been friends at one point or known each other for a long time. One of the people that has been friends with us since then and is still one of our best friends is Brad, and in fifth grade, another student. Growing up with them has taught me a lot about tolerance and seeing that these kids aren't just those kids that sit in a different room all day, but kids who can be our best friends, that can learn in the same classroom with us, that can compete against us in gym, and be just like any other kid.”

As Brad's name was read and he walked across the gym to pick up his diploma, his classmates and teachers stood and applauded in recognition of his efforts. This 8th grade graduating class at Washington Middle School leaves with more than a diploma and lots of good memories – they leave with a very special understanding of the importance of community and the value of each and every member within it.

Q & A

Q: Do you have suggestions for finding a good school district that supports inclusion in the Chicago area?

A: Some suggestions are:

1. View the district website. In general, the more information regarding special education on their website, the more flexible the district's system.
2. Go visit the school.
3. Talk to another family in the district.
4. Find out information about the district through parent training information centers like Starnet or Project CHOICES.



Q: How do we make time to collaborate?

A: The importance of collaboration time has to be recognized by administration. It is important to look at the student's schedule in order to reorganize time efficiently.

(Answers provided by:
Ann Kremer and Jolene Drew
Project CHOICES consultants)

Bright Ideas



- Scheduling is always a major issue for teachers and administrators. www.specialconnections.ku.edu helps schools create their own schedule. Once you have accessed the website, click “collaboration” then “teacher tools”.

- Educators need to recognize the importance of collaborating with parents. Parents have a lifetime investment in their child and know him/her best.

- When utilizing partial participation, target only one thing at a time. For example, if you are teaching parts of speech, some students will have to be able to identify all the parts of speech while some students will have to be able to identify only the verb.

- When including a student, give him/her voice. Let the student be part of the decision-making process. Get to know the student; ask him/her questions.

(Tips provided by: Ann Kremer, Chris Wasik,
Pandora Taylor, and Julie Schackmann
Project CHOICES consultants)

Project CHOICES Serves Schools and Families Through IS-TAC

By Ruth Henning and Nancy Spejcher

You may or may not know that Project CHOICES is now part of a new Illinois Statewide Technical Assistance Center (IS-TAC). This center structure is funded by the ISBE for at least two purposes. One is to increase the collaboration across their funded initiatives so that the dollars are being used in the most effective way and bring to schools an array of services and supports designed to increase the system level change towards improved outcomes for students with disabilities in Illinois.

The second major purpose of IS-TAC is to pool monies from each of the funded partners and begin the development of a comprehensive database to track the outcomes of the training and technical support provided to schools. Data-based decision making will be a stronger focus to ensure schools are continuously learning from and improving their efforts on behalf of students with disabilities.

The data Project CHOICES will be collecting is LRE (Least Restrictive Environment) and outcomes data. It will come from schools through the:

- FACTS - Funding and Child Tracking System (LRE –Least Restrictive Environment information for schools/districts)
- CATS – Collaborative Agreement for Technical Support (includes initial baseline data and strategies demonstrating school/district commitment to system change)
- IPRT – Inclusive Practices Reflection Tool (a needs assessment with ongoing data to show evidence of system change and outcomes for students)
- SIMEO – Systematic Information Management for Educational Outcomes (individual student data showing impact of services)

IS-TAC is administered by the School Association for Special Education in DuPage (SASED).

Current ISBE initiatives that are now members of the center include:

- Project CHOICES- Children Have Opportunities in Inclusive Community Environments and Schools (www.projectchoices.org)
- PBIS- Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (www.pbis.org)
- IATTAP- Illinois Autism Training and Technical Assistance Project (www.illinoisautismproject.org)
- PEP-Parent Education Partnership (www.pepartnership.org)

The goals of IS-TAC are to:

1. Establish effective structures and procedures in districts and schools that promote consistent use of effective practices for all students.
2. Ensure effective data-based decision making for implementing behavioral/ instructional practices.
3. Ensure use of effective behavioral/academic strategies and interventions for students with or at-risk of emotional/behavioral, learning or other significant disabilities.
4. Increase the capacity of school districts to successfully educate all students together in general education settings.
5. Ensure family/student voice and ownership in designing/implementing school-wide systems as well as supports and interventions for individual students.

(See IS-TAC page 5)

IS-TAC (continued from page 4)

To meet the IS-TAC Goals, Project CHOICES has developed 6 targets as a framework for how school/districts can build capacity for educating all students together in general education.

