

FOCUS on Special Education

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How “Micro-Acts” Help to Boost Your Joy

As you get into your car in the morning, perhaps your eyes gloss over your faded “practice random acts of kindness” bumper sticker, purchased at a time you felt more optimistic about the world. Pulling out of the driveway, you notice your neighbor’s newspaper laying on the sidewalk just as a heavy rain threatens. Do you run over to toss the newspaper onto their covered porch? Worried about being late for a meeting as you enter your school, you see an impromptu celebration in the halls as an educator you don’t know very well shares that she just completed her graduate degree. Do you run past, or take a moment to offer congratulations? We’re in what seem to be perpetually stressful times globally, so can such little



kindnesses matter that much? There’s strong evidence that such acts lift the mood of others, but new research suggests they also significantly improve our own mood. Research published this month from the [BIG JOY Project](#) reports that people who commit daily "micro-acts" of joy experience about a 25% increase in emotional

well-being over the course of a week, as well as better coping and relationships, and lower stress. While participants engaged in micro-acts of their choosing, most acts reported were aligned to practices well established in the literature as improving emotional well-being. For instance, making a gratitude list, celebrating others, seeing the silver-lining, and en-
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NEW SEL ADVISORY BOARD HELPS GUIDE IEP DECISIONS

The WEBS program, which serves students from all three districts whose IEP teams determine that they need a higher level of trauma-based instruction, has been in place now for ten years. This year, the

new administrator for the program, created an advisory panel to review the situations of students for whom the program may be a good fit with the intention of informing the IEP process more fully.

The Board has met multiple times this year and helped to guide teams to insure that the least restrictive environment is maintained. For more information, please contact Todd Schroeder and he will be happy to help.

FREQUENTLY (RECENTLY) ASKED QUESTIONS

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.

Q: It seems like whenever we have a student whose behaviors are disrupting the other kids in the learning environment and we think that student needs a different program, like WEBS, nobody listens. Why is it so difficult to get a student into that program?

A: The best answer is that it should be fairly difficult to change a student's least restrictive environment to the most restrictive that we have, short of hospitalization or homebound. The laws in place, both federal and state statutes, are very clear that students must be educated to the greatest extent possible with their non-disabled peers. So when a student's behavior interferes with that least restrictive option, we have a legal obligation to maintain that student through program modifications and behavioral supports to the extent that it may indeed seem like an inordinate amount of work. This is why a behavior plan is so important, with behavioral goals that can be measured and data collected to support any IEP decisions that move a child from one environment to another. It is also why, before making a move to a

program that is not in the student's neighborhood school, that interventions are put in place to change the time spent in general education settings to special education settings within the building prior to considering a move to a different location. This makes it critical to access the behavior supports we have in place, such as the behavioral specialist and school mental health team members to ensure that we have done all in our power to try and keep the student in their LRE. For this reason, those folks' recommendations carry the weight of law with them and must be addressed. If it seems difficult to access a program like WEBS, it's because it is, but keep in mind that we have a lot of examples of students for whom these measures actually worked and allowed them to be successful in staying put as the law intends.

Q: Why do we have waitlists for some of our early childhood programs? Something about a 50/50 rule?

A: It is a product of how early childhood programs are classified and funded, but the short answer is that by definition, an early childhood classroom which serves students on IEPs has to have no more than one peer for every student on an IEP, due to the fact that the teachers in those programs are ECSE teachers (Early Childhood Special Educators). If the teacher is NOT an ECSE, the ratio of having one peer to one student on an IEP goes away, but we would still have to have an ECSE to provide the services to the students on IEPs. We have started to shift to this model when appropriate to provide more spaces for 3-5 year-olds who do not need special education, but it is a gradual shift happening in all three districts. For now, we may just not have enough students on IEPs to warrant additional peers openings, but we know how important early childhood is for all students to be able to achieve kindergarten readiness, so we are making strides toward making it available to every student in all three of our communities.

