

Bledsoe Special Education **Informational Newsletter:** ***(Nov\Dec 2023)***

We hope this newsletter finds you well and thriving. As dedicated parents to students with special needs, we want to shed some light on some crucial aspects of your child's educational journey. Such as the transition process, especially at the age of 14, and how you can actively engage in your child's Individualized Education Program (IEP) during this pivotal time. We will address a critical framework in education that plays a significant role in ensuring the success of all students - the Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS). Additionally, we'll explore the significance of ruling out factors that could contribute to a learning deficit, even though they might not be learning disabilities. Lastly, we will explore the fascinating world of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) and share some creative and low-cost STEM activities that you can enjoy with your children right at home.

****IEP Transition Plans****

Why is the Age of 14 Significant?

At the age of 14, your child's IEP takes on a new level of importance. It's the age at which your child's educational plan must begin to address their post-secondary goals. Transition planning becomes a key component of the IEP, focusing on preparing your child for life after high school. This could include further education, employment, and independent living skills.

Here's How You Can Be Actively Involved:

1. **Open and Effective Communication:** Maintaining open lines of communication with your child's teachers, support staff, and IEP team is crucial. Regular meetings and discussions about your child's goals, strengths, and challenges are essential.

2. **Participate in Transition Planning Meetings:** Attend and actively participate in transition planning meetings. These meetings should include discussions about your child's interests, goals, and any services they may require to achieve those goals.

3. **Explore Post-Secondary Options:** Start exploring post-secondary education options, vocational training programs, and employment opportunities. Seek information about available resources and services that can support your child's transition.

4. **Set Realistic Goals:** Work with the IEP team to set realistic goals for your child's transition. Ensure these goals align with your child's skills, interests, and abilities.

5. **Foster Independence:** Encourage independence in your child by involving them in decision-making and self-advocacy. This can be empowering and build their confidence.

6. **Learn About Legal Rights:** Familiarize yourself with your child's legal rights under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Understanding the law can help you advocate effectively for your child's needs.

7. **Collaborate with Community Resources:** Connect with local support groups, disability organizations, and vocational rehabilitation agencies (Transition School To Work: TSW). These organizations can provide valuable guidance and resources.

8. **Stay Informed:** Keep up to date with changes in special education laws and practices. Staying informed will help you navigate the transition process more effectively.

The transition process at the age of 14 can be both exciting and challenging. Your involvement in your child's IEP during this time is crucial to ensure they receive the support they need to pursue their post-secondary goals. By actively participating and advocating for your child, you can help them embark on a path to a successful and fulfilling future.

Remember that you are not alone in this journey. Reach out to your child's school, IEP team, and support networks for assistance and guidance. Together, we can empower our children to achieve their dreams and aspirations.

Thank you for your unwavering commitment to your child's education and well-being. We look forward to supporting you throughout this transitional period.

****RTI/MTSS****

What is RTI/MTSS?

RTI/MTSS is a systematic and data-driven approach that supports all students, including those with disabilities, in reaching their full potential. It's designed to provide a framework that fosters the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) for every student, ensuring that they receive the right level of support and intervention to succeed.

How RTI/RTI/MTSS Promotes High-Quality Instruction and Support For All Students

1. **Tiered Approach:** RTI/MTSS operates on a tiered system, offering varying levels of support. Tier 1 provides high-quality, evidence-based instruction for all students in the general education setting. Students who need additional support move to Tier 2, where they receive targeted interventions, and for those who require more intensive assistance, there's Tier 3. The flexibility of these tiers allows each student to receive an appropriate level of support, ultimately promoting the LRE.
2. **Data-Driven Decision Making:** RTI/MTSS relies on data to monitor student progress and make informed decisions about interventions. By regularly collecting and analyzing data, educators can adjust the level of support for each student, ensuring that all things remain as the same as possible (Least Restrictive Environment: LRE) while addressing their unique needs.
3. **Early Intervention:** One of the core principles of RTI/MTSS is early intervention. By identifying and addressing students' needs as soon as possible, it helps prevent more significant learning challenges in the future. This early support within the general education setting is essential to maintaining the LRE.
4. **Collaborative Team Approach:** RTI/MTSS promotes collaboration among educators, specialists, and families. This collaborative effort ensures that

students' needs are met while considering their individual strengths and challenges. The focus is on keeping students in their general education classrooms as much as possible while providing the necessary supports.

5. Individualized Support Plans: RTI/MTSS tailors interventions and supports to align with each student's specific goals, ensuring that they receive the LRE while addressing their unique learning requirements.

