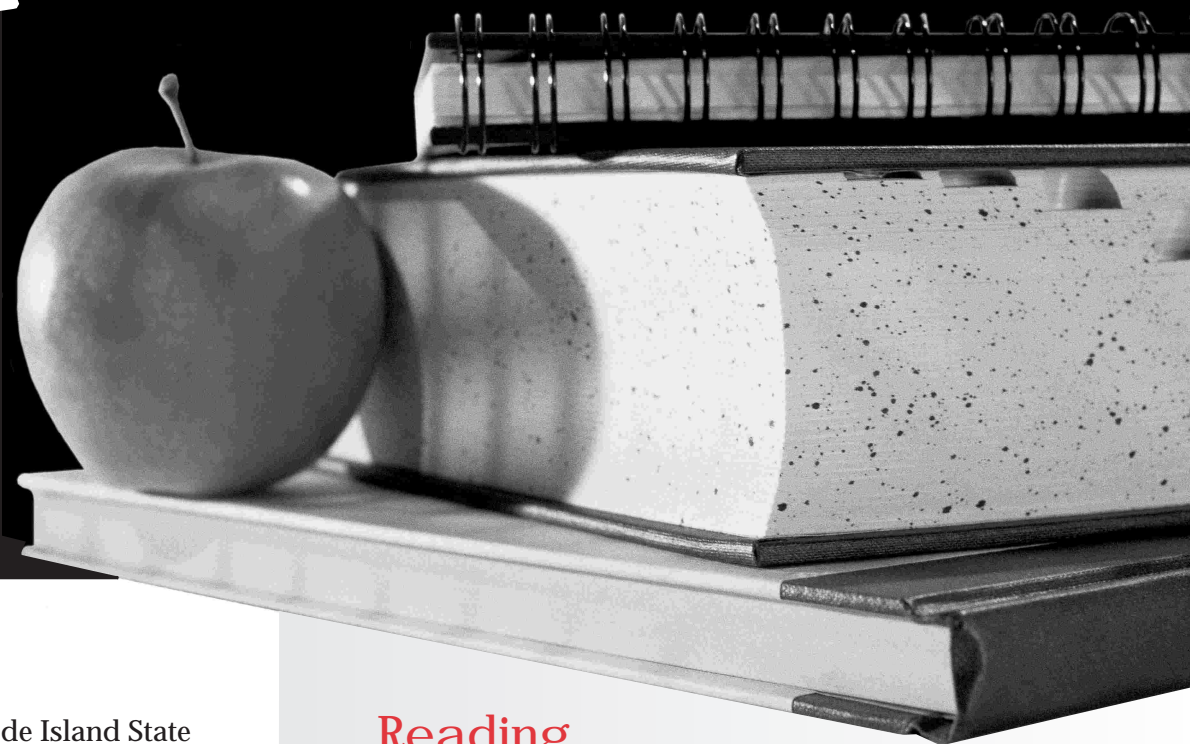


RITnnovations

Information and Resources
for Educators and Families
of All Children Including
Those with Special Needs

Volume I, Issue 2
Spring 2003



What's Inside...

At the White House, the Rhode Island State House, and the local schoolhouse, the chant reverberates – “Literacy, Literacy, Literacy.” The message to teach all kids to read is clear and Rhode Island is organizing its resources to lead and support districts and schools in this effort.

Clearly reading is essential to success in our society and scientific research tells us that most reading difficulties can be prevented. The challenge is to connect the scientifically based research to plans for improving reading instruction.

The good news is that we do not have to do this alone. Teaching all kids to read is a shared challenge. It will take collaboration among all of us – the US Department of Education, the Rhode Island Department of Education, local school leaders, general and special population practitioners, higher education, families and community agencies.

