

Learning Disabilities Association of Tennessee

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**Learning Disabilities
Association of Tennessee**

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NEW PHONE NUMBER!

901-788-LDAT (5328)

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Sue Marsh, President

Tammy Mullins, Vice President

Lorna Schmidt, Secretary

Elizabeth Bishop, Treasurer

How to ensure an effective IEP Meeting

Sue Marsh, President

Most families are in the process of addressing their students educational needs for the up-coming school year. Careful planning is the key to the development of a responsive educational plan that covers all areas in which your child may have deficits.

Federal law requires that each individual educational program (IEP) include the child's present level of performance (PLOP). This should contain not only classroom-based assessments, but also the student's most recent scores from state and district wide testing. When compared with last year's PLOP, it is possible to determine the amount of progress your child has obtained over the course of the school year as well as the state standards in which he/she has mastery and the ones in which continued work is needed. Once this data has been analyzed, the team is ready to develop the annual goals and objectives for the next school term.

When generating goals and objectives, Tennessee's academic content standards should be discussed as they relate to your child's education. The general education teacher on the IEP team may serve as the curriculum specialist. State academic content standards specify what students are expected to know and be able to do. "While there might be a gap – sometimes significant – between the student's present level of performance and the skills and knowledge required to meet the grade-level standards – the IEP should address what needs to happen in order for the student to meet the standards" (Cortiella, 2006, retrieved from www.schwablearning.org on 3/27/2007). In other words, how to move your child from his/her present level of performance to the desired state standard is a key point of discussion in developing the IEP. Cortiella (2006) lists several benefits to students when a standards-driven approach is utilized. They include:

- 1 Increased collaboration between general and special educators
- 2 Increased involvement of general education

teachers with the performance of students with disabilities

- 3 Higher expectations for student achievement
- 4 Specific accommodations and modifications designed to support the student with disabilities in a general education environment

Because *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) legislation requires that all students participate in large-scale assessments such as Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program Achievement Test (TCAP) and the Gateway exit exams, students with IEPs that are content-driven and standards-based are tested on skills in which they have received instruction throughout the school year. You can monitor the progress of your child through progress notes that are issued with each report card. If you have concerns about progress toward goals and objectives, an IEP team meeting can be convened to discuss your concerns and modify the IEP if needed.

Additional Tips

Parents, your value to the IEP team cannot be over estimated. While professionals come to the meeting with knowledge of their specialty area, you come to the meeting with specific knowledge of your child. Please share with the team your child's academic and social strengths as well as things that are difficult for him/her. The team will also benefit from knowing how your child learns best and the progress he/she is making at home and in the community. I find it helpful to bring a pad of paper and a pencil with me to meetings to write down questions and notes. If it is not possible to attend an IEP meeting, please schedule a phone conference with the team. The information you share is critical to your child's educational goals and objectives.

Response to Response to Intervention

Elizabeth Bishop, MSSW

With a national estimate of 4-6% of all students in public schools identified as having a specific learning disability (SLD) each year, it is evident that this is a challenge to educational systems everywhere. The 2004 IDEA Reauthorization

proposes a significant change in how children are identified with specific learning disabilities through the adoption of Response to Intervention (RTI) methodology.

RTI is the practice of providing high-quality instruction and interventions to assist learners with reading problems without adding them to the special education population. Interventions are matched to student need, constant monitoring of progress, and applying results or the response from intervention to educational outcomes and goals. Interventions are to be research based and employed at the first sign of academic trouble. RTI is meant as a response for any child at any state of the educational process and is neither a stand alone assessment tool for special education qualification nor a blockade to those specially designed services.

RTI follows a three tiered approach to intervention. The first tier is a specific intervention or interventions, chosen by the school or school district, implemented in the general education classroom. The second tier is small group instruction with the same model and the third tier is more individualized instruction with the model or a referral to special education. These interventions could take 8-12 weeks or longer to implement before a referral to special education services is issued.

The benefits of RTI is that it responds to problems as soon as they appear in class work, not after the child has failed a course or grade. The use of research-based, highly monitored interventions provides details and data not otherwise evident in test scores or course work grades. Implementation of RTI also involves not only the classroom teacher but the parents in the process. However, RTI does have some drawbacks in efficiency to address the needs of students with unidentified learning disabilities.

- ☞ RTI is specifically geared for reading problems and is not applicable to math, science, or sensory issues.
- ☞ RTI assumes that high quality instruction has always been available and does not account

for student transfers, ethnicity, cultural differences, or substandard teaching.

- ☞ RTI also does not account for societal or environmental factors that could be interfering in child's performance such as poverty, abuse and neglect, and substance abuse.
- ☞ Undiagnosed learning disabilities, visual or hearing impairments, or intellectual disabilities are not ruled out as possible causes of poor academic performance prior to implementation of RTI process.
- ☞ Criteria to identify children early could be masked in children who have higher adaptive functioning skills.

