



ECKCE

Focus

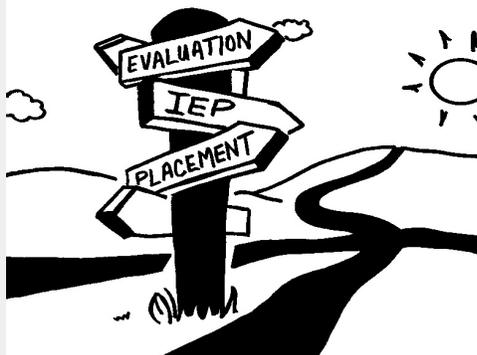
*A newsletter for the employees of
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Cooperative in Education*



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Building Strong Parental Partnerships

The old adage in real estate is that the three most important things are location, location, and location. The same could be said about relationships, replacing location with communication. While there are certainly exceptions, generally speaking, the more communication you have with a parent, the less likely you are to have an adversarial relationship.

Over the 30 years that I have spent working with parents of kids with disabilities, I have been fortunate to experience many great parent relationships. Of the few I have seen go sideways, almost invariably it is because of a lack of communication on someone's part—either a teacher failing to let a parent know what particular problems a child was having or what kind of progress they were making, or a parent, whose expectations were not in line with what or how something was being taught, or how their child was held accountable.

This year, ECKCE is initiating a new facet of parental communication. The Special Education Advisory Council, or SEAC, is a mechanism at the state level which allows for parents to have input into how things in special education work. Not many districts or educational agencies have



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Frequently (Recently) Asked Questions

Every month I will include questions that you have asked – others probably need the answers

Q: I'm a little concerned about a situation that I have with a student of mine who has dyslexia. I know there are a lot of parents asking for certain types of training around it, and I think my parent is about to as well. What do I need to do?

A: This is a great question and one that will continue to pop up over the next few months in Kansas, simply because there is a parent initiative that has made its way to the legislature and will not be going away anytime soon.

The short answer is to keep doing what you have been doing to meet the needs of the students you serve. While there is a lot of confusion about what dyslexia is and how to address it, there are some things that haven't changed. Whatever you do, do not tell parents that we don't recognize the dyslexia diagnosis as a disability in Kansas. While it is true that dyslexia is not a specific eligibility under the Kansas exceptionalities by name, all students who have a reading disability, if they meet the eligibility criteria set forth by the department of education, will qualify for services, usually under the specific learning disability label. You have to keep in mind that the learning disability eligibility still consists of two prongs, as do all eligibility categories.

They must meet the eligibility criteria in prong one, which points to deficits in the classroom or in addressing the state standards for competency as outlined at the grade level, but they must also meet prong two—the need for specially designed instruction. While most students with reading disabilities like dyslexia DO meet both prongs, the debate comes in when determining what that specially designed instruction should consist of. Most parents who understand that dyslexia IS actually covered under the learning disability category believe that the only way to effectively address the learning disability is through a particular methodology, such as Orton-Gillingham or Barton, for example. These methodologies require outside training to implement, and unless you have had the specific training, you cannot use them, so never put specific methodological approaches in the IEP. These interventions, by the way, can be very effective for some students, although no one approach is right for all. The bottom line is that you must implement the instruction that will be effective for the individual. If you have been addressing a student's needs and are not seeing adequate progress, then it may be time to consider what other approaches may need to be explored, so don't rule anything out. If you get to this point, please let your school psych know that you think a different approach is in order, but don't go there on parent request alone.



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chosen to facilitate this type of organization at the local level, but I believe that this is something that should be remedied.

In my time as director of 2 very large school districts in Colorado, I witnessed what a SEAC could actually accomplish. In Douglas County, the SEAC became a vocal organization for change when change was actually necessary. In Cherry Creek School District, the SEAC grew to a powerful advocacy partnership which celebrated the accomplishments of educators, paraeducators, peer assistants, bus drivers and community members on an annual basis through what they called Golden Heart awards. What began as a potluck supper in the gymnasiums of one of the elementary schools grew to a 400 plate formal dinner at the Denver Sheraton Tech Center ballroom. All with funds raised by a parent group devoted to focusing on making their children's educational experience a celebration of success rather than a frustration of shattered expectations.