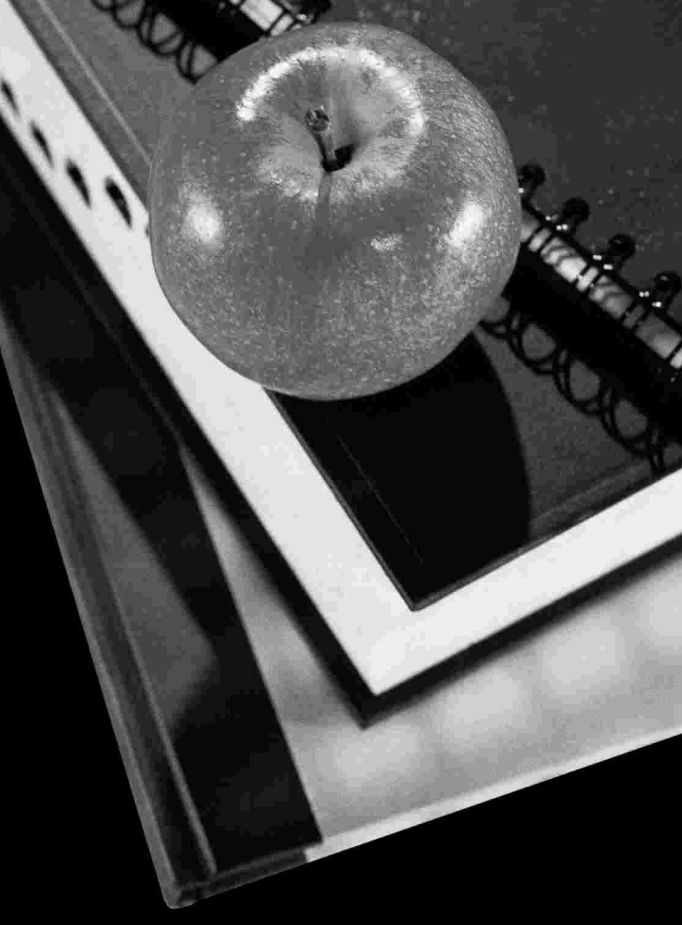
This issue of RInnovations focuses directly on that challenge and Rhode Island’s response. Without a doubt, we have much work to do together.

-Judith A. Saccardo, Ed.D., Director
Rhode Island Technical Assistance Project (RITAP)
at Rhode Island College

Reading..... The Challenge

The Winter Leadership Conference was the site of a provocative presentation by Jack Fletcher, Ph.D. This plain spoken academic is a child neuro-psychologist at the University of Texas-Houston, and a leading researcher on many aspects of the development of reading, language, and other cognitive skills in children. His extensive resume of state and federal grant, research, and educational initiatives speaks to the broad spectrum of expertise that Dr Fletcher brought to the conference. His two presentations *Reading: Putting Research Results in the Classroom* and *Rethinking Learning Disabilities: A Collaborative Venture* stirred reaction among the 300 plus participants by striking vital chords with the various constituencies within the audience.

Dr. Fletcher offered research based information that challenges the thinking and practices at the core of the education world. Despite the money and effort infused into the U.S. public school system, we are not successfully closing the learning gaps for many of our children. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress, “Approximately 40% of students across the country cannot read at a basic level; almost 70% of low-income fourth grade students cannot read at basic level; and almost 50% of students living in urban areas cannot read at basic level.”



“A few of the thoughts that I brought back to my faculty and staff include the simple idea that special education and general education should share resources to teach all kids. Also Dr. Fletcher’s emphasis on the need to address reading at any grade level makes sense for us at Bain. His research and common sense approach helped us focus on some simple, yet critical issues of teaching reading at the middle school. Having two of my teachers, a special and a general educator, attend the conference with me definitely helped bring some important messages and discussions back to Bain!”

Michael O’Rourke, Principal
Bain Middle School

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Dr. Fletcher cited a number of causes for the reading crisis in our schools. He referred to the RAND Reading Report, which states:

- Demand for literacy is high and getting higher.
- Level of reading skills on national and some international comparisons is stagnant.
- Reading instruction is often minimal or ineffective in many classrooms.
- Teacher preparation is often inadequate.

The increasing deterioration of our children’s reading ability has greatly contributed to the number of children referred for special education services. Unfortunately, the dramatic increase in demand for special services has not yielded the expected academic gains. Jack Fletcher identified key flaws within the special education system that inhibit student performance gains.

