

# Exceptional Programs for Exceptional Learners

Parsons, Neodesha, Fredonia, Cherryvale, Thayer, Independence, Coffeyville, Caney

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## WELCOME



Congratulations to Susan Ponce, Resource Teacher at Thayer. Susan was hired as the resource teacher for Thayer at mid-year. Susan is a Masters level special education teacher with many years of experience in general education as well. She began a para-professional position with Tri-County at Thayer in August. The teacher hired for the Thayer position had an unfortunate accident and debilitating injury. With her degrees and experience Susan was the natural choice to fill in while the teacher was healing. Susan rose to the challenge. Even though she had not served as a special education teacher for a number of years, she took charge of the instructional and professional responsibilities with great enthusiasm and energy. She established great working relationships with the general education teachers, school administration, para-professionals, and parents. She tackled annual IEP reviews and alternate assessments for her students. She established a positive working and learning environment in the classroom. In January it was determined the teacher originally hired for the position would not be returning. Susan was asked to step into the position officially. She accepted. She is a great, competent, and professional staff addition to Tri-County.

## Educational Relevance and Eligibility in Communication Disorders

Professionals in Interlocal 607 and other special education service entities across the State of Kansas are struggling with “educational relevance” in determining communication disabilities under IDEA. This struggle is exemplified by the increasing numbers of students identified as disabled in the speech and language category under IDEA. Educational Relevance in the context of speech and language refers to speech language deficits exerting an adverse effect on the child’s educational performance (progress in the general curriculum). Teachers, Speech Language Pathologists, and parents all agree that communication is key in child development. Tri-County training as well as policy and practice directs the use of interventions for communication issues as part of the SIT process. Before the evaluation team considers eligibility for special education services, data clarifying the impact of interventions should be collected and analyzed to determine the efficacy of the interventions in ameliorating the communication issues before proceeding to eligibility consideration.

In order to determine a

child eligible for speech and/or language interventions under IDEA, an evaluation team must consider the convergence and preponderance of data from multiple sources. Identification for speech and/or language services under IDEA is a team decision and cannot be made by one person. The team should be able to determine the discrepancy in performance between the student and their peers. In providing their data to the evaluation team SLPs will address student performance in language, speech sound, voice and fluency as evidence of a severe discrepancy between the speech and/or language performance of the student and their peers. The SLP also provides the team with the impact of communication skills on the student’s performance in academic and social situations within the educational setting. The evaluation should be multi-sourced and sufficiently comprehensive to identify all of the child’s special education and related service needs. KSDE discourages reference to “speech only” evaluations. In an article published in the KSHA Connection (December 2004) Maura Hall suggested looking at educational relevance from

a different perspective i.e., “Will correcting a speech sound error have an essential impact on educational performance either now or the near future?...If (SLPs) are unable to document any impacts or harms caused by the (student’s) speech sound errors, then is it our responsibility to ‘fix’ them for purely cosmetic or aesthetic purposes? Mild sound substitutions or distortions may deserve speech-language services but not necessarily through special education.”

The thought presented here is that children, especially children at the early stages of development will have speech sounds and fluency issues. Approaches to reducing errors and improving language facility are likely to be more successful and student improvement accelerated if speech and language interventions are immersed in the child’s day including home, school, day care, etc. All providers embed opportunities for child speech and language practice throughout the child’s day. This approach preserves therapy time for kids with more significant needs and enhances practice opportunities for kids with milder needs, sound errors, substitutions and distortions.

*Thanks to the paras, teachers and SLPs who work diligently on behalf of kids with speech and language disorders.*