There are other related issues with RTI implementation from an administrative view. RTI is very intense and requires time and diligence upon the classroom teacher and administrator. RTI is meant to reduce the number of referrals to special education and reduce the overrepresentation of minorities in special education. Adequate resources are needed so that school systems can choose the most appropriate tool for RTI as well as training for staff to implement and interpret results.

RTI may not be used as a stalling tactic when LD testing is requested by the parent nor can it be used as the sole criteria for determining whether a child has a learning disability. While there are many RTI models available, very little research has gone into the efficiency and efficacy of RTI to reduce special education referrals and minority disparities. In his September 2006 memo, Joseph Fisher stated that RTI implementation in Tennessee could take as long as 4 years to finalize. The state of Tennessee has entered into a contract with the Iris Center at Peabody College of Vanderbilt University to post training modules and other relevant materials for RTI implementation in Tennessee. The training modules developed by the Iris Center are available online at iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu.

While RTI has the potential to benefit many students by early identification, there is a strong air of caution from learning disabilities advocates regarding the specific needs of children with learning

disabilities. A position paper is posted on the LDA of America website at www.ldanatl.org. Here is a listing of questions that parents should ask about RTI.

- ☞ **What specific RTI steps are to be used?**
- ☞ **How will parents participate in RTI?**
- ☞ **What instruction or interventions will be provided in RTI? By whom?**
- ☞ **What criteria will determine changes in RTI instruction and placement?**
- ☞ **Who will be on RTI decision-making teams?**
- ☞ **If RTI is used, when and how is the comprehensive evaluation implemented?**

While research is pending on the utilization of RTI to address educational deficits at an early stage, there is still much to learn. RTI is highly dependent upon the intervener as much as the intervention. As no child is the same, neither are children with disabilities the same. Efforts to identify children with learning difficulties that are generalized to the entire population are not going to be specific enough to address all needs. The potential danger is that children with learning disabilities who are undiagnosed will continue to go unidentified.



Need last minute gift ideas?

How about an LDA membership! LDA is the voice for people with learning disabilities of all ages. LDA is the leading advocate for laws and policies that create opportunities for people with learning disabilities. LDA is a leader in promoting research into the nature and causes of learning disabilities. LDA membership is a great way to show support for the needs of people with learning disabilities.



Check Out this Great Website for Kids with LD and ADHD!

SparkTop.org

With the advantages of the Internet, there are several websites that feature games for students with Learning Disabilities. A review of one such website has been conducted by a student with learning disabilities. The website is SparkTop.org.

I am a student with Learning Disabilities (LD) and my teacher asked me to check out this great website for kids just like me. The website is free and was developed by SchwabLearning.org. I really liked all the activities - Games, Tips, and Advice for Kids who learn differently! The site provides a positive impact on the lives of kids through knowledge, self-discovery, and a safe community.

The goal of the website is to influence how kids like me, view themselves and their differences and increase their likelihood for a successful life. My teacher used the "Recipe for Success" with our Reading Class, and we set goals to follow for one week. We then outlined the steps to achieve the goal. We also brainstormed "Talent Scout" to discover the many talents and things we do well each day! The site has the latest information on TV, music, entertainment, and historical events. These were fun to read! I think the site is really cool!

Do you have a story that you would like to have printed? Do you have a topic or issue you would like to see addressed?

Then write to:

LDA of TN,
PO BOX 40562,
Memphis, TN 38174



The 11th Annual BEYOND ACCESS Inclusion Conference is designed to provide educators, administrators, parents, and related service providers current information on the best and most promising practices in inclusive education. This year's conference theme, "Inclusion: Mission Possible," reestablishes the commitment of educators and schools to become innovative in meeting the educational needs of diverse learners through inclusive practices such as response to intervention, differentiated instructional approaches, co-teaching methodology, and positive behavior support activities. Participants will learn from other practitioners and experts in the field of education better ways of including not only students with disabilities, but all students, through effective educational practices.

Registration fees include access to the conference keynotes and breakout sessions, lunch and break refreshments, conference materials, and unlimited access to the Vendor Fair. Parking is the responsibility of the participant.

Featured Speakers

Dr. William Heward has had an international impact on improving the education and treatment of people with disabilities by influencing the ways many teachers provide education to those children. He has accomplished this not only through his writing but also his university teaching and advising, consulting to schools and other educational programs, his extensive research programs in the field and numerous presentations at professional meetings for researchers and practitioners. Dr. Heward is perhaps best known for his publication (with Dr. John O. Cooper and Professor Timothy E. Heron) of the extremely widely read *Applied Behavior Analysis*, an introduction to behavior analysis. Dr. Heward has written five other books, including *Exceptional Children: An Introduction to Special Education*, in its eighth edition and translated into multiple foreign languages.

