



THE SPECIAL EDITION

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Tennessee Department of Education, Division of Special Education

710 James Robertson Pkwy.

Nashville, TN 37243

(615)741-2851

Dr. Lana Seivers - Commissioner
Joseph Fisher - Assistant Commissioner
Benton McDonough - Editor



Special Edition

Volume I, Issue III

Message from the Assistant Commissioner

Dear Reader:

The Tennessee Department of Education, through assignment to the University of Kentucky, has been funded for a General Supervision Enhancement Grant. Through this grant the Department proposes to create an integrated state-wide, student-level, locally-entered, and web-based data system on IDEA eligible infants, toddlers, children and youth and the services provided them. This system will provide the state with the information it requires to identify trends and focus on needs identified in the Self-Assessment, assist in tracking progress in its Improvement Plan, coordinate its monitoring of state and local compliance and results (both Parts B and C), facilitate training and technical assistance efforts to improve the involvement of parents, and help coordinate training and technical assistance efforts to improve the knowledge and skills of service providers. This grant is expected to continue for two years.

Additionally, the Department has received funding for a State Improvement Grant. The primary focus of this grant is on improving the literacy skills of children with disabilities in Tennessee schools that have been determined to be high priority schools under No Child Left Behind due to low scores in Reading. The structure for implementation of the Grant will include a continuum of interventions for children ages 2-22 with disabilities that will address children's development of language and communication skills, pre-literacy skills, school readiness, and literacy skills in school-age children. The importance of the role that families play in their children's success will be stressed and supported at each phase of implementation. All efforts will be aligned and partnered with related initiatives to expand and enhance rather than duplicate efforts.

A third initiative from the Department comes from a charge given by Deputy Commissioner Keith Brewer to form a Closing the Gap Work Group to address ways to close the achievement gap for at-risk students and empower schools for success for ALL students. This Work Group represents a diverse group of educators from all three geographic areas of the state including general and special education teachers and state and local administrators. Recommendations from this group are based on emerging research on effective interventions to close the achievement gap. Recommendations to the Department are:

- # 1: Create a more inclusive and integrated system of education.
- # 2: Ensure a qualified and stable educational work force for ALL students.
- # 3: Improve the use of data and technical assistance to increase the application of research to practice.

Sincerely,

Joseph Fisher
Assistant Commissioner

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Special Edition

Inclusion: Success in the Classroom

Inclusion - The integration of students with special educational needs into the regular education setting.

On February 3, 2004, I went to Taylor-Stratton Elementary School to interview the parents of Robert Wells. Robert is an 8-year-old third grader with severe cerebral palsy. As I walked to the front of the school building I was met by his parents, Cynthia and Robert Leatherwood. The two were extremely polite and invited me in. After stopping by the office to sign in we headed to Robert's classroom. On the way to the class we met Robert's resource teacher, Dr. Aluoch. I had a good impression of Robert already as Dr. Aluoch spoke very highly of him. Mr. and Mrs. Leatherwood informed me that Robert still attends Dr. Aluoch's class for 15 minutes of resource on a regular basis because the transition would be too difficult for Robert to immediately leave the resource class. After leaving Dr. Aluoch's class, we reached the class. As we entered the room we could see Robert sitting quietly with Ms. Howard, his classroom assistant. Both sat, listening attentively, as Robert's teacher, Mrs. Craig, gave the students the next assignment.

As we moved to the back of the room, I took my camera out and began taking pictures. Robert's classmates didn't seem to mind my presence. After I met Robert, I could tell there was something very special about him.

Despite his disability, Robert seemed confident, intelligent, and very outgoing. This is the same student who, at the age of two-and-a-half, was assessed as mentally retarded; and the same child who, at the age of three, first entered special education through an early intervention preschool program (ages 3-4) in a school across town from his home.

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(From Left to Right) Robert with his classroom assistant, Ms. Howard, his father Robert Leatherwood, and his mother Cynthia Leatherwood



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Robert's mother told me that within a month of him being in special education classes, he totally lost his personality. In fact, before the special education classes, Robert would playfully fight for control of his toothbrush as his mother would brush his teeth every morning before school. All of a sudden, he would just sit there, motionless. His mother would even try to give him the toothbrush, but he would just sit there, and cry. Mrs. Leatherwood knew something had to be done.

