



# Tennessee Association of Administrators

## in Special Education Advisor

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## Convey grade-level content to students with autism

The increased emphasis nationwide on granting students with disabilities access to general education and assessing all such students according to grade-level benchmarks has pitched educators and administrators into a panic over how to teach those with the most significant cognitive disabilities.

You should familiarize your staff with ways to convey grade-level con-

tent to children with severe special needs, including autism, to ensure they can participate and succeed in the general education arena. You also should share the importance of embedding functional skills exercises into general education lessons.

"We're passionate about this not because of No Child Left Behind, but because it's good for students," said **Jean Clayton**, a former special educa-

tor of 22 years and technical assistance specialist at the **Inclusive Large Scale Standards and Assessments Group** in Lexington, Ky. "Many, many, many times, we hear, 'My student can't do that.' Well, it's because they haven't been taught that. If you provide the tools, they can get there easier."

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### TAASE news and notes

TAASE president **Sandra Earnest** presided over one of the best Legal Conferences ever in 2006 in Pigeon Forge, Tenn. Attendance was incredible; we had nearly 700 people attend the 2006 conference. The conference was dedicated to **Bob Tipps**, who retires after a long career in special education, and 32 years at the State Department of Education alone! Bob will be truly missed in Tennessee. Mark your calendars — we'll be back at the **Music Road Hotel** again in 2007 on Dec. 3-5.

The General Membership meeting was also well-attended, and elections were held for secretary and treasurer. **Bruce Beaty** will assume the treasurer position and **Jo Bellanti** will serve again as secretary.

#### RTI in the spotlight

Response to intervention seems to be the hot topic of concern among special and general educators. TAASE

Board members proposed sponsoring regional workshops on the subject in 2007.

#### Drive the agenda

The TAASE Board invites your input into what you would like to see at the 2007 Legal Conference. This conference is an important venue for special educators in Tennessee, and we hope you will help us tailor it to your needs.

#### Honoring our own

2007 marks the first time TAASE will award an honor to an outstanding special educator in memory of **Paul Coffey**. The **Yoakley Award** will also be given to an outstanding special education administrator.

Nominations for these awards will be accepted until December 31, 2006, and awards will be presented in

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**EXPECTATIONS** (Continued from page 1)

Clayton co-presented the session *Identifying Grade-Level Curriculum that is Relevant to a Student's Life and Teaching That* at TASH's 31<sup>st</sup> Annual Conference, held in Baltimore.

**Set unique expectations for each student**

Students with severe mental retardation may not be able to read hefty novels with their peers. But they can read.

"Reading looks different for kids with significant cognitive disabilities," Clayton said. "For some kids, it may mean deciphering picture symbols or using a text reader."

You should make sure your staff understands how to set different expectations for students with severe disabilities while adhering to state content criteria. This will allow these students in assessments and have a stronger skills base when they leave school.

"Lessons can be on a lower complexity level, but you have to make sure they stay within the context of the grade-level standards," Clayton said. "Finding that link is probably what we struggle with the most when planning instruction."

When developing a reading lesson for a 10<sup>th</sup>-grader with autism, for example, a teacher should question the following:

- Is it really reading content?
- Does it link to the grade-level content standard on interpreting figurative, symbolic and/or idiomatic language?
- Is it meaningful to the student's future?

Therefore, having a child work on doing laundry by following a teacher's verbal directions wouldn't be appropriate. Even though the skill might be meaningful for the student later as he gains more independence, the activity wouldn't involve any reading or grade-level content.

But if a general education class is reading *To Kill a Mockingbird*, having a student with autism learn the idioms from the novel would be appropriate. The exercise would involve reading the phrases that come from a book appropriate to his grade level. These expressions would be meaningful because students with autism often misinterpret such language.

"Any time anybody uses an idiom around people with autism, they become furious because the phrase is an impossibility, like, 'It's raining cats and dogs,'" said **Lou-Ann Land**, a former special ed teacher of 19 years and technical assistance specialist at Inclusive Large Scale Standards and Assessments Group and the **National Alternate Assessment Center**. "It's important for these kids to learn idioms to prevent those behaviors."