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Special Education : The System

- Identification is based on a *failure-underlying* model.
- This *wait to fail* model sometimes stabilizes but seldom remediates.
- This model is oriented to procedural compliance, not services or outcomes.

After discussing our educational system’s shortcomings, Dr. Fletcher’s presentation motivated the audience with a series of action steps to improve the reading results for students with and without disabilities. Because a child’s education is a series of partnerships, we must look to the first and most critical relationship for the child, the family; and what the child is exposed to in the home. Science tells us there is a direct relationship between exposure to language and printed materials, and a child’s reading and comprehension ability.

Families have the opportunity to set the stage for success in reading by:

- reading to their preschool children,
- providing a literature rich environment, and
- developing an enthusiasm for reading.

Once the child enters school, according to Dr Fletcher, research tells us that “*many reading difficulties and disabilities can be prevented through explicit and systematic instruction and concentrated intervention*”. Therefore, the classroom teacher becomes the second critical partner in the effort to teach a child to read. For teachers to teach well, they must be well trained. This places the onus of proper education of America’s teachers squarely on our colleges and universities.

Essential components of teacher training programs are:

- instructional strategies that are scientifically sound
- effective reading programs based on research results
- an awareness and understanding of learning differences among students

In an interview with Jack Fletcher the question, “What type of changes do you suggest within preservice programs for teachers?”, was posed. He suggested that to change what colleges are teaching there must be a dialog between the state education agency, higher education, and the schools. Once communication is established among these partners in education, value judgments can be replaced with access to information; the same information shared among all parties. The basis for change in teacher preparation programs lies in “*what schools need*”. Finally, if teachers are expected to maintain an informed and current edge to their teaching strategies, they must remain engaged in learning themselves. The support of school administrators is pivotal in the ongoing professional development of educators.

“In the field of education, we must use research based information to advance best practices in assessment, teaching, and learning. Jack Fletcher provides important information for all of us.”

Judy DiMeo,
Professor of Special Education
Rhode Island College

With the tools necessary to teach reading to diverse learning populations, teachers are ready for the next critical step; what happens in the classroom. The interaction between teacher and learner is vital in creating successful readers. In the 1998 National Research Council (NRC) and the 2000 National Reading Panel (NRP) Reports, five essential components that must be integrated into reading instruction are identified:

- phonemic awareness
- phonics
- fluency
- vocabulary
- text comprehension

Teachers need to provide direct and differentiated instruction to students, motivate their students to read, and employ extensive and ongoing monitoring to assess effectiveness and guide instruction.

With an emphasis on early intervention, access and opportunity for engagement in reading, and the use of a scientifically based approach to reading, Jack Fletcher suggests that schools will avoid “*instructional casualties*” and consequently less students will be referred to special education services. Prior to referral for these services, intervention should occur within the classroom.

“Dr Fletcher was a refreshing speaker because he backed up every one of his statements with research. He validated the use of direct instruction reading programs at the middle school and specified the SRA Corrective Reading Program for large groups of students at the same instructional level. The SRA Corrective Reading Program is currently in place in general education and special education classrooms at Ponaganset Middle School. He also identified the Phono-Graphix Reading Program for use with small groups and individuals. Following the conference, our superintendent authorized the purchase of that program. Two students are receiving reading instruction through Phono-Graphix and making great progress.”

John Kelly, Special Education Teacher
Deb Procopio, 6th Grade Teacher
Ponaganset Middle School

Dr Fletcher proposes a 3 Tier Model as part of the instructional system.

If progress is inadequate move to the next level.

Level 1: Primary Intervention

Enhanced general education classroom instruction.

Level 2: Secondary Intervention

Child receives more intense intervention in general education, presumably in small groups.

Level 3: Tertiary

Child receives special education services. Intervention increases in intensity and duration.

This model would automatically orient education towards a universally designed approach to instruction. Once a child enters school, he or she would have access and opportunity to learn via direct instruction in a manner that suits his or her individual needs within the general education classroom.

“If schools follow what Dr. Fletcher suggests, our children (those with disabilities) will be naturally included.”

