Planning for a More Inclusive School:  
Reflecting on Current Practices and Progress  
By Lee Anne Sulzberger, M.Ed.

“A goal without a plan is just a wish.” Antoine de Saint-Exupery, French writer (1900-1944)

Even though the 2007-2008 school year is just barely coming to a close, school personnel are already busy preparing to improve teaching and learning for next year. As part of these efforts, school planning teams may wish to consider including goals in their 2008-2009 plans that address becoming a more inclusive school as a way to promote academic success for all students.

What Is an Inclusive School?
Inclusive schools act upon “a philosophy or set of beliefs based on the idea that students with disabilities have the right to be members of classroom communities with non-disabled peers, whether or not they can meet the traditional expectations of those classrooms” (Friend, 2007, p. 5). Inclusive schools are also “places where all students are welcome, and where all students learn essential academic and non-academic lessons in preparation for life in the community” (Salisbury & McGregor, 2005, p.2).

How Inclusive Is Our School?
In order to identify the goals that are needed to move a school toward its vision of becoming more inclusive, it is important to gather information regarding current practices. Voltz, Brazil, and Ford (2001) have identified three commonly agreed upon elements of inclusive education: (a) meaningful participation in all aspects of school, (b) a sense of belonging on the part of all students, and (c) a shared ownership among faculty and staff for the success of all students.

Educators can reflect upon the following questions (adapted from Voltz, et al., 2001) to help identify school strengths and areas of improvement in each of the three areas when planning for next year:

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Participation
- Do students with disabilities participate productively in classroom instructional activities?
- How frequently do students with and without disabilities interact with each other? What types of interactions occur?
- How do adults interact with students? Are interactions similar in quantity and quality for students with and without disabilities?

Belonging
- Are students with disabilities teased more often than their peers without disabilities?
- Do students without disabilities voluntarily include students with disabilities in a variety of activities?
- Do all students appear to value the ideas and opinions of their peers?

Shared Ownership
- Do adults use the words “our” and “we” more often than “you” and “they” when discussing students?
- Do general education teachers and special education teachers share in meeting the challenges of students with and without disabilities?
- Do general education teachers and special education teachers share in celebrating the successes of students with and without disabilities?

What Other Information Is Needed?
While guiding questions can provide valuable insight into the status of inclusive practices at a school, additional information is helpful. Since it has been noted that “inclusion has more to do with how educators respond to individual differences than it has to do with specific instructional configurations” (Voltz, et al., 2001, p. 24), a thoughtful review of student achievement data will enable school staff to reflect upon how they are responding to student academic needs. Answers to the following questions can provide schools with key information regarding the academic progress of all students in the building:

- Where are the widest achievement gaps?
- How have students with disabilities performed compared to overall student performance?
- Does the three-year trend data demonstrate steady, significant gains over time for all students? For students with disabilities?
- Are there differences worth noting between demographic groups?
- Are there major differences among curriculum areas (math, science, social sciences, and English)?
- Are there grade level differences?
- What are the bright spots? What might explain these successes?
(Adapted from Hitch and Jenkins, 2004)

What Makes an Effective Plan?
Once questions regarding the current status of inclusive practices and student achievement have been answered, schools have the information needed to develop a plan to capitalize on the strengths of the school and improve areas needing attention.

The following practices are evident in plans developed by schools that have “higher student achievement and significantly greater achievement gains” (Reeves, 2007/2008, p. 86):

Monitoring
The plan indicates consistent analyses of student performance, instructional practice, and leadership practice. Such analyses should occur at least monthly.
**Evaluation**
The plan indicates that all practices and initiatives in the school are constantly scrutinized to see if they are working. Ineffective practices and initiatives are discontinued.

**Expectations**
The plan indicates a belief that the quality of teaching and learning taking place in the school impact student achievement more than student characteristics or demographics.

The desire to improve inclusive practices demonstrates a willingness to change behaviors and beliefs about how schools can better meet the needs of all students in the building.

For more information about strategies for creating inclusive schools, consult the T/TAC W&M website at [www.wm.edu/ttac](http://www.wm.edu/ttac). A complete listing of professional resources available through the T/TAC William & Mary lending library may be viewed by clicking on the “Library” link. This site provides a listing of holdings, an online search engine, and an online order form. Library materials will be sent along with a postage-paid return mailer. **Considerations Packets** may be ordered by clicking on the “Considerations Packets” link off the main web page. For further information on a process for creating inclusive schools, consult Strategies for Creating Inclusive Schools. Topics addressed in the packet include developing a vision of inclusion, creating a comprehensive plan, and providing ongoing professional development. Additional information about inclusive schools may also be found at [http://www.inclusiveschools.org/](http://www.inclusiveschools.org/).

