

# **SPECIAL** *Services*

Newsletter



**Explore our  
Premiere Issue!**



FALL 2022

## Editors

Dr. Lystrea Crooks

Tamara Jean Jaques

\*

## Sub-Editor/Art Director

Catherine Payne-Lewis

\*

## Contributors

Dr. Karla Rivera

Asim Mubashir

Shelmith Wanja Mwangi

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Tamara Jean-Jaques, Supervisor

Alicia Allen, Secretary to the Director

Flores Suffrard, Secretary

Arianna Williams, Secretary

Marcus Hackett, RITE Officer

Donna Yelverton, CST Secretary

Christine Cook, CST Secretary

John Fulweiler, Speech Specialist

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Deanna Kobus, Team A

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Idania Morel, CST Team C

Aja Smith, CST Team C

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Ilene Kostman, CST Team D

Gina Marocco, CST Team D

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Shari Kantrow, CST Team E

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# SPECIAL *Services*

Newsletter



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## *A Note From*



Dr. Lystrea Crooks  
Director



Ms. Tamara Jean Jacques  
Supervisor

**As we welcome the change of the season and the new school year, we want to thank you All, for your hard work and dedication to our scholars. You have worked tirelessly to ensure that your scholars are receiving the best education possible. Your dedication and commitment make our jobs easier. We are glad to have you All as members of the Special Education Team and most importantly members of our Irvington School family. Please, know that we are all in this together and collectively we are striving to build our community one student at a time. We Can Do It!**

**Our goal this year in the Special Education Department is to ensure that all students are included. As a department we strive to provide our scholars with tools and supports so that they can become fully included and be successful alongside their general education peers. It is our expectation that you are preparing and transiting learners daily. We have a plethora of inclusive resources within the school district that can give you the guidance and assistance needed with transiting your students within the LRE. Please, do not hesitate to reach out to get the support you are in need of. Thank you, for all that you do. Your dedication and sacrifice for our scholars have not gone unnoticed and it is much appreciated.**

*-Dr. Lystrea Crooks & Ms. Tamara Jean Jacques*



# We

*Appreciate You*

We appreciate all of our  
teachers, staff, and colleagues.

Thank you for your support!

# Mental Health & Mindfulness:

## Making the Connection

BY DR. KARLA RIVERA



Since the outset of the pandemic, Americans have reported that their mental health has suffered. According to The American Psychological Association (polling in 2022), 63% of adults feel their lives have been forever changed by the pandemic. In addition, adults report widespread grief, loss, economic hardship, and concerns for children’s development as constant stressors. 87% of adults agreed it feels like there have been a constant stream of crises over the past two years, and 73% felt overwhelmed by the number of crises affecting the world right now.

As a country we’ve seen greater reports of depression and anxiety. Poor coping strategies developed that have been difficult to break- for example, many adults report that they developed poor eating habits or drank more to cope, and have struggled to return to pre-pandemic healthier habits.

In addition, most Americans polled (69%) reported greater social isolation- they have gone longer without seeing loved ones than ever before, and for many (58%), some relationships became strained or broken. It’s no wonder that even as we approach the third year mark since the pandemic began, life often continues to feel like a struggle. If you are feeling stressed, and overwhelmed or generally less happy than you once were- you’re not alone!

So, where does this leave us? How can we begin to be restored to greater mental health? Is it possible? The answer is yes, and research tells us that mindfulness can be a powerful tool in helping us find greater physical and emotional health.

**73%**  
**OF PEOPLE**  
**ARE AFFECTED**  
**BY WORLD CRISES**

What does mindfulness mean? Mindfulness means, simply put- living in the present moment. It means focusing on what is happening in and around you at the present moment without judging it as “good” or “bad”. It’s taking note of what is happening to ourselves physically (e.g., What am I seeing, hearing, smelling around me, how does my body feel, what is it doing?). It is also taking stock emotionally (e.g., What am I feeling?). It is being open and receptive to the present moment and not focusing on yesterday or tomorrow.

