

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Our administration encourages participation in staff development opportunities on a variety of topics. Varieties of staff development opportunities are necessary due to the nature and needs of our unique student population. Few district-sponsored workshops are appropriate for our student population and instructional levels. Even at the state level, opportunities are rare for the low incidence populations. Our school has used grant funds and special budget provisions to fund the highly specialized training classes. The scope of staff development targets several areas: **Medical; Due Process and Testing; Instructional Strategies/Standards Based Instruction; Applied Behavioral Analysis; Writing Individualized Education Plans, Crisis Intervention Training (CPI) and Advanced CPI and Recertification; Use of Adapted Technology and Assistive Technology in the Curriculum; Literacy; Webpage Training; PAS-T; Feeding and Swallowing; Safety Training; Faculty Book Study**

Medical: Staff development directed toward many topics is required for employees, including bus drivers and riders, in medical procedures. This need for extensive training evolved as our school enrolled students with severe medical issues such as the use of the magnet stimulator for students with a Vagus Nerve Implant. Some students require the administration of Diastat for seizure control and use of an Epi Pen for bee stings. All students receiving these medical procedures have protocols for the administration of the medications. Staff must understand how to read and administer the drugs as each student has a different plan. Several classrooms have additional medical staff; they must attend staff development planned by the district office for medical services. Medical team members recertify on a yearly basis for CPR, AED and First Aid. In addition, many staff development hours are used to coordinate planning with city emergency personnel and school staff members for the development of plans for lockdown, shelter in place, evacuation, etc.

Due Process and Testing: When students enter school, psychological and other pertinent tests are administered to assist with placement of a student. After the initial process, students receive a three year evaluation to determine if special education placement is appropriate and if any further testing is required. Information is gathered from staff members, a psychologist, the parents and any other personnel who would have information that would effect decisions concerning the student. Each year, staff submits an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) to parents for the next school year. Standardized tests and informal assessments are used to determine functional levels. Students in Grades 3 through 8 and age 15 are evaluated one time a year on the SC Alternate

Assessment. Intensive in-services are mandated for teachers that administer the test. Our District Teacher Leader and teachers new to the assessment attend full day training sessions provided by the state department. Annually, the District Test Coordinator for Alternate Assessments conducts a local training session for teachers involved in the administering the SC Alternate Assessment.

Instructional Strategies/Standards Based Instruction: The State Department of Education and IDEA mandates that all students participate in standards based instruction. In order to help our teachers adapt the state curriculum standards for our population and their classroom curriculum, certified teachers presented a sample of their curriculum, assistive technical supports, technology used in the classroom, beneficial web sites and instructionally fun activities to the teaching staff at weekly faculty meetings.

Applied Behavioral Analysis: Teachers participated in five hours of “Applied Behavior Analysis”. This training by a district autism specialist provided information about understanding behavior by analyzing environmental factors. The process involves systematic manipulation of antecedents and consequences to increase appropriate behaviors and decrease inappropriate behaviors.



Staff participates in the Applied Behavioral Analysis workshop.

Writing Individualized Education Plans (IEPs): Each school year, new teachers receive training in how to use the EXCENT program for writing IEPs. This program is online and can be accessed from home and school. The Program Facilitator provides spring updates for IEP reviews. IEP objectives are written jointly with all service providers to promote a team approach for instruction and evaluation. During annual spring updates, routine meetings are held to formulate educational objectives for every student for whom both classroom and related instructors will be responsible for the

instruction and accountability. This team effort measure should provide improved student achievement results. The Program Facilitator provided training to inform teachers of new state and federal regulations regarding transition services for students ages 13-21. The training focused on writing measurable post-secondary goals and objectives that address employment, post-secondary education/training and independent living.

Crisis Prevention Intervention Training (CPI), Advanced CPI and Re-certification:

The majority of our staff are certified in Crisis Prevention Intervention Training for appropriate management of student behavioral issues. Each year veteran staff receives recertification training at the beginning of the school year. New staff members attend initial training. This technique for managing behavior was selected by our school district as the most appropriate method and is included in specific IEPs. There is also a Crisis Prevention Intervention (CPI) Response Team. This seven member team has received additional training and certification on physical interventions. This team is called only after regular classroom interventions have been attempted.

Use of Adapted Technology and Assistive Technology in the Curriculum:

Washington Center is famous for its Assistive Technology and Augmentative Communication Programs. Within the past year, Washington Center has added sixteen Promethean boards. Currently, the school is raising money through fundraising and grants to add more Promethean boards. The school's goal is to have a board in every classroom and a floating one for related arts teachers to use. Washington Center has offered training sessions on both the SmartBoards and Promethean boards so that all staff can use the technology optimally for our students to learn. Technology changes very quickly and Washington Center acknowledges that workshops on technology need to be provided throughout the school year to keep up with the recent updates.