**References**

**Parent Resource Center Special Event**
A statewide meeting of the Parent Resource Center (PRC) staff has been planned for May 5-7, 2008. The meeting will be hosted by the Virginia Department of Education at the Stonewall Jackson Hotel in Staunton. This will be a great opportunity to learn about the proposed special education regulations. Information will also be shared with families about other parent involvement practices and resources. Time will be allotted for attending PRC staff members to share the work they have been doing in their school divisions. For those interested in establishing a PRC, please send representatives to the meeting to learn about how a center could serve parents in your area. Look for a “save the date” notice to be posted soon on the website of the William & Mary Training and Technical Center, [www.wm.edu/ttac](http://www.wm.edu/ttac).

For questions or more information about Parent Resource Centers, please call Judy Hudgins at (804) 371-7421 or email at Judy.Hudgins@doe.virginia.gov.
Collaborative Leadership
Collaborate, Communicate, and Respond
By Roni Myers-Daub, Ed.D.

In response to large numbers of referrals to the student support team (SST) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004) provision supporting a response to intervention (RtI) process, Larrymore Elementary School expanded its teacher assistance team (TAT) to include a three-tiered, collaborative, problem-solving approach. With this model, support is provided to students experiencing academic and behavior difficulties in the general education environment. The process involves data collection and analysis to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions by measuring the student’s response to the interventions over a period of time. Response data are then used to make informed decisions about continuing or changing the type or intensity of specific interventions. Increasing intensity of interventions is accomplished: (a) by more frequent use and increased duration of interventions, (b) by delivery of instruction in small, homogeneous student groups, and (c) by the use of specialists to address specific student needs (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). The expected outcomes of this process are classrooms and supports that optimize learning for all students by addressing concerns through intervention rather than remediation.

As a school functioning as a professional learning community, the staff at Larrymore is committed to ensuring that students are not only taught, but that they learn (DuFour, 2004). Therefore, the school was ready for introduction of the RtI process in the 2006-2007 school year. RtI was presented as a reframing of current practices rather than as a major change. Most components to support the RtI process were a part of the existing Larrymore culture; hence, they began the process by discussing what was not going to change, and most importantly, how they were going to build upon existing effective practices (Reeves, 2007).

One such practice was the use of common formative assessments to redirect instruction and improve the quality of learning (Ainsworth & Viegut, 2006). Each month, Larrymore students in 1st through 5th grades participate in common formative assessments in reading and math created by content specialists. After administering the assessments, classroom teachers are charged with the responsibility of analyzing the data, identifying students who struggled on skills assessed, and developing interventions to address the identified student weaknesses. Results of these assessments are discussed with administrators and content specialists as part of grade-level professional development. Discussions involve sharing classroom interventions and, when necessary, planning for small-group support by specialists to provide more intensive instruction tailored to students needs.

In addition to this practice, the educators and support professionals serving on the teams at each tier of the RtI model have the experience and willingness to do what is needed to help all students. They are a true reflection of the strong professional community at Larrymore. The Tier I team consists of the grade-level teams, the Tier II team consists of designated general educators and content specialists, and the Tier III team consists of the SST members. The work of these teams involves cooperation, communication, and a “student-centered” approach. The collective ability of the team members enables staff to work together to enhance student achievement through a continuum of services.

In the first year of using the RtI model (2006-2007), the SST convened to discuss 19 initial referrals. Of those referrals, 5 resulted in comprehensive evaluations, and these 5 students were found eligible for special education services. These numbers reflected a tremendous difference from the previous year, when SST met on 57 initial referrals, conducted 25 comprehensive evaluations, and found 18 students eligible for special education services.

The first-year success of this model was a direct result of the collaboration among the entire staff and the overall culture of the school. The process involved no additional staffing or major changes in school resources. However, it did involve special educators, general educators, content specialists, counselors, psychologists, social workers, and administrators working collaboratively in response to students experiencing academic and behavior difficulties. Most of all, it involved being proactive rather than reactive by improving instructional capacity and behavioral supports to meet the specific needs of students.
Reclaiming the “Miracle” Through Strength-Based Behavior Management

By Denyse Doerries, Ph.D., and Butler Knight, Ed.S.

