



**New Jersey Council on
Developmental Disabilities**

**2009
Fellowship Awards in
Inclusive Education**

NJ Council on Developmental Disabilities

Fellowships in Inclusive Education

In professional and academic traditions, the term “fellow” is often used to describe someone who deserves recognition in a learned or professional society because of their exceptional achievement or service in the field. In this spirit, the New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities has for many years honored educators by selecting them for Fellowship Awards in Inclusive Education.

The Fellowship Program was created to encourage, acknowledge and expand promising practices in including children with disabilities in all aspects of the public education system. The goal of the Fellowship Program is to develop a diverse network of individuals who actively embrace the principles of the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Since 2002, the Council has recognized 53 exemplary practices with Fellowship Awards of \$1,000 each. Each year, the Council features the Fellowship Award recipients in publications to encourage the expansion of their inclusive practices to other classrooms and districts across the state.

With Great Appreciation to The NJCDD Education Subcommittee

The Council wishes to acknowledge the contributions of the members of the NJCDD Education Subcommittee who make the Fellowship Program a success each year. In addition to implementing and guiding the Fellowship Program, the Education Subcommittee provides the Council with vital insights, information and recommendations that enhance the Council’s identification and implementation of effective goals and activities that promote effective and inclusive educational practices in our state.

The Education Subcommittee includes representatives of the following organizations: Coalition for Special Education Funding Reform, Disability Rights NJ, Education Law Center, Elizabeth Boggs Center, Family Resource Network, NJ Association of Child Study Teams, NJ Association of School Psychologists, NJ Coalition for Inclusive Education, Statewide Parent Advocacy Network, The Arc of NJ and additional individual and organizational participants and supporters.

Elaine Buchsbaum, *Chair*
Alison M. Lozano, Ph.D., M.P.A., *Executive Director*
NJ Council on Developmental Disabilities

Brick Community Primary Learning Center

Exemplary Practice: School-wide Collaboration and Team Teaching

The Brick Community Primary Learning Center is a wonderful and exemplary inclusive kindergarten program. Over the last 12 years, 210 children with a range of disabilities have been included in the school's general education kindergarten classrooms. The program currently has four inclusive classrooms and there are six children with Individual Education Plans in each class.

Kindergarten teachers at the Learning Center use proven research-based educational practices consistently and wisely within their classrooms. This has resulted in an enriched environment that nurtures all children. Examples of exemplary practices observed include: effective teaming between the general and special education teacher within the classroom, use of ongoing assessment to fine-tune instruction and differentiate activities, and collaboration of all teachers and professionals in the building.

The Learning Center strives for and achieves progress for all students and routinely ensures that all children are reading by the end of kindergarten. **The teachers and administrators are committed to teaching all children using a "whole child" approach.** This is seen in the way art, music and gym teachers often focus on literacy instruction with children. **In addition, the Learning Center effectively uses a school-wide positive character building program emphasizing mutual respect and making wise choices.** The success of this program is clearly evident at the school where children interact respectfully with each other.

Significantly, the school district administrators have shown sustained and effective support for inclusion. They recognize effective co-teaching teams and keep them together. In fact, one team has been together for 12 years.

Moreover, the administrators foster a community of learning among the teachers and promote professional development with programs such as lunch bag workshops.

The Brick Community Primary Learning Center has created nurturing kindergarten environments that accommodate the special features of every child, including their learning differences, while supporting high expectations for all children.

George Needham and David Wilson, Teachers
Hopewell Valley Central High School, HV Regional School District

Exemplary Practice: Using Co-teaching and Differentiated Instruction to Make a Challenging Science Course Accessible to All Learners

Most high school students with disabilities take a general Life or Earth Science class. However, George Needham, a special education teacher, and David Wilson, a general education teacher, encourage all students with disabilities in their high school to take their Conceptual Physics alongside their non-disabled peers.

Mr. Needham and Mr. Wilson co-wrote the course curriculum and have been co-teaching the course for seven years. The building administrators support the skills these two teachers bring to the course and are committed to keeping them together. **Administrators support their success by providing collaborative planning time, professional development and workshops.** The benefits of this long-term partnership are clearly visible by these teachers' seamless collaboration of skills.

Their practices demonstrate that with proper instructional strategies and a focus on strengths and individualized assessments, all students can learn challenging material. The goal throughout the Physics curriculum is to make science concepts real and relevant. Mr. Needham and Mr. Wilson explain that they strive to make "the learning of fairly complex ideas basic without watering down the content." **The teachers are careful to identify areas in which students have difficulty and find ways to support their success.** For example, they provide students with a writing guide in order to help them work through science labs and minimize common barriers to success with the curriculum, such as difficulty writing lab reports. In addition, the students in the class choose how they want their work assessed to encourage meaningful measurements of progress.

