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Special Education Service Agency Newsletter

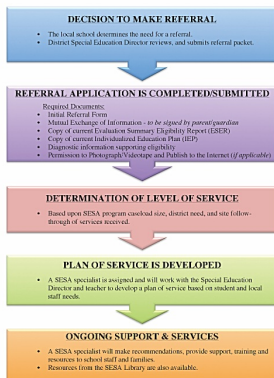
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Issue No. 2
Tips for Inclusion



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Letter From Your Editor

Visitors In Your Classroom

By Jennifer Schroeder, SESA Multiple Disabilities Specialist

Growing up, I always knew that I wanted to become a teacher. I have many teachers in my family, and as a child I loved to play school with my dolls and stuffed animals. As I got older, I realized that I wanted to become a special education teacher. I had dreams of what being in a classroom would be like, what my students would be like, and all of the fun activities that we could do. Through my education, I was able to participate in many practicums and student teaching experiences that allowed me to do some wonderful (and some not quite as wonderful!) activities with a variety of students.

Through my practicums and student teaching experiences, I was able to prepare for many things: writing lesson plans, writing "plan B's" for when those lessons didn't quite go as planned, interacting with students and families, and including my group of students as much as possible. One thing that it didn't prepare me for was how many visitors I would have in my classroom every year.

As a special education teacher, I had SLP's, OT's, PT's, SESA Specialists, nursing staff, and interpreters in my classroom throughout the year. It can be intimidating to have so many adults in and out of the room. One way to make sure that it is smooth for you, the paraprofessionals, and the students, is to come up with a protocol that will work for your classroom and let the people visiting know ahead of time what that is. Remember, the visitors are not there to evaluate you; they are there to help your group of students be the best they can be!

Ideas For Visitor Protocol

- When is the best time to meet with the team? Before school, lunch hour, after school?
- Do you want the visitor to work with the students or to observe the team working with them?
- How do you want the visitor to interact with the team? Talk only to the teacher; give direct feedback to paraprofessionals, etc.
- When you have an interpreter in the room, is that person included in activities, or are they just there to interpret for the student?
- Is it okay to make videos to share with the team later?

Remember, it is your classroom, and having an established visitor protocol will make it more comfortable for everyone.

My SESA Story

By Rachel Sorokin, K-2 Teacher at Baranoff Elementary, Sitka, AK

My name is Rachel Sorokin and I am a special education teacher in the Sitka School District. I have the privilege of supporting an incredible group of students who are, simply put, an inspiration each and every day. I also have the privilege of working with a wonderful group of paraprofessionals and a supportive principal who embrace the inclusive model in our school. Over the past few years, I have provided support for students experiencing intensive medical needs, social-emotional needs, and cognitive needs. I have also worked with students who are non-verbal.



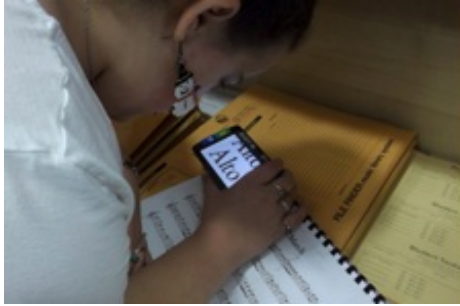
Mr. Mark Lee, Principal; Miss Jen, Paraprofessional; Miss Brooke, Paraprofessional; Ms. Rachel Sorokin, SPED Teacher

This has kept me on my toes (figuratively and literally) and has also made me realize that in no way do I have all of the answers; to truly make a difference in the lives of my students, a team is needed. In endeavoring to provide the best for each and every one of my students, I consider SESA a vital player on the team. SESA has been an invaluable asset for our building from providing tangible resources that can actually be used with our students, to modeling positive behavior supports, to developing plans and systems for our students that are tailored to each specific need. Suggestions are not just made, but tools are placed in our hands that can be used with our students.

Last year, I collaborated with some wonderful individuals from SESA as we put plans in place for students. While working together, I felt that the common mantra of the year was foster independence within the students. By the end of the year, not only could I see progress in the students as they were becoming much more independent, but also other people were noticing. To see a 1st grader go from tantrums and minimal compliance to independently following a schedule and completing work tasks was rewarding not only for me, but also for the student. The student's day was filled with not only academic tasks being completed, but also smiles and meaningful moments. The training opportunities have been incredible for our special education staff as well as the general education staff. I appreciate how the SESA staff interacts with our students with care and heart. They always show the utmost respect and acceptance of all abilities. The SESA staff truly shine!

Tips for Inclusion in the Classroom

Including Students with Visual Impairments
by Angel Black, SESA Vision Impairment Specialist



With September, comes students, teachers and the well-organized classroom. If you have a student with a visual impairment or blindness in your class this year, there are a few things to consider as you create an environment that will help all your students be independent and successful.

Setting Up Your Classroom

- Arrange furniture in a uniform fashion with wide aisles and spaces to move. Try your best to keep it the same way all year.
- Designate specific areas for toys and materials and be consistent in always returning them to these areas.
- Reduce all visual clutter both in and around the room and on the walls.

