

CommunicationPoints

Greetings from our NCSC Project Director, Rachel Quenemoen

On behalf of the NCSC Management Team and staff leadership, thank you for your commitment to the Community of Practice in your state. The goal of the NCSC project is to ensure that students with the most significant cognitive disabilities achieve increasingly higher academic outcomes and leave high school ready for post-secondary options. A well-designed end-of-year test alone is not enough to achieve that goal. NCSC is committed to curriculum, instruction, and professional development support for teachers of students with significant cognitive disabilities. We are building our materials based on best practices and lessons-learned from over a decade of research on assessment, academic instruction, communication, and learner characteristics of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.

Still, just “a decade of research” also means we still have much to learn. We have spent much of the first 15 months of the project coming to agreement on the research and policy foundations for our curriculum, instruction, and assessment designs, and we appreciate your patience while we grapple with these foundational decisions. The next year will be the key to refining these decisions based on partnerships across all partner states, building on the expertise of our Communities of Practice to ensure we have the best understanding of research,

policy, AND practice as we build our new system. Thank you so much for your willingness to try out and improve our project products and processes. With your active participation, we will achieve our goal.

Newsletter changes

Starting with this issue of our newsletter, we are changing from a monthly publication to one every two months because we want to ensure that the information we share is relevant and useful. “Voices from the Field” is a new feature to our newsletter. In this section CoP members can submit and share their stories, so we continue to learn from each other. Regular features such as “Communication Corner” and “Recommendations for You” will continue. Additionally, you can expect to see updates and messages from grant staff and other experts relating to work happening in the other NCSC work groups.

Your contributions to “Voices from the Field” should be between 150-400 words in length. Most importantly, please make sure that you change the names and ages of students whose stories you are sharing to protect their privacy and to maintain confidentiality. Additionally, all submissions may be edited by our staff for content and readability. Submissions for “Recommendations for You” should include a few brief sentences describing the website or resource you are recommending. All recommendations or contributions should be sent to mindy.rodan@uky.edu or to your NCSC state contact.

Lesson pilot testing:

Where we are and where we are we going....

As members of the NCSC CoP, you have been reviewing webinar material that provides in-depth information that you'll need as the grant progresses. The next opportunity to be involved in grant activities is the piloting of instructional materials. As part of the Curriculum and Instruction Work Group (WG2), teachers from specific states will be asked to volunteer to participate in the evaluation of math curriculum materials (e.g., UDL general education lessons, SASSIs, Curriculum Resource Guides, content modules) being developed to support the multi-state comprehensive assessment system.

The math materials include six sets surrounding the topics of computation, fractions, decimals, equations, area/surface area, and data analysis/statistics. Participating teachers will be given three hours of training on how to read and implement the curriculum materials prior to implementation. Over a period of time, teachers will be asked to review and possibly implement the materials with students in their classroom.

Most importantly, teachers will be asked to provide feedback on all curriculum materials in either a webinar or in writing. This feedback will be used to refine the curriculum materials prior to their release to all teachers. South Dakota teachers will begin this work with one set of math materials; teachers from Arizona and Nevada have volunteered to evaluate additional math, reading, and writing materials during the 2012-2013 school year.

Additional state CoP volunteers will be sought in 2012-2013.

By the end of the grant, teachers in all states will be asked to participate in many different activities. Please contact your NCSC state lead to answer specific questions about timelines for your state.

Recommendations for You

<http://tarheelreader.org>

A collection of free, easy-to-read, and accessible books on a wide range of topics. The books may be downloaded as slide shows in PowerPoint, Impress, or Flash format. Each book can be speech enabled and accessed using multiple interfaces, including touch screens, the IntelliKeys with custom overlays, and 1 to 3 switches. You may write your own books using pictures from the huge collection at [Flickr](#) or pictures you upload.

<http://bookbuilder.cast.org>

Use this site to create, share, publish, and read digital books that engage and support diverse learners according to their individual needs, interests, and skills. Contains books on many different subjects. Requires that you establish a free account in order to create or edit your own books.

<http://paulakluth.com>

Includes: 20 Ways to Adapt the Read Aloud, 20 Ways to Adapt the Science Lab, Rewriting History and 9 Other Ways to Adapt Textbooks, as well as information and many other strategies about differentiated instruction, literacy, and autism.



Voices from the Field

The contents of "Voices from the Field" represent the view of the author and are not endorsed by the staff at the National Center and State Collaborative, the Office of Special Education Programs, or the state supporting the CoP member. The contents of this newsletter were developed under a grant from the Department of Education (PR/Award #: H373X100002, Project Officer, Susan.Weigert@Ed.gov). The contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education and no assumption of endorsement by the Federal government should be made.

Communication Intervention: One Student's Story, submitted by Michael McSheehan

Bryce, a 3rd grade student, had been educated in a special education classroom for students with moderate to severe cognitive disabilities. Reports from various standardized measures described him as "low functioning," and he qualified for the alternate assessment based on alternate achievement standards. The focus of his educational program had been on life skills and basic academic skills such as number and word identification. During most instructional activities, Bryce's teachers report that he became agitated and showed behavioral challenges.

A new educator to his team noticed that he had no means for communication; he was non-verbal and had no (low or high) technology support. She perceived Bryce to be more capable of learning than he was able to show without communication supports, so she started teaching him higher level mathematics and reading, starting with kindergarten curriculum. Within a few weeks, using multiple-

choice communication strips (i.e., point to A, B, C, or D) and other curriculum material adaptations, Bryce demonstrated success on near grade-level work in several mathematics and reading units.

Bryce's IEP team acquired some communication technology so he would have a voice, and they began including him in the general education classroom. He uses a computer with a voice output device. Like many students who depend upon technology, Bryce becomes frustrated when the technology isn't working correctly, and he has to rely on others to once again be his voice.

Bryce is successful because his teacher made sure to spend extra time with the adults at his school to help them understand who Bryce is, how he communicates, and why it is important to treat him as a competent student. Bryce is now in the 4th grade and is assessed on the general assessment. He is fully included and is developing friends with kids in his neighborhood school. Bryce's Special Education teacher says, "The kids have been really super accepting of him. It's easier for the kids. It's very difficult for adults to accept what he knows and what he can do."

Communication Corner: The use of symbolic representation of concepts on communication materials does not have to wait until children understand these concepts. This is true for all students, both students with significant cognitive disabilities and typically developing students. To avoid passive communication interactions, don't wait until the child demonstrates an understanding of the concept being presented. Instead, teach the new symbols and concepts by actively using them. For example, when teaching in a cooperative learning activity, the teacher could model communication messages "my turn" and "your turn" by pointing to these messages on a communication display, even if the child hasn't shown mastery of the vocabulary yet.