Every student in a physics class in the school takes part in a school-wide engineering competition called Conqueror of the Hill, and every year, students from the Conceptual Physics class, both with and without disabilities, make it to the school finals.

Another excellent strategy these teachers use to help students prepare for the end of year finals is an activity called the Gallery Walk. Students, paired in teams, create tri-fold display boards of a specific topic covered in the course. Once all the boards are completed, the students, armed with guided notes, walk through all the display boards, reviewing the material and taking notes. The teachers report that this method has resulted in improved comprehension of concepts and better final test scores.

Mr. Needham and Mr. Wilson provide many excellent examples of the benefits of sustained team teaching, differentiated instruction, shared planning time and ongoing evaluation and improvement of their practices, so that all students in the school successfully master challenging scientific material.

**Linda Gaital and Megan Hendershot, Teachers
Keyport School District**

**Exemplary Practice: Enhancing social skills and peer sensitivity through
“Teachable Moments”**

More often than not, preschoolers with and without disabilities can be enrolled together in a classroom and make noticeable academic gains. However, genuine and meaningful social relationships and peer sensitivity are key components of successful inclusion that are often missing.

Linda Gaital and Megan Hendershot have recognized this missing piece and are successfully addressing these issues in their classroom. These teachers place a heavy emphasis on teaching diversity, social skills and social awareness. Due to their progressive philosophy, commitment, and exceptional curriculum, Ms. Gaital and Ms. Hendershot are viewed as model teachers in their district. Other teachers in their district have used their practices to enhance their classrooms.

Ms. Gaital and Ms. Hendershot have mastered the technique of the “teachable moment”. They believe children learn best through modeling, role play, storytelling, story acting and class discussions. Ms. Gaital and Ms. Hendershot closely observe student interactions and classroom dynamics and address all issues with the class as whole.

This practice is highlighted best during free-play. **After free-play the children participate in recall. They each describe what they did during free time and the children with whom they interacted. Then, the class as a whole discusses “issues” pertaining to incidents that occurred during free play.** Both the teachers and the students bring up incidents to discuss. As each example is explored the students learn how the interaction could have been handled in a different, more effective way.

These discussions then lead to a topic of instruction. Some of the topics have included modeling appropriate behavior, not drawing attention to inappropriate behaviors, entering a group that is already in progress, using words to express your feelings, and valuing differences in yourself and in others.

Ms. Gaital and Ms. Hendershot’s approach to social skills development and peer sensitivity training is truly exemplary. They have shown through their daily practices that successful inclusion does not just happen. **Students need learning opportunities to develop an appreciation for their own individuality and for the benefits of valuing all people in their classroom and community.**

Lisa Capone-Steiger, Supervisor of Student Services
Livingston Public Schools District

Exemplary Practice: Extensive and Ongoing Staff Development for Successful Inclusion in General Education Classes

Long term, systemic change requires that both general and special educators are taught research based strategies and proven practices for including students with disabilities in general education classes. The Livingston Public School district has adopted a strategic plan that recognizes this need for ongoing professional development. As the Supervisor of Student Services, Lisa Capone-Steiger has provided thoughtful, energetic, and creative leadership in implementing this vision.

Ms. Capone-Steiger teaches colleagues that all students must feel comfortable in every aspect of life in the learning community. She speaks with passion about the expectation that all teachers should be prepared to teach all students, and that teachers need to learn to recognize the unique strengths in each of their students. She works with everyone in the district, including coaches and teachers of after-school clubs and activities, to help ensure that staff has the supports they need to make inclusion successful.

The professional development opportunities Ms. Capone-Steiger has championed include workshops for the guidance department on post-secondary transition of students with disabilities and workshops for teachers in the English Department on the value of portfolio assessments.

Ms. Capone-Steiger is committed to ensuring that all students have opportunities to access the full high school curriculum, including electives. She is currently planning to expand professional development for inclusion in Health Education and Driver's Education courses. School nurses, social workers, counselors and teacher assistants will be expected to participate in these learning opportunities in the area of Health Education.

Ms. Capone-Steiger plans to use the Fellowship Award to create a resource library that will house materials used in the district's professional development courses. Having a central location for videos, special education journals, and other research based materials will enhance the ability of teachers to implement the theories and strategies they have learned. The library will provide staff with practical tools for planning lessons that reflect the best of inclusive education practices.

By giving teachers the skills and supports they need, Ms. Capone-Steiger is helping to build the solid foundation necessary for achieving the goal of successful inclusion of all students in the Livingston school district.