

Title: **The S.T.A.R. System**

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Abstract

This system aims to improve the communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity in schools that serve students with disabilities, especially those in urban and/or high-poverty settings. The STAR system outlines five practices that build a more adaptive and inclusive education environment while utilizing modes of communication and collaboration amongst school staff and students' families to benefit each students' ability to be an active and integral part of their own community. The STAR system utilizes four major components of a child's educational environment, the students themselves, teachers, administrators, and relatives (that being family or guardians). In the STAR system, these components work collaboratively to support and reinforce each student's academic and social progress and achievement. Each of the five practices in the STAR system encourages collaborative work, community interactions, and positive socialization to improve every student's motivation and investment in education. With the STAR system, schools may begin to close the achievement gap by creating a positive culture that flows reciprocally from the school into the community.

Background

The history of the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) originates in the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (EHA), and its successor (EHA was rechristened in 1990),

the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004). These laws guarantee every child has the right to be evaluated for disabilities and to receive any and all special education services that would assist in augmenting that child's education, should they have a disability, to insure that each student has equal opportunity to succeed in school. EHA mandated that every state excepting federal money for school provide services to students with disabilities. IDEA expands that idea to a wider age range, a wider range of disabilities, and provide support services.

With IDEA becoming law, not only was every student with a documented disability given the legal right to a Free and Appropriate Education (FAPE), they were also granted an individualized education program, or IEP, that would give each student the best access in the least restrictive learning environment to the general curriculum. The IEP is a document that considers the student's present level of performance (PLOP) in relation to state standards for learning in all subject areas, occasionally including activities in daily living (ADL), such as hygiene, community skills and communication.

Action Plan: The S.T.A.R. System

This action plan consists of five practices that unite the four major constituent groups of the school community; Students, Teachers, Administrators, and Relatives (that being parents, guardians, and other family members of the student).

Goal 1: Improve communication amongst school staff and students, between the school and students' homes, and in the larger school community, by creating and maintaining a staff-led and student-made school newspaper/newsletter (Vang, p. 21, 2006).

-Role in inclusive practice and Expected Impact- Students will develop, publish, and distribute the newspaper. The process of creating the newspaper will encourage socialization, proximal development, literacy development, and discussing social studies and social justice topics. Students will think critically as they explore topics of interest, interviewing peers and adults to gain alternative perspectives. Students will also learn to think critically as leaders of individual articles and projects for the paper, using their own strengths and resources to complete self-directed assignments.

Students will develop creative themes, topics, compositions, and layouts for the newspaper. Students will work in pairs and groups to think creatively and collaboratively to augment each others ideas.

Students will work independently, in small groups, and larger groups to create, form, and sustain the newspaper, its publication, and its content. Although each student is unique and has individualized learning goals, students will be able to find commonalities in their shared interests and strengths.

Students will collaborate with peers to improve communication and cooperation amongst themselves. The nature of the project will foster teacher and staff collaboration, and even student-teacher collaboration, as students and teachers work together to complete news articles, its layout, and its publication. The newspaper will also improve communication between all members of the school community, relating news, editorials, and events to all staff, students, and parents/guardians (Lam, p. 215, 2006).

Learning Goal 1 - Students will be able to meet their individualized literacy goals through expressive writing.

Objectives

- Students will communicate topics of interest through expressive writing.
- Students will increase proper spelling, print orientation, typing skills, and grammar through expressive writing.
- Students will express opinions and facts through expressive writing.

Learning Goal 2 - Students will be able to work collaboratively with peers for greater understanding and assimilation of writing skills.

Objectives

- Students will work cooperatively in small groups to complete a writing task (article).
- Students will complete self-directed writing assignments.
- Students will master two individualized literacy goals in relation to the newspaper project.

-Tasks for completion - Assemble a volunteer staff, create a personnel and staff budget, write projects or grants for materials and funds, announce the project to students, request participants, incorporate it into ELA and Social Studies lessons, develop, assemble, and edit the document, and publish the newspaper.

