

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



Founder of Project CHOICES, Retires

By Bill Peters
North Team Consultant

Dr. Sharon Freagon, director of the Center for Child Welfare and Education at Northern Illinois University and creator of Project CHOICES retired June 30, 2007.

Throughout her career Sharon has championed the cause of those children she saw as the most oppressed. Prior to her coming to Illinois, she worked as the director of a residential agency in Nashville, Tennessee. She was instrumental in placing children and youth with special needs, many of whom had been abused in large institutional settings, into group homes and foster care.

Since coming to NIU in 1977, Sharon has devoted her career to research and demonstration. She is recognized as a national leader on school inclusion. She received funding for large federal demonstration projects which brought money to Illinois for the development of model practices in the education of children and youth with disabilities. One of these federal projects was the beginning of the Project CHOICES technical assistance initiative. This project was originally funded as a partnership with the Illinois State Board of Education and continues to provide support to school districts on best practices for developing unified school systems.

Sharon has also been a strong advocate for families. One component of the Project CHOICES federal grant was the development of a parent network to function as advisory to the initiative in schools. As part of her early work with Project CHOICES, she and colleagues held community meetings throughout the state to inform family members and professionals on the benefits of inclusion. The outcome of these efforts was to build impetus for more inclusive schooling options in Illinois.

In 1997, Sharon began a partnership between NIU and DCFS, which began as the Educational Access Project and grew into the Center for Child Welfare and Education in 2000. The center strives to improve educational outcomes for children in the state's foster care system.

Those of us that have had the pleasure of working with Sharon would certainly agree with the words of NIU President John Peters when he described her as "an advocate that is passionate, tireless, committed and strong".

In retirement, Sharon plans to continue her efforts to improve the lives of all children and youth in Illinois. The staff at Project CHOICES congratulates her on a lifetime of service to children and families. We wish her a relaxing and enjoyable retirement. Thanks, Sharon, for making a difference.

September
2007
Inside This Issue

Page 2
•School Celebrations
•People You Should Know

Page 3
•Bright Ideas
•Q & A Corner

Page 4
•"Reading, Writing, and Relationships"

Page 5
•"Champions"

Page 6
•"Back to School"

Page 7
•"Reading, Writing, and Relationships" con't

Page 8
•"Getting Ready for School"

Page 9
•Resource Page
-On the Web
-Books
-Trainings
-Upcoming Conferences

Page 10
•Last Thoughts
•Contact People

Let's Celebrate!

• Woodstock District 200 worked throughout this last year to revamp their TASK (Teachers Actively Supporting Kids) teams and the process they use to support students who are struggling with school work but who are not identified as needing special education services. A core group of educators and specialists from Northwood and Olson Middle Schools created this change by analyzing their old process and incorporating successful processes and record keeping that other schools are currently using. They have created an easy to follow format that will be implemented district wide. Great example of collaboration, Woodstock!

• Valley View School District 365 U made an 8% increase in the number of students with IEPs who are included in general education 80-100% of the time and an 11% decrease in the number of students attending self-contained classes! Also, the district hosted a three-day summer institute in conjunction with the Project CHOICES team to provide training in effective inclusive practices and time for school teams to plan for the fall semester.

• Shields Elementary School District 299 will have co-taught classrooms in Kindergarten through 4th grade in the 2007-2008 school year. Special education and general education teachers will collaborate and share instruction in all these grade levels. Shields has also established an articulation process for teachers to discuss the needs of students coming into their classrooms, which was very successful this past year.

Project CHOICES Consultants

North Team

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

South Team

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

Ruth Henning
Project Coordinator

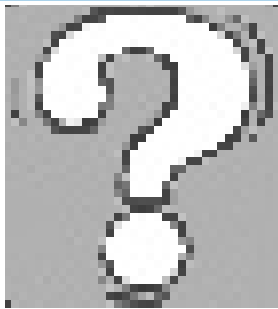
Sandy Naruszewicz
Administrative Assistant

Sue Barkman
***NIU Administrative
Assistant***

Nancy Spejcher
Information Specialist

Joy Warner
Support Staff

Amy Atherton
Office Clerk



Q & A

How much time does it take at the beginning of the year for students to understand and learn classroom rules and routines?