**Incorporate functional skills**

You also can embed more elementary life skills into grade-level lessons for these children, Clayton said.

Say students in a general education English class must write weekly journals, she said. If the goal of a student with significant disabilities is to become proficient in writing his name and address, his teacher can direct him to write the information in his journal, along with a small entry, selecting picture symbols from a word bank if he can't write on his own.

"Students can use assistive technology as long as they're doing the same instructional activities," she said. ■

**Use creativity in lessons so students share 'drudgery' of school**

Besides helping students with significant cognitive disabilities access grade-level content, creatively delivered lessons also provide these students with social capital to use with nondisabled peers.

You can use tactile cues, such as swatches of satin that correspond to vocabulary words, or picture symbols that correspond to scenes in history or in a novel.

If a general education English class is reading *The Giver*, for instance, a teacher can read portions of the novel to a

student with disabilities, paraphrase the overall theme, and ask her to do a project on it, which will allow her to talk about the book with other children.

"Typical students might say, 'You're reading that book? I'm reading it, too!'" said **Jean Clayton**, a former special educator of 22 years and technical assistance specialist at **Inclusive Large Scale Standards and Assessments Group** in Lexington, Ky. "It lets them know they're both sharing the drudgery of school." ■

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## Use the IEP as a springboard to address 'running' behaviors

A student with autism can make the switch from being engaged in a classroom activity to being distracted by something else in an instant. These students can disappear just as quickly. That's why you must put in place proper planning and supervision when a child has a tendency to run from the classroom, or even away from school.

The first step in addressing a student's tendency to run should happen at the IEP meeting. Once the IEP team better understands the student's behavior, it can create targeted accommodations that address the running behavior and also outline emergency procedures. It's also important you make sure to communicate the details of the IEP to teachers, aides and administrators.

"The real issue with these children is that they are so highly distractible," said **Sue Constable**, director of the **Autism Support Center** at the **Rhode Island Technical Assistance Project**. "If they see something they are interested in, before you know it they're gone."

### Tragic consequences

If a student has a history of running away, **Scott Poland**, associate professor of psychology at **Nova Southeastern University**, said districts need to have an emergency plan.

"You also need to consider the immediate dangers close to the school and what in the immediate vicinity is most dangerous to children," Poland said.

In *Hui v. Sunnyside Sch. Dist. No. 201*, 45 IDELR 163 (Wash. Ct. App. 2006), the school district failed to cover both of these areas. Even though school staff knew about the child's propensity to run away, the 6-year-old with autism wandered away from his classroom sometime between 11:45 a.m. and noon.

Teachers and aides immediately began checking inside and around the school for him, but the school did not notify police until 1:07 p.m. The child was found in a nearby canal about 30 minutes later; he had drowned. The

### Use simple safety strategies

**Sue Constable** has seen her share of "bolters" when teaching students with autism. Constable, now the director of the **Autism Support Center** at the **Rhode Island Technical Assistance Project**, says as a teacher she was able to minimize the risk of students running away by using some simple safety strategies.

"My classroom door had an alarm on it so whenever it opened we knew right away," she said. Constable added that playgrounds were fenced in when students with autism were brought outside for recess.

"Even though the playground was contained you had to pay close attention," she said. "These kids are also climbers."

School officials need to notify public safety officials immediately when a student disappears, added **Ken Trump**, president of **National School Safety and Security Services**. ■

court found the district guilty of negligent supervision and awarded the child's parents a \$3.7 million settlement.

### Plan ahead

Thus, encourage good communication among staff.

"Teachers, aides and administrators need to be in on the plan," he said. "They also need to be aware of the emergency response that needs to happen when students run."

This should include procedures on how to notify parents and police, how to use radios in a search, when a lockdown is appropriate, and how to custodians cover perimeter of the school, he said.

