

# SPED NEWS

Staff Edition



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Special Education  
Sevier County Schools  
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## Developing Independence

by Dr. Cecil Blankenship, ETSU

Dependence and independence are both learned throughout life. It is important for a student's well being that she/he learn when to be dependent and when to be independent. Both are necessary for a happy and wholesome life. Sometimes special needs students are very dependent on their parents. It is difficult for some parents to recognize the need for their child to develop independence. There is a natural inclination on the part of parents to protect their special needs child from the outside world. Whereas this protection is necessary in some aspects of a child's life such as in dangerous situations, there are times when a child wants and needs personal independence. There are

*continued on next page*

## Directors MEMO

I recently spoke to parents at a meeting of the Sevier County Association of Handicapped Adults about transition from school to society. Although IDEA focuses on the transitional needs of all students with disabilities, my focus and the focus of the parents in attendance was on the needs of students with severe disabilities, specifically those in CDC programs whose ability to function independently is limited or even nonexistent. The question facing those parents and those of us working with these students is how to provide a meaningful life for them beyond their 21<sup>st</sup> year and when their time in public school comes to an end.

I do not walk in the shoes of parents who are raising a child with a significant disability. I cannot imagine the dedication required to assume responsibility for the total care of a child 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Although I am a parent and have assumed responsibility for four children of my own over the years, I have always lived with the knowledge that if I were even somewhat effective in my responsibilities as a caregiver for my children, that one day they would be able to function independently. Therefore, I have a great deal of compassion and sympathy for the plight of parents who are struggling to find appropriate placements and programs for their children after they leave public schools.

Transition from school to work or home is a responsibility entrusted to schools and to teachers of students with disabilities. However, as the availability of programs decline and as available revenues for assisting students who are not institutionalized goes to address class action lawsuits filed in West Tennessee, money for programs for students who have been raised by their parents and who have gone through public schools declines. Where once we could be assured that our students would find a place at Douglas or in some other program in the region, now we can be assured that they will probably not qualify for any of these programs. Students who are currently entering the Department of Mental Retardation's computers for post-school programming are finding themselves in the one thousand range or higher on the waiting list, making it virtually impossible for them to receive state assistance in the near future. Therefore, we must become proactive in assisting all of our students and their parents in finding solutions to this problem.

Although I have no panacea that will address the needs of everyone, I do believe that parents of students with severe disabilities must unite and act as a group. Individually, they will have no clout, but as an organized group will have the means to influence the decisions being made in Nashville and Washington. They will need our help in doing this and will need encouragement from each of you if this is to be a successful effort. By taking the time to suggest to your parents that they develop support groups that meet and discuss topics of mutual interest on a regularly scheduled basis, you will be helping them to contact others with similar issues to confront and with whom they might find common solutions. No one can afford to wait for the state to respond. Each of our parents must begin immediately seeking answers for the needs of their children once they are out of school. Each of us must help them. Encourage parents to begin ex-

*continued on page 2 Memo*



## Flexible In-service

### ***Functional Behavioral Assessments - Behavior Improvement Plans***

Jan 16th 3:45-5:45

by Jeff Moore, Kelly Perkins,  
and Don Zong

Trula Lawson Early Childhood Center  
550 Eastgate Road, Sevierville

Teachers be sure your Par-  
ents and Paraprofessionals  
know they are all invited!

**Memo** *continued*

ploring the transitional needs of their children much earlier. Encourage them to contact the state agencies that will eventually assume responsibility for assisting them and get their children on the state's waiting lists now.

Formal transition plans and programs must focus on meaningful goals and objectives, on practical vocational skills that will allow as many of our students as possible to function in work environments where they can experience success and where they can contribute to their own independence. We can do this by focusing on Work Based Learning objectives, by working with community members and businesses to find placement and employment opportunities for our students. People want to help. They are waiting for you to ask for their help. Do not be discouraged by those who will not. Many more are out there who will. Persevere. Keep looking and asking until you find the help your students need. This is an issue that will become increasingly important to all of us, and only by addressing it now will we have a chance to make a legitimate difference in the lives of our students. Thanks, as always, for all that you do to improve the lives of children in Sevier County.

