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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

Preparing our children for life

Conference challenges audience to forge new mindsets, approaches

The state's first-ever special education conference may be over. But for the 1,200 educators, parents and advocates who converged on Des Moines mid-June, it was a launching point to end the education gap among students with disabilities.

Keenly aware that Iowa ranks toward the bottom of the national pack when it comes to the education gap, participants were given a wide array of information, from what a student should know when entering kindergarten to current case law involving special education.

The conference centered around four themes:

- Children coming to school ready to learn.
- Children going through schools in safe environments.
- Children achieving at high levels.
- Youth leaving school ready for life.

"We need high expectations for all children," said Dr. Martin Ikeda, the state special education director for the Iowa Department of Education. "Educators are being challenged to focus their teaching talents to more dramatically help each child. And to do that, there needs to be more interaction in the classroom between the teacher and students all working toward high standards."

A few prominent messages surfaced from the bevy of nationally recognized speakers and researchers:

- All children are general education students first and foremost.
- If a student cannot make a full year's growth in one year, how close can you get him or her?
- Avoid a self-fulfilling prophesy: Assume all children can exceed beyond your wildest expectations. To do less is to ensure they won't.
- Historically, we have relied on hunches when making student determinations. We can no longer do this. Evidencebased practices truly make a difference in a child's education.
- The role of special education has evolved. Special education today isn't just to allow access to support students with disabilities, but to enable performance in grade-level content on grade-level achievement standards.
- It is important to get students on target by Grade 4 because after that, the data shows it is much more difficult to get students "caught up."

"I found the conference to be extraordinarily energizing," Ikeda said. "It's exciting to see 1,200 people learning and exploring together over something they care about deeply. We all were working to change lives. We accomplished that here in Des Moines. I look forward to everyone taking this work back to their communities."

Never say can't, say can

Tyler Greene, a student who successfully went through the Iowa public school system – but not without occasionally having to advocate strongly for himself – was a guest speaker during the conference. Tyler says he doesn't like the word "can't." "Instead of focusing on what I can't do," Tyler told the audience, "focus on what I can do." Tyler is now a junior at the University of Northern Iowa. Watch his video at www.imtyler.org.

An Iowa educator shares experience, thoughts

Note from the editor: The teacher asked not to be identified.

I approached one of my science buddies and asked if special education students could qualify for a science award, assuming they met the criteria. The answer was that no, they could never because they (all special ed. students) do not have the ability to take the advanced classes and maintain the high grades.

I was horrified but understood exactly why sped kids in that classroom have difficulty.

I am sure that if Albert Einstein or Stephen Hawking were students at that school today, neither would amount to much; Albert would be ADD because he wouldn't concentrate on the basic stuff because he was thinking about the complex, and Stephen was too physically handicapped and should head to Link to put together muffler clamps.

Until we demand that all teachers for their certification and certification renewal take at least 12 hours in special education, particularly methods of instruction, the quality of education to our students will not be met, and they will miss opportunities granted to others.

We have come but a few steps, and have a very long way to go to change attitudes and opportunities.

Time to update your emails?

Do you have new teachers on staff? Have you transferred districts? Are there new parents whose children will be in your classrooms? It's time to update your email addresses to ensure consistent delivery of Each and Every Child. Send your updates to jim.flansburg@iowa.gov.

Some fun (and educational) summer activities

Keep your child's mind fresh during the summer break, and avoid the education slide. Here are some quick, easy tips that are fun. (And, you may want to keep this to yourself, but they also are educational!)

- Try round-robin writing. Have your child write the first paragraph to a story, and then you add the second, and pass it around. It's creative, fun and keeps writing skills (and imagination) in sharp focus.
- When reading to your child, be sure to ask them occasionally, "And what do you think happens next?" Keep them engaged.
- At the same time, when you're showing them pictures in the book, ask them, "What do you suppose is going on here?"
- While on vacation, have your child write postcards to relatives and friends.
- At the end of a vacation, put together a scrap book of the adventure with your child. Include photos, captions and memorabilia.

Encourage the actors within your children. Have them stage a play based on their favorite book.