This sounds simple enough, but in our high pressure, technology saturated, socially and emotionally demanding world, it can be extremely challenging to be mindful. Our days are often filled with “mindless” activities- meaning we are only paying partial attention to anything we do.

For example, how often have you been emailing and texting all at once? Have you found yourself only half listening to what a loved one is saying at home because you’re distracted by your phone, chores or other tasks? How often have you reached out for that next potato chip before you’ve even swallowed the first, or scarfed down a meal in your car on the way to that next destination? How often did you have one drink too many, because you weren’t really paying attention, or lost sleep because you couldn’t set aside your phone or stop bingeing that show? What about when you’ve misplaced your keys or phone when you’ve JUST had them?

# Mental Health & Mindfulness:

Making the Connection

CONTINUED



BY DR. KARLA RIVERA

These describe ways we all find ourselves being mindlessly distracted throughout the day. These behaviors can easily lead to feelings of stress and anxiety and a general sense of being on autopilot- not fully taking in any experience.

However, we are also at any given moment distracted by our own thoughts. We worry about what happened yesterday or perhaps something that hurt us long ago, or we are agonizing about tomorrow. We are stuck looking in the rearview mirror or preoccupied with what is around the next turn, and we are missing out on our lives in the present at great emotional cost.

How can we become more mindful? This requires a commitment to our mental health but also developing mindful practice as a habit. Just like a negative habit can become entrenched, a positive one can too!

We will need to be very intentional about practicing mindfulness. It can help to have a mindfulness routine. The good news is that mindfulness can be practiced at any time, while doing anything, by simply paying attention to the moment without judging it. This can take many forms.

You can begin with ten or twenty minutes of mindful practice- you can choose to do this at any point during your day. You can wash dishes mindfully, sit down and eat a meal mindfully (at a table, without a device), go for a mindful walk (really focusing on the sights and sounds around you and sensations within you), or even work mindfully (no multitasking).



You can also set aside a block of time each day for mindful practice through such things as yoga and meditation. Most of us will need help and support to get started, but there are many mindfulness apps, as well as guided meditations available on youtube at no cost. Journaling can also be a powerful tool when practicing mindfulness, it can be used to record what is happening for us but also our thoughts and feelings about it.

Mindfulness practice allows you to bring into greater focus your thoughts and feelings. It helps us to accept what we may be feeling and to look at it head on. Oftentimes, we look away from difficult thoughts or feelings without realizing how much they are controlling us by affecting our behavior unconsciously. Mindfulness allows us to really become self aware, and to examine how our experiences are impacting us. This reduces our need to cope with difficult emotions and stressors in unhealthy ways. Begin your mindful practice in whatever way works for you, and you will begin to notice many benefits by being present in your life, including greater happiness and fulfillment.

Acceptance

Be in the Now

MINDFULNESS

# TEACHER TIPS FOR STAYING AHEAD OF IEP DEADLINES

By *Shelmith Wanjia Mwangi*



## 45 DAYS BEFORE

Contact families, case managers, and general education teachers (for inclusion placements) to solicit and exchange input through phone calls, emails or virtual meetings about the student's progress. Getting input earlier can aid in writing the IEP seamlessly, thus alleviating the additional pressure that comes with writing quality IEPs. Teachers should also take time to review quantitative data to draft statements on student progress.

## 30 DAYS BEFORE

Take time to engage in writing the sections of your IEP. Write the sections in a meaningful way using numeric data to support your statements.

## 2 WEEKS BEFORE

Connect with families to get their input on your draft (IEP Best Practices Guide, 2019) and ask them questions about any topics that you need more information about (e.g., parent concerns in subject areas, student strengths and challenges). This step reduces the possible concerns that might be raised by parents during the meeting, enabling time optimization.

