

## WHAT IS YOUR BURNING QUESTION ABOUT INCLUSIVE EDUCATION?



**SUCCESS FOR ALL STUDENTS** (SFAS) has been funded by the Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council, with support from the Ohio Department of Education, since 1998. A primary objective of SFAS is to successfully include, in general education classrooms, children with significant disabilities who have traditionally been segregated in separate classrooms.

SFAS seeks to help individual school communities gain the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to promote inclusionary practices; to create strong partnerships among parents, teachers and school personnel; and to increase the opportunities for children to be valued members of their school community, and as a result, to be more fully included in after school and community activities.

SFAS is managed by the Central Ohio Special Education Regional Resource Center (Serre), Miami Valley Serre, Northern Ohio Serre, Southwestern Ohio Serre and the Child Advocacy Center.

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## FINDING OUR WAY TO INCLUSIVE

## SCHOOLS

PARENTS  
AND  
EDUCATORS  
**REFLECT**  
ON A  
CONFERENCE  
LEARNING  
EXPERIENCE



*Finding Our Way to Inclusive Schools* was published and developed through a grant from the Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council. All opinions are those of *Success for All Students* and do not necessarily reflect those of the Council.



"Success for all Students"



## **More Questions Waiting to be Unpacked.....**

**H**ow can we invite more people to experience and notice the wonderful things that happen when students are welcomed into their school community?

**W**hat is the next step? How do I challenge each child?

**I**s there a way to determine when helping stops and enabling begins?

**H**ow do I make each student feel a part of the class?

**W**hat would it take for us to let go of the “how to” for a while and move on to the “what” we want to happen?

*“We learn from the questions others have the courage to ask.”*

-PETER BLOCK, THE ANSWER TO HOW IS YES:

ACTING ON WHAT MATTERS

# Finding Our Way to Inclusive Schools

*Parents and Educators Reflect  
on a Conference Learning Experience*

*“Questions open the world to us. Between not knowing and our urge  
to know is where we are most attentive and alive.”*

*-VERNA ALLEE, THE SEEDS OF KNOWLEDGE*

**O**ne more plus is that we have learned more about each other. This affords us the opportunity to discuss things that we normally don't take the time to do at school. It has given me a renewed appreciation for the people that I work with and the school where we are attempting to institute a better learning atmosphere.

RANDY, MIDDLE SCHOOL INTERVENTION SPECIALIST

*“If the truth is to become our own, we need to allow our experiences to speak to us.”*

-SHARON SALZBERG

## **Introduction**

**H**ello everyone! My question had to do with making inclusion meaningful to every student and teacher. I guess that I still hate the word "inclusion" because it means that ALL still doesn't mean ALL. We still have a group(s) that are disenfranchised and that is sad. I enjoyed meeting some parents who were there with waiver money support. I learned (from one helpful parent) to be politically correct/sensitive and refer first to children, then to the disability as in "child with autism" vs. "autistic child" if a label was needed. That makes sense to me, and it is such a minor thing with major implications.

I guess that I was pleasantly surprised to return and have so many colleagues asking "what did you learn?" and indicating a desire to watch the video (upon arrival) and read some of the books. I purchased several copies of "Learning Outside the Lines" and a few students are reading! (they even admit to reading and parents are confirming!!!!!!) A teacher even "borrowed" the book from one of her students.

I think this trip gave me an opportunity to remember why I entered the education profession, and to remember how great it is to share with colleagues - to have real conversations, not just 30 second encounters. Thank you!

LAURA, SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST

*FINDING OUR WAY TO INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS* is a collection of messages exchanged among participants of the 2002 School Reform and Inclusion Conference in Denver, Colorado. The voices in this booklet represent the hopes, challenges and possibilities of creating inclusive school communities.

History tells us that our work will not be easy. We know that before 1975 many students with disabilities were excluded entirely from public education. Today, even after the passage of federal laws designed to support and protect students with disabilities many learners are still isolated from "regular" children.