Claudia Lowe, Parent

To reach this end, Dr. Fletcher left the audience with 3 major recommendations:

- Most reading difficulties can be prevented. (National Research Council Report, 1998)
- To provide targeted student instruction, student progress must be assessed and evaluated continually.
- Well-trained teachers are the best intervention strategy students have. (National Research Council Report, 1998)

Reading..... The Rhode Island Response

The Rhode Island Department of Education and the Office of Special Needs are responding to the challenge of improving the reading achievement for all Rhode Island students. Many of the national initiatives which promote and support the changes that Dr. Jack Fletcher recommended are a part of the RI Initiative to improve literacy skills in Rhode Island. The following is a brief description of some of the efforts of the RIDE and OSN.

continued on next page

continued from page 3

Reading First.... This initiative is federally funded and is administered by the RIDE Office of Instruction. The focus is on early reading instruction and assessment. The districts targeted for assistance are those high poverty LEAs with schools that are low performing and not improving in English language arts as demonstrated by performance on the RI State Assessment. The RI Reading First Initiative requires district reading programs to develop a coherent instructional design which includes explicit instructional strategies, a coordinated sequence of instruction, ample opportunity to practice, aligned student materials, and a daily block of uninterrupted time for reading instruction.

RI Reading Initiative – Reading Fellowship Program..... Four reading teachers were selected for their demonstrated excellence to serve as Reading Fellows at the RIDE. They are currently developing Literacy Content Standards for all teachers K-12 and supporting the certification/credentialing process for new teachers. They oversee the Network for the Foundation of Literacy Instruction, Assessment and Coaching for seven urban districts that have the lowest performing elementary schools in English language arts.

To reach the educational goal of leaving no child in RI behind, the Board of Regents has drafted new High School Literacy Regulations including, *Assessing Reading Levels of Students Before and During High School*. The requirements within ensure each district's annual report of all students who fail to attain proficiency on Commissioner-designated state subtests of state assessments. This regulation applies to all public schools at every grade level and is not limited to high schools. It is enacted in order to ensure that reading interventions are undertaken when there is evidence of a literacy problem and builds upon the requirements of Article 18 which compel schools and districts to report reading levels of all students in grades K-3.

To address the trend towards an increasing and disproportionate number of students being referred for special education services, the Initiative for Reading Excellence through Assessment and Differentiation (I READ) was developed. Funds are targeted for teacher and leadership training. Elementary schools with a high special education referral rate and high percentages of students performing at the lowest levels of the two reading subtests in the NSRE for English language arts are targeted for support. The four regional educational collaboratives are the fiscal agents and administrators of the I READ Project.

Project Access (Advancing Commitment and Capacity of Educators to Support Students) is a team approach to capacity building among classroom teachers. Based through the four regional collaboratives, their focus has been sharing and expanding strategies to support diverse learning needs in the classroom. For years 2002-2004, the core of their work is in the area of literacy. Professional development and resources are directed towards building teachers' repertoires of strategies for improving student performance in reading, and to share knowledge and skills with other teachers.

Excerpted from Current Reading Initiatives in RI, RI Department of Education, Winter Leadership Conference, January 24, 2003.

State Legislative Acts have insured the inclusion of special education in the school reform agenda and the Rhode Island School Improvement Initiative. The Children with Disabilities Study: Special Education in the Context of School Reform was commissioned by the RI General Assembly in July 1999. The report provided information about children with disabilities and their special education programs to inform and enhance the strategic and school improvement processes. This extensive evaluation yielded recommendations that encompass a unified general and special approach to school reform. In regards to reading, it emphasized prevention, early identification and intervention with the following conclusion, *"The first level of prevention is for all students to be provided with high quality reading instruction in general education. Many of the reading difficulties that result in the identification of children as learning disabled can be prevented through early identification and intervention programs."*

State law via Article 18, The Rhode Island Student Investment Program, holds districts and schools accountable for student performance. Key requirements include:

- Accountability for student performance with the emphasis on closing performance gaps as correlated with poverty, gender, language, language background, and disability.
- Scientific research based reading programs to improve reading skills for all children.
- Personal Literacy Programs for each student performing below grade level.
- Professional development to assist teachers to improve reading instruction and enhance reading throughout the curriculum.