**Bringing Order from Chaos**

Encouraging positive behavior and dedicating assistance to keeping students with disabilities in the general classroom are some of the driving forces behind the IDEA amendments of 1997. Rather than viewing students with challenging behaviors as "discipline problems," schools and teachers are now trying to determine the basis of behaviors and to intervene as early as possible.

The challenge of the discipline regulations of IDEA, said Judith Heumann, assistant secretary for special education and rehabilitative services in Washington, DC, is balancing the need to educate all students in a safe environment and the need to serve students with special needs whose disabilities may cause them to behave in challenging ways (*LRP Publications, May 1999. Inclusive Education Programs, 6(5), p1.*)

Maintaining appropriate classroom behavior can be a difficult and often complicated task. The task becomes more difficult when it involves students with disabilities. When students with disabilities display disruptive behavior, appropriate interventions should be developed by the IEP team, which includes the parents. The basis of the interventions should be derived from a carefully thought out behavior intervention plan (BIP) that includes positive behavior supports. The classroom teachers, who are represented on the IEP team, should use the BIP as a basis for their careful and thoughtful discipline strategies they use. Generally, classroom teachers can use the same disciplinary practices to manage the disruptive behavior of students with disabilities, as they would use with students without disabilities. The primary difference may be in the behavioral intervention selected to be used.

When selecting behavioral interventions for students with disabilities, teachers:

- Should ensure that the strategies are appropriate,
- Should take into consideration the child's disability, and
- Must follow due process requirements.

Disruptive behaviors occur as a result of a number of factors including the following:

- Lack of alignment between curriculum, instruction and behavior.
- Inappropriate behavioral interventions.
- As a result of services a student may not be receiving (e.g., positive behavioral supports).
- Deliberate actions taken by the student to cause classroom disruption.
- Mismatch between teaching style and the learning style of the student resulting in inappropriate behavior.
- Student's inability to understand the concepts being taught resulting in off-task behavior.
- Inability of the student to see the relationship between the skills being taught, and how these skills relate to the world outside of school.

**Blankenship** *continued*

many safe areas of a child's life where independence can be encouraged and cultivated. Supervised independence might be encouraged in areas such as; planning and/or preparing a meal for him/herself or the entire family, planning a family trip or outdoor adventure with the family, spending money wisely, selecting personal clothing and being responsible for washing and caring for the clothing, and accepting and fulfilling assigned chores within the household and within the classroom. Another way a child should develop independence is in the area of making decisions about his or her own body. Children should be taught that no one has a right to touch them inappropriately. Special needs student's should also to be taught the difference between appropriate and inappropriate touches.

As children mature they will naturally assume appropriate levels of independence. Parents and teachers can help special needs children learn the areas and levels of independence appropriate for the child's maturational level. Children should not be so overly dependent that they are always at the mercy of others for safe and routine aspects of their lives. A proper balance between dependence and independence is necessary for a fulfilling life. Parents and teachers should help children develop a proper and healthy balance between the two.

*A parent of a particularly unique special needs child said,  
"My child is a gift that I don't quite know how to unwrap."  
--Lisa Beck*

*continued from page 2 Bringing Order*

- Lack of alignment between content and skill level of the student resulting in frustration.
- Lack of variety in instructional delivery (e.g., teaching strategies) resulting in boredom and off-task behavior.
- Class size too large to accommodate varying learning styles, learning pace, and needed assistance.
- Group composition allowing several students with behavioral concerns to work together.
- Physical arrangement of the classroom where close proximity of students to other students may be distracting.

