

Christian Schools With Special Need Programs

"The concerns and the strategies that helped solve those concerns"

In November 2000, at the Associated Christian School International Convention, 65 private, Christian schools attended a brunch/seminar to network and build prayer/resource support systems.

The 65 representatives were seated in small groups and were led to discuss "The Special Needs Teacher's greatest concerns for the Special Need's Program at their school? And what the Special Needs Teacher has done to support the concerns of their program that has been beneficial."

Following are the shared concerns. The **blue comments** are what was shared that has positively supported these concerns.

The **red comments** are further recommendations from childd.org

1. **Modifying regular classwork without losing content.**

Asking Teachers for a copy of up-coming tests so that you can make sure that the student is knows the content of what will be tested.

Begin a file of these tests keeping the tests confidential to your eyes only (This will eliminate questions from teachers and other students and families). Use 3X5 cards to highlight each main idea of the content being tested. Add three sentences created by the student to support these highlighted main ideas (a study card). Make a photocopy of each card (study card) and have the student study only these cards. Keep a copy of the study cards behind the tests you file for future reference or needs.

Offering pre-printed modification suggestions that you have personalized for each special need student.

Always meet one on one with the teacher your are sharing your suggested modifications with. Make sure that what you are asking to be modified is reasonable by providing justifications for each modification in written form (To eliminate the need to repeat justifications). To keep accountability, begin with a few modifications the first week. Meet at the end of that week and talk about how it worked out. Try to add modifications that will not overwhelm the teacher but keep the teacher accountable to the special need student. Do not just leave the teacher with your suggested modifications...you may need to help the teacher with them by examples and definitely keep the teacher accountable week by week. Begin a file of what modifications worked filed under the special need the student has to begin building a resource of workable modifications for your school.

Communication between past teachers and new teachers of workable classwork modifications a special need's student had and has benefited by.

Childd.org suggests that this be done a minimum of three times a year. A meeting between the past teacher and the new teacher of a special need student needs to take place before the school year begins. At this time, the past teacher can share intimately with the new teacher the student's special need modifications that have worked well and that can be continued. Together they can brainstorm over any concerns the new teacher may have. A second meeting should take place after the first two weeks of the new school year. At this time the new teacher can share concerns that may have come up and the experience of the past teacher with this student can be valuable. The last meeting is just an accountable/support meeting between the past teacher and the new teacher. This is the meeting where the past teacher supports by listening and helping in any way possible any needs the teacher may have. At this point, if the new teacher has any new concerns...it is childd.org suggestion that the new teacher meet with the special needs teacher or the administrator for further help.

2. How to get psycho-educational testing funded for the parents?

Find volunteers to help.

Use School District testing.

Use program testing such as SRA Corrective Reading Program, which provides testing in the program.

If you find volunteers...they need to be professionals who understand testing and have the credentials to provide testing. One way of finding such professionals is beginning a "search and find" for such professionals of special needs in the churches and community of your school by beginning a professional Advisory Board for your program. *See link Administrators and Teachers and click on Advisory Board.

Many school districts are not providing testing for students enrolled in the private schools.

www.childd.org *See link Administrators and Teachers / and Parent link

Psycho-educational testing involves so much more than finding a score in a subject area. It is truly an informational way of finding out a student's strengths and weaknesses and possible learning disabilities. It involves much more than a reading test or screen, and must be done accurately and by an experienced professional. Results from the test not only include a score but a diagnostic process in which the experienced professional is trained to pick up from the results of the scores. This is not easily done. Childd.org recommends attempting the school district first and then searching professionals in the local area the school has had good experience with.

Secondly, childd.org highly recommends creating an Professional Advisory Board from your community who being Christian and already willing may provide special discount rates for testing from your school to be accomplished.

Childd.org recommends that a multi-disciplinary Team be involved in all testing situations. The multidisciplinary team will involve the school Administrator, the parent(s) and guardian(s), the student, the teachers of the student, any outside school tutor or academic helper, and any professionals involved with the student. Together the multi-disciplinary team can share information and their knowledge of the student and steps from this meeting can be begun.

Costs for psycho-educational testing professionally can be in range from \$150.00 per test to \$3,000.00 on a series of tests. (Depending on the tests used and the time involved.)

3. More "preparation time" needed for the teacher.

Child.org recommends keeping one photocopy of all "creations" that you have made for the special need student you are helping. Keeping a file organized according to need or subject will help lessen the demands each year brings with the students God gives to you who have special needs. Keeping all on file on the computer, is another excellent source for individualized modifications can easily be done on the computer/

4. Meeting the needs of Jr. High and Senior High special need students.

When entering the Junior High and upper elementary grades key emphasis should be on study skills and organizational skills. The Special Need Teachers must keep the student's accountable to keeping abreast of their assignments by writing them down with due dates and test dates. The students must learn how to "glean" information *See Administration and Teacher link for Study Skills.

One problem that arises is the need "to not look any different than others". Much insecurity surface in these years. These insecurities are pronounced by hormones, peer pressure, opposite sex attractions and in high school the "dating" scene. The Special Need Teacher must keep the confidence of their students in their areas of weakness. Every student's strong areas must be emphasized and curriculum applied to their interests. High school students will need career guidance and survival skills. Teach reading using Driver's training manuals, local restaurant menus, movie guides and the local newspaper. Teach the mis-spelled words in their daily writings. Teach math using a calculator and how to account money. Teach computer keyboarding, and social skills. If a student feels secure within the class, and feels the sincere support, a Special Needs Teacher will be seen as the "coolest" teacher on staff.

