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QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

October 2023

Team Collaboration and Communication Strategies



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Letter from the Editor

Dear Readers,

Welcome back to the SESA LID Quarterly Newsletter! Before introducing this quarter's topic, I wanted to take a moment to introduce myself, the new newsletter editor. My name is Kristina Bower, and I am a Multiple Disabilities Specialist at SESA. This is my third year working with SESA, and I have loved every minute of getting to travel around this beautiful state. I hope that the newsletter is a valuable resource to you.

Thank you to everyone who completed our 2023 Spring newsletter survey. We have used your feedback to adjust our newsletter for our readers. If you didn't get an opportunity to voice your feedback this year, another survey will be sent out in Spring 2024.

The new school year is well underway, and the chaos has started to settle; there is a little more time now to refine our teaching and skills so that students can have the best educational experience. One vital part of this refinement is working with other professionals in a team. Collaboration and communication with everyone on a student's team can look different for each team; even teams themselves look different. Some teams include an Occupational Therapist and Physical Therapist, while others include a Teacher of the Deaf or an Orientation and Mobility Specialist. Most will include a Special Education teacher, at least one General Education teacher, a Special Education director and/or another administrator, parents, and, of course, the student.

As you think about ways to improve collaboration and communication with your various teams, it is our hope that this newsletter will inspire you and give you a fresh perspective. As always, contact your SESA specialist if you have any questions or if you'd like additional training on collaboration.

Have a colorful fall,

Kristina Bower

Multiple Disabilities Specialist/Newsletter Editor

"Individually, we are one drop. Together, we are an ocean."
- Ryunosuke Satoro

Paraprofessional Spotlight



Meet Lucy, nominated for our paraprofessional spotlight.

Lucy is a great paraprofessional because she...

- Has high expectations for all students
- Makes sure that students have the social/emotional support they need to be successful
- Provides positive behavior support and allows natural consequences for student growth
- Promotes active involvement by all students
- Provides a variety of activities for students to learn and grow
- Is a leader in the classroom and school environment
- Advocates for student needs

Keep up the great work, Lucy!

Collaborating for Success

by Erin Land, Autism Education Specialist

Collaboration is one of the most important aspects of fostering an ideal environment for students' success. For collaboration to be effective, the team must make decisions that will guide the student's growth in various areas listed but not limited to academic, social, communication, behavioral, adaptive, and emotional well-being. Collaboration can seem like a complex goal, but with everyone having the same goal in mind: the child - it can be easier than you may think.

Some ways to provide meaningful impacts are fostering an effective relationship with parents/guardians to extend the learning process to the home environment and frequent planning between the staff that directly support the students, like related service providers, paraprofessionals, special education teachers, and general education teachers.

Instilling early collaboration in the school year can jumpstart the process. Many schools hold collaboration meetings at the end of the year and/or the beginning of the year to do a "hands-off" meeting to get an insight into how the previous year went for that student. Learning what strategies were successful and unsuccessful in helping that student progress can make it an easier transition for the student.

Check out these other resources to better understand how collaboration creates success:

[Four Areas of Practice - Collaboration](#)
[Educational Journal on Co-teaching](#)
[8 Ways to Collaborate](#)

Steps to Making Collaboration Easier

1. Hold the Meeting:
 - Have an agenda
 - Identify meeting goals
 - Identify roles and responsibilities (facilitator, note taker, timer keeper)
2. During the Meeting:
 - Actively Listen:
 - Be present
 - Allow others to finish their thoughts fully
 - Questioning:
 - Ask questions, particularly open-ended and clarifying ones
 - Approach colleagues with an inquiry mindset
 - Integrating:
 - Use input and feedback to strengthen initial ideals
 - Synthesize colleagues' ideas to arrive at an actionable solution
 - Summarizing: Capture notes based on discussions throughout the meeting
 - Summarize the following steps, ownership, and any deadlines for follow-through
 - Empathizing
 - Assume the positive intent of others
 - Ensure everyone's voice is equally heard
3. After Meeting:
 - Have the designated note-taker send a meeting summary with future steps, deadlines, roles, etc.
 - Schedule future meetings or check-ins

Note:
Remember to revisit these steps during future meetings to ensure the completion of unresolved topics

Team Collaboration & Communication

by Amy Topmiller, Multiple Disabilities Specialist

When we think about collaboration and communication, special education is at the heart of those concepts. We know these two concepts are best practices in the field and have been shown to provide stronger planning, programming, and instruction for the student. Students who experience multiple disabilities often have a lot of "people" that help support them. This includes family members, teachers, paraprofessionals, related service providers, medical teams, etc. With a lot of "cooks in the kitchen," it is imperative

that teams work together and communicate frequently to share ideas, problem-solve challenges, and get feedback from different perspectives. Teaching special education is not a solo job. The members that make up the student's special education team look through a variety of different lenses, and each brings valuable information to the table.