As Jack Fletcher made us aware, the sooner we intervene the better but it is never too late to start. Reading is fundamental to success in all academic areas. The children in the State of Rhode Island deserve access and opportunity to the best education we can provide; and only through the joint effort and shared responsibility of home, school, state education agency, and higher education will our children succeed within and outside of the classroom.

For more information:

Dr. Jack Fletcher is the Co-Director of the Center for Academic and Reading Skills.
<http://cars.uth.tmc.edu>
Jack.Fletcher@uth.tmc.edu

The Children with Disabilities Study is available for free viewing and download at www.ritap.org

The Rhode Island Department of Education Office of Special Needs and the Rhode Island Technical Assistance Project (RITAP) at Rhode Island College co-sponsor a quarterly statewide Leadership Institute Series. Conference brochures are posted in the Current News and Events section of the RITAP website at www.ritap.org

Rhode Island Reading Initiatives are detailed on the RIDE website at www.ridoe.net/standards/reading/default.htm

Article 18 is available for free viewing and download at www.rilin.state.ri.us/Statutes/TITLE16/16-7.1/INDEX.HTM

Partners in Education

The School, Family and Technical Assistance Relationship

by Julie Pascoe and Diane LaMontagne
TBI Consultants, RITAP

Families are never expecting the life changes following a brain injury. The family portrayed below never anticipated the trauma and life changes they have had to face but with their strong will, determination, knowledge, and collaboration efforts managed to create a successful plan of action. Advocating keeping him in the community, home school, and past-attended regular classes had been a priority to address all of Greg's needs educationally, emotionally and socially.



Greg's word of advice: "Just always strive to be the best."

In December in the small town of North Smithfield, Rhode Island, two months after his 12th birthday, Greg Joseph, a star athlete and straight "A" student was involved in a serious car accident. He remained in a coma for several days. With the expertise of the medical staff at RI Hasbro Children's hospital, he was pulled through this trauma. However, his brain injury resulted in a total loss of speech, right side hemiparesis (weakness), and a memory deficit.

For the following months and years while faced with new challenges, Greg remained focused, strong, and had a "will to survive". He resided with his parents at the Franciscan Children's hospital for five months for rehabilitation services, working very hard trying to regain the skills lost. Then, they were able to finally return home and celebrate the Christmas they never had. In June, only six months post injury, Greg was scheduled to reenter school. His family, through their support and knowledge, advocated for him to return to his home school with the peers and in the community that has "been there" continuously for him and his family. However, the school system never experienced a child

with a traumatic brain injury (TBI) and decided to postpone the transition until the following school year to ensure that Greg and the school personnel were prepared.

To assist with the transitioning, the special education director of the town hired a tutor to work with him at home on a daily basis during the summer and sought out assistance from a TBI consultant from the Rhode Island Technical Assistance Project (RITAP) at Rhode Island College. RITAP offers technical assistance and support, and professional development and training to increase capacity to provide comprehensive and coordinated services to all children including those with disabilities. The consultant provided direct consultation to the school staff as well as yearly workshop trainings to enhance their understanding of traumatic brain injury and to increase their skill in the areas of instructional strategies and assistive technology, and to facilitate smooth grade to grade transitions.

Now at 16 and in the 11th grade at his home school, he is an honor roll student and has been since reentering school. He has regained his speech and with assistive devices he can independently write, complete his school work, and is mobile. His success cannot go without also recognizing the supportive school staff, resource teacher, guidance counselor, and teacher assistants for being understanding, flexible, family centered, supportive, and for making appropriate modifications and accommodations that best meet Greg's needs.

With the collaboration, consultation, and interagency supports, Greg's program has been successful in developing his strengths and addressing his needs as he recovers and progresses. Greg's school success is attributed, in great part, to his determination and that of his family as well as to the excellent collaboration, between home and school, and between all agencies involved in his recovery. All personnel and agencies reviewed the IEP every few months with input from specialists and would implement the changes and revisions that continuously would best meet his needs as his brain healed and he progressed. This interagency collaborative planning created a seamless program of services and support that ensured his success. The consultant from RITAP will continue to be involved in his transitions through high school and into post secondary schooling, as needed.