It takes six to nine weeks for a new behavior to be established. Be explicit when reviewing rules and routines of the classroom. Then make sure that for the first six weeks of school you review, model, and have students practice the behavior you want from students daily. This may seem like a lot of time, but your students will make transitions more quickly and efficiently and will have internalized the rules and routines of your classroom by the end of September. This will create a safe and organized learning environment.

By Staci Garvin and Maria Martinez
North Team Consultants

Bright Ideas



“A Call a Day” is a simple way to build positive partnerships with parents. One call takes about 5 minutes and can easily be worked into the school day. The call should focus on the successes of the student with specific information on how their child has shown improvement. If a teacher calls one parent a day, by the end of six weeks, the parents of all the students will have been called once and then you can begin the rotation again.

By Cheryl Crosby
North Team Consultant

Co-Teaching Team Nominated for the Illinois “Those Who Excel” Teaching Award

by Julie Schackman
South Team Consultant



Kay Rhodes, general education teacher and Ilethea Suggs, special education teacher, co-teach Algebra at East St. Louis High School. As seen in the photo they are busy planning for how they will co-teach an upcoming lesson together. They have been nominated for the Those Who Excel award by the Illinois Teacher of the Year Program under the team category. They have presented for their colleagues at East St. Louis High School as well as at the St. Clair County Institute.

The pair will also be sharing their knowledge and experiences at the Project CHOICES Fall LRE Institute on September 27, 2007, at the Fairview Heights Sheraton Four Points Hotel. They will be part of the session on Co-Teaching, presented by Dr. Patrick Schwarz.

Come and hear how they make co-teaching come alive in their classrooms every day at East St. Louis High School. They are a dynamite co-teaching team that is committed to making sure every student is successful in their class. They are truly two teachers teaching algebra together! They have tried a variety of co-teaching models, but say that team teaching is their favorite.

Congratulations to the super team of Suggs and Rhodes!

Reading, Writing, and Relationships

By Chris Wasik
South Team Consultant

It's back to school time! You've purchased their favorite book bags and school clothes, and that endless list of school supplies is waiting to be put to work. You've debated whether to purchase erasable, washable, flip-top, screw top or smelly markers. Or perhaps you've spent the week's grocery allowance on a graphing calculator. And how many Footlocker stores did you visit before just the right pair of shoes was selected? You're exhausted, right? So, how much time have you spent networking with next year's school team? Making an effort to welcome next year's educational team may be the most important school supply you invest in.

Research shows that:

- when parents are involved, students achieve more, regardless of socioeconomic status, ethnic/racial background, or the parent's education level.
- the more extensive the parent involvement, the higher the student achievement.
- the benefit of involving parents is not confined to the early years. There are significant gains at all ages and grade levels when parents remain involved.
- the most accurate predictor of a student's achievement in school is the extent to which that student's family is able to:
 - create a home environment that encourages learning.
 - communicate high, yet reasonable expectations for their child's achievement and future careers.
 - become involved in their child's education.

"Thirty years of research makes it clear: Parents and families are pivotal to children's learning" (U.S. Dept of Education, 1995).

So how can you start welcoming the members of the team into your child's educational journey?

Here are some tips for how to have a collaborative year:

- Visit before school starts. Many teachers are in their classroom a day or two before school starts decorating, labeling tables, setting up desks and prepping. You might call your school and ask if you could drop in during those few days before classes officially start. Offer to bring a picnic lunch, a cold thermos of ice tea, a coffee from Starbucks or offer to help decorate the bulletin boards. This allows your child to see the layout of the school, find his desk, locker, lunchroom, and office and makes the first day of school less stressful. During your visit, it's a wonderful chance to get to know the teaching staff, share your excitement for the new school year and get to know each other.

- Communicate. Write short, effective notes. Teachers don't have time to read more than one page, and a short paragraph will probably get the fastest response. Be specific about the issue and ask for guidance. Always begin your relationship with your child's team with respect. Create a problem-solving relationship, instead of confronting a teacher. Make sure you discuss the form of communication you would like to establish. Share your email address, fax number, office number, and home phone numbers.

