

PENews

"Respecting the Right of Parents to Make Educational Decisions for Their Children"

Summer 2009

Inside this issue:

Challenging Your Child To Be The Best He or She Can	1
Oral Health Care For Special Needs	2
Repeating A Grade	2/4
Early Intervention	3
The Importance of Transition to Kindergarten	3

Challenging Your Child To Be the Best He or She Can Be

Disability does not define a child.

Disability does not cancel a child's personality, strengths, abilities, or learning style. Disability does not define a child. No two children with the same disability will develop in the same way. Because each child is unique, parents need to balance their expectations in a way that is right for their child. We don't want to expect too much and set the child up for failure, or too little and show a lack of faith in the child's capability. Children must be allowed to be who they are and not simply who we dream they will be.

How do we keep this balance with a positive and respectful attitude and encourage our child? Consider these ideas:

- Build on your child's strengths, abilities, natural interests and personality.
- Be intentional. Goals don't just happen. Make a plan of how to accomplish the goal.

- Make it fun; leave room for humor and play.
- Use hobbies or sports to encourage the skill or goal.
- Life shouldn't be all struggle and work. Keep your child's spirit in tact¹ with a balance of striving and relaxing, working and playing. (¹*Including Samuel*. Dan Habib, 2007.)

Children must be allowed to be who they are and not simply who we dream they will be.

- If something isn't going as you hoped, look at what you are doing, not just what the child is doing. Maybe you'll have to change your method or emotional reactions to better suit the child's way of learning.
- Encourage your child to view mistakes as something normal and as an opportunity to learn.

- Work with your child during school breaks. Achieving the goal may take more time than it does for other children.
- Help your child understand how he or she learns best; affirm your child's learning style with positive language.
- Praise small steps and attempts as well as larger accomplishments; most success in life is achieved by those who show up and try.
- Give positive feedback on what is done correctly.

Although the early years are very important in child development, learning is also a lifelong process. . .

Dreaming, hoping, and seeing potential where others may or may not--that's the role of the parent.

Excerpted from *High Expectations*, by Carolyn Anderson. © 2009. Used with permission from PACER Center Inc., Minneapolis, MN, (952) 838-9000. www.pacer.org. All rights reserved.

A Significant Problem: Oral Health Care For Special Needs Children

A visit to the dentist can often be a confusing and sometimes frightening experience for a person with disabilities. They often need additional help and support to achieve good oral health.

The National Institute of Health and The National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research (NIDCR) have developed a guide for caregivers and family members who support oral health care for family members or clients. Here are a few of their suggestions:

- Set the stage for a successful dental visit by involving the entire dental team--from the receptionist to the dental assistant.
- Arrange for a desensitizing appointment. Introduce your child to the

dental office, equipment and staff BEFORE treatment begins.

- Gain cooperation in the least disruptive manner. Bring a blanket, toy or other comforting item to the appointment. If appropriate, sit near the child or have the child sit on your lap.
- Make appointments short, if possible, and praise the child for his or her behavior.
- Look for signs of specific stress related to your child's disability. Let staff know if you observe your child is in any distress.

NIDCR offers a comprehensive list of oral health care resources on their website:

www.nidcr.nih.gov/OralHealth/Topics/DevelopmentalDisabilities/ContinuingEducation.htm

Do You Need To Find A Dentist?

Medicaid-funded managed care organizations (Medical Assistance-MA) in Pennsylvania are REQUIRED to help make dental care available to people with disabilities. Check the back of your insurance card for a phone number for your plan. Or check out the PA Medical Assistance website: www.dpw.state.pa.us/ServicesPrograms/MedicalAssistance (Click on Dental Services)

Another oral health care resource: PA Dental Society (717. 234. 5941) or www.padental.org

Repeating a Grade: The Pros and Cons by Colleen Stump, PhD



By the GreatSchools.net staff

Has anyone at school talked to you about retaining your child in the same grade? Have you been thinking about whether your child should be promoted on to the next grade level?

Reasons for Retention

Grade retention is a very difficult and emotionally charged decision. It may be considered when a child:

- Has significant struggles making progress in reading, writing or math
- Fails to reach performance levels expected for promotion to the next grade
- Appears to be "immature" and "young" for her age

Children with Learning Disabilities

Many children with learning disabilities (LD) really struggle when taking district-adopted and state-adopted achievement tests. These tests require students to:

- Concentrate for long periods of time
- Work independently
- Persevere when faced with material they struggle to read and understand
- Record their answers using "bubble sheets"
- Work within specific time limits

Test results may not show what your child actually knows and can do. Instead, they may tell you how well she does on this type of test.

When test scores are used as the only basis for whether a child will be promoted to the

next grade, kids with LD can be at a great disadvantage.

Factors to Consider

So, the big question is how you decide if retention is right for your child. Here are some questions to ask yourself:

Academic:

- In what area (s) is your child struggling the most --reading, writing, math, science, social studies, social skills or others? Is it just one subject or most of them?
- What have you and the teachers done this year to help your child develop necessary skills?
- What has worked and helped your child learn? What hasn't worked this year?
- If your child were to spend another year in the same grade, what type of instruction would she

receive in the areas she finds most difficult? Would a new teaching approach or new materials be used, or would the teacher do the same thing as last year? How do you know that "doing it over again" would make a difference?