Some of us are beginning to challenge those old assumptions. We are beginning to recognize the contribution of all children. In the process, something curious is happening - We are discovering our own gifts and capacities for change. We are becoming better at what we do for everyone as we are learning to be inclusive. Our insights are leading us to new discoveries and new questions.

We hope that by sharing these questions and reflections others on the path of change will feel more comfortable living and working in the gray areas - between knowing and not knowing - and that all who read this will be renewed by the spirit of these individuals.

*“Reflection is a process of knowing what we know. It is the only chance we have to discover our blindness and to recognize that the certainties and knowledge of others are, respectively, as overwhelming and tenuous as our own.”*

*-VARELLA & MATORANA, THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE*

I went to Denver hoping that I could find a magic wand and make everything that we have learned over the last 10 years magically transform itself into the minds of the high school staff and administration. Well, for those of you who went shopping in Denver, you can find magic wands and they are a great gift to bring home, but they don't work any magic. So as you all struggle, as we all struggle on how to bring the magic into the conversation, how to move forward with some action around our questions, think about how we impact not only the moment in time and the place that we are right now, but how our actions can impact the systems of our much larger environment. Because our inability to do that will come back to have a direct and substantial impact on our actions of today. So to sum it up, how do we take action without a magic wand?

MARY, KATIE'S MOM

**A** story. My daughter Katie is a freshman in high school. Since we entered into the school system in kindergarten, we have struggled with and learned from just about every question posted. We moved from someone having to be with Katie all the time, to her interdependence in classrooms. We moved from having her own curriculum to her involvement in and progress in the general education curriculum. We moved from conversations around what one person's "A" means to what progress and learning means for all learners, and yes it is different, but it's just different, not less. We have moved from all the responsibility being placed on the special education teacher to a real collaboration and learning that we all have a valuable role and we embrace what we value. We have learned a lot. But guess what. All of that learning went right out the window when we showed up in high school. As I sit back and look at what has happened over the last semester, what was in place, what wasn't and I read your questions, we are right back in the same place we were in kindergarten.

## **Most of You Carried at Least One Question to Denver.....**

**What** happened around your question?

**What** might this mean - either personally or for your work?

**What** did you discover about yourself?

**What** else did you learn? What surprised you?

**What** needs to happen next?

**What** new questions do you have?

Even from that height, we were able to take beginner level runs to the bottom. All along the way John taught, coached, and spotted me. When we reached the bottom, I was tired, but felt good. I had skied down the mountain and hadn't hurt myself!

That afternoon, we skied some intermediate slopes. I was nervous and did fall once. But I got back up and finished the run. By the time I reached the bottom again, I was beat! But, it had been a wonderful day.

I learned a lot about myself this year. I was surprised how afraid I'd felt and how low my self-confidence had been. Maybe that's how many educators and parents feel when asked to include all children in the total fabric of the "regular" education community. Even though I wanted to ski, I needed the support of an experienced teacher who encouraged, coached and made it safe for me to try. If I had backed out, my confidence level would have sunk even farther. Though I'm still a beginner and need support, I want to ski again. And the next time won't be nearly as scary.

Teachers and parents who want to include all children need more support than has often been provided. My next steps involve working to make it safe enough for teachers and parents to give all children the experience of being full members of the school community. Then, maybe next year, it won't be so scary for them either.

MARTY, EDUCATIONAL CONSULTANT

*“Questioning can change institutions and entire cultures. It can empower people to create strategies for change.”*

-VIVIAN HUTCHINSON

**T**his year I decided to go skiing after the "PEAK" Conference, even though the only time I had skied was 35 years ago in Ohio! I asked my son's friend, John, who lives in Denver and was a skiing instructor, "How about taking an older, out of shape novice skier?" John enthusiastically agreed.