When it came time for Kindergarten, Robert started attending Taylor-Stratton Elementary. Although he was zoned for another Metro-Nashville school, Stratton Elementary had the ability to meet Robert's needs, so he was allowed to attend the school outside of his district. It was at this point that Mrs. Leatherwood decided to fight for her son to be in a regular education classroom setting through inclusion. The path they encountered was more often than not a struggle, but that was not enough to deter Mrs. Leatherwood or Robert's teachers, who saw something very special about him. Robert was able to breeze through his Kindergarten year, learning such things as his numbers, phone number, colors, etc.



(Robert jokes around with one of his classmates during some down time.)

First grade proved to be something entirely different. Robert's first grade teacher was great, but the assistant that year was not experienced in inclusion and had only been in Life Skills classes. She did not know how to properly assist Robert, which made the first grade year a struggle for him. Robert left first grade not knowing how to read. The first grade teacher worked with Robert as much as she possibly could to develop his skills, but to no avail. That summer, Robert attended Extended School Year (ESY) and had a wonderful, caring resource teacher who worked hard to teach him how to read. By the end of summer, Robert was reading.

Robert had no problem with second grade and moved easily into the third grade where I met him today. To my surprise, none of the children shied away from Robert even though he wasn't just like them. They treated him as their equal. In fact, Mrs. Leatherwood tells me the story about one child who made the mistake of picking on Robert. That student didn't mistreat Robert for very long because his classmates stood up for him and put that fellow student back in line.

As the children in Mrs. Craig's class sat down to work on their new math assignment, Robert went to work with little assistance from his classroom assistant. *Cont'd page 4...*



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After a few minutes Robert was one of the first ones to turn in his assignment. Throughout the interview the Leatherwoods told me how they have to be careful what they say around Robert because he picks up tidbits of information from sources all around him. One example of this is one day Mr. Leatherwood wanted to bring home a golden retriever puppy because one of his friends was giving it away. Mrs. Leatherwood said, in no-uncertain terms, that she was not going to have another dog in her house. They discussed it quietly so as not to let Robert hear their conversation. The next day, as Robert and his mother drove to school, he asked about the man who was giving away the dog. Needless to say, the Leatherwoods are now the proud owners of a rather large golden retriever puppy. When asked to describe her son, Mrs. Leatherwood likened Robert to a “sponge”. She said he’s able to soak up everything going on around him which explains why he does so well in school. I believe the story of the dog really drives home that point.



Halfway through our meeting a woman by the name of Colleen Harris came into the classroom. She is Robert’s speech therapist. An interesting note to this is that Colleen was one of the first people to see Robert when he was

(Robert with his classroom assistant, working on a math assignment. Robert was one of the first children to finish the assigned work.)

taken to Vanderbilt and observed by Tennessee Early Intervention Services. Colleen says, “It’s rare that a therapist like me gets to see a past client of mine and see how far they have come. In the case of Robert, this is really a rewarding experience because he is such a special boy.” Colleen worked at Vanderbilt for TEIS and is currently a speech therapist for Metro-Nashville Public Schools.

After everything slowed down, Mrs. Craig came to speak to me about Robert. Who better to interview (other than his parents) about his daily progress than the person who grades him on a daily basis? She told me about Robert’s grades: four A’s and one B. Mrs. Craig and Mrs. Leatherwood laugh about the fact that some of Robert’s classmates look off his papers to make sure they get the correct answers. Mrs. Craig is due a lot of

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credit for her patience and willingness to work with Robert and try new things even if that means some failure on the front end. She always tries to keep him involved in everything and treats him just like any other student under her supervision, expecting nothing less from Robert. Equally as worthy of praise is Ms. Howard. She works closely with Robert, but also realizes that he needs his space. Robert seems to thrive under these conditions as evi-



(Robert with his principal, Mrs. Constance Hayes)

dent from his scores of A's and B's. Robert's grades are so good that parts of his IEP have not been implemented because he obviously doesn't need the extra assistance.