## DAY OF

Before the meeting, special education teachers should ensure that all the needed documents are organized (e.g., student work, progress data) in a sharable format to make any presentation seamless. Moreover, educators should consider limiting jargon by using parent-friendly language and provide a one-page, quick reference guide for any acronyms or terminology when appropriate (Diliberto & Brewer, 2012; IEP Best Practices Guide, 2019).

## WHERE DO I GO FOR HELP?

**Teachers can receive help** on creating meaningful IEPs by enrolling in the EDPLAN monitoring track program. Special Services has organized an opportunity for teachers to organize, and plan for meetings using EDPlan software. Contact Tamara Jean-Jacques at [tjeanjacques@irvington.k12.nj.us](mailto:tjeanjacques@irvington.k12.nj.us) to learn more about how this powerful tool can work for you in your classroom.

### References:

DeLussey, S. (2020b, June 23). Streamlining the IEP Process (for Teachers) - The Intentional IEP. The Intentional IEP -. Retrieved September 30, 2022, from <https://www.theintentionaliep.com/streamlining-the-iep-process-for-teachers/>  
Diliberto, J., & Brewer, D. (2012). Six Tips for Successful IEP Meetings. TEACHING Exceptional Children, 44(4), 30–37. <https://doi.org/10.1177/004005991204400403>  
IEP Best Practices Guide. (2019). nsseo.org. Retrieved September 30, 2022, from <https://www.nsseo.org/wp-content/uploads/IEP-BP-Guide-Updated-2018-2019.pdf>

# BECOME IEP EFFICIENT

**NEXT  
SESSION**  
MONDAY 11/14  
@ 3PM

## JOIN THE EDPLAN MONITORING TRACK COHORT

- \*Receive 1 hr PD
- \*Meetings are monthly
- \*Meetings are 100% virtual

“

EdPlan monitoring track is a more effective way to have IEP data tracked to the goals of the student!

”



## SIGN UP TODAY!

Contact Tamara Jean-Jacques  
Special Services Supervisor  
[tjeanjacques@irvington.k12.nj.us](mailto:tjeanjacques@irvington.k12.nj.us)

# COMMUNITY BASED INSTRUCTION

## C.B.I.



# LIFE ENDEAVORS

C.B.I. PROGRAM @ Irvington Public Schools



# COMMUNITY BASED INSTRUCTION

By Catherine Payne-Lewis

To improve or enhance functional skill ability in High School students with disabilities, connections between subject content and real-world application must be made (Noddings, 2013). According to the National Center for Special Education Research (2015), students with disabilities are less likely to attend and complete college, obtain a job, earn competitive pay, open a checking account, or live independently after graduation. Special Services hosts the Community Based Instruction (CBI) program, an interdisciplinary program that aims to increase functional capabilities in individuals with disabilities (ages 18-21), giving them the tools to become competitive contributors to society.

The CBI Program at Irvington public schools is called **Life Endeavors**. It is housed in Irvington High School and consists of an apartment with a functional kitchen and living room. **Kimberly Petcos**, a passionate teacher and transition coordinator, saw a need for this kind of support system and engaged in extensive research on CBI programs, ultimately leading to its launch here in Irvington during the 2019/ 2020 school year. In addition to Petcos, Life Endeavors teachers include Keith Kowalski and Lauren Greenfield with job coaches Cynthia Roth and Justin Bonds.

Life Endeavors tailors instruction based on its students' academic needs and interests. Students express their interests regarding different work profiles and career paths. Students then work on the skills they need to become successful independent adults. Some daily activities that participants engage in are:

- \***Cleaning and Organization skills**
- \***Time Management**
- \***Money management**
- \***Recreational activities**

Life Endeavors provides students with opportunities to enhance or develop job skills, work ethic, and self-esteem. Some places where students have gained extensive training include Ocean State Job Lot, with future collaborations to include Summit Medical Group. Petcos is diligently working on creating exciting placements that can create jobs for her students. **"It's a great program... They are building references and gaining work experience at their skill level. They love it!" said Petcos.**

Life Endeavors is an outlet for Teachers, students, and the community to come together as a team. At Irvington High, it runs clubs and fundraisers. It also assists with district events such as the Special Olympics. Life Endeavors is providing inclusive opportunities for its students in district and beyond as it garners respect locally.