Daily Greg still faces many obstacles. While he may never be able to do some of the things he once did and loved to do, he keeps a positive outlook on life and appreciates all that he has. For the future, he anticipates walking across the stage during his high school graduation and living an independent, productive life.

Greg should be extremely proud of all that he has accomplished. He is truly a wonderful, very special, young man. His success story is not only one of personal perseverance but also one that demonstrates the power of collaboration.

TBI Instructional Strategies

When the student with TBI returns to the classroom, he/she may not be able to attend, or to remember information and organize thoughts and materials. Cognitive deficits can affect how the student perceives, interprets, and responds to his/her environment and the tasks at hand. The following are instructional strategies and modifications that will be supportive in developing a successful reintegration program.

Structure

The following basic guidelines will provide a framework to build a structured environment for the reintegrated student.

The student with TBI will:

- 1) function best when provided with organization
- 2) function best with clearly stated expectations, combined with a systematic and consistent routine
- 3) function best with limited choices to eliminate confusion and provide direction
- 4) function best when directions are specific, task oriented, and clearly stated with expectations outlined

Flexibility of Demands

- Student may need time to make up courses or instruction they have missed.
- Student, initially, may be able to attend school for only a few hours daily due to fatigue.
- Student may need extra time to get from one class to another or from one activity to the next.
- Student may need extra time to respond verbally during classroom discussions, when answering questions, or may require structure/cues to aid verbal organization and recall.
- Student may need a "time-out" period to rest due to fatigue, at least initially upon return to school.
- Student may need to use video and audio tapes for studying. Tape recorders can be used in place of notetaking.
- Student may need to have written demands reduced.
- Student may need oral testing in place of written responses.
- Student may need multiple choice format, tests of recognition, as compared to tests of recall. Whenever possible, multiple choice test format should be considered because it is an effective means of assessment for the student with TBI.

Supervision

This will be essential in one or more aspects of the student's program. The severity of the student's deficits will be one determinant of the amount of supervision needed.

- A Buddy System is one way to provide support to the student in getting from one room to the next, getting to the bus, getting to lunch, and following the day's schedule.
- A teacher assistant can meet the student at the entrance of the school and bring him/her to class. Often the student who has suffered a brain injury is confused upon entering a building and may need direction.
- Supervision is also recommended for review of the student's schedule for the day. The student with TBI needs to become familiar with his/her surroundings and schedule. With frequent reinforcement and the use of a daily log, the student will become more independent.
- Supervision during transition periods may be necessary until the student has become familiar with his/her surroundings and can use compensatory strategies.
- Supervision will be necessary if the student has mobility problems. Secondary students may need to be released from classes several minutes earlier to avoid the confusion of the halls.

Collaboration

The most effective model for successful educational reintegration involves collaboration between the school and the hospital/rehabilitation center in the transition process.

- School personnel should be notified prior to the student's reentry so that services can be planned, and staff can be informed.
- It is helpful if the referring agency visits the school to observe the classroom and building layout.
- The therapists and educators who will be servicing the student should visit the referring hospital or rehabilitation facility to learn about the student's present services and needs.
- After the student is fully transitioned to school, collaboration between school staff must continue. The key to a successful program is the continued collaboration and planning by all staff working with the student and his/her family.

Information and Resources on Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)

Traumatic Brain Injury Resource Center at Rhode Island Technical Assistance Project.

Consultants: Diane LaMontagne and Julie Pascoe

Services and supports include workshops, in-service trainings, school consultations for school districts and school personnel working with children with a brain injury, and a traumatic brain injury resource library. A library listing can be requested by calling the RITAP office.

401-456-4600 or 401-456-1998 ext. 2359
www.ritap.org

Brain Injury Association of Rhode Island
A Chartered State Affiliate of the Brain Injury Association of America

www.biausa.org

BIARI offers support groups, information, advocacy, and resources to survivors and families.