I did not get the opportunity to meet Robert's entire IEP Team. One of these individuals I was not able to meet is his occupational therapist, Shayla Noel-Spaulding. Mrs. Leatherwood explained how Ms. Spaulding came into the class one time while Robert was doing a math assignment and noticed that he did not have any manipulatives to assist him. She spoke with Ms. Howard and was telling her that she needed to bring some things for Robert to use to do his math work. During the conversation, Ms. Howard told Robert to count the sticks in his head. Ms. Spaulding went on to say that was ridiculous and that he needed to have something to count. When the conversation wrapped up between the two of them, Robert had completed his math on his own and all the problems were done correctly. Ms. Spaulding realized that sometimes we try to provide too much support and that Robert did not need the manipulatives in order to do his math.

The other team member I did not get the opportunity to meet is Robert's physical therapist, Diane Phillips. Mrs. Leatherwood explained how Mrs. Phillips goes out of her way to work with Robert. She sees him on Monday mornings at 8:45 on the dot to insure that he misses the least amount of time in the classroom. This has always been a concern of the Leatherwoods, so all the service providers have worked with Mrs. Craig

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to develop a schedule that is best for Robert's individual needs.

One of the key members in the whole IEP process that I met has been the principal of Taylor-Stratton Elementary, Constance Hayes. Her openness and hard work have helped make the entire inclusion process a smooth one. The Leatherwoods praise Mrs. Hayes because she wants to be very involved with Robert's progress and she communicates well with the family. Mrs. Leatherwood says, "To have a relationship with a principal this quickly after just one year is phenomenal. It's pretty rare that you connect with the principal like this during their first year."

From covering this story it is obvious that Robert has a great support system. All the members of the IEP Team work closely together to make sure that Robert has all the supports necessary to be successful, and this includes working closely with his parents. Mrs. Leatherwood feels that the team members often step outside of their job descriptions in order to address Robert's needs. It's obvious, from this story, that inclusion does work when used properly. This is obviously a case where inclusion was used and implemented successfully. Mrs. Leatherwood says, "Children just want to do what other children are doing." She went on to tell me that there are numerous children out there in her son's exact situation that are in special education classes when schools should use inclusion instead. Robert has gone through Stratton Elementary from Kindergarten all the way to third grade. He went from no one having any idea who he is to everyone knowing who Robert is. Mrs. Leatherwood said, "Sometimes we'll be out at a store or some place similar and some child will say, 'mom, that's Robert! The kid I was telling you about' not, 'hey, that's that kid in my class.'" Mrs. Leatherwood goes on to say, "We did this inclusion for our son, but I hope that by observing our success, other families in our situation will have an easier time moving through the system. Inclusion can work. You just have to have the proper support system and people who care and want to make a difference." In the end you have to ask yourself who benefits the most from the practice of inclusion. That's an easy one. Everyone.

NEWS FROM THE THREE GRAND DIVISIONS

Middle Tennessee - By: *Allison Davey* -

Staff members of the Middle Tennessee Regional Resource Center (MTRRC) have recently begun planning for their second annual Special Education Supervisor's conference. Last year's conference was a tremendous success. This conference will be planned and organized, with the help of the MTRRC staff, by a group of 11 Special Education Supervisors. They hope to make this fall's conference as informative and fun as the last, and to provide many opportunities for networking with their colleagues from the Middle Tennessee region.



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West Tennessee - By: Larry Greer -

Directors of Special Education in West Tennessee met recently at “Listening Lunches” to discuss current issues in special education and to review the status of school improvement strategies initiated by their group. Currently, the West Tennessee Regional Resource Center (WTRRC) staff is merging the group’s existing documents into a checklist which can assist in school improvement planning.

Other activities include:

TRIAD teacher training in Carroll County, Tipton County, and Jackson-Madison County
Special Education Manual training in several West Tennessee locations
Secondary Transition Workshops

In the near future, WTRRC staff will be facilitating Parent Involvement Workshops to assist school districts in developing strategies to increase parental involvement. Other staff development activities will be provided for administrators.