Community-based instruction is a tool to assist students with disabilities in transitioning from High School to independent living. In Irvington, Life Endeavors seeks to provide differentiated educational needs for adult students with disabilities. Life Endeavors' expected outcome is to prepare students to become successful adults post-graduation who can live meaningful lives while showcasing skills learned from jobs they love.

#### References

- National Center for Special Education Research. (2015). National longitudinal transition study 2. Retrieved from <http://www.nlts2.org/reports/>.
- Noddings, N. (2013). The false promise of the paideia: A critical review of the paideia proposal. In D. J. Flinders & S. J. Thornton. (Eds.), *The curriculum studies reader* (pp. 187-194). New York, NY: Routledge.

# 3 Ways to Support Paraprofessionals in the classroom

By Asim Mubashir

**Paraprofessionals are the connectors of instruction in the classroom** (Chopra, 2004).

The only way to ensure the provision of a comprehensive support program for children with disabilities is through comprehensive collaboration between teachers and paraprofessionals. Collaboration allows for varied expertise and perspectives about students to be shared among those responsible for managing students behavior and learning. Teachers can offer their support to paraprofessionals by doing the following:



## 1. Create Lasting Relationships

**It is imperative that special education teachers foster and maintain** strong collaborative relationships with paraprofessionals in order to provide high-quality education for students with special needs. Paraprofessionals are essential members of the teaching team (Biggs et al., 2016) and a healthy relationship can only be created if paraprofessionals feel valued and respected. Therefore it is important to include paraprofessionals in planning, team meetings, troubleshooting, and any other decision making where you feel their input would be valuable.

## 2. Manage time effectively

**Teachers and paraprofessionals have many daily responsibilities that** limit the time available for them to truly engage and communicate with each other. Finding time to collaborate requires teachers and paraprofessionals to manage their time wisely and make time for collaboration. This can be done by creating lists throughout the day of questions and concerns to share later and schedule time every day to address these issues. While teachers and paraprofessionals must be creative to find the time to collaborate, their collaborative efforts will benefit their relationship with one another and their students.

# 3 Ways to Support Paraprofessionals in the classroom cont.



“Ensure the provision of all the resources and materials that paraprofessionals need to fulfill their duty.”

## 3. Provide relevant and meaningful materials

**The primary role of a teacher is to provide the paraprofessional with a clear vision, direction and purpose. Doing so enables paraprofessionals to have an understanding of their role, responsibilities, and the goals they are expected to achieve. Additionally, it is the responsibility of the teacher to ensure the provision of all the resources and materials that paraprofessionals need to fulfill their duty and make them readily available. Teachers need to equip the paraprofessional with daily plans, activities, and “to-do” items at the start of each day. Last minute or impromptu changes tend to stress both the teacher and the paraprofessional and restrict their preparation time (Fitzell, 2021).**

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Biggs, E., Gilson, C. B., & Carter, E. W. (2016). Accomplishing more together. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, 41(4), 256-272. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1540796916665604>

Chopra, R. V., Sandoval-Lucero, E., Aragon, L., Bernal, C., de Balderas, H. B., & Carroll, D. (2004). The Paraprofessional Role of Connector. *Remedial and Special Education*, 25(4), 219-231. <https://doi.org/10.1177/07419325040250040501>

Fitzell, S. (2021, March 25). Collaborating with paraprofessionals. Susan Fitzell. Retrieved August 29, 2022, from <https://susanfitzell.com/collaborating-with-paraprofessionals/>