Finally, you are entering the last nine weeks of school. You breathe a sigh of relief. It is so gratifying to enjoy the fruits of your labor and, even more so, to reap the greater rewards of summer vacation looming gloriously before you.

But, what is this? Johnny refuses to remain in his seat and his antics are entertaining even your most motivated students! Carol is doodling, her papers are scattered around her desk, and for the third day this week she cannot find her agenda. Her parents depend upon the daily correspondence in the agenda to monitor her behavior and homework completion. The pressures begin to mount.

Before your blood pressure reaches new levels, sit down, take a deep breath, and imagine that during the course of the night a “miracle” happened (O’Hanlon & Beadle, 1997). When you entered your classroom this morning, something was palpably different. A calmness and predictable momentum permeate your classroom. Johnny is seated and completing the “morning math challenge.” In disbelief you glance in the direction of Carol’s desk and are elated to see the neat stack of books tucked beneath her desk and her agenda lying open on her desk.

Suddenly you realize that this vision is not the “miracle” you initially thought, but a recollection of how your students performed earlier in the school year. You remember Johnny’s enthusiasm for math brain teasers and the special status he held for his genius in unlocking the code. Other strengths come to mind as you recall the many ways he helped his classmates use mathematical principles in everyday activities. Curiously you begin to consider that the more current behaviors may not be as problematic after all. You begin to wonder if there is some way to reclaim these assets and stretch this “miracle” into the next nine weeks.

To reclaim or re-establish what was working earlier in the school year, think back to what you were doing differently. You undoubtedly had established three to five simply defined classroom expectations, such as be respectful, be responsible, and be cooperative. You and your students had clearly defined what these expectations looked and sounded like. You provided opportunities to practice these behaviors and recognized students for successfully demonstrating them.

Refocus your students on these behaviors and select some strategies for “catching them being good.” The following strategies highlight student strengths and set the stage for everyone to experience the miracle.

- Teach, re-teach, and reinforce classroom expectations using the Teacher-Student Learning Game (Nelson, Benner, & Mooney, 2008) (see insert).
- Increase positive, specific praise statements (four positive to one negative). For every negative statement a teacher makes, a student is owed four positive statements (Nelson et al., 2008; Sprick, Garrison, & Howard, 1998).
- Write the names of the students who are demonstrating the expectations on the board.
- Use nonverbal praise such as a sticky note or special doodle on the student's paper to prompt or recognize expected behavior.
- Institute Raffle ticket systems:
  - Students recognized through the above examples are eligible for a raffle drawing.
  - Hand out tickets or pieces of paper to students who are demonstrating an expected behavior.
  - Students write their names on the tickets.
  - At the end of class, tickets are placed in the lottery container.
  - At the end of class or the end of the week, two or more winners are drawn. The winner draws a card to determine which prize she or he won. Each card has a number between 1 and 7 (inclusive), representing the numbers of the 7 prizes. However, one card has all 7 numbers, which allows a pupil to win all 7 prizes. Additionally, the person with the highest number of tickets earned in a week automatically gets to pick a card. Examples of prizes include homework passes, NFL pencils, a selection of CDs on loan during free time, fast food restaurant coupons, early dismissal for lunch, and options that are negotiated.

References
This is the fourth in a four-part Link Lines series. Part I (September/October 2007) defined and clarified the purpose of transition assessment and identified the scope of data to be collected. Part II (November/December 2007) provided guidelines for summarizing the assessment data in the PLOP. Part III (January/February 2008) described a process for developing postsecondary goals based upon the results of age-appropriate transition assessment data. (See www.wm.edu/tta/Newsletter/index.html for these issues.)

Requirement to Provide Transition Services
Beginning not later than the first IEP to be in effect when the child turns 16 and then updated annually thereafter, the IEP must include …
Transition services needed to assist the child in reaching those goals, including courses of study [§614(d)(1)(A)VIII]

Courses of studies represent long-range plans for ensuring students have access to the coursework and other educational experiences they need if they are to be adequately prepared for adult life (Storms, O’Leary, & Williams, 2000). A major reason why students drop out of high school is that they do not see the relevance and importance of the coursework they are taking (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morrison, 2006). The more specific that IEP teams can be in using transition assessment data to identify coursework that directly relates to students’ postsecondary goals, the more likely students are to be motivated to complete their education.