During the first few days of school this year, I will be asking you to send out a flyer which I will create inviting parents to the initial meeting of the SEAC, which will be in late August/early September. The initial meeting will be to gather information about what the parents would like to have the educational focus be for each of the monthly meetings, as well as to encourage parents to form a leadership team for the SEAC to ensure that it will be self-sustaining. To begin, we will focus on the educational rights of students and their parents, including their procedural safeguards and a list of advocacy agencies that they may want to contact. We will also focus on just learning the lingo of special education, as many parents hear the alphabet soup that IS our business and never really stop to ask what any of it means. We will also introduce some of the critical players in the districts when it comes to special education service delivery and open things up for parents to ask questions and voice concerns if they are comfortable to do so. Regardless, at every meeting there will be comment sheets readily available for them to fill out if their concern is not something that they would like to be known publicly, and I will follow up with each of those that are initiated. Of course all ECKCE staff, as well as the administration or board members from each of the respective districts are welcome to attend, but because the meeting is outside of school hours it will be strictly optional.

Because this SEAC will be unique, in that it will be comprised of 3 separate school districts, it is hard to predict what the initial interest will be; it is my hope that any parent who has felt that they have not had a forum for networking with other parents of students with disabilities will gain hope from knowing there are others who have felt the same. I want to thank you in advance for spreading the word to your parents and encouraging them to see if it might be of some benefit. I will keep you posted on how the initial and subsequent meetings go and let you know if there are things you can do to be a greater part of the organizational leadership team if you are so inspired. Have a great school year!!!



DOs & DON'Ts

Here are things to consider when communicating with your students' parents

- DO** always begin communications with your parents with positive things that are happening
- DO** consider that your students' parents are coming at things with a history that may have some negative educational history or perceptions. Be patient in letting them build trust
- DON'T** respond negatively to requests for anything without checking to make sure it isn't something that should be considered
- DON'T** get into the habit of contacting your parents on a regular basis. When you fail to communicate the positive things that are happening, the relationship will sour when you call about problems that may arise.

New Behavior Specialist to Serve All Schools

We are happy to welcome Liz Knowles to the ECKCE team as our new behavior specialist. She comes from Nashville with years of experience coaching teachers in supporting students with behavior, academic, and emotional needs. She believes that improving behavior requires data-based decision making, measurable outcomes, evidence-based practices, and a commitment to student success while works as a team. She looks forward to supporting all of our districts. Her role will include attending monthly school meetings, participating in the WEBS referral team, coaching individual teachers, leading professional development, collaborating with service providers, and participating in the Parent Advisory initiative. She's a problem-solver and strong believer in true collaboration for student growth and success. Let's welcome her to the team!

Back to School Certified In-Service August 10

Well, it was hot while it lasted. I hope all of you had a great summer and are eager and refreshed to begin the new year right! We will gather at the Baldwin Intermediate Center on Friday August 10 @ 8:00 with a light breakfast provided by the 614 NEA. We have a lot of introductions and trainings to complete, but the plan is to wrap things up around 12:00, followed by a brief association meeting, then back to your own buildings. If you are a new teacher or planning to mentor a new teacher, there will be a brief meeting right after the vote to cover roles and responsibilities for the upcoming year. See you all then!

Para Corner

Please share this newsletter with your paras, just in case they did not receive it via email. If you have questions about paras as a group, don't hesitate to now contact Shelly McCart @ smccart@eckce.com.

Back to School Paraeducator In-service August 8

For all of you who are returning this fall, welcome back! For those of you who are new, welcome aboard! Regardless, I hope you had a great summer and are refreshed and eager to start another great school year helping our students with all the things they need to succeed!

Paraeducator In-Service training will take place on August 9 from 8:00 until 3:30 with lunch on your own. A light breakfast will be served and we will start various mandatory trainings at 8:30. We will go over a variety of topics related to your job duties, and will have folks from the office available for questions on benefits and everything else you might need at that time. We will also go over the paraprofessional handbook and any questions that you may have about your current work agreement including levels and differentiated pay.

There have been some questions as to the individual district trainings that your buildings may be requiring you to attend. If you have checked with your building and they would like you to attend those trainings, please just clock in and out and you will be paid for those hours as well as the four hours allotted for working in your classrooms. Welcome back!!!