East Tennessee - By: Robert Winstead -

The staff at the East Tennessee Regional Resource Center (ETRRC) started off the new year with a two-day retreat. During those two days, goals, action plans, and next steps were identified for the ETRRC team to work toward. Goals identified were as simple as improving our work space and scheduling more time to work as a team to the loftier mission of becoming a fully functional and superbly trained resource center that schools and families would turn to for technical assistance and training.

Some initial steps include the development of a Website and a brochure to promote our services. Martha Murray is heading up the Website effort with input from the staff at each phase.

Our group has developed a Post-School Exit Survey, which is now being field tested by Knox County Schools. Transition Coordinator, Lanny Arms and our own Frank Gosnell, Transition Consultant, presented the survey, instructions, and initial field test data at Doris Butler’s Supervisors’ meeting in Bradley County, March 5, 2004. Lanny says he has 30 years in education and 30 years of marriage and he doesn’t get excited often, but he is excited about this exit survey and what it will mean in planning and programming for better results for students with disabilities.

Jane Winstead is planning a two-day reading symposium for the school systems she serves as Management Consultant. The 20 LEAs will showcase the research based reading programs used this school year and share student data. Special education teachers, supervisors, and Title I teachers will be invited to attend.

The compliance staff, Judy Walters and Doug Settles, continues to be overworked with CIMP monitoring and follow-up visits. Along with their many other duties in (*Continued on page 8.*)



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... serving the entire East region, Debbie Cate and Martha Murray are involved with TRIAD training. Rodney Franks and Dorris Mattraw serve on the Intervention Teams in their respective areas. They report having received excellent training as they prepare to assist targeted schools.

Doris Butler, Doris Mattraw, and Jane Winstead will be beginning their Management tour of the East in May. Nan McKerley and Kathi Rowe will be coming to God's Country to assist the school systems we serve with Comprehensive Plans for the 04-05 school year. As always, our wonderful secretary Geneva Looney is keeping us all in check.

Excellence in Teaching

Collaboration by: Jennifer Butterworth and Paul Ayers

Commissioner Lana Seivers, and Assistant Commissioner Joseph Fisher, would like to recognize teachers from across the state who have exhibited excellence in the field of teaching. These educators have implemented programs for all students and have proven success statewide.

EAST TENNESSEE



**Alcoa High School
Alcoa City Schools**

To see successful Work Based Learning (WBL) in action contact teacher *Jason Adams* (pictured left), at Alcoa High School. He has students taking advantage of the WBL opportunities at nine different businesses that host as extensions of his classroom. These businesses range from an airline to a funeral home.

**Darlene McCleish
Chuckey Elementary School
Greene County Schools**

As part of implementing a system of positive behavior support in her classroom, *Darlene McCleish* (pictured center) honors a student for following all of the school and classroom rules for a month.





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Deborah Flanagan
Chuckey Elementary School
Greene County Schools

Deborah Flanagan designs her first grade classroom to support a balanced literacy program as she teaches her students to read and write.



Maynardville Elementary
Union County Schools

Maynardville Elementary has launched a balanced literacy program across the entire school seen by *Barbara Holz, Julia Stevens, Christy Cox, Stephanie Haynes, Shannon Johnson, Mark Wheatley, and Jocelyn Kitts*

Inskip Elementary
Knox County Schools

Visit inner-city school Inskip Elementary and watch the students and staff successfully demonstrate school-wide positive behavior support.



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Middle Tennessee



Erin Elementary Houston County Schools

Erin Elementary teachers, *Teri Mitchum (3rd grade teacher)*, *Jessica Lyle (2nd grade teacher)*, *Susan Lewis (special education teacher)*, *Elaine Hewitt (principal)*, *Amy Wilson (librarian)*, and *Keli Allsbrooks (psychology intern)* work as a collaborative planning team for the successful inclusion of students with significant learning challenges in the general education curriculum, as evidenced by the active learning of diverse students in this class.



Houston County High

Houston County High is demonstrating its commitment to their students with challenging behaviors. They began by supporting one young man, who is now working toward a regular diploma, by means of an individual positive behavior support team. This school year they have expanded their commitment to include universal positive behavior supports for the entire student body.