-Resources - Computers with word processing and layout program for creating a self-published document, printer with ink and paper, one social studies block per week, one ELA block per week, and one half-hour to distribute the paper to classrooms every week.

Volunteer Staff participation:

Principal - Oversight, copy-editor

Assistant Principals (3) - copy distribution

Unit/Parent Coordinator - translation of newspaper for Spanish version, other languages

Music and Gym Teachers - Help students to create, coordinate, cover, and publish school events news

Technology Teacher - Oversight of newspaper layout and publication, assists and collaborates with students to create the finished monthly newspaper

Art Teacher - assist students in the photographic elements of the newspaper, as well as layout and composition

Librarian - Assist students in understanding the history, purpose, and function of a newspaper, provide access to printed and online news to demonstrate effective news reporting and editorialism

All Classroom Teachers - Link individualized literacy goals to student involvement in the project, assist students in collaboration, writing, and contributing to the newspaper

Budget Coordinator (teacher) - Secures and distributes materials, performs outreach services in the school community, tracks and maintains project expenditures, determines publication scale

Publicist (teacher) - Works with budget coordinator to determine newspaper distribution scale, translation needs, advertisements from community businesses, and printing

Editors - (2 teachers) and students (1 representative from each class) that coordinate monthly themes with students

Editors-In-Chief - an elected student and teacher team that finalize each publication for the copy-editor (Principal)

Production Managers (4 teachers) - Teachers that maintain the timeline of the project and coordinate staff collaboration

-Timeline -

OCTOBER

- Assign or elect editors and editors-in-chief
- Generate themes for October through January
- Create a newspaper headquarters
- Align two or more literacy goals for each student to the project
- Establish baseline performance for those goals
- Assess student interest through newspaper themed literacy lesson plans
- Offer preliminary writing and activities based on student interest and learning goals

NOVEMBER

- First published newspaper
- Data over baseline yielded from literacy activities will show initial impact of project

JANUARY

- Mid-term progress reports will prove impact of newspaper project on individual and overall student performance
- Re-evaluate project for improvement, re-assignments, and budget accuracy
- Generate themes for February through June

APRIL

- 3rd Quarter progress reports will show if students are on track to achieve yearly literacy goals and perform to standard on annual assessments

JUNE

- Final assessments and data collection will be compared to October's baseline data and Year-Ago data for all students to evaluate the success of the project

- End-of Year “Good News is Great News” party, to celebrate the first successful year of the project

Goal 2: Improve communication and collaboration between staff, students, relatives, and administrators by organizing special school events (Vang, p. 21, 2006).

-Role in Inclusive Practice and Expected Impact - Special school events will highlight student work, providing positive reinforcement.

Learning Goal - Students will create a product, complete a production, or perform a task that exemplifies and measures two or more IEP goals.

Objectives

- Students will create a product from a set of directions

- Students will occupy and maintain a role in the completion of a production

- Students will perform a task that reflects the practical application of a personal interest

-Tasks for Completion - Create and organize several special student events to take place during school hours, including invitations, providing lesson plan ideas for other participating teachers, obtaining permission from an administrator. Possible events include a talent show, a bake sale/share, a plant(vegetable/flower) sale/share, a school play, or a field day

-Resources - arts and crafts supplies for stage decoration, planting and potting supplies, all necessary ingredients for cooking each food item, musical instruments, speaker system, two blocks of science per week, one block of social studies per week, one block of art per week, two blocks of music per week and related service providers to assist in each event.

-Timeline - Announce events at the beginning of the school year via school newsletter, distribute lesson plan ideas to participating teachers, send out information and invitations to teachers, administrators, and parents via newsletter, use Science, Social Studies, Music, and Art unit lessons to work on each event products and production, re-send invitations one week in advance.

October - Bake sale/share

December - Talent Show

February - School Play

April - Plant sale/share

May - Field Day

Goal 3: Volunteer to participate in and/or host an inquiry team to collaborate on lesson plans, curriculum modifications, assessments, and behavior modeling (Stolp, pp. 1-5, 1994).

