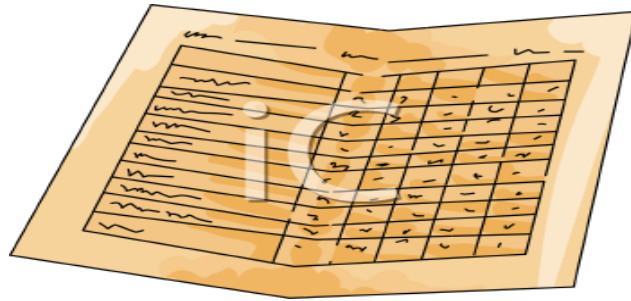


OnTeam Winter 2011 – 2012



I CAN..... The Theme for Empowerment & Achievement *How do we get there through the Progress Report?*

Dear Parents and Guardians,

Happy New Year! As your child moved through the bustling times of the holiday season, I am hopeful that you had an opportunity to observe the skills gained during the school year and how they were integrated into everyday conversations and activities within your home. This is a tribute to you – for providing an atmosphere that reinforces good behavior, skills in thinking, and a place, which is comfortable to talk and feel safe.

Similarly, our schools have an equal obligation and are accountable to you as parents and guardians for the same type of training and modeling. The OnTeam Winter 2011-2012 newsletter gives us an opportunity to reflect on how learning is best integrated across settings, and address some issues that move us forward in sustaining better communication with the home. An improved sense of reporting both internally within the schools as well as externally to the home offers a seamless way of openly communicating regarding student achievement. Both systems are important in reaching our district SMART goal in formative assessment. How do we know our children are learning? How do students optimally achieve success in curriculum and demonstrate mastery of instruction by incorporating specialized instruction?

Most students in special education attend regular education classes and receive instruction and support from specialists and clinicians in a variety of settings. Parents and guardians have the opportunity to discuss progress of their child with the teacher, specialist, clinician, or administrator at anytime, formally and/or informally. Sometimes, parents of students with special needs choose to wait and examine progress reports (required by the IDEA regulations), that are shared on the same schedule as building based report cards. Specifically, this progress report articulates your child's progress, measured against his/her accomplishment of the goals and objectives set forth in the IEP. What is sometimes less obvious is the requirement that special education and regular education teachers should be collaborating regarding these reports and figuring out how each student's goals are met in the regular education classes. We are taking steps to consider how we can improve the integration of the progress report, so that parents and

guardians can readily monitor how these skills are applied to regular education classes. We are further taking steps to ensure that required accommodations are implemented in the regular education curriculum and specialized instruction; from an ideal point of view, a child's application of skills is applied in all settings, automatically. Although we have many progress reports that fully integrate all requirements, I believe we can improve on our reporting system.

We want parents to understand how their child is progressing toward the annual goals outlined in the IEP, and to determine whether the progress is sufficient to meet those goals. These goals are achieved through the sharing of progress reports that are collaboratively discussed with regular and special education teachers.

For example, an IEP objective may indicate that a 4th grade student will use graphic organizers to write a 5-paragraph report in science by sequencing sentences with a topic sentence, supporting sentences, and a conclusion, as part of the student's overall communication goal. That annual goal is supported through the special education teacher with benchmarks or rubrics through good instruction. The regular education teacher, also aware of the IEP goal, works to that end with the student and others on that written language goal. But, in this diagnostic teaching model, the child needs assistance to develop an outline or graphic organizer to enhance learning. Once developed, the student can proceed with some assistance and feedback. The student moves from a written outline (with support) to independently developing his/her own written outline. Although this is an oversimplification, I simply want to make a point here. The student receives specifically designed instruction in special education because he/she has a disability in writing and/or executive functioning. That instruction is applied and reinforced in regular education. The skills of the regular education teacher are imperative because the techniques that are used with this child can be applied to all children in the classroom. Graphic organizers, written outlines, practice, are all instructive aides to reach mastery of the regular education curriculum. When we add the content of science, its frameworks and standards, we have a student who can access the knowledge of content areas and through the cooperative working efforts of regular and special education teachers, we can help a child compete in a regular education classroom with his peers. Those regular education teachers are really **instructional clinicians** because they daily assess and strategize ways to help children achieve in the classroom through effective instruction, accommodations and modifications, whenever and wherever necessary. That mastery assumes written back up through the progress report by answering the question of how well the child must perform to achieve the goals stated through the IEP process. These evaluation criteria are measurable, outlined by the IEP Team, including the home, with down to earth criteria (80% accuracy, 16 out of 20 words correct, with guided support, independently, etc.)

In other words, the goal is for special and regular education teachers to review the IEP goals and objectives, collaborate on the challenges of newly learned strategies in regular and special education, share how these strategies support the special education child (and others in regular education), and implement these strategies by measuring the effectiveness of class work and assignments, supplemented by ways of assessing mastery

(tests, portfolio, writing journal, production of a science report, etc. and standardized assessments through the IEP process {evaluation instruments} or high stakes testing).

Federal law indicates that all students should participate in the regular education curriculum, i.e., the same curriculum in which their non-disabled students are learning. The IEP does not design a specific curriculum; it designs the services that are necessary to make documented and measurable progress in regular education.

What can parents do?

- It is always helpful to become better informed about the regular education curriculum, as well as the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks <http://www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/current.html> With this level of understanding, Team members become much more instrumental in discussing how a student can participate in the regular education classroom. The emphasis is on “CAN”.
- Bring questions to the meeting such as: How do you measure my child’s progress in regular education based upon the IEP goals and objectives? How does the regular education classroom teacher implement those goals in the regular education classroom? How are they measured? What accommodations and/or modifications are required? Where does my child fit into the demands of the curriculum? Is my child meeting the classroom standard? Is my child on track for meeting grade level requirements/diploma requirements?

What can we (the school) do?

- We want to enhance our progress reports that are jargon-free, helpful to parents, and integrate special and regular education objectives, while fulfilling our responsibilities under the regulations.
- We will review the progress reporting system by randomly selecting teams and their progress reports to ensure that there are interconnections between the goals of the IEP and how they are implemented in the regular education classroom. Students in the regular classroom who have IEP goals can maximize and integrate the above strategies (example used in fourth grade) by using the regular education curriculum.
- Should we identify inconsistencies in reporting in any of our schools, we will enhance our training and discussions with our staff based upon this data.

In summary, the progress report is a mechanism that serves as a measurement of IEP goals. But, we must go beyond that yardstick and provide a written platform for integrating these goals into the regular education curriculum. Whereas the underlying assumptions of collaboration and cooperation between regular and special education are expected, we will plan to offer discussion and further training for those areas that will enhance that vision.

We believe all children can learn to the best of their abilities and demonstrate those skills in regular education classrooms with special education support. Every child must have the opportunity to participate, observe, investigate, inquire, compare and contrast data,

and explore. We want to create a learning environment that encourages collaborative learning in our competitive society so that our children are able to learn throughout their lives. Ultimately, we want them to love learning, despite the challenges.

A special thank you is given to our Special Education Parent Advisory Council who earmarked this area for discussion through the Parent Survey, 2011.

Happy New Year,

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