

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

A High School Student You Should Know

By: Ann Kremer

First National Honor Society, then Homecoming King – John Garlock is a success story we wanted to share! John, who has Down Syndrome, has been in the regular education system since daycare. He attended his local elementary and junior high school, and currently attends Rock Island High School.

John has experienced success in all areas of school life. Not only was he inducted into the National Honor Society last year, but in the fall of 2008, John was selected by faculty and others to be on the homecoming court. Over 1,500 students voted in the homecoming court election, and John won the honor of Homecoming King by a landslide!

John's enthusiasm is quite contagious, and he is a local celebrity in Rock Island having been interviewed by the media several times. In addition, his picture has been featured in the local newspaper on numerous occasions.

John's parents are so proud of him and all of his accomplishments. John plans to continue school/transition until he turns twenty-three, and then find employment in the community.



Teacher Leaders in the Change Process

By: Ruth Henning

Leadership in schools is often thought of as Principals, Superintendents, and other Central Office Personnel. More and more literature addresses teachers as leaders. Research is very strong on the impact of leaders within buildings who are skilled in coaching, mentoring, and supporting teachers to continually improve their instruction, especially instruction that is designed to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student population. Teachers are often the most effective leaders and facilitators of their peers.

Lambert (2003), speaks of the potential for leadership within a teacher as a reawakening. She posits that everyone has the capability to be a leader given the right circumstance. This circumstance might look more like an opportunity or it might look more like a challenge that reawakens a teacher's initial enthusiasm and belief in students. There is a significant connection between change at the individual/teacher level and change at the systems level. Leadership to develop "buy in" at the beginning and to ensure follow up to support implementation are both critical to success.

Although the literature is replete with examples and exhortations regarding the climate that will foster and sustain improved student outcomes, schools do not change quickly or easily. A simple change effort may produce measurable effect, and yet the culture of the school can pull that change back to a status quo with teachers isolated in their classrooms, unaware of what others are doing. Barber and Fullan (2005) put it this way:

"There is a major trap that system leaders fall into: they assume or are oblivious to whether capacity to implement given policies automatically follows the introduction of supposedly good practice. Here the lesson is; don't invest a lot of money up front if the capacity to use it effectively is missing."

District and school systems must support development of the capacity for sustaining improvement. Teacher leaders are uniquely positioned to facilitate growth and change at the building level, and to bridge the process to the district leaders.

Continued on page 3

April 2009
Inside This Issue

Page 2
Inclusion in the Classroom

Books to Read

Check Out These Sites

Page 3
Teacher Leaders in the Change Process continued

The Winds of Change Are Upon Us

Dreams

Bright Ideas

Page 4
Last Thoughts

Contact People

Are you looking for resources in your area for summer camps and other activities?

Check out www.illinoislifespan.org for more information.

Inclusion in the Classroom

By: Joann Bryja

Special Education Teacher

Brooks Middle School

Valley View School District #365U

"You don't ask everybody to conform to the same system. You ask the system to include everybody" . -Gerard Etienne

In my school, we don't treat every student the same because we want to be fair to ALL students. I have the luxury of co-teaching which allows us to meet the needs of every student, with or without a disability, on a daily basis. We can't honestly try to treat and teach all students the same way. We differentiate instruction for the multiple intelligences in our large classrooms. Our challenge is that we have students with disabilities included in our general education language arts classes, along with students who are culturally diverse. Our job is to ensure every student is successful in his or her own way.

I co-teach with a dedicated, passionate, and selfless person who always puts our students first. Co-teaching can be difficult and only works if both teachers are willing to do it. It doesn't work when two unlikely and unwilling people are matched up. It should never be forced on teachers. My co-teacher, Mariam Sarkar, and I both want what is best for our students. Our students are learners whose job it is to absorb information and use it to be the best they can be. We want to expose them to many things and master skills and information so that they can be strong students now and better people in the future.

Mariam and I worked together before we co-taught, and that was very helpful. Before we started co-teaching we met before school started to talk about a game plan and get our classroom in order. We developed a plan for the first few months of school. We talked about our philosophies of education and what we think is important for our students to learn, and we decided on our discipline expectations. We were successful because we created a plan and built a strong working relationship. As a result, Mariam and I have also become good friends, which makes co-teaching work.