The IEP also needs to be specific about factors that may trigger a student's impulsive behavior, Constable said.

"For example, if a student loves water, the IEP needs to include this information," she said. "If he sees a pond on a hot day the child may run away and jump in without thinking twice." ■

IDEA REGS (continued from page 1)

Nashville at the **Department of Education's** Spring Conference.

### Mirroring the regs

TAASE Board members serve on the Task Force developing new state rules and regulations to mirror the IDEA regulations.

TAASE has also represented the membership on the Speech-Language Task Force, Gifted Task Force, Early Childhood Outcomes Task Force, and others. It's important that members speak up with their concerns so that these may be communicated to those groups.

### Watch the Web

**Jeff Romanczuk** from Sevier County has also developed a TAASE Web site to facilitate communication. Most recently, a position paper has been posted about SB0268, which you are strongly encouraged to read.

We hope that every member will alert his or her legislator about the ramifications of this particular bill.

The Tennessee Legislature resumes in January, and your voices need to be heard!

You can visit the Web site at: [www.taase.org/](http://www.taase.org/). If you'd like any information about any of the above, please write Jo Bellanti, secretary, at [jbellanti@scsk12.org](mailto:jbellanti@scsk12.org) or [jbellanti@ortmemphis.com](mailto:jbellanti@ortmemphis.com). ■

## Refine your postsecondary planning for students with autism

Your IEP teams should begin transition planning for students with autism as early as possible, sometimes as early as elementary school, to help educators know their interests, aptitudes and abilities.

In elementary school, a transition assessment should be conducted as either a written transition plan or as a series of conversations with the student during an IEP meeting, said **Elin Doval**, a transition specialist with the **Virginia Autism Resource Center**.

Even though transition services and activities are planned for the time covered by the IEP, teams should use a multiyear planning process that accounts for a student's strengths, interests, preferences and needs.

"The biggest problems students with autism face is IEP teams fail to consider all their needs after they leave school and they fail to get them prepared for life after school," Doval said. "For students with autism, school is a scheduled environment. Once they leave school they leave that scheduled environment."

Thus, it is very important for these students to be taught what their lives will be like after they finish school and how they can meet their own needs, she said.

### Plan for the future

At a minimum, Doval recommends you begin the process at least five years before the student leaves high school. Work with the student to:

- Identify learning styles.
- Determine needed accommodations.
- Complete interest and aptitude assessments.
- Explore postsecondary education and training options and requirements.
- Determine admission criteria of desired postsecondary colleges or institutions.

Look at the IEPs you develop for students with autism to ensure teachers are able to instruct students how to:

## Help students cultivate long-lasting relationships

The final IDEA Part B regulations require that transition services begin "not later than the first IEP to be in effect when the child turns age 16, or younger if determined appropriate by the IEP team."

As such, begin postsecondary planning for students with autism, who require extra support, long before general education students begin to gain work skills, experts say.

Meet with parents as early as possible and explain skills that students with autism will need to learn so they can be successful throughout their lives, advises **Barbara Doyle**, an autism specialist in Springfield, Ill.

Doyle said you will lose many opportunities to effectively address life goals if you start transition planning when a student with special needs is age 16 or even age 14.

"Transition planning should start as soon as you realize the student is a special needs child," Doyle said.

She recommends working with students to develop the skills they need to:

- Live with other people.
- Have a real job.
- Earn a good living.
- Have healthy fun.
- Have a healthy body and mind.
- Develop relationships and sustain them across time.
- Contribute to the well being of other people. ■

- Identify interests, options, and supports needed after the students leave school.
- Effectively communicate interests, preferences and needs.
- Explain autism and clearly articulate needs.
- Make informed decisions.
- Acquire assistive technology devices.
- Broaden experiences through involvement in community activities.
- Develop and expand friendships and relationships. ■

## Connect children with outside service providers

**Elin Doval**, a transition specialist with the **Virginia Autism Resource Center**, recommends your IEP teams address the following issues at least three years before a student with autism leaves high school:

- Identify support services and programs, such as vocational rehabilitation, behavioral health services, and centers for independent living.
- Invite adult service providers to IEP transition meetings.
- Gather additional information on postsecondary programs and support services.
- Arrange accommodations for college entrance exams.