As the time approached, I started to worry. People told me horror stories about friends and relatives who hurt this or broke that. And being 52 years old, having had two knee surgeries, and gaining 30 pounds since my first surgery, I had my own doubts. By the time I got to Denver, skiing had become a dark mountain that loomed on the horizon. It was so scary it distracted my attention from the conference. Luckily, John's enthusiasm and the encouragement I received from one of our fellow Ohio travelers kept me bolstered.

Sunday dawned in a mood that matched my own - overcast, windy and cold. John, Erin, another friend of his, and I reached Winter Park and were ready to ski by 8:30 a.m.... The moment of truth had arrived. John gave us lessons, explaining what to do, demonstrating it, having us practice and then giving us feedback - telling us what he had observed and how to do it more effectively.

After a few runs down the easiest hill, John announced that it was time to go up the mountain. New doubts flooded my brain. I'm afraid of heights and we were going to take an 8 1/2 minute chair lift ride 1700 vertical feet up! John taught me how to get on and off the chair lift; then, up, up, up, and up some more we went. When we finally reached the top, it was so cold and windy that we immediately headed downhill.

**W**hat can I do as a building leader to convince people that inclusive education is something we want to do?

As a building principal, I often feel out on a limb (just part of the job...). However, it was wonderful to realize how many people there are out there where I can get support!

I have a wonderful staff but I sense a great deal of fear. I've got my work cut out for me, but now I feel I've got some tools for the job.

My epiphany came while having dinner with Doug Fisher. This is not a new idea for me. I think I can!!! I have more confidence that I am not alone.

What am I going to do first?

*TODD, ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPAL*

**My** question is how can we best serve everyone? How can we make everyone feel successful? Can everyone (or should everyone) learn algebra?

First I want to thank you and everyone for giving me the opportunity to go to Denver to attend and participate in the conference. I learned a lot. I never knew much about ADD or ADHD but I found it immensely enlightening to listen to speakers who have dealt with and continue to deal with this.

I did not find an answer to my question, "Does everyone need to take Algebra II?" I will continue to search for that answer.

I found it a little comforting in the fact that even though we have only been working with inclusion for two years - we are doing okay. Yes - we need to continue to work in this area of including everyone in this education process and yes, no matter where we are, we need to constantly be working on improvement in all areas.

I discovered that I still can become energized this late in my career. What a great feeling! I don't feel like a "special ed" teacher any more. I feel like I am really contributing to a greater number of students than ever before in my life, like I am really doing something that will help another human being

I need to develop an effective time management system. In my school, I am pulled many different directions: audio equipment, video equipment, computers, pictures, digital this and that, mini courses, and last but not least, inclusion specialist. I guess my question would be how to balance all of these things without any of them suffering. I pretty much know what I need to do though. I will probably have more questions as I get more experience.

Thanks for the opportunity that you afforded me. It will be of benefit to many students.

RANDY, MIDDLE SCHOOL INTERVENTION SPECIALIST

I didn't take any questions with me. I went to listen and learn what I could and hopefully be able to apply what I've learned back at school. Questions are naturally generated as I hear the presenters and the people from the audience. It was an awesome experience.

What happens next is that I will incorporate some of the things that I learned into the program where I teach. I will walk the walk of inclusion and educate others about the things that have affected me at the conference. I will remain super sensitive to the actions and reactions of all of the students that I encounter and will work to improve their quality of their life and to make them feel worthy of trying to better themselves. What used to be problems and roadblocks are now challenges and opportunities. I will endeavor to help the students to develop a more positive attitude about learning and about school, to make it a rewarding place to come.

I also found that many speakers talked about understanding and compassion. Many times high school teachers forget those two words. It never hurts me to be reminded that I am dealing with people and I need to remember to be understanding and compassionate.

In Algebra, we are working on multi-process problems, such as going to the store and buying something on sale for 15% off. Our problem is then to figure out the discount and sale price. This is a real problem. I know that 3 step or 3+ - step problems are very difficult for many students. Can these be introduced more easily?