In addition, Washington Center is scheduled for district technology Refreshing to begin the Summer of 2011. With the replacement of all computers with updated program versions, faculty training will be recommended for beginning the subsequent school year.

Literacy: Washington Center students are encouraged to participate in the BIGmack Attack for Literacy, a home literacy program involving adapted readers and voice output devices. Students are welcomed and encouraged to use the Media Center. The PTA has awarded the media specialist over \$1000.00 in grants during the 2009-10 and 2010-11 school years. These grants have purchased books and other materials for not only teachers' use, but for student checkout, too. Washington Center has partnered with Christ

Church School, a local private school. Each week the eight-grade students come to Washington Center volunteering as Reading Buddies with our students.

Webpage Training: Under the guidance of our Web Master, our Website has expanded to include current news articles and newsletters with links to services and information. All teachers have the links to their pages with current information. Staff development is provided annually to cover the basics of creating a web page as well as designing newsletters and adding pictures.

PAS-T: In accordance with our school's PAS-T Evaluation, teachers can demonstrate professional development participation within the Professionalism section of the notebooks. Teachers were issued PAS-T notebooks and administrators provided review training in how to complete their portfolios. They were given timelines for all deadlines and placed on either Cycle 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5. New teachers were given intensive assistance in policies and procedures required by the district and specific for our school. The Administrative Assistant met with them regularly to provide support. New teachers were sent to district training for the ADEPT process. Mentors were assigned to beginning teachers.

Feeding and Swallowing: Many students at Washington Center have a variety of specialized feeding needs. Our Occupational and Speech Therapy departments came together to provide teachers with some important information about how to address the different needs. Some students have difficulty swallowing solid food; many require physician ordered feeding tubes or a modified food texture, such as blended or pureed. If a student exhibits signs of having swallowing difficulties, a referral may be made to have a swallow study completed by a physician. Adaptive equipment such as spoons, forks, bowls and plates are used to enhance a student's feeding independence. Teachers need to know and understand the different feeding needs within their class in order to help the student gain the highest level of independence that is possible; therefore, training and support are provided through the OT and Speech Therapy Departments.

Safety Training: All employees are required to view the mandatory safety training videos which are provided on the Greenville County Portal. These include Blood Borne Pathogens Exposure/Prevention, Greenville County Schools Code of Ethics, Material Safety Data Sheets, Sexual Harassment: Student Issues and Responses and General Safety Orientation. All employees are required to complete an online quiz covering the material. A Certificate of Completion is provided for the employee. Additional suggested (but not mandatory) training includes Back Injury and Lifting, Health

Emergencies, fire Extinguisher Safety and First Aid. Washington Center has compiled a specifically designed School Safety Manual which all staff are required to review yearly.

Faculty Book Study: Teachers participated in a six week book study by reading “Leading with Kindness” by William F. Baker and Michael O’Malley. The objective of the book study was to build leadership skills through thoughtful analysis of productive qualities. Individual and group discussions were held at faculty meetings with input from both administration and staff.

Professional Development and In-Service Requirements for Teachers and Para-Professionals: The Greenville County School District provides a variety of professional development in-services throughout the school year. All teachers must participate in a minimum of 24 hours of professional development in the course of the school year, and they may include workshops, in-services and coursework from a college or university. At least twelve of the required twenty-four hours will be offered by the school. The time spent in district trainings will be credited to a teacher in the form of exchange hours or toward teacher certificate renewal. The district provides ten days set aside for professional development and workdays, without students present. During those days, traditionally, time is set aside for work in classrooms, instruction preparation, updating progress reports and IEP’s or to attend planned in-services.

Para-professionals are required to attend five of the ten professional development days throughout the school year. Four of these days are at the beginning of the school year; they assist their designated teacher with classroom set up and various duties in preparation of the first day of school for students. All para-professionals must be deemed “Highly Qualified” as defined in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. In order to comply an applicant must possess an associate degree from an accredited college, have 60 semester hours from an accredited college or have passed a state approved Praxis exam.

Review of Staff Development:

After a review of the previous School Strategic Plan, it was apparent that the staff development planning team listened to what staff had to say, what surveys indicated and were able to add requested components. School sponsored in-service sessions were held to benefit all staff members. Para-Professionals were offered staff development opportunities during monthly meetings. During faculty meetings, teachers shared various teaching techniques that they found useful in their classroom. Our faculty was cohesive in priorities for staff development.