There are several barriers that can cause a team to be out of sync, so below are some suggestions on ways to strengthen the team approach with a focus on the student:

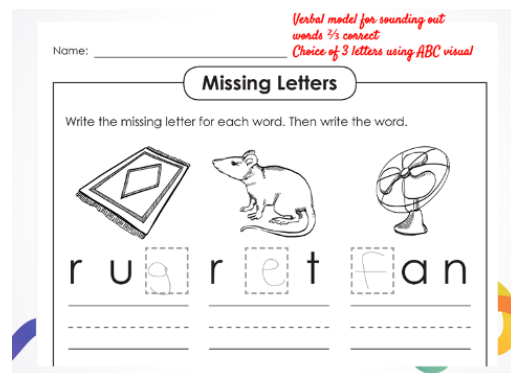
- Establish trust among the team.
- Communicate openly and honestly (paraprofessional, teacher, special education teacher, related service provider, family members).
- Discuss goals, plans, and priorities on a regular basis among gen ed teachers, sped teachers, and paraprofessionals. This will help support modifying content so the student is successful in the classroom.
- Keep data and share – was this task too hard or too easy? What would you do differently next time? How many did the student get correct independently?
 1. A small notebook or clipboard that can be kept in the classroom works great. Gen ed teacher and sped teacher can review and provide feedback to para.
 2. Data can be recorded on the student's work to share information with general education and special education teachers on how much support was provided, modifications, etc.

At the end of the day, keeping the conversation student-centered directs the focus of the team on working together to provide the best support for the student.

Examples of data collection to keep everyone informed about the student's progress:



On the left side of the picture is a counting task with number choices at the bottom for the student to answer with. On the right side of the picture is a notebook with the date, activity, accuracy, and level of prompting needed for the student.



A missing letters worksheet for CVC words. At the top of the page, notes from the staff identify the level of prompting the student needed, the accuracy, and the size of the field the student chose from.



“If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.”

Collaboration Strategies

by Angel Black, M.S.Ed., TSVI, COMS, Vision and O&M Specialist

Team collaboration with a student’s team is so very important. Upon researching this topic, I found this excellent article by Carmen Willings, owner of the Teaching Visually Impaired website, and it is used here with her permission.

Willings, C. (2022, June 12). *Collaboration Strategies*. Teaching Visually Impaired.

Collaboration Strategies

by Carmen Willings

Teaching Students with Visual Impairments

June 12, 2022

Collaboration Strategies Team Effort

Instructing students in the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) is a team effort. Effective teams work closely together and in synch to best support students. Other team members may provide intense service in some ECC areas with collaboration from the TVI. This may include the Occupational Therapist, Special Education teacher or para working intensely and daily on activities of daily living. The speech and language pathologist may work on communication skills and social skills with a group of students. While each person will specialize in their areas, there should be overlap and working together. You want other team members to follow through on areas of the ECC just like a PT wants team members to support positioning throughout the day and the OT will want the team to meet the students sensory and fine

motor needs, and the speech and language pathologist will want everyone to use communication devices or boards throughout the day. The team will be more effective if everyone learns from each other. You may even want to occasionally “co-treat” meaning you share a lesson. The other therapist will be focusing on how the student approaches activities and focus on their domain while you will be focusing on embedding ECC skills. Remember, the goal of every IEP is that the student is successful and supported through a team approach. The important thing to remember is that other team members shouldn’t provide instruction in some areas such as braille instruction as only a TVI is qualified to provide instruction in braille.

[Read Article](#)

Working Together to Access Print

by Meriah Cory, Alaska Center for Accessible Materials (AKCAM) Coordinator

Collaboration can feel very challenging and impossible when working with students struggling to access print. These students often do not have large teams of people supporting them and may not be getting any special services. As adults in their environment, one can feel lost on how to get the support needed. These students need just as much collaborating and brainstorming to help figure out support and access as any other student in the school, so how does one start the process of collaboration?

Checklists: A way to gather information without the time-intensive conversations.

- Does the student have a print disability? Here is a very basic question that can help someone who does not understand what that means or does not have a team to talk about this with. [More Information](#)
- What does a print disability look like in conjunction with other disabilities? [More Information](#)
- Creating a quick student-specific checklist that can be passed to the teachers who work with this student, asking questions about time on task, disruptive behaviors that show fatigue or avoidance, and interests. This helps get a better picture of the student’s day, provides clues to what the struggle or struggles might be, and allows targeted conversations.

