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Each and Every Child

Quick news for Parents, Teachers and Students

An e-newsletter by the Iowa Department of Education's Bureau of Student and Family Support Services

There's no 'I' in 'team'

No one would listen to Rachel Anderson. She knew it could be done, for she did so at home. But the school insisted: Your kindergartner needs to be on medication or he will not be in class.

"Kendall didn't need to be on medication, but they wouldn't listen to me," she said. "So he would spend time in the principal's office – about four days out of five every week. What he learned in Minnesota is what I taught him at home."

That was in Minnesota. She then moved to Des Moines.

"I was nervous about the whole thing, thinking our horrible experience in Minnesota would be repeated here," she said. "So I called the school ahead of time and explained the situation."

And then she held her breath. But much to her astonishment, the team at Brubaker Elementary in Des Moines was ready to help.

"They listened," Rachel says in near disbelief. "At first I was shocked, but then greatly relieved. They not only helped him with what he needed but, honestly, I was relieved that I no longer had to be his only teacher."

And when Rachel refers to "they," she means it. The entire team – from principal to counselor to special education teacher – view each and every child as "their" students. Everyone is involved. And the IEP is the center of educational decisions.

"The IEP is very overwhelming," says Laura Olson, a Brubaker educator and former teacher of Kendall's. "Before we start a meeting, you need to point out that everyone is a part of the team."

Laura says that it's important to remember that parents frequently have a difficult time coming to terms with their child's need for an IEP.

"You must be compassionate to the parents," she said. "And remember that we use so much educational jargon! Talk to the parents so they can understand. After all, most of them are not educators.

"Above everything else, parents need to thoroughly understand that we are doing what we believe is the best for their child."

That was easy for Rachel to understand because of Laura's approach.

"Once in a while, Miss Olson would call me and say 'Kendall's had an awesome day,' and that's all she would say," Rachel said. "So when Kendall would come home, I would reward him. It's great to be able to do that, and he doesn't automatically think there's trouble when school calls."

"That's really necessary in building up strong relationships not just with the parent, but with the student, as well," Laura said.

Holiday opportunities

The holiday break presents lots of education opportunities for your child or student – all of them fun. Try these:

- When you are cooking, measuring ingredients is a great way to work in math instruction.
- Use the calendar as a countdown to the holidays, another way to bolster math (and, for younger students, an understanding of the calendar).
- Read seasonal stories to your child and, when finished, have the child explain what the story was about. This helps build comprehension.
- Make holiday decorations; this helps the child learn how to follow instruction.
- Writing thank-you cards helps the child with his or her writing.
- Make sure the child reads at least 20 minutes a day during the holiday break.