- Share your child's strengths. Parents know their children better than anyone, so share that information with your school team. Let them know your child's interests and what inspires your child to work towards her goals. Share how your child learns. (Is your child a visual, auditory, or hands-on-learner?) Share what supports you feel would help your child meet her educational goals. Share the names of friends who work well with your child. Share your vision, hopes, and dreams for your child.

- Volunteer. Some parents are able to volunteer to support their school team during the school year, and schools welcome that connection. If you are unable to volunteer, you might ask what support you

continued on page 7

Reading, Writing, and Relationships cont. from page 4

could still provide your school. Teachers are always looking for help cutting out patterns or helping to gather art supplies. Just because you can't physically be at your child's school doesn't mean there aren't ways you could support your school. Ask how you could help your school from home.

- **Peer support/Study Buddies.** Some students need to have a little extra support when they begin their homework. Ask if there are one or two students willing to be your child's "study buddy" in case your child needs someone to call with questions about school work. If your child excels in a subject, your child can offer to be a "study buddy" for someone else.

- **Share your gifts.** Every parent has "gifts" they can share with their school teams. Being willing to share those gifts is very welcoming. If you were an experienced seamstress, what a wonderful addition to a class studying Betsey Ross sewing the first flag. If you found pencils on sale and could purchase a few boxes – what a nice gift. If you purchased a new computer for home, consider donating your used computer to your school. I remember one school year my son's class was studying farm animals, so we loaded one of our horses in a trailer and brought him to class. Of course, you might want to check to be sure this gift is welcome! Be willing to share the gifts and special interests you hold. Every parent has gifts they could share!

Remember the five "EYES".

- **Invite:** Remember you have to "invite" them into your life and into your vision.
- **Identify:** Identify the common interests with your teacher. Help your school to know your child.
- **Inform:** Give them information only you know about your child.
- **Involve:** Stay involved; whether that involvement is at the school or from home using alternate ways to stay connected. Work alongside your team.
- **Invest:** If you invite, identify, inform and involve then everyone will invest in your child.

Best wishes for a great school year!

Direct



Connection

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



Getting Ready For School: A Student's Perspective

By Kayla Martinez

At the age of seven, Kayla was diagnosed with High Duo Myopia. Last spring she graduated from Portage Park Elementary School. This fall she will attend Lane Tech High School in Chicago because of its focus on creative writing. Kayla's goals include attending college and someday publishing a novel.

Hello! My name is Kayla Martinez. I am 14 years old and on my way to start freshman year in high school. I believe that you can never be too prepared to start everything on the right foot. I wanted to share some ways that I prepare myself to begin a new school year. The ways in which I prepare myself have a crucial importance in succeeding in the new school year. In my own experiences these steps work well and are quite simple.

The first step is of course, a new wardrobe to look good. The reason I do this, is because it's my own way of starting fresh on a clean slate. Second, I write down all the supplies I will need if a list isn't provided. This helps me to make sure I don't forget anything that I will need for any of my classes/subjects. I get an organizer which is very helpful. In it I can have my daily schedule, I also like to include a school's floor map so that I can quickly find classrooms, I can write down all my assignments, what I have to do, and due dates for specific projects. It is helpful to write down when I am going to have a test so I can study for it several days in advance and not just on the day before it.

Another thing I look for is Post-it tabs; these separate my notes from school work and homework pages. When I am buying my notebooks and folders I color code them and I assign a color for each of the subjects and I label them. Doing this allows me to be more organized and to get the right notebook or folder quickly, which is important when you're given only 4 minutes to get from class to class! Also important is a ten pocket file organizer (spiral) which I label by subject areas and extras. In it I file all the papers that teachers return to me just in case I need that one paper for any reason; so I won't have to redo it. Mechanical pencils are better so that I don't waste time doing any sharpening. Highlighters are great to underline words, texts, or anything else you may want to mark.

Last but not least is writing a schedule. It is crucial to distribute your time between study time, extra curricular activities, and also socialization time. You want to be able to do this so that it does not get too overwhelming. Another thing I recommend is to get a book of your desire, one that you think you would enjoy. Reading a book as a pastime permits the mind to exercise its educational state of mind yet have fun because it's your choice and there's no pressure.