# Interview With



***Roxanne  
Pinnock***

New Master Teacher

# Interview

WITH

## Roxanne Pinnock

# Master Teacher

Q. Why use token economies?

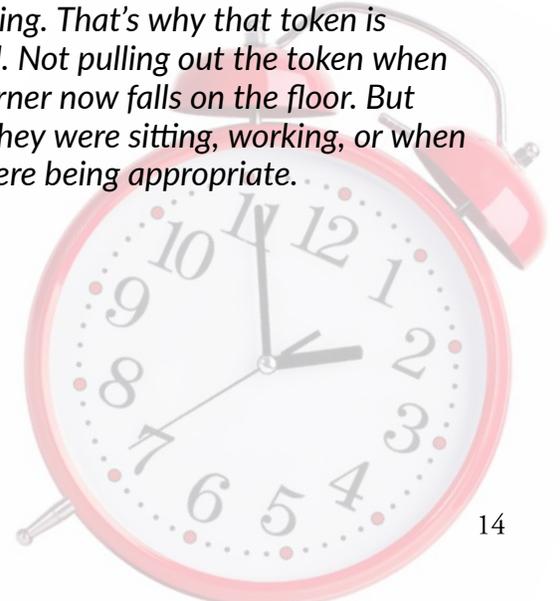
Token economies are a **payment system for our learners** and everyone likes to get paid for doing things. It's a way for learners to get rewarded for doing something that they don't necessarily like.

Q. How can token economies be fun?

Define fun, what's fun? You know what's fun to you might not be fun for the learner. There's so many different options to choose from. Some of them are visual, some of them are auditory, or kinesthetic. Once, I had a learner that I used a jar of marbles for. The reinforcers were delayed. The student would have to have a jar filled with marbles by the end of the day (2:30pm) and if achieved, they would earn pizza or ice cream. At the end of every assignment, which was no more than 20 minutes, he'll take a marble, put it in the jar, and hear the marble make a "clunk" sound. The student liked the sound and feel of the marbles. Most importantly, he was able to pair it with the time on the clock where we showed him what 2:30 looks like. When the jar was filled to the point where the green line was, he knew he could get the treat he was working for throughout the day.

Q. What about token system generalization?

Somehow we seem to forget that students need the same level of reinforcement system on the same schedule, which is if you had it on a 20 minute schedule in the classroom, why wouldn't it be on a 20 minute schedule in the hallway or outside of the class classroom? It looks the same, it's just **in** a different setting. **So I think the biggest thing that teachers need to remember is generalization.** You have a treatment and if you're reinforcing behaviors, and you're using a reinforcement system, it should look the same across all settings such as walking outside, sitting or waiting in the cafeteria appropriately. When students are doing the skills that we want to see more of, they should be reinforced so that we can see that behavior increasing. That's why that token is needed. Not pulling out the token when the learner now falls on the floor. But when they were sitting, working, or when they were being appropriate.



# Middle School Life Skills Program



**ELIZABETH CHOMKO**

I am excited for the life skills room as it is something we have been planning for a long time. Now that the space is available, I look forward to adding this to our program. One of my main goals for the students in this program is to build independence. Through the life skills program, I hope to teach students domestic and home skills like making a bed, doing dishes, cooking an easy meal, and how to clean. I already have programs in place where the students take care of our classroom by sweeping, vacuuming, and wiping tables. Now we can take these skills to a whole new level. I am surprised to hear that we are also getting a washer and dryer. I realized that when I got a box full of laundry supplies. All students need to know these skills, but our students with disabilities have a harder time learning these skills for many reasons. Through this program, we can explicitly teach these skills and help plan for independent living for their future.



# Middle School Life Skills Program

Q. and A.  
• WITH •



**DR. KATHRYN BUSCHAN**

Kathryn Buschan has a PhD in Special Education Leadership and is excited about the implementation of the life skills program with the Autistic Special Program at University Middle School as it relates to her dissertation work regarding collaboration and dissemination of information to improve student outcomes. We sat down with Dr. Buschan to discuss the middle school life skills program.

