

FOCUS on Special Education

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Strategic Planning for a New Era at ECKCE

Welcome back to school! Hope your summer was refreshing and that you are all ready to embark on this new journey that is the 2022-23 school year!

With the beginning of the new year comes the operationalization of our five-year strategic plan, developed in partnership with all of you, our parents, our board and our districts. Some of the highlights of this plan have already begun, but the entire plan can be seen on our website at eckce.com. One of the first things targeted



was the need to increase paraprofessional pay, which we did at the beginning of this year, raising our base to \$12 an hour and our average pay wage to over \$13.50. We also added more social work support to address the social and

emotional needs of our most impacted learners. Another focus of the plan is to build our SEL curriculum to meet the needs of all of our students, so we are currently researching options for what might be the best fit for our diverse learners. (Cont. on pg. 3)

TRANSITION SPECIALIST NAMED CEC EDUCATOR OF YEAR

Congratulations to Sheila VanderTuig who was honored as the Council For Exceptional Children's Iva Dean Cook Award

recipient for the 2021-22 school year. Sheila has worked for ECKCE for the last 23 years and was honored by the local branch of the

CEC at the August Board Meeting. Thanks for all you do for our kids here at ECKCE Sheila And congratulations!!!

Often in Special Education, questions arise which you may need the answer to and others may benefit from that answer as well. Each month we will include a few of these questions, so please don't hesitate to ask.

FREQUENTLY (RECENTLY) ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: I was told by my last school district that 504 plans should only be in place for physical disabilities. Is that accurate?

A: I'm not sure how long it will take before we get the difference between 504 plans and IEPs, but we'll keep at it until we do. A 504 plan

should be in place any time that a student has a disability which impacts one or more major life areas and has educational implications unless those implications rise to the level where they need specialized instruction. Then, the student should be evaluated to

determine eligibility for an IEP. 504 plans are appropriate to keep the school district protected because they document accommodations that are necessary for the student to be able to access the general education program and are always a general education function.

Q: We have a parent who is upset that the general education teacher left the IEP meeting after presenting their information at the beginning. Are they supposed to stay?

A: Great question, and the answer is a simple yes. The IDEA sets forth the mandatory members of the IEP team (CFR 300.321) as at least one general education teacher, at least one special education teacher, the parent, and a representative of the LEA, knowledgeable about the general education curriculum and is able to allocate resources. This has been clarified to mean for the portions of the meeting

which involve the student's participation in and access to, the general education environment, or, more clearly, the entire meeting. And while there is an excusal process in place for mandatory members, which include the general education teacher, that process indicates that the expectation is for the entire meeting as it indicates the excusal to be "in whole, or in part". Furthermore, in order to be excused, that member must submit input to the IEP in writing prior to the meeting being held, both to the parent and to the team. The written excusal can then, and

only then, be signed by the parent. To be clear, the IDEA makes it extremely difficult for members to be excused for a very important reason. The IEP is the cornerstone of the IDEA and the focus is on being as comprehensive as possible for the child. The general education teacher plays a vital role in determining the success of each child on an IEP and must be encouraged to be as much of a participant in the development of that plan as the special education teacher and the parent. Without that collaboration, the student will have a difficult time reaching his or her potential.

STRATEGIC PLANNING UPDATE (CONT. FROM PG. 1)

Another focus of the plan is improving communication and participation in the IEP planning process with parents. To that end, we have provided parent input forms for case managers to send out prior to IEP meetings to gather information to inform

the PLAAFP section of the IEP. This will help to ensure parents feel heard in the IEP process which can be daunting at times. It will also make certain that we are not overlooking valuable information as to the progress students have made over the course of the

IEP year. Please make sure that you copy one of the parent templates for input into your own communication delivery mode so that we can gather the information consistently across all three districts. As always, if you have questions or need support, let us know!

Thank you to all of our service providers for helping us get this year off to a great start. Your efforts are greatly appreciated and do not go unnoticed!!!

All Districts Still Looking to Add to Soocial Ed Teams

While we have increased our paraprofessional ranks with some very impressive folks this fall, our needs still remain fairly high. We could use just a handful of dedicated people to join us in all three districts. We are continuing our

incentives to recruit new folks to join our team this fall so if you have any friends that are looking to find a fulfilling career in education, please let them know to go to our website and apply. Or if they are comfortable in approaching any of our principals in all three

districts, they will guide them through the process of application. Any paras joining us upon your referral and staying for 12 weeks entitle you to a \$100 gift card. So spread the word and help change the lives of the people you recruit and the children they will serve!

DON'T FORGET YOUR LEAVE REQUESTS IN FRONTLINE!!!

All ECKCE employees must submit leave requests in Frontline, whether you are in need of a substitute or not. It is the only way that we can give you

credit for leave taken and make certain that you are adequately compensated. This is particularly important if you are in an itinerant position, because you

may or may not have a consistent team and when folks need to contact you, we need to know that you are there. Thanks for your attention to this detail!



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Paraprofessional Pathways Information

Welcome to the 2022-23 School Year!!!

Many of you have expressed interest in the paraprofessional pathways program that we referenced in the beginning of the year inservice. There are actually multiple ways that have been created for paras to become teachers. If you have a bachelors' degree and paraprofessional for at

least a year, you are eligible to apply for the limited Apprenticeship License. The link is:

<https://www.ksde.org/Agency/Division-of-Learning-Services/Teacher-Licensure-and-Accreditation/Licensure-License-Application/Elementary-Education-and-High-Incidence-Pilot-Program>

In addition, there is also a Teacher Apprentice program that allows you to get your bachelor's online while you are a para through several schools, the link to one which is below. If you have other questions, please email me. https://www.wichita.edu/academics/applied_studies/TAP/Teacher_Apprentice_Program.php

PARAPROFESSIONAL NEWS AND NOTES

Just a few notes for the beginning of the year. Remember to check your timecards in Meta for accuracy, as that is the only way you can get paid what you have worked. If there are discrepancies, please contact Shelly McCart and she will help you fix them. Also, I hope that everyone had a great paraprofessional inservice day on

August 10 and turned in your sheets for your inservice hours. I am excited to learn that many of you are already done with your inservice hours for the year—a full 25% of you so far! Let that be a motivator to the others of you—you don't want to have me come and track you down for those hours at the end of the year!

Finally, don't forget that we appreciate you as much as the students that you support do. Without your dedication we could not provide our students with the things they need to be successful. I hope each of you have a great rest of the year, and remember that we are still giving out gift cards to folks who refer friends to be paras too!