MICRO-ACTS OF KINDNESS (CONT. FROM PG. 1)

gaging in tiny random acts of kindness such as complimenting a stranger or sending a text to a friend letting them know you're thinking of them. Many acts involved opportunities for fun or acting silly with colleagues.

One reason the researchers believe that committing to one or more such micro-acts daily is effective is that it gives us a sense of agency over our mood. Many things that cause us stress and unhappiness aren't within our control, but practicing acts of kindness each day restores some of that control. In just one week, there was nearly a 30% increase in agreement with the statement "I have felt able to impact, influence, or play an active role in how happy

I generally feel." One collaborator suggested that when feeling stress, we should think of these acts as "tools at our fingertips" to use as needed to lift our own spirits. Their deployment and the joy that usually comes also serves to remind people that in general, our happiness depends on how much we invest in others.

The researchers say that just as being fit doesn't randomly happen but instead requires exercise, emotional well-being should be thought of as something that improves with deliberate practice. To get started, plan out micro-acts each day. For instance, looking for a moment each morning to chat with a colleague or say a kind

word to a stranger, or using the first 10 minutes of your daily walk to think of things you are grateful for.

So as we head into the last few days of our busy end-of-semester filled with thoughts and plans to refresh and spend time with family, don't forget that the folks on either side of you are family too, dysfunctional as it sometimes may seem. Take a moment out of your day to pat someone on the back, offer a helping hand, or just smile a knowing smile that says, "I know. It isn't easy, but I'm here for you." And if there are things that we can do to help you get through this busy time, please don't hesitate to call us. We appreciate all you do for the kids of each of our communities and want you to have the best, most relaxing holiday season you can possibly have. See you in January!

Thank you to all of our teachers and service providers for continuing to do a great job with all of our students! Your efforts in managing the day-to-day behaviors and academic needs of your very diverse kids are greatly appreciated!!!

ECKCE Still in Need of More Paraprofessionals

We are blessed to have a great group of paraprofessionals this year—more than we have had for the last 3 years, and we are extremely grateful.

However, the needs of our kiddos are so diverse and the numbers are increasing, which creates the need for even more support. We

are still looking for at least one more per building on average, so if you hear of anyone who may still be looking for opportunities to switch to a more fulfilling job, please have them apply and join our team!



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The Holidays are Stressful—Don't forget Guardian!

Often times we have questions about things that may or may not be job related but are heavy on our minds. Whether it is a question about legal advice, financial guidance, family or life planning, or things that might be weighing you down, our Employee Assistance Program is here to help. The Guardian EAP is available to all ECKCE

employees. All you need to do is go to worklife.uprisehealth.com and login as an ECKCE employee using the access code **worklife**.

Once you have logged in, you have access to a myriad of services, including mental health counseling. You can have up to three visits per family member per issue, all free of charge

to you. Because you are our employees and your well-being is important to us. We need you to be all you can be for the students we serve and for the teams you support.

The Guardian EAP is only one of the ways we hope you know we are here for you. We hope you all have a tremendous holiday season! Let us know how we can help!

PARAPROFESSIONAL NEWS AND NOTES

We are delighted to know that so many of you are contributing to the lives of our students in all three districts! This year we have been able to bring so many new folks into our schools, but we can always welcome more. If you have friends who are thinking about going into education and are looking for a great job, please send them our way!

We had an update to

the new clock-in system which caused a few glitches, but we think we have those addressed at this point. Thanks for your patience in this changeover.

There have been a few instances of employees needing to be reminded to not be on their phones during school hours until you are clocked out for lunch or end of day. Remember that you are not only a support

for the students you are working with, you are also an example.

Lastly, please remember to clock in and out for lunch within the timeline your supervisor has given you—you need to take at least 20 and no more than 40 minutes for lunch unless otherwise arranged. Your students are counting on you being prompt as they need that consistency. As always, thanks for all that you to support our students in all districts!