- Identify health care providers.
- Gather information about family planning issues.
- Determine need for financial support, such as supplemental security income, Medicaid, and state financial supplemental programs.
- Develop a plan to teach and practice appropriate interpersonal, communication, and social skills across settings.
- Develop a plan to practice independent living skills, including budgeting, shopping, cooking, housekeeping.
- Identify needed personal assistant services. ■

## Empower parents to promote child language skills

Often the most difficult aspect to accept for parents of children with autism is the difficulty these children have carrying on conversations.

While a chat with a nondisabled 5-year-old might be peppered with precocious “Why?” queries and a natural curiosity about the world around him, a child with autism might not seek out information, making families feel disconnected.

Besides exasperating families, this deficit can prove problematic when it comes to educating these young children. Thus, consider ways in which your staff can help parents boost language development in, and feel better connected to, their young children with autism.

With repetitive activities in structured environments, based on the principles of applied behavior analysis, parents can help their children master social interaction.

“There’s very little research out there on how to get children with autism to ask for information,” said **Katie Endicott**, co-assistant director of Autism Support Services: Education, Research, and Training Program at **Utah State University** in Logan. “But we found that you can contrive situations to teach 3-5-year-olds how to ask for whatever they want to know.”

“Parents can be trained to implement research-based practices and be successful in the home,” said **Kara Reagon**, co-assistant director of the ASSERT Program and co-presenter of the session, *Strategies to Promote Language in Young Children with Autism*, at the **Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children’s** annual conference.

### Emphasize importance of natural exchanges

While activities based on aspects of applied behavior analysis are by nature artificial, you should make sure parents understand the need to maintain an even, natural tone throughout the process to encourage their children’s spontaneous language.

“Parents should only use elaborations that match children’s verbal imitations and use the appropriate intonation and volume,” said **Kara Reagon**, co-assistant director of the ASSERT Program at **Utah State University**.

You also should address parents’ observations and concerns to help prevent them from unwittingly sabotaging their children’s progress.

Using gestures and acting out activities are acceptable, Reagon said, but parents shouldn’t employ praise or additional reinforcement that can interfere with interactions. ■

The main way to help children begin to show interest in finding out information is to slowly inspire interest in objects and situations of value to them. This can be done by introducing scripts to children. Scripts are tape-recorded or written phrases or sentences that aid young children with autism in initiating or continuing a conversation.

“Scripts can help a young child with autism initiate an adult in conversation,” Reagon said. ■

### Help parents pique children’s curiosity with scripts

An ASSERT Program study carried out during a three-week period found that most parents who stuck to preselected toys and scripts had a positive effect on their children’s conversational prowess.

“Two-thirds of parents felt that they would use other scripts in the home again to teach their children,” said **Kara Reagon**, co-assistant director of the ASSERT Program.

While training should occur before parents use scripts with their children, here are steps that you can discuss with parents to familiarize them with the process:

**1. Introduce a device:** Help parents start by giving them a tape recorder or voice-recorded button that their children can push to hear short phrases, such as “Let’s play cars,” she said.

For parents to introduce the device to their children, she said, have them load it with phrases that won’t be used in later conditioning, so children separate learning about the technology from practicing social interaction.

**2. Help child use device and scripts:** Parents should help

children understand that they will move from saying, for example, “Let’s play cars” to “Let’s play.” Next they will fade out their initiation of the conversation completely and have the children go through the progression of using and fading out the use of the device and scripted initiations and responses themselves.