Randy Reopke



Linda Mason



Jeannie Williams



Stephanie Hudson



Pam Parker

Farrar Elementary Tullahoma City Schools

Farrar Elementary School recognizes the hard work of *Sarah Liechty (principal)*, *Randy Roepke (kindergarten teacher)*, *Linda Mason (3rd grade teacher)*, *Jeannie Williams (school counselor)*, *Stephanie Hudson (2nd grade teacher)*, and *Pam Parker (1st grade teacher)* who continue to use positive behavior support strategies as well as form new individuals teams around students with significant behavior challenges.



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West Tennessee

Michie Elementary—McNairy County—
Conducting a Positive Behavior Support Team
for a student with Asperger's Syndrome.



Camden Elementary—Benton County
Schools—Currently conducting a Positive Behavior
Support Team for a 3rd grade student with
multiple learning disorders and behavior chal-
lenges.

Briarwood Middle School—Benton County
Schools—Working with two 3rd grade teachers on
incorporating cooperative learning strategies into
all content areas through lesson design.





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Alamo City—Alamo City Schools—Currently working with grade level teams on improving instruction for diverse learners through research-based literacy strategies.

Three Oaks Middle School—Dyer County Schools—Working with special educators on improving reading gains for students in 6th-8th grade through targeted instruction and support in the Three Oaks Literacy Lab.



Germanshire Elementary—Memphis City Schools—Working on paraeducator staff development and differentiated instruction strategies with general educators.



Special Edition

CIMP

UPDATING THE CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT MONITORING PROCESS

By:

Nancy Turnbo, Compliance Consultant

Panel Discussions of LEA Supervisors at Spring Conference. Eleven LEA special education supervisors from across Tennessee participated in panel discussions at the 2004 Annual Spring Conference. The participants included Kathy Brown from Hamilton County, Dana Winningham from Cumberland County, Eva Davis from Hawkins County, Linda Inman from South Carroll SSD, Betty Wallace from West Carroll SSD, Dr. Lynn Crain from Memphis City, Cheryl Hill from Knox County, Wanda Johnston from Wayne County, Anita Brewer from Manchester City, Brenda Hughey from Franklin City, and Jeff Romanczuk from Sevier County. These supervisors represented school systems with diverse populations of students with disabilities – from metropolitan to small rural.

The sessions were entitled, “The Effects of CIMP Program Improvement Plans in School Systems.” Prior to the actual discussion of the Program Improvement Plans (PIPs), supervisors gave an overview of their CIMP experiences. Comments regarding CIMP as a positive experience included: “Now we are emphasizing what we have done, not what we haven’t done”-Kathy Brown. “Yes, it got more people involved.” – Elva Davis and Dana Winningham. Betty Wallace and Linda Inman noted, “We got together as a county and met with other agencies and we were made aware of some services that we did not know existed.” The systems in Carroll County met with early childhood service providers and secondary transition service providers in a consortium during the initial year of the CIMP self assessment process, continued to work with them throughout the second year of the process and met with them during the third year in a reunion steering committee meeting in the spring of 2004.

Dr. Crain noted that as a result of writing a Program Improvement Plan (PIP), “the incarcerated youth program has greatly improved.” Both Brenda Hughey and Wanda Johnston said that their systems identified the need for an LEA behavior consultant to assist in providing positive behavior interventions and that having these consultants has been a tremendous asset to their school systems. According to Kathy Brown: “A post-secondary follow-up survey is now being conducted as required by IDEA.” Linda Inman emphasized: “Trainings with early intervention providers were done because of a PIP written and now this will be an annual ongoing training.” Elva Davis remarked: “As a result of writing a PIP, I have

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had trainings with early intervention providers and I now see this as a good thing. I also have meetings with parents of children not eligible for special education services and an early childhood services packet is distributed.” Dana Winningham also informs parents of “services for their children ages 3-5 who aren’t eligible for special education.”

When compared to the previous monitoring process, general comments of the supervisors relate that as a result of the CIMP self assessment process, more training is being provided based upon the needs identified by the school system, including training with parents, early childhood service providers, and secondary transition service providers. Facilities are being more closely monitored to ensure comparability and accessibility for all students. In most school systems, special education student files are being annually reviewed by local personnel with the CIMP checklists and in some cases as a result of the file reviews, new teachers and/or teachers who are noted as having problems are assigned mentors. Several supervisors noted that the Program Improvement Plans (PIPs) had immediately been shared with their principals and individual groups, as needed for public inclusion in SIP.