## What is happening in your classroom with the life skills program?

The life skills middle school program is a pilot program to assist learners with learning functional skills. This year we are going to have a full kitchen installed in our class so we can teach some basic cooking skills and learn about safety in the kitchen and in the household. We're also going to be teaching cleaning skills, such as how to sweep, vacuum, mop, and doing laundry. In the coming months, a full kitchen will be installed in my classroom to assist the learners with learning, so I can't wait! I am looking forward to it.

## How are you planning to teach the skills?

Basically what we're going to be doing is a task analysis... breaking it down into smaller small pieces for the students to master that concept.





**DR. KATHRYN BUSCHAN**

CONTINUED

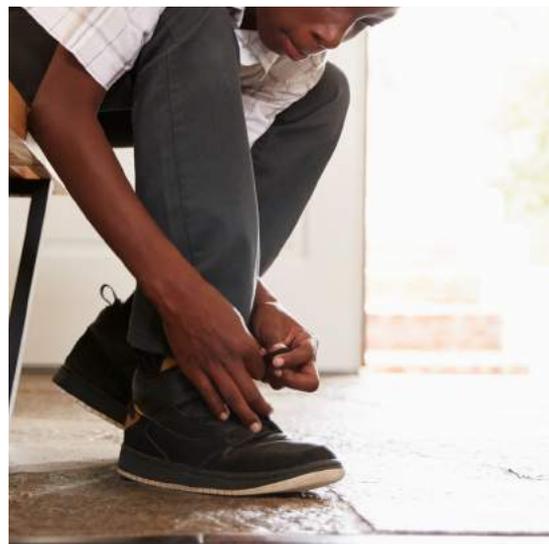
**Q. What are your hopes for this program? How is this going to be different from what the middle school department has done in the past?**

I think it makes it meaningful for the kids because they need to be taught life skills before they exit the public school system. These are skills they need to learn how to do in school and at home. Many of these skills can then be transferred to a job. Thus, leading to more independence. The hope is for them to be able to get a part time job, maybe a full time job in a restaurant or market as a cashier or any other position where they can contribute to their community. We want to set them up with long term goals so that they can have better outcomes.

“  
So the hope is  
that some of  
them will be able  
to get a part  
time job...  
”

**Q. Why do you think it's so important for districts like ours and departments like ours to really consider the thoughts of the parents?**

They know their kids a lot better than we do and they're also starting to think about long term goals for their children. They don't want to keep doing everything for their child. A lot of our kids can be more independent than they are. So this program will help build some of those independence skills. For example, one of the things I started working on last week was teaching my students how to tie their shoes. I'm not going to be bending down all the time (laughs). One of the paraprofessionals showed me a really great video showing how to "tie shoes" and one kid already mastered it and we are working on the other kids too. Our 6th & 7th graders have difficulty with tying their shoes. While it's more of an OT thing, parents do want them to know how to do it. Even though we think of school just being focused on academics and social emotional growth, these are life skills that our kids need to know too and our parents are really going to love it!



# Special Services Teacher Spotlight



## CHANTE ODOM

**Inclusion Teacher**  
**Mount Vernon Elementary**

Chante Odom is a K-5 inclusion teacher for Mount Vernon Elementary. She has been teaching for 9 years with a BA in Early Education from Clark Atlanta University. As a native of Irvington, she attended Florence Ave, Union Middle and Irvington High. Ms. Odom is now thrilled to finally work in Irvington. We are so excited to welcome her!

### WHAT DO YOU LIKE MOST ABOUT CO-TEACHING?

I like to collaborate. I like to bounce my ideas off another teacher, seeing what their approach is and how I can incorporate that into my teaching style. I think it's really good for the kids to have two different styles in the classroom. Co-teaching also allows for children to feel comfortable to ask for help because they feel like they have more support.

