



ECKCE

Focus

*A newsletter for the employees
of the East Central Kansas
Cooperative in Education*



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Down Syndrome Awareness
Month

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Keeping the Focus on Increased Independence

There is perhaps no other vocation in the world that has as its primary goal to make the employee unnecessary, but that is indeed what our focus in education should be. Our priority in making our students as independent as possible would ultimately result in our intervention being unnecessary, and that would be a tremendous thing. Because if our students no longer need us, we have done our job in preparing them for whatever comes next.

The criterion of the next environment was the mantra of my special education training, and if it wasn't yours, I hope you'll indulge me and adopt it as your own. What it means, is that no matter what the needs that the student is demonstrating, the primary goal in developing accommodations, modifications, or instructional goals is to keep the focus not on the classroom, but on whatever comes next for the student. So for preschool it would be what skills do they need to be successful in Kindergarten, for elementary students it would be what they need for middle school, etc. Ultimately, we are preparing our students for what comes after they are no longer eligible for educational services and we have no ability to provide them with the supports they currently require as students in special education in public



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Frequently (Recently) Asked Questions

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

Q: We are getting a lot of questions from general education teachers about parent requests for dyslexia screenings. How do we handle these requests?

A: Generally these requests should be brought through your CARE or SIT team meetings and should make their way to your school psychologist, but the attention that is being paid to the dyslexia diagnosis is reaching an all time high. And there is a lot of confusion about the requests as well. Many parents who are concerned with their child's reading difficulties assume that it must be dyslexia and will request that their child be screened, which seems simple enough but is anything but. While dyslexia is a disability that falls under the category of Specific Learning Disability in the Kansas Eligibility Indicators, the mere application of the dyslexia label doesn't confer special education eligibility on the student as many parents assume. In fact, there are many more students with dyslexia in our schools that are not eligible for an IEP than there are those with IEPs. And there are many parents who do not ask the school for any type of screening or evaluation but rather seek it out on their own and bring that diagnosis to the team expecting that it will mean that their child is eligible. But under both federal and state eligibility criteria, the student must not only have a disability but also demonstrate the need for specialized instruction, which is not automatic.

It's important to distinguish between what constitutes a screening and what constitutes

an evaluation, however, as the response is very different. When a parent requests a screening, ask for more information. Ask if they suspect that the student has a learning disability and would like to have them evaluated for special education services. Many times parents are simply wanting a reason why their student struggles in reading but really don't want the formal evaluation process. If they do want the evaluation, take the request to your school psychologist and they can have the conversation with the parent about what the evaluation will look like. The determination of an SLD is tied to intervention data collected as a result of the student's involvement in the tiered MTSS process, so things must be addressed through that process to determine qualification. We don't simply screen for dyslexia—we evaluate for a specific learning disability.

Q: I noticed one of our older students with a para delivering a bouquet of candy bars to the office the other day and wondered what that was all about?

A: (Yes, this is a shameless non-profit commercial plug.) Our Bridges transition students have started their own business to work on vocational, social and communication goals and it is called Bridges Candy Creations! Bouquets start @ \$15.50 and the students can deliver them to any of the school buildings and limited other locations upon request. If you have a special occasion and want to make it even more special, send your request to bridgescandycreations@gmail.com and they will be happy to brighten somebody's day with a delicious bouquet of customized goodies!



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schools, i.e. when they are out in the real world. By the criterion of the next environment model, everything we are teaching revolves around building independence for our kids at the level at which they can exercise them to make them productive, happy, self-actualized young adults.

One of the problems with the educational model that we have set up is that the students who have significant learning challenges often require much more support than their non-disabled counterparts and their IEPs contain levels of support that must be provided, typically through paraprofessional support in the general education classroom. While this is determined by the IEP team, we often default to the idea that more is better and that because of the students' disabilities, the services are absolutely necessary. One of the pitfalls of the listing of these services on the IEP is that while the supports MAY in fact be absolutely necessary now, we fail to consider the growth that the students may make between now and the end of the IEP cycle, and it is very difficult to predict when and if the supports can be faded when that kind of growth occurs. Furthermore, in providing those supports we often fail to give the students the opportunities they need to practice their independence because we fall into an instructional routine which anticipates and addresses the struggles with the material and doesn't give students the chance to demonstrate the skills they have acquired. In doing so, we can create the very dependency that our quest for independence is designed to avoid. Many of our students can develop "special education syndrome", or the inability or unwillingness to exercise the opportunity for success on their own because they are fearful of the failure that often precedes it.

