



**QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER**

February 2023

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# Interest Inventories



[Interest Inventory Resources](#)

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[SESA Library Materials](#)

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## Letter from the Editor

Ade',  
(hello in Deg Xinag)

Reflecting on your own interests, you may be someone who has had the same interests for many years, or you might be the type of person whose interests change frequently. Our students can fall into one of these two categories or maybe fall somewhere in between. We often use high-interest materials to motivate our students to move forward with their learning. For example, if you know a student likes Molly of Denali, you could make a reinforcement sticker chart with the character on it.

Interest inventories are helpful tools to determine general likes and dislikes for students. They can be used for identifying recreation/leisure activities, identifying strengths and interests for employment, gathering information for transition plans, and identifying general interests for community participation. Interest inventories can also be helpful when identifying reinforcers for students. A best practice is to have data drive our instructional practices, so the more information we can gather on a student to guide their educational experience and planning, the more meaningful it will be for the student.

We hope you enjoy this newsletter on interest inventories. Your SESA Specialists can also help support teams implementing interest inventories. Just ask!

Dogedinh,  
(thank you in Deg Xinag)

**Amy Topmiller**

Newsletter Editor and Multiple Disabilities Specialist

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**Finding Student Interests in Alternative Formats**

by Luke Martin, Accessible Technology Specialist

When assisting a team in determining appropriate format and materials for their student with a Print Disability, The **Alaska Center for Accessible Materials (AKCAM)** utilizes software called the Accessible Educational Materials (AEM) Navigator to guide us through all aspects of the student's educational setting.

One of the most important aspects of this navigator is a collaboration with AKCAM to discuss the student's current abilities and interests. This is important when we trial alternative formats and technology with a student; being able to meet the student where they are and piquing their interest is key for participation. This allows us to see if the student is avoiding the content or simply unable to access the format in which it is presented.

[Read More](#)



**Paraprofessional Spotlight**

Our nominated paraprofessional for the February newsletter is Gyddon.

Here is what makes him a phenomenal paraprofessional:

- He works hard to make sure his student receives the best services.
- He has high expectations for his student.
- Ensures his student has access to communication.
- Gyddon is a positive influence across the school.
- Always willing to try new activities and strategies.
- Willing to learn about new methods so that the student thrives.

**Way to go Gyddon!  
Keep up the amazing work!**

## Preserving Student Interests

by John Barrowman, SESA Autism Education Specialist

Interest inventories come in different forms, ranging from formal procedures to basic lists. Typically, students with autism have a limited set of interests, liking only one specific toy or certain food. This presents challenges to staff and families who are trying to identify items that can be used to encourage students to try new or less-preferred tasks. Click [HERE](#) for a sample of a simple tool.

Below, please find some quick tips on how to address some of the most common challenges with maintaining student interests and also developing new ones.

Steps to preventing current preferences from becoming boring or no longer preferred:

1. When using snacks, give small amounts or just enough to be acceptable. Giving large amounts can break the chain of motivation by satisfying interest totally. When using toys or other activities, try to set timers for a few minutes at the most. Too long of a break can also break the chain of motivation.
2. Rotate items day-to-day or week-to-week. This can help to be sure that the same items are not available every day, all day.
3. Spice it up by working in new flavors, colors, shapes, or themes. Offering choices between two similar preferred items can actually increase motivation for some students.
4. Activity-specific bins can help students to be more motivated to try a certain task that may be hard. Identify special items of interest and store them in the work area where the student struggles the most. This is now the main location where that item can be accessed.
5. Respect student break time. It may be tempting to interact with students during a break, and this may be OK. Just be mindful of how the student responds and be sure that the break still provides some enjoyment. Sometimes a little quiet time is OK.

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## Complex Needs Can Lead to Limited Interests, But Should They?

by Meriah Cory, SESA Multiple Disabilities Specialist

When struggling to motivate students, we often jump to interest inventories, but for students who have complex bodies, this can sometimes be challenging to evaluate. These are the students who might only have 1 or 2 interests at any given time. Limited interests can be the result of very little exposure to leisure or high-interest activities because of their physical limitations or access challenges.

Addressing these challenges takes a lot of thought and creativity to overcome, but it is well worth the investment. Once high-interest activities are determined through an interest inventory, they can be used as rewards or reinforcement during and around instructional time or other challenging activities.

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## Identifying Career Interests and Making School Mean Something

by Lyon C. Johnson, MA, MCSP, BCBA, LBA; SESA Emotional Disabilities Specialist

An essential part of secondary education is providing students the opportunity to develop organizational, academic, and social skills to allow them to live productive, meaningful lives and contribute to society. Many students struggle to connect the dots between attending school, building core academic skills, and finding a meaningful post-secondary job or career.

Students who experience behavioral and learning challenges often struggle even more to connect these dots. Luckily, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) specifies a student's eighth-grade year as the starting point for career exploration and planning.

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## Join Us for FREE Webinar Training!



### Alaska Deafblind Project

### Instructional Strategies and Resources for Deafblind Students

February 28, 2023  
11:00 AM - 12:00 PM AKST

[Register Today!](#)

Access to safe and efficient mobility is deeply connected to both opportunities and quality of life. For individuals with multiple disabilities or those who are deafblind, communication is intertwined with mobility. Come and explore how to create meaningful and motivating mobility routines that integrate communication and concept development.

**Presented by Dr. Amy Parker, Coordinator of the Orientation & Mobility Program at Portland State University.**

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## Introduction to Print Disabilities Part One: Supporting Individuals with Vision Loss

April 4, 2023  
11:00 AM - 12:00 PM AKST

[Register Today!](#)

What is a print disability? Learn how to support individuals with vision loss. Topics include how to help IEP teams determine eligibility for students, making education accessible, and how to access FREE print disability resources. Guest speaker Leslie Weilbacher, APH Outreach Specialist, will discuss common misconceptions, positive impacts resulting from print disability-related services, and resources available through the American Printing House.

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## Our Office has Moved!

Our New Address:  
[2600 Denali Street, Suite 200. Anchorage AK 99503](#)



[View as Webpage](#)