- What level of performance would you set for your child to achieve if she were retained? What changes would you need to see to be satisfied that retention was effective?
- Realistically, will your child be able to meet the required standards to be promoted next year? What kind of change are you expecting in one year? Is that enough to make the retention worthwhile?

(Continued on page 4)

EARLY INTERVENTION for Infants, Toddlers and Preschoolers

Through collaboration with the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) and the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare (DPW), the Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) administers the Commonwealth's Early Intervention Program for eligible infants, toddlers and preschoolers.

At the local level, Early Intervention programs for infants and toddlers from birth to three years of age are administered by county government. OCDEL contracts services through intermediate units (IUs), school districts and private agencies for local services to preschoolers from three to the age of beginners (entrance to first grade).

The role of Early Intervention is to assist families in finding and providing the information and resources that your child needs, which represents a full range of supports and services.

Most delays in a child's development are typically discovered before a child goes to school. Early discovery of delays in development allows parents to make early decisions about who will help, and how and where the help can be found.

In these early years, a child's brain is most ready to learn such basic skills as eating, communicating, understanding how toys and objects work, moving around in the world by crawling or walking, dressing and getting along with others. Later, more complicated skills are built on these basic ones.

Because timing is very important, Early Intervention is available at the earliest possible time in Pennsylvania.

Parents with concerns about their child's development should call the CONNECT Helpline. Staff will refer you to the appropriate local Early Intervention Agency. **The toll free number is: 800-692-7288.**



For more information about Early Intervention call **Parent Education Network at 800-522-5827, to speak with PEN's Early Intervention Coordinator, Theresa Thomas**, or to request a copy of the PEN publication:

“Early Intervention for Infants, Toddlers and Preschoolers in Pennsylvania”

The Importance of the Transition To Kindergarten

If your child is in the Preschool Early Intervention program, during the year before they are eligible for kindergarten, the Early Intervention program will invite you to a Transition Meeting to discuss options for your child and to develop a Transition Plan. This transition meeting must occur before the end of February.

You will be asked at the meeting to sign a form giving the school district permission to obtain Early Intervention records and to register your child for kindergarten in your home school district.

The School Psychologist may re-evaluate your child to see if he or she qualifies for special education services with the school district. However, it is encouraged that the school use the existing EI evaluation information.

If the school district does re-evaluate your child, you will receive a copy of the Evaluation Report for your review before an IEP meeting is scheduled.

As an active member of the IEP team, you will help develop the plan for services and the location of the services which will be provided for your child. Parents and school personnel will meet before school starts, so that decisions can be made concerning placement and services for your child.

It is strongly encouraged that you and your child visit with the kindergarten teacher, and other school personnel. You may observe in kindergarten classrooms locally, regionally, or in specialized schools, and/or talk to other parents. This will assist you and your child with the transition process and in deciding about the appropriate placement for your child.

For many parents, this transition can be a stressful experience because of uncertainty about classrooms, staff, transportation, etc. Parents know that there will be an increase in class size, increased expectations and responsibilities and more difficult skills that the child must master.

While information will be given to parents at a transition meeting prior to entrance into kindergarten, parents can also relieve some of their anxiety with regard to transition by asking the school the following:

TRANSITION QUESTIONS FOR PARENTS

- How do I schedule observations?
- What type of curriculum is used in kindergarten?
- How many children are in a classroom?
- How many teachers/aides are in the classroom?
- How will transportation be provided?
- How can I help my child adjust to this new setting?
- What supplies does my child need for school?
- What is the kindergarten schedule each day?

Repeating a Grade: The Pros and Cons . . . continued from page 2

Social/Emotional

- Is behavior a concern?
- How will your child feel about being retained? Will she be more motivated to learn and try, or will she be embarrassed and further withdraw from learning?

Alternatives to Retention

- The National Association of School Psychologists favors "promotion plus" interventions designed to address the specific factors that place students at risk for school failure. With that in mind, some questions to ask yourself about alternatives to grade retention:
- Have you worked with your child's teacher to identify accommodations that could increase her success in the classroom? If interventions are working, will they be continued?
- What will happen to your child's peer supports and friendships? How will they be affected by retention?

- Is your child receiving extra support? Does she get one-on-one or small group help to understand new ideas and complete work?
- If your child receives special education services, are her IEP goals and objectives/benchmarks related to the standards established by the school? If not, the IEP Team may need to revise them to focus on outcomes leading to promotion to the next grade.
- What type of curriculum materials and instructional strategies does the teacher use? How effective are they with your child?
- Could your child benefit from one-on-one tutoring or counseling?
- Are options such as summer school, extended day or extended year available?
- Does your child resist your help with schoolwork? If so, find alternatives - have a sister or brother help with homework, get help from a high school or college student.

The Big Picture

Before retaining your child, carefully consider your responses to the above questions. Read some of the literature on retention, and talk with your child and other family members. Speak to the teacher and other school staff who know your child. Talk to the principal about state law and district policy on retention to discover who makes the final decision and what the appeal process is. If your child receives special education services, be sure the IEP team is involved.

Whatever is decided, carefully monitor your child's academic and behavioral performance during the next year. Be sure to work closely with teachers to ensure that you and the school are giving the support needed..

Updated April 2008 ; © 2008
GreatSchools, Inc. All Rights Reserved. Excerpts printed with permission from:
GreatSchools, Inc. Reprints/Business Dev.