Lighting

- It's usually a good idea to put students who have a visual impairment with their backs to any windows in the room, reducing any problems with glare.
- If needed, individual lighting can be very helpful to students with low vision.
- Use blinds or curtains to control the amount of natural light coming in, and also to reduce glare.

Materials

- Scatter a few large prints and Braille books in your classroom library allowing all students to explore them and learn the differences between those and regular print.
- Always choose contrasting colors for activities.
- With any environmental print that is placed in the classroom include large print and Braille.

By following these few tips, your classroom will be efficient, organized, and ready for all your students to enjoy, grow, and learn!

Including Students with Hearing Impairments by Olivia Yancey, SESA Deaf and Hard of Hearing Specialist

Teaching a student with hearing loss requires knowledge of how much access the student has to spoken language, what the communication mode is for the student (e.g., American Sign Language, listening and speaking with an assistive listening device, etc.), and his or her own advocacy skills. These factors will impact your individualized instruction as a teacher.

Regardless of the communication mode there are some strategies that would benefit any student with hearing loss accessing communication and instruction.



Classroom Physical Characteristics

- Flashing fire alarms/smoke detectors are installed.
- Classroom door is closed during instruction and small group assignments.
- Student is seated in front-side to access instruction.
- Visual Schedule is accessible by student with information such as: time, page numbers, expectation of the assignment, and location of activity.

Teacher-Student Characteristics

- A routine is established on how to check for understanding (e.g., secret signal for student to tell the teacher a concept was missed, routinely asking student "What did you hear/see?")
- Teacher faces student when speaking/signing.
- Teacher provides wait time before asking question or moving on.
- Teacher uses closed-captioning for all videos presented to the class.

Including Students with Multiple Disabilities, Cognitive Impairments, Physical Disabilities, and Other Health Impairments

by Meriah Cory, SESA Multiple Disabilities Specialist



Teaching a student with multiple needs or a cognitive impairment can seem daunting at the beginning of the school year. While each individual student will require different accommodations and modifications, there are some things that are universally helpful for students in these categories.

Teach the process before trying to teach a skill

For example: Teach what the phrase "put in" means before expecting the student to sort into containers. If they know the process, they will be more successful and it will be easier to include in classroom activities.

Adapting Materials

Look for ways to add pictures to the materials their peers are using to make it more accessible.

Shorting/simplifying the activity

Can the activity be changed so that instead of writing, they are matching or ordering?

Using part of an activity

Remember that if the class is doing reading, your student should also be doing reading. Including does not always mean doing the exact same thing, but staying on the same topic.

Setting up a student's area so that they can be successful

Look at the placement of materials, desks, and students.

Be prepared and try not to have a lot of downtime

Small activities that students can work on while whole group instruction is happening can be very beneficial.

Including Students with Emotional Disabilities

By Lyon Johnson, SESA Emotional Disabilities Specialist

Reducing Challenging Behavior: No Magic Dust . . . No Substitute for Thinking!

Throughout my career I've had the opportunity as an education specialist to work with IEP teams. Often, there is a great sense of urgency to eliminate destructive student behaviors. Understandably, teams may be hoping for a quick, prescriptive strategy based on the form or type of behavior (i.e., If any student is aggressive toward peers, then try this strategy). These requests are always conflicting. I know that a one-size-fits-all quick tip is not likely to eliminate many of the challenging behaviors experienced by school teams. The only standardized "go to" tips would be ensuring that the classroom and school environment supports all students, regardless of abilities and prior learning histories, through posting visual supports, and through actively teaching, acknowledging, encouraging, and reinforcing behavioral expectations. Classroom-wide positive behavioral interventions and supports (CW-PBIS), or even better, school-wide positive behavioral interventions and supports (SW-PBIS) would be the closest "go to" tip (see www.pbis.org for more information).

As one of my mentors once said to me, "there is no magic dust and certainly no substitute for thinking" when attempting to reduce the most challenging student behaviors. In such situations, my training as a behavior analyst leads me to follow these steps, in order:

- Operationally define the challenging behaviors and establish a current baseline.
- Operationally define the identified pro-social behaviors to increase and establish a current baseline.
- Conduct a functional behavioral assessment (FBA) and hypothesize the most likely reason for the occurrence of the challenging behavior.
- Identify a functional equivalent replacement behavior (FERB) that serves the same purpose as the challenging behavior: *A FERB is a more acceptable behavior the student uses in the short or mid-term, which will be naturally reinforcing and therefore less dependent on other types of potential reinforcers (e.g., token system, edibles, tangible items, activities, etc.).*


Through a Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP):

- Enhance, as necessary, environmental supports identified above to prevent problem behavior.
- Provide natural cues and prompts, direct instruction, and effective

reinforcement to increase the likelihood students will emit or respond with pro-social behaviors.

Set up a realistic and sustainable progress monitoring system so you know if your behavior intervention plan is working. I am a big fan of perceptual rating scales, such as Direct Behavior Ratings (<http://dbr.education.ucom.edu/>).

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