Historically, classroom and school management have been viewed as “controlling students.” Suspension and expulsion are examples of such controls but often result in unfortunate consequences; the lack of supervision for the very students who need to be supervised the most. And when control procedures don’t work, students’ continued noncompliance is met with an arsenal of punishment and more removal strategies. “Discipline is a complex issue. Facing it honestly and effectively can be likened to a good balancing act. Suspension and expulsion simply don’t work to achieve the balance or solve most behavior problems.” (*Heumann, J. (1999). National Teleconference.*)

Research regarding the use of exclusionary discipline practices is limited and most research that has been reviewed primarily focused on students without disabilities. However, it is speculated that the deleterious effect on students without disabilities will ultimately have the same effect on students with disabilities. In a 1990 study, suspension and expulsion were found to be ineffective methods as they were not a deterrent for future misconduct (*Bacon, E.H. 1990, Disciplining handicapped students: Legal issues in light of Honig v. Doe. Academic Therapy, 25, 599-611*). In addition, students with multiple suspensions in junior high or middle school face a 50% chance of future suspension and a 29% chance of future expulsion (*Bock, S.J., Tapscott, K.E., & Savner, J.L. 1998, Suspension and Expulsion: Effective management for students? Intervention in School and Clinic, 34(1), p. 50-52*). Students who are suspended and expelled are usually those who need to remain in school the most. Removal from school reduces their opportunity to benefit from instruction and often results in failing grades. These students are also part of a group of students who increasingly drop out. One researcher observed that the more frequently students were suspended, the higher the likelihood they would drop out. “Suspensions often bring a pattern that leads to the termination of formal education” (*Ibid., p. 51*).

Positive behavioral supports offer one approach that may assist educators and families not only to deal with these behaviors in question but also assist in understanding the contexts of the behavior (*Research Connections in Special Education, Positive Behavioral Support, Winter 1999, ERIC Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education, Reston, VA.*). Positive behavioral supports view such things as setting and lack of skill as a part of the problem and work to change those. They consider them as a long-range approach to reducing the inappropriate behavior, which lead to teaching more appropriate behaviors, and result in the provision of the contextual supports needed for successful outcomes. George

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Sugai and Robert Horner, researchers at the University of Oregon, have studied positive behavioral supports in over 65 schools. They have developed a school-wide approach, called Effective Behavioral Support, which defines the teachers’ role and encourages appropriate behavior in children in elementary and middle school. Horner explains that “With our approach, schools establish an effective environment, which frees teachers to devote special attention to the students who have more challenging behavioral problems” (*Ibid., p. 3*).

To address the behavioral needs of all students, Horner and Sugai suggest a four-level approach that includes a school-wide approach, a specific setting approach, classroom support, and individual student support. Strategies for the school-wide, specific setting, and classroom levels include having:

- A clear, positive purpose for learning.
- A set of positively stated expectations for prosocial behavior.
- Procedures for teaching school-wide expectations.
- A continuum of procedures for encouraging students to display expected behaviors.
- A continuum of procedures for discouraging violations of school-wide expectations.
- A method for monitoring implementation and effectiveness (*Ibid., p.4*).

The primary issue for Sevier County teachers and students relates to the primary purpose of education. If that purpose is to impart knowledge then we must find ways to teach appropriate behaviors to students with and without disabilities, and we must do so as school communities, not isolated students, classrooms, programs or teachers.

## In-Service Opportunities

**Parents, Paraprofessionals, Teachers  
and Administrators are all invited**

**January 16th 2003**

**Functional Behavior Assessments**

Behavior Improvement Plans

Jeff Moore, Kelly Perkins and Don Zong

**March 18th**

**Determining the Need for Extended School Year**

**A Guide for Policies and Procedures Based on**

**Case Precedent and Current Law**

John Enloe, SPED Director

All In-service programs are held at the Early Childhood  
Center 550 Eastgate Road, Sevierville, TN

865-453-1036 or 1037

## Sevier County Paraeducators Checklist

### *Perspectives on Paraprofessionalism*

Are you searching for a professional development opportunity but having trouble picking the one you need from all the available choices? Why not conduct a needs assessment? Business professionals regularly assess their individual needs before spending money on training, so you should, too. Grab a pencil and use this checklist to help decide what kind of professional development is best for you.