Just as courses of study provide educational plans that lead students through secondary school, transition activities lead students through the process of preparing for adult life. Individualized education program (IEP) teams must consider assessed needs in all seven domains of transition planning (see Jan/Feb 2008 Link Lines Transition Time article) and design transition activities that address these needs. Part C of the definition of transition services identifies seven kinds of transition activities IEP teams may plan to help students prepare for life following high school.

Definition of Transition Services
(34) TRANSITION SERVICES: The term “transition services” means a coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability …
(C) includes instruction, related services, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and when appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation [§602(34)(A)]

A description of these seven kinds of activities and an example of each follows.

1. Instruction - Activities that provide explicit instruction in knowledge and skills students must acquire to be ready to pursue their postsecondary goals
   Data: Student does not demonstrate skill in being interviewed for a job.
   Activity: Provide direct instruction in the job interview process.
2. Related Services - Activities that empower students to access appropriate related services as adults, generally related services they receive during their high school years
   Data: Student fears living away from home as an adult.
   Activity: Engage in family counseling to assist in eventual transition to a group home.

3. Community Experiences - Educational opportunities provided in the community that prepare students to participate in community life
   Data: Student lacks knowledge of disability services offered at the college he will attend.
   Activity: Visit the disability services office at the college the student will attend to interview a counselor.

4. Employment - Activities that focus on developing work-related behaviors, job-seeking and job-keeping skills, career exploration, skill training, apprenticeship training, and actual employment
   Data: Student has not been referred to Department of Rehabilitative Services (DRS).
   Activity: Refer student to DRS for eligibility determination.

5. Adult Living - Activities that focus on adult living skills, generally activities that are done once or occasionally
   Data: Student does not have a driver’s license.
   Activity: Complete behind-the-wheel driver’s training from a private vendor during the coming summer.

6. Daily Living Skills - Activities that adults do almost every day
   Data: Student has difficulty arriving for events in a timely manner.
   Activity: Use a wristwatch with an alarm to manage personal schedule.

7. Functional Vocational Evaluation - An assessment process that provides information about career interests, aptitudes, and skills
   Data: The IEP team lacks data related to student’s strengths in an area of interest/preference.
   Activity: Participate in a PERT evaluation at Woodrow Wilson Rehabilitation Center.

Meaningful use of transition assessment data will result in unified sets of plans designed to enable students to realize their postsecondary goals.

References
If you’ve been to a technology conference recently, you’ve probably heard this question and answer or something similar. What does preparing students for the future really mean, especially for schools?

“Their World”

What does it mean to prepare students for the future? In *Ten Trends: Educating Children for a Profoundly Different Future* (2002), author Gary Marx suggests that social and intellectual capital will be the primary economic value in society. Such an economy will be driven by technology and information. The role of 21st century schools need to be radically altered to assist students in learning to collaborate, evaluate information, engage in critical and creative thinking, use a vast array of technological tools and possess high levels of perseverance and curiosity (Marx, 2002). As computers control more and more tasks, we are left with our creativity and ability to produce products with technology (Zolli, 2007).

Students are in fact engaging in activities to prepare themselves for the future. According to a study by the National School Boards Association (NSBA, 2007), students ages 9 through 17 are already engaged in creating, producing, and evaluating information. The students who were surveyed reported spending an average of 8 hours per week online, and 50% of those students were discussing schoolwork for at least part of that time. The students were blogging and creating websites, videos, podcasts and photos that they uploaded online. These students are digital natives who have grown up in a world infused with technology and digital resources.

What Does This Mean for Instruction?

Schools can support students by bringing technology into the classroom in order to differentiate instruction. “Differentiated classrooms operate on the premise that learning experiences are most effective when they are engaging, relevant and interesting” (Tomlinson, 200, p. 5) and that all students will not always find the same avenues to learning equally engaging, relevant, and interesting. Today’s computers and programs allow most learning styles to be met in delivering instruction and developing student-created products. For example, a unit on autobiographies might have students creating their own autobiography in video, audio, or written format. To help create or activate background knowledge, visual learners could view a video, linguistic learners could read about the topic, and auditory learners could listen to information. A reluctant writer may be more likely to blog about his or her experiences, whereas shy student may prefer to create a video presentation rather than give an oral report.
Many technology-based projects encourage the higher levels of learning involved in synthesizing information for creating projects and producing new knowledge. Projects that incorporate activities fostering these higher levels of thinking lead to increased student achievement (Marzano, Pickering & Pollock, 2001). A project where groups of students create a movie of an original myth requires students not only to recognize the components of a myth, but also to apply those components to original work. Another advantage of technology projects is that they typically involve both linguistic and nonlinguistic representations of content through video, photos, or audio. The more we use both systems of representation – linguistic and nonlinguistic – the better we are able to think about and recall knowledge (Marzano, et al., 2001).