Dr. Christopher H. Skinner (Chris) received his M.A. in Special Education from Johnson State University in Vermont and his Ph.D. in School Psychology from Lehigh University in Pennsylvania. He has worked with de-institutionalized adults with chronic schizophrenia and developmental disabilities and taught 10th-grade students with emotional-behavioral disorders and elementary students with autism. Chris served as Editor of Journal of Behavioral Education for 6 years and has edited two books and co-authored a text. Additionally, Chris has published over 100 peer-reviewed journal articles. His interests include preventing and remedying student problems via the application of behavioral strategies.

REGISTRATION:

Educational Professionals

Early Registration* \$70

OnSite Registration* \$90

School Group Discount

\$280 / 5 people or \$360 / 5 people

5th person free with 4 fully paid

Students and Parents

Early Registration \$40 / person

Onsite Registration \$60 / person

Students must submit copy of Student ID

*Early Registration forms must be postmarked by November 6, 2007. If registering on-site please notify the RISE office at (901) 678-4932.

[Registration Forms May Be Faxed 901-678-2772 or mailed to:](#)

The University of Memphis

115 Wilder Tower

Memphis, TN 38152-3520

ACCT #: 539239-229375-234124-58360-2600

Contact the RISE Office at 901-678-4932 for forms or visit the website at www.utmem.edu/bcdd.

**NEW PHONE NUMBER LDA
of TN:
901-788-LDAT (5328)**

At Learning Disabilities Association of Tennessee (LDATN) we often receive phone calls from parents enquiring about the best schools in a specific area for students with specific learning disabilities (SLD). Both state and federal law mandate that students with disabilities must be educated either in their home schools or as close to the home school as possible. Based on this mandate, most districts require that children with SLD be placed in the home school (the school in your neighborhood that children without disabilities attend). Here is the good news

Any school can be a great school for students with SLD if faculty and parents are working together to create an environment that is supportive of the disability while providing a rigorous educational experience. Certain characteristics are evident in all schools that provide an educationally relevant experience for children with SLD. Parents who encourage and support these attributes in their neighborhood school find that the level of success for the student with SLD increases.

Schools that successfully educate students with SLD have **established philosophies that support appropriate educational practices**. A clearly articulated philosophy provides administrators, teachers, and parents with a framework from which educational choices and alternatives can be chosen. It also provides the authority to commit resources to support the decisions that are made. Parents should ask about the values and philosophy at the school when they enroll their child.

Team work and collaboration between all stakeholders is essential. Successful schools have ample planning time for teachers. Communication between parents and school personnel is essential to build an effective partnership for a child's education success. Parents have expert, in-depth knowledge of their child's personality, strengths, and needs and can make substantial contributions. Successful schools recognize this, welcoming input from parents and striving to involve parents, not only in IEP team meetings where decisions are made about the child's education, but also throughout the entire school year as concerns or questions arise.

Successful schools are **flexible**. Faculty and staff are not afraid to make adaptations to the environment and/or curriculum that enhance the student's ability to be successful in an educational activity. Schedules may be adjusted, classes changed, or teaching styles modified to meet the student's needs.

Remember to be friendly and helpful as the partnership works to increase the capacity of a neighborhood school to educate students with SLD. School staff will usually respond positively if suggestions are constructive. Try to avoid placing the school in an adversarial position. The best way to make a child's school the best school is for parents and the faculty to make changes collaboratively. If possible serve on the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) board, be a room parent, or volunteer for other activities at the child's school. This helps parents to get to know the school and also provides the school personnel with an opportunity to get to know them. To share a success story with LDA of Tennessee contact the office at 901-788-5328 (LDAT) or send an email to info@learningdisabilities-tn.org.

Looking for Training?

For more trainings in your area log on to the TN Disability Training Network Calendar at <http://kc.vanderbilt.edu/tnpathfinder/calendar/>

You can also search online for services and professionals at these websites.

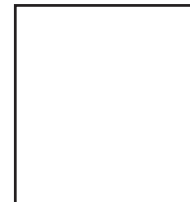
Tennessee Disability Pathfinder – www.familypathfinder.org

West Tennessee Community Services Network www.wtcsn.org Memphis Shelby County LINC services 901-415-2700.

Support and Training for Exceptional Parents S.T.E.P. training calendar can be located on the web at www.tnstep.org or by calling 1-800-280-STEP (7837).



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The Learning Disabilities Association of Tennessee has a mission to provide information concerning awareness, advocacy, parent information, and community education to maximize the quality of life for individuals and families affected by Learning Disabilities and related disorders in Memphis, Shelby County, and West Tennessee.