Our job as educators and as paraeducators is to look for every opportunity to allow the student to exercise independence, whether it be in the general education classroom working through a difficult math problem or demonstrating initiation in social skills by greeting peers without prompts. We need to write more goals that are focused on achieving independence and scaffold the amount of support from one quarter to the next to encourage that progress. In the classroom we need to look for ways to allow students those chances by increasing wait time and expecting the achievement that has so often eluded our kids, making them reticent to try. Let's face it—there is a part of the human condition that recognizes that it is easier to let someone do something for us than to do it ourselves, and we cannot teach this practice out of simple convenience for the student and often for ourselves, because it is more efficient. Because there is another component of the human condition that thrives on attempting something that was not always achievable, and feeling the exhilaration of succeeding for the first time at that very task. We need to be mindful of instilling that desire in our students by letting them risk failure at the potential of feeling success. We all share that same exhilaration when we see the light bulb come on for a student who has often struggled mightily in the school environment. It's up to us to provide the opportunities for them to succeed by accurately determining when to take a step back and let them experience true education.



DOs & DON'Ts

Here are things to consider when focusing on giving your students independence opportunities

DO always look for opportunities to allow your students to demonstrate that they can perform a skill independently. Don't assume that they can't—rather assume that they can.

DO increase the wait time that you use when asking for a response to a task request or to a question in general. Our student need time to process the question before formulating a response.

DON'T give too much information without letting the student try to figure out the appropriate answer themselves. Sometimes it may seem like you are helping when you are really rescuing. Give them the chance to succeed.

DON'T feel like you are there to always guarantee that the student doesn't struggle with the task at hand. Sometimes it is the struggle where the most learning occurs. There can't be success without failure at some point.

News and Notes Around the Interlocal

SEAC to Meet October 29 in Baldwin

Our Special Education Advisory Council, or parent advocacy group, will meet again on October 29 at the Intermediate Center in Baldwin at 6:30. We will be talking about the upcoming structure and focus for the rest of the school year and hearing more from community organizations as well as getting an update on our newly formed Unified Sports Basketball team. Remember that you are always welcome, no matter which hat you may be wearing. Hope to see many of you get involved this year!

Employee Assistance Program Now Available for All ECKCE Employees

ECKCE is now providing a new benefit for its employees through a contract with New Directions Behavioral Health, LLC. It is called the Employee Assistance Program (EAP). It is designed to help employees and families deal with the wide range of personal problems that may disrupt lives and affect job performance. We recognize that almost any human problem can be resolved successfully with the right kind of support. The EAP is designed to help employees and members of their household get objective, professional assistance on a **confidential** basis without jeopardizing one's job, future, or reputation. You are encouraged to take advantage of the program by calling the EAP directly at **1-800-624-5544** for an appointment or more information, or accessing the website at **ndbh.com** and using the login code ECKSCE (had to be 6 characters, so take note of that). Additionally, all of the services that are available are listed in downloadable handouts available on our ECKCE.com website under the tab Employee Assistance Program on our home page. Please check out the information and access any services that you may find helpful. Thanks for all you do!

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.

Paraeducator Reminders

As we do every year in the first few weeks, we have added new folks to our para ranks. For all of you who are returning this fall, welcome back! For those of you who are new, welcome aboard! Regardless, I hope you are all finding a groove in your positions and are excited about helping our students with all the things they need to succeed!

Just a few reminders for paras this school year. Remember that when you are assigned to be working with children in the building, this is your focus. The use of cell phones in the classroom, unless by prior arrangement with your building principal for unique circumstances is prohibited. Please be mindful that principals will reinforce this expectation.

Please demonstrate regular attendance so that the students you are there to support can feel consistency in their programming. While you are given discretionary leave at the beginning of each semester, please use it judiciously. If your attendance is noted to be a concern for wither your direct supervisor or building principal, I will be visiting you with a plan to address your attendance. We need you. Our students need you. Please recognize this with consistent attendance.

Please recognize that the students that you work with require that you keep their information confidential. Do not engage in conversations about the students outside the workplace.

Your inservice logs are due now. In order for us to keep track of the inservice hours requirement, we really need you to turn those in to Shelly McCart. Thanks for all you do for our students!