



Starting Middle School is a transition that can be traumatic for many students. Social cliques are forming, hormones are raging, extra curricular activities are competing with academics, and teenagers are struggling for independence. These events that face all families are particularly challenging for parents of students with developmental delays. How does the added emphasis on curriculum impact the abilities of students with special needs to be included with their peers?

To respond to this question, the *Parent Education Advocacy and Leadership (PEAL) Center* in Pittsburgh, PA, developed an audio conference series this year: “Middle School Inclusion: Making it Happen.” Speakers from several states covered a variety of topics. All of sessions, except Judy Gran’s, are archived, along with the speakers’ PowerPoints, handouts, and/or articles at www.pealcenter.org. Just click on “Middle School Series.”

The Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Judy Gran, Esq., of the Public Interest Law Center of Philadelphia (www.pilcop.org) stated emphatically that school districts must consider “the full range of supplementary aids and services during IEP development.” These include curriculum modification, teacher training, behavioral support, and an instructional assistant, as well as the effects of inclusion on non-disabled peers.

Inclusion works! It’s a civil rights issue. Research consistently shows that students with all types of disabilities do better academically and socially when included in regular education classes, and that they MUST be included to become productive adults.

Co-Teaching

Lisa A Dieker, Ph.D., of the University of Central Florida examined several innovative co-teaching models, including:

- *one teacher lead, the other support.*
- *station teaching* – divided content, shared but separate responsibilities.
- *parallel teaching* – same content with instruction delivered to half the class.
- *alternative teaching* – one large group, one small. Small group pre-teaches. Reinforces or re-teaches large group.
- *team teaching* – shared instruction with coordinated activities in one lesson. Mutual trust and commitment are essential with co-planning the cornerstone for success.

These coordinated efforts bring about gains not only in academics, but also in behavioral/social and work habits. Two helpful sites are www.powerof2.org and “Co-teaching Lesson Plan Book” at www.nprinc.com. Dr. Dieker offered many practical exercises on how to help the regular education teacher imbed IEP goals into the daily curriculum, including her “IEP Snapshots” and “General Education Curriculum Snapshots.”

Life after the School Bell Rings

Steven Hinkle, a college student with a disability, delivered a most powerful presentation sharing his personal experiences through middle and high school. His message was the importance of developing a social life that is connected to school, and what the schools **can**, and **need to do** to make a social life happen for students with special needs.

Practical Modifications and Accommodations

Rebecca Bond and Liz Castagnera, support teachers from San Diego County, CA, shared a wealth of information about practical accommodations and modifications they have used successfully for years including:

- *Handouts:* Watch layout (ample white space), font style (no serifs), and size (14 point +).
- *Directions:* Use simple terminology, bulleted instructions, examples, read aloud.
- *Assignment Options:*
 - Same assignment: fewer items with IEP objectives.
 - Streamlined assignment: reduce size, retain key points.
- *Tests and Quizzes:* Limit to one or two types of questions.
 - Multiple choice: Decrease choices, arrange vertically, eliminate “all,” “none,” and negative wording.
 - True/False: One fact only; clear and precise questions.
 - Fill-in-the-blanks: Only one blank per question.
 - Matching: Definitions on left, responses on right.

Using Paraprofessionals

Michael Giangreco, Ph.D., of the University of Vermont Center on Disability and Community Inclusion believes that while paraprofessionals can benefit many students, they can also be impediments to learning. Overdependence on paraprofessionals can adversely affect socialization with peers, and academic growth of students with disabilities. Some feel stigmatized when receiving paraprofessional support.

For students with behavioral problems, paraprofessional support put in place to assist them may, in fact, provoke behavioral outbursts. Minimize unintended, undesirable effects by placing students with disabilities in the center of the classroom, not on the periphery, to encourage ongoing access to teacher and peers.

Role of Families

Diana Autin, Executive Director of the Statewide Parent Advocacy Network of New Jersey, gave families multiple ways to connect to their school community, to be active members within the school, and to be ongoing members of the evaluation, IEP, and instructional team. Ideas included:

- Share information re student’s strengths and learning style.
- Set and communicate high levels of expectations.
- Participate in school, community, and district activities.
- Support learning at home. Limit screen time, utilize local library, practice real life skills like cooking and gardening.

Sexuality and Social Life – Jim Del Bianco

Mr. Del Bianco gave a frank overview of how adolescence and puberty are just as much a part of special students’ lives as any other young peoples’. Readers are referred to Jim’s article “Educating Children about Sexuality” in *New Developments* 8:3,4.

To view presentations in their entirety, and PEAL’s extensive training and advocacy opportunities, go to www.pealcenter.org.

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