AUTISM

Autism Summer Institute on Applied Behavior Analysis

BY:
LINDA COPAS

The Tennessee Department of Education, Division of Special Education, in collaboration with **TRIAD** of Vanderbilt University, is proud to announce a summer training institute dealing with Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA). This workshop will be geared toward training **teams** of parents, teachers, paraprofessionals, speech language pathologists, and other school personnel on how to integrate the various methodologies of ABA to develop an individualized, student-specific program. Conducted by two TRIAD staff, the workshop will be open to trainees from across the state who demonstrate some prior knowledge about autism. Each region will be allowed to send two, four-person teams, so a total of six teams and twenty-four people will participate. Each team will focus on one or two students with autism and will bring information about the student, including his/her IEP, behavior plan, test scores, etc. to the training.

Training will occur July 12-16, 8:30-3:30, at the Stallworth Rehabilitation Hospital in Nashville. The week long institute will consist of a combination of lectures, videotape demonstrations, and hands-on learning experiences, designed to teach the

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methodologies of discrete trial training, structured teaching, and incidental teaching. During the first three days, trainers will provide an overview of ABA and specifics about the components, teaching sequences, and phases of discrete trial training, structured teaching, and incidental teaching. On the fourth and fifth days, participants will learn about integrating the different methodologies and will practice their implementation.

There is no cost for this training, but participants will be expected to bear the cost of meals, and any travel or overnight stays incurred. Housing in Vanderbilt dorms is available at a cost of \$27.50 per night. Bath facilities are communal and participants will provide their own linens. Interested systems should contact Linda Copas for an application at: 615-741-7790 or Linda.Copas@state.tn.us.

YOUR DIVISION IN ACTION

Mr. Fisher gives a speech on Brown v. Board of Education at Austin Peay. State University in Clarksville, Tennessee.



The Tennessee School for the Blind Choir performs Christmas songs for Special Education Staff in the Andrew Johnson Tower.



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Commissioner Seivers speaks at the Special Education Spring Conference in March, 2004, in Nashville, Tennessee.



CALENDAR

JULY

12-14 Northeast Tennessee Special Education Conference, Knoxville Marriott.
For hotel reservations call: 865-637-1234.

12-16 Autism Training (8:30 – 3:30) Stallworth Rehabilitation Hospital

SEPTEMBER

13 Special Education Management: Juggling it All! University of Tennessee
Conference Center, Knoxville, TN. TASL Credit Available

13-15 School-wide Positive Behavior Support: Building Systems of School wide Positive
Behavior Support, University of Tennessee Conference Center, Knoxville, TN. TASL
Credit is available.

14-15 Reading Assessment: “Know Where they Are So You’ll Know Where to go”,
University of Tennessee Conference Center Knoxville, TN. TASL Credit Available

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SEPTEMBER

- 16-17 Supporting Diverse Students to Participate Actively in the General Education Curriculum, University of Tennessee Conference Center, Knoxville, TN. TASL Credit is available.
- 21-22 Transition Planning: Navigating the Transition Maze, University of Tennessee Conference Center, Knoxville, TN. TASL Credit is available.
- 21-23 Instructional Strategies for Students with Intellectual Disabilities and Autism, University of Tennessee Conference Center, Knoxville, TN.
- 23-24 Motivating and Including Diverse Students in General Education Settings, University of Tennessee Conference Center, Knoxville, TN. TASL Credit is available.
- 23-24 West Tennessee Special Education Conference

OCTOBER

- 19-21 LEAD Conference, Nashville Renaissance
- 28-29 First Annual East Tennessee Special Education Supervisors Retreat on Music Road in Pigeon Forge. All 55 systems will be in attendance
- 28 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. - Fogelman Executive Conference Center - Memphis TN - The 8th Annual BEYOND ACCESS Inclusion Conference - Contact: 901-678-4932 or email payers@memphis.edu or visit www.people.memphis.edu/~coe_rise



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