Alaska Center for Accessible Materials: www.akcam.org

What if a teacher or adult needs help knowing where to start and what questions should be asked? Maybe they need clarification on what a print disability is before they can create a checklist. What if a teacher works alone and does not have anyone else to discuss with? Reach out. AKCAM can connect anyone with a specialist who can answer questions and help direct the conversations to figure out a student's needs. AKCAM helps support, clarify a print disability, find access methods, and locate materials.

Data Tracking: In order to have effective collaboration, one must have the information ready when the conversations happen so that the conversations can be targeted to the needs of the students and teams.

- **Response to Intervention Tracking Tool**

- Simple tally sheets with areas where frustration or struggles happen.
- Don't forget to keep track of what has been working or what has been tried so time is not wasted repeating accommodations.

Just remember that any collaboration is better than no collaboration to support students accessing print, so even if one does not know the questions to ask or the order information should happen, reach out to the people around and start the conversation.

Training and Team Collaboration Opportunities

by Lyon Johnson, MA, NCSP, BCBA, LBA, Emotional Disabilities Specialist

At this point, pre-service training is in the rearview mirror, and the school year is off to a fast start. SESA specialists are making trips throughout the state and surveying staff on training needs. In my travels, staff have expressed interest in effective collaboration strategies, positive behavioral interventions and supports, and self-care training. Great news! Several great training opportunities will take place in these areas. Here are a few of them:

10/30/23 (1:30 PM to 3:00 PM Alaska Time)

Healthy Teams: Dynamics and Tactics For Healthy Working Groups by Kira Mauseth, Ph.D., will review the research on healthy working groups and how those dynamics can be replicated even in high-stress conditions.

11/02/23, 11/09/23, and 11/16/23 (8:00 AM to 9:30 AM)

Cope, Calm, Care: Thinking, Feeling and Being Part of A Learning Community by Kira Mauseth, Ph.D. will help participants develop the tools and strategies needed for a healthy life and practice. Sessions provide concrete ways for those staff who are addressing the behavioral health needs of students and others (e.g., counselors, psychologists, behavioral health specialists, school social workers) to develop the tools and strategies needed for a healthy life and practice. Sessions will provide concrete and practical ways to cope, calm, and care. CEUs are available for this training.

2/03/24 and 2/04/24 (8:00 AM - 4:30 PM) at ASSEC 2024 Preconference

Conducting Basic FBAs and Development and Implementation of BIPs for Students with Mild to Moderate Problem Behaviors by Lyon C. Johnson is designed to train teams in how to conduct "Basic" Functional Behavioral Assessments (FBAs) and develop and implement function-based Behavior Intervention Plans (BIPs). The training is for intermediate-level (and above) certificated staff to address the needs of students with mild to moderate problem behavior. The training content and methods are designed to train certificated special educators (e.g., IEP case managers) and specialists involved in the IEP process. The Basic FBA/BSP training methods are designed to address the needs of students with mild to moderate problems--NOT complex, severe, unsafe, or dangerous behaviors, which would require the support of a highly trained, experienced behavior specialist, school psychologist, or Board Certified Behavior Analyst.

Take care, and have a great school year!

Deaf and Hard-Of-Hearing Team Communication

by Abby Steer, Deaf and Hard of Hearing Specialist

When the team surrounding a student has good communication, everyone wins. The team involves those working with the student, including the school and guardians. For Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing students, this communication can foster a more positive attitude toward learning, improved self-confidence, better relationships with peers and adults, and encourage regular attendance at school.

This communication may be about, but is not limited to:

- Participation in class.
- How the student's evening at home was or if they had a rough night and may be tired.
- Accommodation for the student in the classroom.
- Regarding listening devices (hearing aid, BAHA, cochlear, the battery, etc.).

Some ways to form positive communication between school and home:

- When the teacher first finds out who will be in their class, reach out and welcome the family.
- Guardian-teacher or even guardian-teacher-student conferences throughout the school year.
- Continuous communication throughout the school year.
- A notebook that goes to and from school with communication and encouragement.
- A take-home folder to keep information safe between school and home.
- A classroom newsletter to keep home up to date with what to expect and what happened in class.

Upcoming Events

Join us for a FREE Webinar Training!

Your Core Mission: Phase 1- Discover the Power of Core Vocabulary

How do you know which words to target for new Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) users? In this first phase of Your Core Mission you will learn about core vocabulary. We will explore this concept by reviewing typical language development. Participants will engage in hands-on activities to experience using core vocabulary in choosing early language targets. This will demonstrate how core vocabulary can enhance AAC users' ability to express themselves in a wide variety of settings and situations.

Join us on this mission to discover the power of core vocabulary! [Read More](#)



Presented by Michelle Mineo M.S., CCC-SLP

AAC Consultant • PRC-Salttillo

October 25, 2023

3:00PM AKST

[Register Here](#)



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