**3. Implement scripts for intervention:** Once a day, parents can set predetermined toys in front of their children and start brief intervention activities by saying, for example, “Let’s play trains” and recording kids’ scripted and unscripted responses, eventually fading out the scripts over a few weeks. Parents can introduce a box in the back of the room and put one of the toys inside to prompt motivation in their children to ask for the toy, and, thus, initiate a conversation. A toy frog used before in the intervention can be placed in a box, for example, and the child can be taught over time to ask, “Where’s the frog?” and “Who has it?” Parents should remove any other distractions and unrelated toys while working with scripts. ■

## Paint 'vision of inclusion' for parents of young children

Despite the proven benefits of inclusion, many parents don't believe in the need for such programs for young children ages 3 and younger, experts say. This is because they have the misconception that the more hours of intense services a young child receives, the more likely he can "beat" a particular disorder or condition.

But, under Part C of the IDEA, early childhood providers are required to offer early intervention services in a child's "natural environment." And under Part B, 3-year-olds are entitled to the LRE. So you should strive to partner with parents and other agencies to foster inclusion opportunities among young children. This will pave the way for their productive inclusion in their communities later in their lives.

"Parents want to do everything they can to help their child reach his potential and, a lot of times, they translate that into fighting for the most hours of services a week they can get," said **Michelle Hart**, co-director of public policy at the **Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council** in Baltimore. "A lot of times they think, 'Maybe if my child has so many hours of services, he won't have autism anymore.' Parents have to be taught to have a vision of inclusion for their children. Otherwise, they end up living for services versus having services for living."

You can help parents develop such a vision by discussing what they wish for their children as they become adults, said Hart, who co-presented the session *Partnering to Improve Inclusive Early Childhood Learning Opportunities* at **TASH's** 31st Annual Conference, held in Baltimore.

"If a parent says, 'I want him to be a productive citizen in the community with us,' you can say, 'The best way of assuring that happens in his adult life is by helping him experience that in childhood,'" Hart said. "For me it's logical that he has to grow in the community, so we have to do everything to ensure that his right to be in the LRE with appropriate supports and services is exercised early on."

### Emphasize aids and services

As the meeting progresses, she said, you can discuss with parents how different aids and services might help their child excel in an inclusive infant-toddler program or pre-K class, including modifications to a room's design and coordination of services to fit the classroom schedule.

"They need to know that there can be modifications and services provided in the classroom to help their child participate in the same activities as the other children," she said.

### Create parent partnerships

Introducing parents to families who have been through the IFSP/IEP meeting process and warmed to inclusion also can open them up to the idea, Hart said.

"It's hard to even know what inclusion looks like if you haven't had a child with a disability go through the system yet," she said. "It helps to talk with other parents who can teach that inclusion is not a place." ■

## Seek out community partnerships to provide early childhood inclusion

Parents who are game for their young children with disabilities to experience inclusion don't always have the chance. While pre-kindergarten programs often offer inclusive opportunities for children ages 4 and 5, few child care centers and preschool programs offer such opportunities for children who are younger.

Here are some strategies for making your program more inclusive for children who are age 3 and younger:

- **Interagency communication:** Set up a collaborative so your community's infant and toddler coordinators, preschool education coordinators, and other early childhood providers can work together with families on how to best build inclusive settings for young children.

"You need a combination of families and providers working together to build stronger, more inclusive educational environments for young children," said **Paula Boykin**, Birth to Five supervisor in the **Baltimore County (Md.) Infants and Toddlers Program**. "Any time one of the partners isn't at the

table, the group probably isn't using their planning time as efficiently as they could."

- **Service delivery consultation:** If you don't have the staff or resources to provide supplementary aids and services to young students with disabilities, you can create contracts with independent therapists and teachers who can best meet children's special needs.

"A special educator could come out to see a child at his child care center," Boykin said. "It can be on his IEP that this will be how he'll receive his services."

- **Professional development:** Before integrating young children with disabilities into your program, be sure to provide training for your early childhood educators on how to work with kids with special needs, said **Michelle Hart**, co-director of public policy at the **Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council** in Baltimore. You can work with other agencies to organize professional development opportunities and build a web of administrative and teacher support. ■