1. All children have access to general education curriculum.
2. Students have access to, and are supported by, all of the school's resources.
3. Schools address social emotional development as a key part of academic outcomes.
4. Schools develop and use data for decision making and problem solving.
5. Schools make a concerted effort to involve family members.
6. The school district is committed to system change and developing an effective educational system for all students.

Another aspect of the new center is that each of the initiatives will now be charging for some or most of their services. Funding from the ISBE will continue, and hopefully grow; however, the intent of asking schools to pay for a percentage of the services they receive is to ensure that services are available to any and all schools and school districts in Illinois who request them.

For Project CHOICES specifically, this new structure has brought new challenges and new opportunities that we believe will benefit the schools with which we work, and more importantly students with disabilities. Although the umbrella name "Project CHOICES" encompasses two grants, CHOICES and Early CHOICES, it is only the grant for school age students, ages 6 to 21, which is officially a part of IS-TAC.

Our Early CHOICES grant continues to be an integral part of what we offer to schools, but services to programs for children ages 3 to 5 do not come under our fee structure. In addition, to ensure that we are impacting services in early childhood, for FY2006, we have provided three forums on blending services for children with disabilities and programs for children who are at risk or who are typically developing. We will again provide three Forums on Blending in the coming school year, FY2007. We are beginning to already see an increase in requests for training and technical support for early childhood programs who would like to develop or increase opportunities for young children to be educated together.

Direct



Connection

Corner

Our consultants are available to answer specific questions regarding any of the following categories.

Differentiated Instruction

Pandora Taylor
618-549-1181

Sue Raso
217-356-1674

Co-Teaching

Jolene Drew
217-469-9052

Inclusion Basics

Cheryl Crosby
630-369-1893

Paraeducators

Ann Kremer
815-356-8310

Transitions for Life

Chris Wasik
815-220-0869

Classroom Management

Staci Garvin
815-751-4163

Maria Martinez
815-753-0994



“We’ve Come a Long Way” A Magic Moment in Time

By Heidi Heimer in collaboration with Nancy Spejcher

During the school years 2003 – 2006 Freeport High School and Project CHOICES had a magic moment in time. A magic moment in time is where things come together in such a way that the environment is made significantly better for everyone. The collaboration that transpired between Project CHOICES and Freeport High School led to just that...improved outcomes for students, teachers and parents.

It all began, when a parent, who had a daughter with Aspergers Syndrome attending Freeport High School, suggested the high school contact Project CHOICES for support. At that time, the high school teachers wanted something different in the way of Team Teaching. They wanted to improve co-planning among general education teachers and special education teachers, and increase the number of students with special needs being educated in general education. The teachers wanted to work as partners and share classrooms. They wanted to become teachers teaching all students rather than separating some students for instruction based on ability and behavior.

Freeport High School submitted a request for support to the project. Project CHOICES began with an initial consultation so they could hear first hand where the district was, and where they wanted to be. The teachers in the high school completed a survey and needs assessment to see where they were with their knowledge of co-planning, team teaching, and beliefs and interest in educating all students together in general education with support. What Project CHOICES and Freeport staff discovered was a need to educate teachers on the law and instructional practices for including students with disabilities in general education. The first step in the plan of action that was generated through collaboration between Freeport High School and Project CHOICES was to present workshops on the law and instructional practices to all the teachers.

Concentrating on the whole group first helped people have a general understanding and increased their knowledge base. That being in place, Project CHOICES moved to working with selected groups of team teachers on differentiating instruction, team processes and inclusive practices. What was particularly helpful from the Project CHOICES staff was their diversity of people and views, their helpful, friendly attitudes, and the onsite visits where Project CHOICES staff observed classrooms and were available for collaboration.

Over the next two years, teachers changed the way they team taught; teachers became equal partners in the teaching of a lesson. Co-planning and common planning time became important parts of the process. Teachers co-planned, and continue to do so, at least once a week. There were increased conversations about students and their needs. Suspensions, detentions and behavioral referrals decreased and attendance increased. Test scores improved and parent satisfaction increased.

As a result of all these changes, numbers of students with disabilities in general education increased and special education classrooms decreased (originally 15 to 6 currently). Students with special needs educated in general education increased from 60+% in 2002 to 80+% in 2006. Academic and behavioral expectations from students, teachers and parents increased and everyone realized all students can be successful in general education; students with special needs knew, and know, they can learn in general education classrooms and that the support is there for them. Currently the majority of Jr. High students enter Freeport High School in general education classes.