A survey of staff development opportunities produced information and results that influenced our school vision and plans. Sessions attended included CPI Refresher Training, Autism/Applied Behavior Analysis, Promethean Board Training, “Leading with Kindness” book study with classroom teachers, and various internet instructional opportunities. Teachers responded that staff development sessions were attended per requirement, through interest and to enhance instructional skills. The staff survey requested in-service opportunities be offered for augmentative communication, technology updates and advancements, practical adaptations for South Carolina standards, and behavioral interventions. (A copy of the staff survey is included at the end of this section).

The following staff development requests have been met:

1. Behavior management strategies and characteristics of behavior impaired syndromes (Applied Behavior Analysis in-service)
2. Instructional strategies for the severe/profound population (faculty sharing different strategies during meetings)
3. Information regarding the diagnosed syndromes of our students (located in most PAS-T notebooks)
4. Office, custodial, nursing and kitchen staff were sent to all required in-services.
5. All staff completed required on-line Safety Training.

6. All staff members were trained in the district-sponsored Integrity program.

Research

Because the students enrolled at Washington Center have many physical and intellectual challenges, professional development is based on enabling the staff to better serve and teach. Many of our students are medically fragile; therefore, training on their differing needs is vital. Training in areas such as gastric tube feeding is essential to student welfare. Cortical Vision Impairment (CVI) is a major concern for our staff and informative presentations conducive to learning for this population have been beneficial.

“Research has substantiated that children with CVI are not malingering, do not have inherent behavior problems, and are not inherently poorly motivated: their ability to use their vision really DOES fluctuate across time and situations. The literature has further made clear that the unusual attending and gaze behaviors seen in these children are used for a reason, predominantly as attempts to self-compensate for visual difficulties. Most importantly, research has incontrovertibly established that some level of improvement can nearly always be attained in the visual capabilities of children with cortical visual impairment. In light of these findings, it becomes critically urgent that service professionals recognize the relevant symptomology of CVI and provide appropriate and timely interventions for these students.” Swift, S. H., Davidson, R. C., & Weems, L. J. (2008). *Cortical Impairment in Children: Presentation, Intervention, and Prognosis in Educational Settings* Teaching Exceptional Children Plus, 4(5) Article 4. Retrieved from <http://escholarship.bc.edu/education/tecplus/vol4/iss5/art4>

Behavior and communication issues also drive our staff development plans. Training in Functional Behavior Assessment and Applied Behavioral Analysis gives the staff the tools needed to understand when, why, and how students have behavior manifestations. The staff is able to determine what situations to avoid and how to respond to students. Training in behavior assessment and actually assessing student behavior meets Individualized Education Plans requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Act and South Carolina State Department of Education mandates. Crisis Prevention Intervention (CPI) is supported by the Greenville County School District with staff training as a viable strategy to manage student aggression.

“The Nonviolent Crisis Intervention program is a safe, harmless behavior management system designed to aid human service professionals in the management of disruptive

behaviors and assault of people, even during the most violent moments. It has been developed and taught by the Crisis Intervention Institute, a training organization devoted to training staff in the safe management of potentially violent individuals.” Crisis Prevention Institute, Inc. (2005). Participant Workbook for the Nonviolent Crisis Intervention Training Program. Brookfield, WI: CPI, Crisis Prevention Institute, Inc

Best practices in Special Education indicate that students with special needs learn more effectively with repetition and technology. There are numerous sources of research advocating the need for these best practices. P. P. Godt applauds technology as a “.....simple strategy to encourage emergent literacy in young children with disabilities.” Godt, P. P. (1999) *A Simple Strategy to Encourage Emergent Literacy in Young Children with Disabilities* Teaching Exceptional Children, 32(2) 38-44. In two additional educational journals that specifically address the needs of students with disabilities, Hutinger advocates the use of technology as an instructional technique for students, especially for those students with emergent literacy needs as an effective tool for drill/practice and individual interaction and reinforcement. Students enjoy working with technology since interaction between student and technology provides immediate feedback and interaction. Hutinger, P. B. (Fall, 2006) *Establishing and Maintaining an Early Childhood Emergent Literacy Technology Curriculum* Journal of Special Education Technology, 21(4), 39-54. Hutinger, P. (1996). *Computer Application in Programs for Young children with Disabilities: Recurring Themes. Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities*, 11(2), 105-114.

The Syracuse Community – Referenced Curriculum Guide for Students with Moderate and Severe Disabilities (Ford, Schnorr, Meyer, Davern, Black, & Dempsey, 1989) states that students learn best in the natural environment in which targeted skills will be used. Skills mastered in artificial environment such as a classroom do not efficiently transfer to the environment in which they will be used on a daily basis. The standard reference for the importance of Community-Based Instruction is The Syracuse Curriculum Guide. This curriculum is firmly in support of the feasibility of instructing disabled students in the natural environment community. On that premise, Washington Center students are regularly involved in Community Based Instruction as an activity in functional community participation. Task analyzed data collection and monitoring are crucial components this curriculum.