Fill in each blank below with one of the following responses.

A- I do not need assistance in this area

B- I need some assistance in this area

C- I definitely need assistance in this area

- \_\_\_\_\_ Communicating with teachers and/or my supervisor
- \_\_\_\_\_ Communicating with students and their parents
- \_\_\_\_\_ Dealing with stress
- \_\_\_\_\_ Organizing and managing my work
- \_\_\_\_\_ Managing my time at work and home
- \_\_\_\_\_ Dealing with differences among students and staff
- \_\_\_\_\_ Managing students in small-group activities
- \_\_\_\_\_ Assessing student needs in a specific subject
- \_\_\_\_\_ Using office equipment to enhance my job
- \_\_\_\_\_ Using computers and other technology to assist teachers
- \_\_\_\_\_ Helping students with special needs
- \_\_\_\_\_ Motivating students
- \_\_\_\_\_ Completing administrative work
- \_\_\_\_\_ Understanding district and/or campus policies

Now that you've completed this quick and easy assessment, go over the results with an instructional leader in your school or system such as a teacher, principal or other administrator. Ask him/her to help you find the professional development opportunities that can best help you in the areas in which you need assistance. We also suggest that you visit our Web site as it is a rich resource for professional development opportunities. Just go to <http://www.slc.sevier.org/teachers> and find the category for paraprofessionals, where you will find Web sites specifically for paraprofessionals.

Other people and places that can provide you with professional development opportunities are district staff development personnel, your regional resource center in Knoxville at Tennessee School for the Deaf, and local colleges and universities. Once you find what you're looking for, keep track of all the hours you complete and submit them to your supervisor. If money and time constraints are a problem, think about individually guided professional development such as reading a book or researching at your local library. If you take this route, keep a journal of what you learn to turn in to your supervisor. One more thing: While you're taking advantage of opportunities to learn and grow this school year, don't forget to take some time to rest, relax and rejuvenate yourself. You deserve it!

### *Four steps to conducting successful one-on-one sessions with students*

Teaching assistants are often asked to work with students one on one to practice problem-solving, review lessons or give informal tests. Have you ever thought about the best way to prepare for and conduct these types of activities? Following are some suggestions for getting the most out of a one-on-one tutoring session.

1. **Plan and prepare** Talk with the student's teacher before the tutoring session. Learn the objective and find out what the student's strengths and weaknesses are so you're prepared to react to them. If a teacher provides you with confidential information about a student, remember to keep the information to yourself. Arrange for an environment that is conducive to accomplishing the task. Select appropriate table and chair heights, and make arrangements for any special needs of the student. Make sure there are no distractions and adjust lighting and ventilation, if necessary.

2. **Get to know the student** Always use the student's first name, and expect the student to address you appropriately. Open the conversation with simple questions about the student's day, family or favorite free-time activities. Listen carefully for clues that might assist you during the session. Be supportive if you know the student is preoccupied with personal problems, but expect him to work with you. Communicate the importance of learning and completing the task. Keep the session's tone light and maintain your sense of humor to keep you and the student from unnecessary frustrations.

3. **Conduct the session** Explain to the student the objective as outlined by the teacher. Have several instructional strategies in your "toolbag" in case things don't work out as planned. Ask the teacher or your supervisor for assistance if needed. Provide plenty of encouragement and praise throughout the session to sustain a "safe" environment for learning where the student can make mistakes but still feel good about what he's doing. Don't give the answer; guide the student through the process to find the answer independently.

4. **Report to the teacher** Keep organized notes on each of the tutoring sessions. Jot down the date and time and any observable behaviors, including the student's performance. Report any concerns to the teacher and offer observations about the student's behavior.

**Happy Holidays  
See you  
January 6th!!**