While today’s students are skilled in the use of technology, they need instruction in how to create and design products. Effective creation of technology-based products incorporates many components of the writing process: brainstorming, outlining, planning, creating, revising, and editing. By breaking projects into phases of planning, creating, and revising/editing, teachers can assess student understanding and mastery of content throughout the process. Using this opportunity to re-teach and clarify information, as needed, teachers create optimal conditions for student success.

It is crucial to maintain effective instructional practices when integrating technology into the classroom. Instructing students on the writing process is important whether students are handwriting a paper or typing it on a computer. Sound instructional practices cannot be sacrificed because teachers are using technology. Another important consideration is whether or not the same learning outcomes can be accomplished as well or better using more readily available and easy-to-use tools and resources (Harris, 2005). If so, there is no need to incorporate technology into the lesson. However, when it comes to differentiating instruction, technology provides a significant advantage over “more readily available tools.”

References
Check It Out!

The following materials are available on loan from the T/TAC William and Mary lending library. To request materials, please call 1-800-323-4489 and leave a message. The materials will be sent to you along with a postage-paid return mailer. A complete listing of professional resources available through the T/TAC William and Mary lending library may be viewed at: http://www.wm.edu/ttac. Simply click on the Library link to view holdings, complete an online search, or order materials.

The resources below are companions to the articles in this issue of Link Lines. These resources will provide more in-depth, expanded coverage on the topics in the newsletter.

**The Road Ahead: Transition to Adult Life for People with Disabilities**  
By Keith Storey, Paul Bates, and Dawn Hunter

This book provides strategies and ideas on a variety of secondary transition topics. Authors offer information on transition assessment, instructional strategies for secondary school students, and supported living resources. (TR 174)

**Collaborating for Inclusive Education: Developing Successful Programs**  
By Chriss Walther-Thomas, Lori Korinek, Virginia L. McLaughlin, and Brenda Toler Williams

This book is designed to help school professionals serve as effective members of planning teams charged with developing inclusive education programs for students with disabilities and others at risk for school failure. The authors address the needs of both novice and experienced professionals. (IN105.4)

**Inclusion: A Service, Not a Place**  
By Alan Gartner and Dorothy Kerzner

The authors provide a road map for educators developing a whole-school approach to inclusive practices. The book includes a summary of IDEA and its implications. (IN152B) The companion video is also available. (IN152.A)

**Creating a Unified System: Integrating General and Special Education for the Benefit of All Students**  
Forum on Education 2004

White Church Elementary School in Kansas City uses an instructional coaching model guided by schoolwide data-based decision making and full integration of all school resources and supports to benefit all students. Their results are remarkable and captured on this 56-minute video resource. Research at White Church led to the development of the Schoolwide Applications Model (SAM) created by Dr. Wayne Sailor at the University of Kansas’ Beach Center and Oakland-based Blair Roger. (AL122.1)

**Instructional Practices for Students with Behavioral Disorders**  
By J. Ron Nelson, Gregory J. Benner, and Paul Mooney

This book presents a broad range of instructional programs and practices shown to be effective for students with behavioral disorders. Described are clear strategies for promoting mastery and fluency in early reading, writing, and math, while tailoring instruction to student needs. A special chapter outlines instructional management procedures for enhancing student engagement and promoting positive behavior. (Coming soon! Check the T/TAC library for availability.)

**Parenting with Positive Behavior Support**  
By Mame Hieneman, Karen Childs, and Jane Sergay

This is the practical guide that parents and professionals need to bring positive behavior support (PBS) to life. The book introduces a creative problem-solving approach to behavior and translates the research behind PBS into concrete strategies that everyone can understand and use. Readers will find easy-to-follow guidelines for identifying behaviors of concern, understanding the reasons behind the behaviors, and effectively intervening through three basic methods: preventing problems, replacing behavior, and managing consequences. (Coming soon! Check the T/TAC library for availability.)
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