401-461-6599
email: biari20@aol.com

Recommended Books:

*The Special Case of the Very Young
Child-Pediatric Brain Injury*

Carole Sellars and Candace Vegter

*Signs & Strategies for Educating
Students with Brain Injuries*

Marilyn Lash, Gary Wolcott and Sue Pearson

Educational Dimensions of Acquired Brain Injury

Ronald C. Savage and Gary F. Wolcott

These books along with many other brain injury materials are available at the TBI Resource Center at Rhode Island College.

Websites:

Brain Injury Association

<http://www.biausa.org>

This is a national link that provides an abundance of information in the areas of brain injury, injury prevention, consequences of brain injury and reintegration suggestions and strategies. It offers additional resources from their media library and provides directories and links to local chapters.

For: Educators, survivors, families, caregivers, general population. Directed towards all age groups.

Lash Publishing Association

<http://www.lapublishing.com>

Marilyn Lash is an author of many good, easy to read, informative materials on brain injury, it's consequences and strategies. This site offers free samples and materials for purchasing or viewing.

For: Families, educators, survivors, caregivers, general public. Directed towards all ages.

Brain Source

<http://www.brainsource.com>

Brain Source provides information and resources about the brain, brain injury, rehabilitation, neuropsychology, creativity and learning as well as additional links to other informative sites. It was created to present and explore contributions of clinical neuropsychology and to understand the lifestyle challenges produced when the brain is injured.

For: Survivors, caregivers, families, educators, legal and psychology professionals. Directed towards all ages.



From the Director's Desk...



Thomas P. DiPaola, Ph.D.
Director, Office of Special Needs
Rhode Island Department of Education

Springtime in Rhode Island is typically a roller-coaster of weather patterns. This year in particular has been all that and more! In many ways our weather has been symbolic of the twists and turns that have occurred as we strive to improve results for all children, including children with disabilities. Our state is very close to having its plan for complying with the provisions of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) approved by the US Department of Education. We have a team of people from RI working with colleagues from New Hampshire, Maine and Vermont that is well along in the development of grade specific content standards for our State. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is in the process of reauthorization and is expected to be completed by early summer. In the meantime we have children and teachers working in the schools, families working more closely with educators than in recent memory and all of us attempting to use our precious resources in the most effective and efficient manner possible.

We are hard at work to ensure that our system for early identification and intervention for children who experience learning or behavioral difficulties in school results in children being identified early but more importantly to receive the instructional supports that they need. In fact we are learning about other states' efforts to develop and implement models that have been proven to be beneficial to children.

In the inaugural edition of this publication, I spoke of the importance of using our State's Improvement Plan for Special Education as a blue print and framework for our efforts and the resources in our State Improvement Grant to support those efforts. We are making progress. We have organized around three major focus areas: Educator Quality, Research to Practice and Leadership.

In the area of Educator Quality we are working very closely with the institutions of higher education in RI which are preparing teachers and other service providers. It is our hope that these collaborative efforts will help us in recruiting and retaining the best and brightest to work directly with our children. We have implemented initiatives to address our "shortages" in the areas of secondary special educators and bilingual special educators and we are soon to implement activities to increase our pool of teachers of children with vision impairments. We have had long-standing success in our state-wide network for teacher assistants and recently have received national acknowledgement for our work in this area. In April 2003, Peggy Hayden presented a session entitled *Leave No Para Educator Behind* at the national conference of the Council for Exceptional Children in Seattle, WA.

In the Research to Practice area, we are working closely with the RIDE Office of Instruction, which is led by Diane Schaefer to ensure that our efforts to provide professional development opportunities for school personnel are coordinated. The primary focus is to improve reading and literacy skills of all children. We are also working with our regional educational collaboratives to build on the very successful IREAD and Diverse Learner Needs activities. To build on these initiatives our state improvement plan and grant is designed to offer additional supports to school improvement teams that are interested in improving results for all children including children with disabilities.

Finally in the area of Leadership the efforts to develop and support the work of principals, administrators of special education and parents is underway. Our quarterly leadership institute series is but one example of our work in this area.

So like our roller coaster New England weather, we have exhilaration and excitement with a little anxiety thrown in for good measure! If you are interested in learning more about these activities please contact us. To improve results for our children we need to work closely and collaboratively together.