We made it clear to our students that we are both the teachers and that they were all our students. We wanted our students to be comfortable coming to both of us with questions. Also, we wanted them to know that we split every thing equally. Mariam and I take turns teaching. Some days Miriam does the writing for half of the class and I do the literature with the students. We plan and create together. We split up our grading so when Mariam needs to do more teaching, then I do more grading. If I need to test the students with special needs on my caseload, then Mariam will teach while I administer tests, create accommodations and modifications, write and update IEPs, or attend IEP meetings. Each of us steps up when the other needs to accomplish something that will support our students. We're not bitter nor do we fight about this issue because it is part of our job, and we are doing it for our students.

Creating caring and inclusive classrooms, co-teaching, and providing accommodations or modifications is never easy. The key to having the classroom that Mariam and I want is communication and perseverance. We talk about our ideas for individual students and our classroom, and we work together to make our ideas realistic. If something doesn't work, then we find other ways to make our students victorious in their learning. Mariam and I never forget that the students are all OUR students. We are here to teach each and every student in our classroom, and that is why we teach; it is our art form. It's not about us and never has been. It is always about the children and how we mold them into respectful, responsible, and positive role models.



Books 2 Read

Instructional Coaching: A Partnership Approach to Improving Instruction

By: Jim Knight (2007)

*A resource describing practical details of instructional coaching and providing necessary tools to implement job-embedded instructional intervention.

Leading in a Culture of Change

By: Michael Fullan (2001)

*This book offers valuable insights into the dynamics of change. Fullan presents valuable guidance to leaders who want to be successful in complex, uncertain circumstances.

Check Out These Sites:

*** www.k8accesscenter.org**

A resource for enhancing access to general education curriculum for students with disabilities including Differentiated Instruction, instructional strategies, and co-teaching.



*** <http://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/index.html>**
Visit the IRIS Center for Training Enhancements for free online interactive resources that translate research about the education of students with disabilities into practice. The materials cover a wide variety of evidence-based topics, including behavior, RTI, learning strategies, and progress monitoring.

“Teacher Leaders in the Change Process”

Cont. from page 1

Project CHOICES works with educational systems to build leaders at the district, building, classroom, and individual teacher level. Leadership for change is challenging. Effective leadership is grounded in a commitment to develop schools that are ready to teach all children, rather than expecting that children must “get ready” to be members of their home school and general education classrooms.

Barber, M., & Fullan, M. (2005) Tri-level development: Putting systems thinking into action. *Education Weekly*, 24(25), 34-35.

For additional resources about programs and practices that can help students, communities, and education systems, consult the following websites:

- *What Works Clearinghouse* (<http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/>)
- *NREPP* (<http://www.nrepp.samhsa.gov/>)
- *Colorado Blueprints* (<http://www.colorado.edu/cspv/index.html>)
- *American Education Research Association* (<http://www.aera.net/>)
- *State Implementation & Scaling-up of Evidence-Based Practices in Schools* (<http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~sisep/resources.cfm>)

The Winds of Change Are Upon Us

By: Nancy Spechjer

As we anticipate the coming of Spring and the changes it brings, Project CHOICES, under the auspices of ISTAC (Illinois State Technical Assistance Center) and SISEP (State Implementation & Scaling-up of Evidence-based Practices), looks forward to positive results from increasing equity and access for all students in general education. It is exciting as we watch staff in districts and buildings that we work with, implement new education practices producing intended benefits to students and scale up effective practices so they are available to all students.

Using evidenced-based practices, implementing these practices with fidelity, and collecting data to evaluate student impact has opened eyes to the value of changing our educational system at the universal, secondary and tertiary levels. This change is a student centered approach. Support and services are brought to the students rather than students being removed to receive what they need. The benefit of a student centered approach is the availability of support to all teachers and students in general education environments.

R. Spencer Darling, Business Expert, tells us, “All organizations [and systems] are designed, intentionally or unwittingly, to achieve precisely the results they get”. As districts that work with Project CHOICES build capacity and intentionally align systems and functions to fully support students as part of “education as usual”, change becomes sustainable.