During the Connections Conference in Springfield April 2006, sponsored by Illinois State University and the Illinois State Board of Education, Freeport staff highlighted Project CHOICES and shared the following: Freeport School District is a district that participates in initiatives to maximize their resources. Over the years they have tried a lot of things with mixed reviews. Project CHOICES was different; it left a good impression and did make a difference with the students, faculty, parents and administration. They helped us look at what we were doing, commended us on what was in place and helped us improve what we wanted to do better, which was educate all students together. Freeport High School continues to grow and move ahead with sustaining the inclusive practices which have grown from this magic moment in time.

Save The Date!

4th Annual Piecing It All Together: How Children's Mental Health and Mental Illness Affect Family, School, and Community

October 27-28, 2006

Four Points Sheraton

Fairview Heights, IL

For information contact: (618) 798-9788

ASCD Annual Conference & Exhibit

March 17-19, 2007

Anaheim Convention Center

Anaheim, CA

For information contact: (800) 933-2723

www.ascd.org

7th Annual Project CHOICES LRE Institute

January 26, 2007

Holiday Inn Select
Tinley Park, IL

For more
information contact:

(630) 629-0551

or

www.projectchoices.org

Upcoming Early Childhood Blending Forums

South Region

October 2, 2006

*Best Western Prairie Inn
Galesburg, IL*

March 15, 2007

*Rend Lake Resort &
Conference Center
Wittington, IL*

North Region

February 23, 2007

Tinley Park Area



6th Annual National Inclusive Schools Week December 4-8, 2006

For information:

www.inclusiveschools.org

Check Out These Websites:

www.help4teachers.com

*Kathy Nunley's site for
Layered Curriculum*

www.teachernet.com

Variety of resources for teachers

www.fmptic.org

Family Matters website

www.pbis.org

*Positive Behavior Intervention
and Supports*

Books 2 Read

*The Inclusive Learning Center Book
For Preschool Children with Special Needs*

By: Christy Isbell and Rebecca Isbell

*It's So Much Work to Be Your Friend
Helping the Child with Learning*

Disabilities Find Social Success

By: Richard Lavoie

CONTACT PEOPLE

SCHOOL ASSOCIATION
FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION IN
DuPAGE COUNTY

Ruth Henning
Project CHOICES
1590 S. Fairfield Street
Lombard, IL 60148
Ph: (630) 629-0551
Fax: (630) 620-9473
E-mail: projectchoice@projectchoices.org

NORTHERN ILLINOIS
UNIVERSITY

Dr. Sharon Freagon
Project CHOICES
Northern IL University
DeKalb, IL 60115
(815) 753-0656

ILLINOIS STATE BOARD
OF EDUCATION
PRINCIPAL CONSULTANTS

Pamela Reising Rechner
100 North First Street, E-230
Springfield, IL 62777-0001
(217) 524-4835 (Voice)
(217) 782-1900 (TTY)

Barb Sims
100 North First Street, E-254
Springfield, IL 62777-0001
217-782-5249 (Voice)
(217) 782-1900 (TTY)

If you have questions or
items to submit, please email
sjgarvin@hotmail.com
or mmartinez5@msn.com

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from federal sources.

Last Thoughts . . .

The National Center for Educational Accountability at the University of Texas recently published results of a six year study of the best practices of elementary and secondary schools in 20 states that have consistently successful track records. Researchers discovered that one of the factors that the most successful schools have in common is that teachers differentiate instruction to meet the individual needs of all students (*Education Week, July 6, 2006*).

In the following poem Karen Marfise, a third grade teacher at Shields Elementary in Chicago, provides a compelling reason of her own about why she differentiates for her students:

As I went out to water my plants this morning, the thought occurred to me that the flowers I tend daily are very much like my students. Each and every plant has its own needs. Which ones need to be watered daily? Which ones should I take care not to drench? Some plants are able to be left alone with little care and they will still produce beautiful blooms. With which plants should I be especially watchful, for they may shrivel from neglect? Which ones thrive when placed close together, and which ones need enough space to reach their full growth potential? Who needs more sun? Who grows best in the shade? Some plants will produce amazing results when given a little fertilizer and some extra attention. Even a few I had given up on spring back when their thirst is quenched.

I differentiate for my plants. Should I do less for my students?

For information on differentiating: www.differentiatedinstruction.com

Project CHOICES
1500 South Grace Street
Lombard, IL 60148

Staci Garvin and Maria Martinez,
Editors

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