Content

Our student achievement data indicated needs in several areas. Instruction in task-analyzing objective skills was given along with creation of a resource notebook of suggested step-by-step skills to achieve an objective. IEPs for next year will be written so that goals and objectives will be task analyzed. Opportunities were provided for related service providers to meet with classroom teachers to update and analyze individual student progress. Reference notebooks of Modified Standards and Guidelines, standards-based instructional strategies, resources and teaming with related instructors have provided methods to improve student alternate assessment scores. A process for daily communication between instructors and parents has been implemented involving voice output messages and a notebook system.

Staff has been provided with a system of input into the school's decision-making process. The School Advisory Committee reviewed and updated the School Strategic Plan and provided guidance in developing goals for the next 5 years. Monthly meetings of the chairpersons presented an opportunity to share strategic plan information and discuss directions for future plans.

In addition to focusing on student needs and learning, we needed to use professional development time to analyze how we work and communicate with each other. Since our school emphasizes teamwork in instruction, it is vital that staff members work cooperatively. We decided to include norms for professional behaviors and attitudes in our survey. The purpose was not only to create a list of expected positive attitudes, but also to provide an opportunity for self-analysis. Once these professional behaviors were expressed, we noticed an improvement on campus for inter-personal relationships involving staff and students. We agreed that these expectations would be the primary catapult for driving our vision. Our list of expected and valued norms for behavior follows:

- Treat students with dignity and courtesy.
- Respect all co-workers, expressing concern with willingness to work out problems.
- Communicate courtesy and respect to students, co-workers and parents.

- Work as a team, sharing ideas and smiles.

Impact

Progress in student achievement has resulted from our emphasis on relevant staff development. Reviews of SC-Alternate scores indicate that teachers have an improved their understanding of standards instruction and the testing process. Teachers attended the workshops, sought assistance and shared instructional ideas. Scheduled IEP updates show that more objectives are nearing mastery. Objectives are more appropriate due to the process of breaking down tasks into smaller increments. Team planning and instruction have resulted in a cohesive teaching approach.

Classroom teachers read, “Leading with Kindness” by William F. Baker and Michael O’Malley, and participated in a six week book study, lead by the Washington Center’s principal, Dr. Wanda Brownlee. The study has resulted in improved professional and inter-personal behaviors and a greater knowledge of the importance of professionalism, leadership and compassion in the classroom and throughout the school.

Several teachers have reported impressive success with students using the strategies and programs acquired from this year’s professional development. Washington Center has currently added new Promethean boards for classroom teachers. Promethean board training was conducted for beginners and for advanced users to enhance our students’ learning. These classes have helped our teachers have a better understanding of how technology can improve students’ learning.

Summary of Progress

Our school presents a treasure of knowledge and experience. In our unique situation, we are searching for relevant opportunities to expand our current practices. We have realized how research and data analysis can drive investigation into improvement. We have updated training in assistive technology, instructional strategies and behavior management strategies to assist the needs of our students. Focusing as a team for student achievement with open-mindedness for innovations has proven productive. Our shared vision and plan has been our inspiration to seek methods for improvement. We are a great school; we believe that we can only get better!

Next Steps

Our in-service opportunities have helped to implement our continued vision with students benefiting in the process. We have decided to continue and embellish our current practices:

- Provide on-going support for the SC Alternate Assessment criteria and administration procedures concentrating on improving scores in Social Studies and preparation for meeting the new high school Biology standards.
- Continue IEP co-authorization, instruction and accountability
- Continue the initiative for writing goals and objectives in a task analyzed format
- Create more time for staff development and the sharing of productive in-school instructional units and strategies
- Provide training sessions in alternative/augmentative communication strategies for our severe/profound population
- Conduct training for staff in the use of the updated computer programs resulting from the district Technology Refreshing.
- Survey results pinpoint requests for training in the following:
 - Behavior management strategies in the classroom
 - Additional technology workshops that can enhance our faculty's use of technology in the classroom
 - Additional training with the use of Microsoft Excel.
 - Additional Promethean Board training

- Stress reduction workshops
- Practical adaptations of SC Standards for Washington Center population
- Augmentative communication workshops
- Transition workshops
- Advanced Teaching Techniques for Washington Center population
- Regularly evaluate the impact of professional development on student achievement
- Provide follow-up training on Functional Behavior Assessments, writing BIPs, and behavioral strategies in the classroom
- Continue initial and on-going support for new staff members
- Provide on-going training for creating and updating teacher web pages
- Provide future book studies utilizing books that advocate self improvement, professionalism and leadership in the workplace