5. Bringing in quality staff and special need teachers.

Bringing quality staff is always guesswork for the Administrators. Our hope is that those teachers who will be teaching Special Need programs will have some experience and education with those with learning disabilities and differences. In the private school, many serving in this area do not have the education or credentials in special education that we would like. One way of inservicing staff and teachers is to have them educate themselves. There is a lot of literature and resources, as well as training available. The website child.org has a contact area in which individualized help can be given. Having a teacher of quality truly is one that is open to God's leading, informing and has a heart to serve students with special needs.

6. Making sure that the staff will be open and willing to learn how to help student's with special needs.

Just because the staff is Christian does not mean that the teachers and the Administrators will be open and willing to learn how to help a student with special needs. Openness and willingness comes from the heart and not always the cerebral mind. Inservices and awareness is the best thing you can bring to the school staff is to "open their eyes" to what is important and what is necessary.

Holding them accountable in a loving way is vital. Gaining the support of the Administration is utmost, and being patient and trusting God.

7. Starting a program.

All you need is a "calling" from the Lord and faith that He will provide. This ministry is not one that is easy, and the spiritual warfare is constant. Any call is easily dissolved without the prayer support and networking support. Look on www.childd.org under the link "Special Need Programs" and look at the roster for schools near you that you can visit and be supported in. Take as much information as you can from www.childd.org in every link and present it to your School Board. Emphasize that the calling is to help the school provide for every child God brings to its doors. Share the network of schools with existing programs and the possibilities that can occur for your school. Use scripture to reinforce that the call is from God for you to "plant the seeds" for a program because God has given your school students with special needs.

8. Placement of students in a special needs program.

Depending on the grade of the special need student, this can be a sensitive area. Those under 3rd grade welcome being pulled out of class and welcome the special "one on one" help. Those over 3rd grade tend to be embarrassed until they see the results of their pull-out. Being sensitive to the student as well as the teacher you are pulling the students out of their classes is vital. If you gain the student, but lose the teacher... you lose. If you gain the teacher and lose the student, you too can lose.

One Junior High Special Needs Teacher chose to use a two week schedule. I found this to be one of the best pull-out schedules I have ever seen. She too, saw her students twice a day...one hour alone and one hour in study hall. Her scheduling went as follows:

9. Working with the Administration and the School Board and finding support from them.

Please look at the answer to question number 11 for this answer as well.

10. Feeling inadequate to teach students with special needs. We need more training.

The Special Need's Institute under the Director of Dr. David Sanfilippo and Grace Christian School will be providing training for teachers in the summer of 2002. You will have multisensory techniques from Slingerland Reading and Writing, National Dyslexia Research Foundation Multisensory math techniques, Linda-Mood Bell Language and Reading techniques, Assessment and Diagnosis etc... training offered to you for a nominal fee.

See www.childd.org under the link "Special Events and Conferences"

11. Helping the school population to be sensitive to the special needs of our students and more inclusive. Fighting the stigma special need students has.

See www.childd.org under "The Ten Commandments of Teaching Students with Special Needs"

12.A need to adjust the "awards" and "honor roll" standards for students with special needs so that they too can attain such awards from the school.

When I first began the special needs program at our Christian school, one of the most difficult things to hear my students mention was their awareness that they would never get a school "academic award" of any kind. At this time, our school had the "student of the month" award, with bumper stickers and all...my special need students actually dreaded to having nightmares going to these assemblies. To them, every year, the same top ten students would receive this award. To them, they could never achieve as these top ten could. To them, every first day, they already knew who would be the ten that would receive "student of the month" for the next ten months. And...they were correct.

How did this change? I talked with their teachers. I let shared with them to look beyond the "letter grade" and look instead at the "effort grade". Some special need kids study 3-4 hours to attain the "B", while the academic student needs only to study 1/2 hour to attain the "A". I told them who is giving more, who is giving their all. These are the students that should be recognized.

I also talked with the Administration into not repeating "year after year" awards. If a student had won "student of the month" one year, they should not be able to get it the following year. They can be recognized in other ways, but allow this award or any award to touch the lives of more.

An example of this award is through my children. At the time I had two in school with these awards, and they got Student of the Month and Student of the Year every year. In time, they became quite bored with it. It wasn't a big deal for them anymore. Why? It wasn't anything novel for them and it became something expected. This is where I feel the award system fails. And this is where I take the stand to give the award to those who are trying so very hard to attain it.

God looks at the heart, not the grades. He sees the efforts and the tears in the efforts and praises the perseverance. He awards us yes, but in Heaven and blesses us here on earth. Can we be an extension of his blessing to students with special needs who persevere? Can we encourage their efforts by acknowledging them publicly? I guarantee you will have watered very dry soil if you award special need students for their efforts and even more so, blessed them as Jesus would.

13.Knowledge of SAT testing modifications.

See www.childd.org under the Administrator's link

14.Staff, School Board, Administration and Parent awareness inservices.

I highly recommend "Put Yourself In The Shoes Of A Dyslexic" which is a disability simulation where the participants become disabled in a hands-on workshop. The simulation leads to greater

empathy and understanding of the problems and gives insight into working effectively with special need individuals. The simulation is designed to be stressful and participants may become fatigued and even emotional which are typical of these emotions and fatigue experienced by those with special needs with classroom assignments.

The International Dyslexia Association, Northern California Branch provides these packets for a nominal fee.

IDA Northern California Branch (650) 328-7667

www.interdys.org/3-nc.stm

My recommendation is that those special needs area administrators' purchase one for their area network of schools dividing the total costs with shipping and handling.