

March 2012

Volume 1, Issue 12

# 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

## Evolution of special education

If there's consensus on anything, it would be that there are as many opinions about the reasons for an education gap among students with disabilities in Iowa as there are people asked.

It should come as no surprise. The evolution of special education over the last 40 years has been substantial. Starting in the 1970s, the goal was to identify students with disabilities who at the time were excluded from school, and provide students an appropriate public education. A decade later, the common belief was to teach students with disabilities a functional curriculum so they could live independently and participate in community activities.

Society evolved again, pushing for full inclusion in the general education classroom for socialization purposes; knowledge and mastery of the content, however, even at reduced levels of complexity, was not emphasized.

We then tried more inclusion with practices like co-teaching, which has worked well in some settings and not as well in others. We are coming to understand that inclusion isn't enough, yet at the same time, pulling students from the general education classroom isn't enough.

One of our barriers, though, whether students are fully included or fully self contained, appears to be a belief system of "protecting" students with disabilities. In order to have equal life opportunities after high school, students with disabilities need more supports and equally high expectations as students without disabilities. All students in Iowa, regardless of disability, deserve to make at least a year's worth of growth in a year's time, or have someone doing something to support them. By law, students with disabilities have that support, but even then, only 65 percent of students with disabilities made a year's worth of growth in a year's period of time (2009-2010 to 2010-2011). Granted, we don't know if more students with disabilities made more growth once they were placed on IEPs, but we also don't know if the IEP supports were really designed with the intention of "catching the student up" or merely to let the child progress at their current pace "because, after all, they are disabled."

People in the field are working extremely hard to help students with disabilities and their families. Yet the hard work is not producing fair life outcomes for students with disabilities in terms of college- or career-readiness and access to competitive employment or meaningful work after high school.

School entry, community access, participation with nondisabled peers. These were the 3 iterations we've experienced in a generation. Performance in the general curriculum and equal life outcomes is the next milestone for ability awareness. It's not some pie-in-the-sky ideals but based on people who saw through age-old perceptions – just like the education pioneers of 20, 30 and 40 years ago.

## Students with disabilities are capable of top performance

All students with disabilities are capable of performing grade-level content, even if through different means

of getting information or demonstrating knowledge. For students with disabilities, it will take accommodations, universal design, more opportunities for success, more encouragement. Faculty and community members need to expect the same of a child with a disability as they do from students without disabilities. And teams of caring individuals need to help the child understand the impact of the disability on his or her performance, and teach children the skills they need to perform in the general curriculum.

## **About that survey**

To date, more than 2,100 of you have responded to our survey on special education in Iowa. If you haven't done so already, please take the Iowa Department of Education's seven-minute survey at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/IEPGAP>.

Your input is critical to helping Iowa move forward.

We will share results in future issues.

## **Questions from readers:**

Q: Can you explain how the education gap is measured?

A: The education gap is the difference between the percent of students with IEPs who are proficient versus the percent of students without IEPs who are proficient. As an example, if 80 percent of students without IEPs are proficient, but only 20 percent of students with IEPs are proficient, the gap would be 60. The gap itself is only one issue: the relative low performance among students with disabilities is what is causing the gap to look so large when compared to other states.

Q: Did you ever consider that we are more honest than many states when it comes to our assessments?

A: Students in the nation receive the same test through the National Assessment of Educational Progress. And all states have to meet participation goals for students with disabilities, English language learners, and students without disabilities, as well as some exclusion criteria. About 40 states met their participation targets and did not exceed their exclusion goals, and the roughly other 10 states were very close to participation goals and exclusion rates. As such, it is an apples-to-apples comparison.

## **Classroom arts program serves children with disabilities**

There is a joint initiative between the Iowa Department of Education and VSA Iowa to provide arts programming in classrooms that serve children with disabilities.

VSA Iowa is a non-profit organization focused on making the arts accessible to all.

The Arts for Children Program offers arts workshops to Iowa schools at no charge to educators or participants. Class hours with Teaching Artists are available to classrooms serving one or more students who have an Individualized Education Program (IEP). Teaching Artists collaborate with classroom teachers to provide one- to three-hour workshops. Classes are targeted toward children with disabilities, but are also aimed at increasing classroom engagement and enhancing curriculum for all students.

If you are an educator or coordinator interested in building a residency or workshop with a VSA Iowa teaching artist, call VSA Iowa's program director E.B. Updegraff at (515)281-5839 or email her at [eb@vsaiowa.org](mailto:eb@vsaiowa.org).

## Get this on your calendar

The Iowa Department of Education's Pursuing the Promise – a three-day conference bringing together special educators, parents, state and federal policymakers, school administrators and community partners this summer – is taking shape.

Speakers for the June 11-13 conference in Des Moines include Kevin Jennings, the former assistant deputy secretary of the U.S. Department of Education, who headed up the department's Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools. Other confirmed speakers include Dan Reschly from Vanderbilt University and Jeanne Wanzek from the Florida Center for Reading Research.

Topics to be covered include ensuring that students with disabilities come to school ready to learn, go through school in safe and caring environments, achieve at high levels, and leave school ready for life.

More information on the seminar, including programming, registration and accommodations, will be posted soon on our website, [www.educateiowa.gov](http://www.educateiowa.gov). We also will let you know when more information is available through this newsletter.