### WHAT IS YOUR TEACHING MISSION??

My mission is just to make sure that students feel comfortable with learning! One thing that I pride myself on is allowing students to feel like they can voice their truth or speak up for themselves and be a master of their own learning. Having students learn how to say "This is hard.", "Can I take a break?" or "Can I help this person... I've noticed they need help?" can help them build confidence. If you don't feel confident in something, it's a little bit harder to learn something new, especially if you're telling yourself that you can't do it. So teaching students that sometimes things are going to be hard, and helping them to understand their support systems can allow for them to be comfortable to say, "I don't know this", or "I need help", while boosting confidence, character, and learning.

### HOW TO ADDRESS CHALLENGING BEHAVIOR?

Dealing with challenging behavior can be addressed by making sure that we "see" the kids, that's very important. Like just seeing them as people, not just as not just as students.

### ANY FINAL WORDS?

So I want to say that there have been plenty of teachers here at Mount Vernon who made me feel welcome and I think that's very important because I feel at home. I also want my families to know that I'm here for you. I have an open door policy and am willing to work together as a team because these are our students, these are our babies. I am here to work collaboratively with all parents and teachers and am looking forward to having an amazing year!

**CONTACT MS. ODOM AT**  
**CVWILSON@IRVINGTON.K12.NJ.US**

# Special Services

## Master Teacher Spotlight



# INGRIDE R. JEANNOVIL LAYNE

## New Master Teacher

### WHAT LINK DOES EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING HAVE IN RELATION TO PRE-ACADEMIC SKILLS? WHY ARE THESE SKILLS IMPORTANT FOR OUR STUDENTS TO LEARN IN PRESCHOOL?

Executive functioning and self regulation are cognitive processes that enable students to focus, plan, follow instructions and manage everyday challenges and stress. Executive function and self-regulation skills are dependent on three types of brain function: mental flexibility, working memory, and self control. The roles of these three types of brain functions are as follows...

- 1). Mental flexibility-helps students to shift attention and sustain attention in response to various demands and to apply expectations and rules in various settings.**
- 2). Working memory- the ability for children to manipulate and retain distinct information over a short period of time.**
- 3). Self control: assist students to resist impulses and set priorities.**

All students, typically developing and those with special needs are born with potential to learn these skills. Some students may require various support, modifications, and strategies to learn and apply these skills. The State of New Jersey implemented a Pyramid Model framework of evidence-based practices that focuses on preschool students' healthy social and emotional development. The introduction of the Pyramid Model focuses on an 'Effective Workforce' and 'Nurturing and Responsive Relationships. An Effective Workforce focuses on developing relationships between teachers and their students and students amongst their peers. Do students feel safe in their classroom? Are there consistent rules and expectations? Is the classroom an inclusive environment? Are all adults in the classroom working collaboratively? Are students and adults spoken to and treated with respect?

Is the classroom an environment that promotes learning? In order for Preschool students to reach their full potential they must be in a nurturing academic environment with educators that model appropriate social emotional skills which will lead them to be productive members of society as adults. Preschool students that receive support in developing strong executive functioning skills are more successful academically, able to identify their feelings (happy, sad, nervous, angry, excited, etc.) and find solutions when there's a problem instead of exhibiting challenging behaviors. The Pyramid Model assists preschool teachers in providing students with the tools necessary to ensure academic success with a focus on social-emotional development and developing relationships prior to pre-academic skills.

### WHAT SPECIFIC AREAS ARE IMPORTANT TO PREPARE LEARNERS TO TRANSITION TO 1ST GRADE?

The New Jersey Core Curriculum Standards would like students advancing to the first grade to master various academic areas upon completing the preschool and kindergarten curriculum but it's often not that simple when young students are expected to be more independent. First grade can be demanding and at times frightening for many of our learners. As a first grade student there's a level of independence many students have to get acclimated to. Often, there's no longer a bathroom in the classroom, lunch is with 'the big kids' in the cafeteria, students may have lockers and be responsible for their belongings without the constant assistance from teachers, the pressure of now being in a testing grade and maneuvering in the halls without a teacher can also be overwhelming. To mitigate these feelings it's important for students to start first grade with the ability to follow directions, organizational skills, self-regulation, confidence to express one's feelings and support from adults that continue to nurture these young minds.