-Role in Inclusive Practice and Expected Impact - The ideas gleaned from collaboration will improve the quality of the lesson plans enacted for students.

Professional Goal - Teachers will be able to identify individual student needs and create or alter strategies to accommodate that need.

Objectives

- Teachers will develop instruction delivery practices and strategies that engage students in learning
- Teachers will adapt standards to individual student needs
- Teachers will use data to identify successful and unsuccessful methods of instruction delivery and strategies

-Tasks for Completion - Recruit colleagues willing to collaborate on an inquiry team, have meetings to target learning goals, select control groups, and plan academic interventions, and employ the results in the classroom. Collect data on student performance to analyze the success of the inquiry.

-Resources - One hour a week to meet with the inquiry team, data collection templates, lesson plan templates, and data progression tracking software

-Timeline - Assemble the inquiry teams in September, meet once a week from September through June, display bulletin boards once a month showing the progress of each inquiry team focus, have a final meeting in June to review the collected data.

September - Target learning goals, select control groups, select appropriate method or strategy for intervention, plan unit for months September to December.

December - Analyze data from four months, identify successful and unsuccessful strategies and methods, plan unit for months January to June.

January - Implement revised inquiry team plan

June - Analyze data from January to June, compare data over months September to December, and, where applicable, over year-ago student performance data. Submit findings to colleagues and supervisor.

Goal 4: Create, promote, maintain, and supervise a classroom and/or school podcast. This effort will encourage collaboration among students as well as staff, employing proximal development for both parties (Stolp, pp. 1-5, 1994).

-Role in Inclusive Practice and Expected Impact - Authoring a podcast allows students to share what they learn in the classroom with their friends, teachers, and/or relatives who have a computer or iPod, reinforcing their involvement and investment in their classwork.

Learning Goal - Students will be able to develop socialization skills in collaboration on a performance task.

Objectives

- Students will work together in small groups to complete a script to be read aloud
- Students will work cooperatively while occupying individual roles in a group collaboration
- Students will work together in small groups to edit an assembled set of scripts for grammar, and recording time limits

-Tasks for Completion - Set up podcast program (GarageBand for Apple) on a classroom Mac, invite students to talk about what they are learning in ELA, science, social studies, and math, publish the podcast through iTunes.

-Resources- A Mac computer, one block of ELA per week, one fifteen-minute block of social time once per week

-Timeline- Set up the podcast software in September, conduct the recording every Friday throughout the school year beginning in November.

September - request proper permissions from school supervisors and student guardians for publication of podcast on the internet (via subscription on iTunes program), install and familiarize staff with GarageBand.

October - request student participation, develop and implement writing assignments that will assist students to author a script for the podcast

November - record and publish first podcast

December - June - continue recording and publishing podcasts, analyze project success from student, guardian, administrator, and staff interest

Goal 5: Begin a “Wake-Up Wednesday” potluck breakfast in the classroom. Invite teachers to come in before school hours and share student work, as well as ideas for units or lessons, and collaborate on ideas that could improve the school community and instruction delivery. Invite students during morning bus arrival to meet and greet with other students, also to share their work gallery style, work on puzzles and games together, and socialize in a positive environment.(Barth, p. 7, 2002).

-Role in Inclusive Practice and Expected Impact - The socialization that comes from these events will allow students to meet and become acquainted with students from other classes, offering access to the general curriculum, opportunities for proximal development, and positive socialization skills (Eggen & Kauchak, pp.82-4, 2007).

Learning Objective - Students will provide positive reinforcement for peers

Learning Objective - Students will learn from proximal development through social interactions by sharing learning strategies

Professional Objective - Teachers will share instruction lessons and methods with colleagues

Professional Objective - Teachers and administrators will provide a positive unified model for socialization

-Tasks for Completion - Announce the event to teachers and administration (after asking administrative permission), host the event as regularly as possible, and set up a gallery for students to display their work.

-Resources - Breakfast sign-up sheet, materials to set up a gallery wall, one hour of before-school time once per week

-Timeline - Send invitations to all teachers and administrators in September, and conduct the meeting every Wednesday from September through June

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