Again, thanks for the wonderful experience of Denver. I will never forget and hopefully will remain energized.

SHIRLEY, HIGH SCHOOL ALGEBRA TEACHER

## What is my job?

I wanted to know the role of the inclusion teacher and I found out that I'm doing it!

This helps me know I'm on the right track and that there is more that I can be doing.

Next, I want to help the teachers in my department understand their role and how I can help them educate the students they have in their classes.

I learned that one way to make the inclusion program work is to implement a good strong peer tutoring program..all successful programs use this. I was very surprised at how our inclusion model is so similar to that of San Diego (Douglas Fisher) and that they have been at it for 10 years...are successful...and that was great to find out. This makes me think we can also be successful.

I listened as Joyce and her husband Ed talked about the importance of being guided by the what and why - and not getting stuck in the how.

I was reminded of something either Carl or Jason had said at a meeting before we left for Denver. They talked about influencing others through informal conversation and sharing stories about kids.

What does this mean for me personally? That being in conversation about what matters is one way to sustain our energy and might even be the action that changes the world.

My new question?

" What would it take for us to make time for conversation? "

**H**ow can we sustain our energy as we go about change?

While in Denver I bought and read the book: “*Turning to One Another; Simple Conversations to Restore Hope to the Future*” by Margaret Wheatley. In that book I read this line - “When we begin to listen to each other, and when we talk about things that matter to us, the world begins to change.”

While in Denver I listened to a school team as they talked about what matters to them. I listened to Randy’s voice (and heart and soul) in his writings. He wrote, “Without exception, we are getting a strong message from every speaker and that message is this: inclusion is the right thing to do. To segregate students from their peers is a severe, degrading injustice to the student and to their parents. Inclusion is not a place (room) or a thing. It is a philosophy and a work in progress. It is a concept. It is not mainstreaming; it is not an activity, and finally, it is not a drop and hope situation.”

I discovered that even though I have been a believer in inclusion, I am more passionate about it than I thought. I also could not believe how good it made me feel about myself and the job I do to know that I am on the right track and doing the things I should be doing..I am not out there in left field somewhere.

How do we turn around the thinking of our special education teachers so they understand their role and job and get away from the mentality that “this is not my job?” Some have been confused up to this point about their role and that has caused confusion with the regular education teachers.

So...how do we all get on the same page?

LINDA, HIGH SCHOOL INTERVENTION SPECIALIST

**I want to thank you for allowing me the opportunity to attend the conference in Denver. It was a very educational experience.**

**How does successful inclusive education work when there are not enough staff members?**

**I found the solution to my question! After attending a seminar with Douglas Fisher, I realized that implementing a peer tutoring program could help solve some of our problems. I was pleasantly surprised to learn that what we are trying to do in our inclusion program is similar to the one in California. It seem that we are not the only ones who have staffing issues.**

**Now, how to get all the teachers on board?**

SUSAN, HIGH SCHOOL INTERVENTION SPECIALIST

**Thank you for allowing me to journey to PEAK and beyond with all of you. I am so happy to see this beginning discussion. This discussion has raised a new “question” for me. I have been struggling with this peer idea for a while - more from the developing friendships side. While I realize that some intention is needed to facilitate relationships (as well as tutoring) for Erin, I worry about promoting any programs that would make Erin a “service project” or a “service credit”.**

**Erin is being tutored in American Sign Language (an official foreign language at our high school) by two students. Fortunately, it has turned into a more natural happening and Erin has benefited from her relationships with these two students in other ways. One of these students is also a member of the drama club with Erin. She has encouraged Erin to try out for more drama club crews, etc.. This girl has seen what Erin can do, has observed her interests, and is encouraging her to be a helper not just a “helpsee.”**

**How do we encourage more equal, reciprocal relationships?**

BARR, ERIN'S MOM