At times there may be students entering first grade that do not have the academic skills or social emotional tools expected. When this occurs, educators identify these students, adjust their curriculum with modifications, small groups, strategies, re-teach and use various forms of interventions.



## Continued

### WHAT CLASSROOM STRATEGIES WOULD YOU LIKE TO SHARE WITH TEACHERS TO ASSIST THEM WITH ENGAGING CHILDREN IN MEANINGFUL WAYS?

Getting to know students as individuals is the best form of meaningful engagement. As adults we are all very different, internalize differently, perceive and react in various ways when things occur. This is no different when working with students, educators must take time to find various ways for students to understand the objective of the lesson and to grasp and retain the material taught. It's important to look at each student's Individualized Education Plan (Program) in order to understand students' needs, develop relationships with parents, have conversations and be interested and caring about what goes on in your student's life. A student's homelife impacts their performance at school therefore it's important to build a bridge between school and home which will lead to trusting relationships with all involved.

### WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO FOCUS ON THE INDIVIDUALITY AND PREFERENCES OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES?

When working with students that have disabilities, it's important to remain cognizant that the disability is not the child themselves. When providing services for our special needs population I understand the importance of working diligently in assisting students with reaching their individual goals, applying strategies and often revisiting strategies that may not have been successful previously and finding an alternative method that will be more beneficial. It's important to focus on the individuality and preferences of students yet it's also of great importance to make the classroom environment inclusive of all students regardless of the classroom setting.

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*It's important to focus on  
the individuality and  
preferences of students...*

---

*- Ingrid R. Jeannovil Layne*

WE WELCOME

# Megan Cummings

Lead Behaviorist



*Megan Cummings has over 25 years in the field of autism. She is on a mission to educate and share her wealth of knowledge with every single person at every single level who is willing to build a partnership.*

*Megan is hyper focused on creating programs for our learners in a strategic manner that is rooted in excellence.*

“

I am a partner who  
is here for your  
success.

”

- Megan Cummings



# Picky & MESSY EATERS

By Shelmith Wanja Mwangi &  
Catherine Payne-Lewis

## Picky Eaters

Children with autism are five times more likely to demonstrate picky or fussy eating habits (Autism Speaks, 2018; Freeman et al., 2019). Research suggests that making food fun or interesting can considerably improve eating behaviors as it heightens motivation to non-preferred foods (Freeman et al., 2019). BCBA Khadijah King suggests contriving moments where the child can touch, hold, or kiss the food to allow for the child to improve tolerance. Another fun strategy is to connect with parents and encourage them to cut food into fun shapes (e.g., animals, letters) using cookie cutters.

## Messy Eaters

Messy eaters require some assistance too. Allowing an opportunity for messy eaters to consume food slowly can increase socially acceptable behaviors. According to Master Teacher Julie Samuels messy eating is a “Normal part of a child’s development”.

Messy eating develops fine motor skills and helps children learn about food and their world.

### **Samuels states that parents and teachers must:**

- \*Be patient**
- \*Praise tidy eating**
- \*Model tidy eating**
- \*Use a place mat on the desk or table**
- \*Place plastic, newspaper (or other protection) under the child’s chair**
- \*Don’t turn meal time into clean up time (focus on the eating)**
- \*Identify the foods that make the most mess and troubleshoot**
- \*Offer praise or other forms of reinforcement for tidy eating**

When it comes to picky and messy eaters, teachers often have to make ethical decisions that benefit the student and what the classroom can support. If you seek more assistance regarding this matter, make sure to contact your master teachers, and consult with your BCBA for support.

#### References

- Autism Speaks. (2018, October 9). Autism and food aversions: 7 ways to help a picky eater. <https://www.autismspeaks.org/expert-opinion/autism-and-food-aversions#:~:text=If%20you%20have%20a%20picky,%20and%20meal%2Drelated%20tantrums.>
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