Bright
Ideas



“Math Manipulatives”

Learning and understanding mathematics requires student engagement. Mathematics is not a spectator sport. Much of current instruction fails to actively involve students. Manipulatives help students

visualize relationships and applications. The National Library of Virtual Manipulatives has developed a library of interactive, web-based virtual manipulatives or concept tutorials. Visit the website at <http://nlvm.usu.edu/en/nav/vlibrary.html>

By: Pandora Taylor, Consultant

“Teaching Vocabulary”

“Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a framework for designing curricula that enable all individuals to gain knowledge, skills, and enthusiasm for learning. UDL provides rich supports for learning and reduces barriers to the curriculum while maintaining high achievement standards for all.”

At first glance, UDL may seem like a monumental undertaking. Start slowly. A first step might be to reflect on how you could change the way you teach vocabulary in a subject area and then visit <http://www.cast.org/resources.php#ideas> for ideas. You will see a teacher friendly approach that enables all students to gain the knowledge and skills they need to achieve success with unfamiliar vocabulary.

By: Ann Kremer, Consultant

Dreams

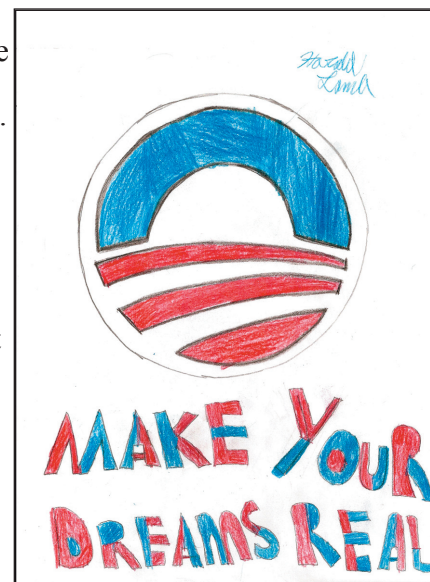
By: Harold Lamb

7th Grade Student

Eisenhower Middle School
Rockford School District # 205

*The following is an assignment Harold completed for Ms. Cara Omiecsinski's and Mr. Toni Ruiz's co-taught English class.

Dreams are very powerful things. Dreams live in the world where horses have horns and animals can talk. Where the kings sit around a round table and kids pull swords out of stones. This is the land where dreams live. In this land is where there are short people who live in trees; where your wife lives in a tower which is guarded by a ferocious beast. Where witches ride brooms, and wizards have wands. This is where dreams live. Dreams also live where a black man can become president. Dreams live in all these places, but the most important place where dreams live is inside you. It is up to you to make your dreams come true.



Last Thoughts . . .

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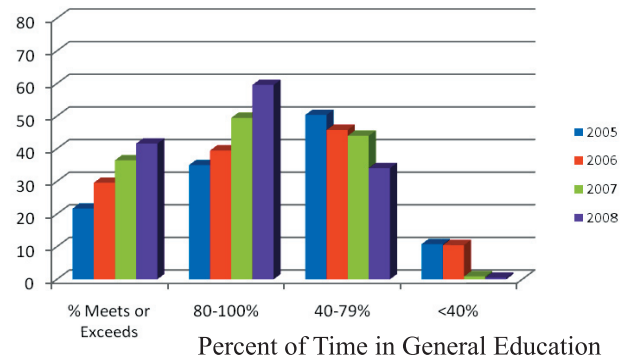
Educational Environment and State Testing

*By: Eric E. Brackmann
Director of Special Education
Ford County Special Education Cooperative*

For the past five school years, Paxton-Buckley-Loda and the Ford County Special Education Cooperative have worked with Project CHOICES to make some positive changes in how and where we educate special education students.

Our EE data that first year showed us that only 35% of the students with IEPs were in general education classes for 80% or more of the school day, a statistic that was quite alarming to me. Since then, we have improved those numbers drastically through the efforts of the school district and Project CHOICES.

The above graph shows a definitive link between “where” students are educated and the outcomes on the ISAT, PSAE and IAA State Assessments. As we have moved more students back into general education classes with supports, our outcomes have also increased!



SASED/ Project CHOICES

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

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