Your Role as Parents

As parents of students with disabilities, your involvement is crucial in the RTI/MTSS process. Here's how you can actively participate:

1. Stay Informed: Familiarize yourself with RTI/MTSS and its components. Understand how the system supports the LRE for your child.
2. Collaborate with Educators: Engage in open communication with your child's teachers and support staff. Share your insights into your child's strengths and needs.
3. Participate in Meetings: Attend RTI/MTSS meetings and IEP meetings. Your input is invaluable in shaping the support and services your child receives.
4. Support at Home: Continue to provide support at home that complements the strategies used in the classroom. Your partnership with educators is vital to your child's success.

RTI/MTSS is a powerful framework that ensures the LRE for all students. By working together with educators and actively participating in your child's educational journey, we can provide our exceptional students with the best opportunities to thrive. We are here to support you every step of the way, and together, we can create an inclusive and empowering learning environment for all.

****Unraveling Learning Challenges: The Importance of Ruling Out Non-Disability Factors****

Identifying the underlying causes of a learning deficit is critical. Sometimes, challenges that resemble learning disabilities may be attributed to various other factors, including:

1. Vision and Hearing Problems:

- Undiagnosed vision or hearing issues can significantly impact a child's ability to learn. Regular eye and hearing examinations are essential to ensure these factors are not hindering their progress.

2. Speech and Language Delays:

- Speech or language delays can be mistaken for learning disabilities. Early support and interventions can help children overcome these obstacles.

3. Emotional or Behavioral Concerns:

- Emotional distress, anxiety, or behavioral challenges can disrupt learning. Understanding and addressing these issues is vital.

4. Environmental Factors:

- Factors such as a disruptive home environment, attendance, trauma, or frequent changes in living situations can affect a child's ability to concentrate and learn.

Your Role in the Process

As parents, you play a crucial role in identifying and addressing these factors:

- **Open Communication:** Maintain open lines of communication with your child's educators, therapists, and healthcare providers. Share your concerns and observations regarding your child's learning challenges.

- **Regular Health Checkups:** Ensure that your child has regular health checkups, including vision and hearing screenings. Any undiagnosed issues should be promptly addressed.

- **Advocate for Your Child:** Be an advocate for your child's educational and emotional well-being. If you **suspect non-disability factors** are affecting their learning, work collaboratively with school professionals to find suitable solutions.

It's important to remember that every child is unique, and the causes of learning challenges can vary widely. By ruling out negative factors that could contribute to a learning deficit, we can ensure that our children receive the appropriate support and interventions they need.

We encourage you to stay engaged with your child's educational team and keep the lines of communication open. Together, we can provide the best possible learning environment for our exceptional children.

****Engaging STEM Activities for Our Extraordinary Students at Home****

1. Build a Homemade Weather Station:

- Use empty plastic bottles to create a rain gauge and a wind vane.
- Teach your child to measure rainfall and observe wind direction.
- This simple activity not only teaches science but also connects your child with their environment.

2. Backyard Bird Watching:

- Set up a bird feeder or create birdhouses from recycled materials.
- Keep a journal to record the types of birds that visit your yard.
- Encourage your child to learn about different bird species, their habitats, and behaviors.

3. Kitchen Chemistry:

- Explore chemistry with ingredients found in your kitchen.
- Conduct simple experiments like creating a vinegar and baking soda volcano or growing crystals from salt.
- Safety is paramount, so always supervise your child during these experiments.

4. Nature Scavenger Hunt:

- Create a list of natural items found in your local environment.
- Go on a scavenger hunt to find leaves, rocks, insects, or plants.
- This activity fosters curiosity, observation skills, and a love for the outdoors.

5. Engineering Challenges:

- Use everyday materials like cardboard, popsicle sticks, and rubber bands to challenge your child to build structures or contraptions.
- These hands-on engineering challenges help develop problem-solving skills and creativity.

6. Star Gazing:

- On clear nights, explore the night sky with your child.
- Identify constellations, planets, and stars.
- Encourage a sense of wonder and curiosity about the universe.

7. Virtual STEM Resources:

- Utilize online resources like educational YouTube channels and STEM websites.
- Many offer free videos, interactive lessons, and experiments that can be done at home.

Remember that STEM activities can be adapted to accommodate your child's unique learning needs. Be patient, and let your child explore at their own pace. The key is to foster a sense of wonder and curiosity about the world around us. At-home STEM activities can be both fun and educational, offering a fantastic way for your child to develop critical thinking skills and a love for learning. We hope these ideas inspire you to embark on exciting STEM adventures with your child. Your involvement in their education is invaluable, and together, we can provide our extraordinary students with the tools to succeed.