These are some of the ways that I get ready for a new school year. The best thing you could do is to find what works for you! What ever helps you to make school easier and better is what you need to use, and remember there is always a solution to any problem. All you have to do is to stop and think.

Books 2 Read

Punished by Rewards
by Alfie Kohn

In his book, Kohn provides a compelling argument against the use of rewards in the classroom and at home in order to “motivate” kids. Whether you are a parent or a teacher, Kohn will make you think about what we are teaching our children.

Many Hands One Vision: Tenth Early Childhood Sharing A Vision Conference

Date:
October 17-19, 2007

Location:
Crowne Plaza
Springfield, IL

Featured Speakers:
Dan Hodgins, PhD,
Lilian Katz, PhD, and
Richard A. Villa, PhD

For information contact:
(217) 824-4776 or
www.sharingavision.org
*Registration Deadline:
September 12, 2007

Save the Date!!!

**Eighth Annual
Project CHOICES
Winter LRE Institute
January 25, 2008**

**Holiday Inn Select
Tinley Park, IL**
For information contact:
(630) 629-0551 or
www.projectchoices.org



Upcoming Early Childhood Blending Forum

DATE: February 15, 2008
**LOCATION: Grizzly Jack's
Grand Bear Resort
North Utica, IL**

For information contact:
(630) 629-0551 or
www.projectchoices.org

Making Dreams Come True: Collaborative Inclusive Education Conference

Date:
November 2 & 3, 2007

Location:
Best Western House
Conference Center,
Morton, IL

Speakers:
Paula Kluth, Patrick
Schwarz, and Alice Udvari-
Solner

For information contact:
Call: 8000-877-1478

Sponsors:
HOIDSA, STARnet,
FamilyMatters PTIC, and
Project CHOICES

CPDU's Available

Check Out These Sites:

[www.paulakluth.com/articles/
readingaloud.html](http://www.paulakluth.com/articles/readingaloud.html)

*Paula gives ideas for 20
ways to adapt read alouds

www.time4learning.com

*Provides lessons and
activities for preschool -
third grade children that
could be utilized at school
or home for reinforcement.

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. Toni Tollerud
Project CHOICES
Northern IL University
DeKalb, IL 60115
(815) 753-9311

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

Project CHOICES is operated by the School
Association for Special Education in DuPage
County under a grant from the
State Board of Education.
Approximately 92% of funding is
from federal sources.

Last Thoughts . . .

How We Became Inclusive by Ted Rehl Superintendent of Prairie Hill Consolidated School District 133

Ready, fire, aim! Not the preferred method of operation in most cases, but sometimes you simply have to get going. And so began the maiden journey of Prairie Hill School into the churning waters of "inclusion". It wasn't as if no one had thought about inclusion before or that anyone was actually against it. It was just that there were so many questions and concerns; we couldn't seem to get off the dime. Indeed, it is a scary notion to change what has always been in favor of "are you sure this is the right thing to do?" There was concern that moving away from a "pull out" model would somehow minimize the level of intervention to individual special education students. Teachers worried that parents would be upset because their children were receiving "less" service. Finally, and perhaps, the most critical issue of all was accountability. Who would be responsible for grading these students?

So now we are a year into it and feeling confident that we have met those questions and concerns head on and if we did not resolve the issues, we at least developed a plan to work through them this year. Perhaps our most significant "aha" is the realization that it is not about the narrow parameters of special education, it is about meeting the needs of every child. We realize that learning about, understanding, and implementing differentiated teaching strategies are the keys to success. We also recognize that teacher collaboration and time to plan together are the bedrock for a solid inclusion program.

Anticipation has replaced anxiety, confidence has replaced doubt, and where there was resistance we now enjoy acceptance. The staff and parents know that we will again be supported by Project CHOICES and we will be better for it. We all have developed the attitude that failure is not an option, that commitment is non-negotiable.

SASED/ Project CHOICES

1590 South Fairfield Avenue

Lombard, IL 60148

NON-PROFIT ORG.

AUTO

U.S. POSTAGE

PAID

NAPERVILLE, IL

PERMIT #74

Staci Garvin and Maria Martinez, Editors

Printed on Recycled Paper

