



e-xtra Special

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Message from the Director

Produced by BISSD Special Education Department

Inside this issue:	
Transition Fair	2
“Dear Tex”	3
Harassment	4
Hero Corner	4

Dates to Remember
Feb. 27—March 3 Winter Break
April 6— Bad Weather Make-up Day
March 6—10 Diagnostician Appreciation Week

Whew! Another week of state assessment is here. This is a time of high stress for everyone in the schools. From counting tests to ensuring that everyone has the right test to administering the test (and praying that everyone has the right answers), we are all in a state of high anxiety. While I know we cannot relax this week, it is important that we take care of ourselves. Personally, I always think that TAKS week should end with me getting a new purse or pair of shoes! Lately I have noticed that there are so many tests that perhaps I need to get a new closet.

For our book study this year we have been focusing on *Classroom Instruction that Works: Research-Based Strategies for Increasing Student Achievement* by Robert Marzano, Debra Pickering, and Jane Pollock. This book examines the research on various instructional techniques to identify “best practices.” While this book does not address specific methodologies, it does look at research proven techniques that we can all use in our classrooms. Many of you are already using the strategies I will be discussing, but it’s nice (and important) to know that the way we are teaching is “research based.”

Last month we looked at **Reinforcement**. This month I would like to focus on **Homework**. The authors made an interesting comment when they stated that “schooling occupies only about 13% of the waking hours of the first 18 years of life, which is less than the amount of time students spend watching television” (p 61). Homework is one way that teachers use to increase the amount of time spent on learning, but it is important that we use homework as a tool and not a chore.

Research shows that homework has different effects depending upon the ages of students. While elementary students showed the smallest gains in achievement, high school students showed large gains as a result of homework. However, the authors did not use these findings to recommend that elementary students not be given homework. I particularly liked their quotes on this matter:

First, I recommend that elementary students be given homework even though it should not be expected to improve test scores. Instead, homework for young children should help them develop good study habits, foster positive attitudes towards school, and communicate to students the idea that learning takes work at home as well as school (p 62).

The authors also discussed two different types of homework and how they should be used. The first type would be to **“master a skill that requires a fair amount of focused practice”** (p 67). The research Marzano cited stated that students need about 24 practice sessions before a skill will reach the 80 percent competency level. They also suggest that these practice sessions be spread out over a period of time to ensure mastery. In other words, students should not just be focused on today’s lesson in their homework, but should also be practicing a few skills from previous learning to ensure mastery of those concepts as well.

The second type of homework is referred to as **“focused practice on a specific element of a complex skill.”** In this homework, students are focused on one particular step or process that they are learning. The author cites an example where a teacher was working on improving writing skills. For two weeks, the homework was centered on writing better conclusions to paragraphs. Students focused just on the components of a good conclusion and had the opportunity to write multiple conclusions for the paragraphs given to them. This seems like a good way to hone in on this skill without making the student write (and the teacher read!) multiple essays.

Take some time to relax next week. Spring is coming soon. Enjoy your time off.

Betty



NE Community Resource and Transition Fair Huge Success

More than 350 students, families, and staff members from the five northeast Tarrant County school districts attended the Northeast Community Resource and Transition Fair at Tarrant County College Northeast on Thursday, February 16th. The BISD Special Services Department played a key role in the development and implementation of this successful event.

About 65 agencies, programs, support groups, and recreational services had tables and displays and representatives were on hand to talk about their services. The "We Have a Voice" drama troupe, comprised of actors with special needs, presented two performances during the evening. Another hit of the evening was visiting REBEL, an American miniature horse, from the Riding Unlimited Therapeutic Horsemanship program in Ponder.



Be Part of an Educator Review Committee

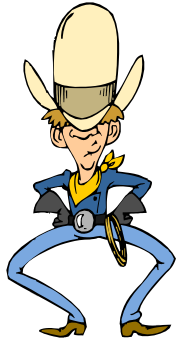
Each year Texas educators play an important part in the development of state assessments. Classroom teachers, curriculum specialists, administrators, and education service center staff work with TEA assessment staff, university specialists, and publishing company personnel to design, review, and select items for future assessments. Most meetings take place in Austin during the summer and last for two or three days. This is an excellent professional learning opportunity and we would encourage you to go to the TEA website at:

www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/.

Download and complete the Recommendation for Educator Committees form, and send it to your special services consultant. We will send it on to TEA. It is critical that we have knowledgeable educators on the committees that will, ultimately, be developing the new assessments to replace SDAA and LDAA for our students. Please consider joining together in this effort.

Math Workshop

Bill Monty, Smithfield Middle School resource math teacher, recently conducted a two-day workshop for secondary resource teachers entitled "Building Understanding of Math Concepts." Mr. Monty's workshop focused on teaching and reteaching math concepts using concrete manipulatives, inquiry, pictorial and graphic representations. Teachers acquired skills that will enable them to build understanding and improve student engagement in the classroom. The sessions were adapted from the Region VII three-day course, "Math, TAKS, SDAA-II: Closing the Gap." Participants gave Bill an outstanding review and requested more workshops of this type. Way to go Bill!



Dear
Tex

This column features questions and answers with Tex Chex, a noted authority on special education issues.

Dear Tex,

I'm writing a soap opera about testing in Texas. Can you tell me the names of the major characters to be in the play? I am planning that it will be a very sad story with a lot of drama, intrigue, and crisis.

Your friend,

Hors N. Aroun

Dear Hors,

Wow! What a cool idea! Would you let Tex be in the show? Tex has a badge and a gun and has always wanted to be on the stage. However, the characters for your play seem to be changing every day. In December, we had the TAKS-I, the TAKS-M, and the TAKS-A. As of January, these have already changed to the **TAKS-Alt** and the **"New 2% Assessment."** The TAKS-Alt is only for students who are not receiving any instruction in academics and is limited to 1% of the tested population. And don't you just love the name of the second test—who wouldn't want to be a **"2 percenter"**? You also need to include a funeral for our old friends "SDAA-II" and "LDAA" in your play. Next year (2006-07) is the last year that we will have those friends around—they are riding off into the sunset. The new rules are also severely limiting the number of students who **will be allowed to take the new assessments**. No more than three percent of students will be allowed to take an off-level assessment beginning in 2007-08. **Everyone else will be taking TAKS!**

Tex is really hoping to audition for your soap opera and is practicing jumping on and off his high horse. Please let Tex know when you are holding auditions.

Your friend Tex

Dear Tex,

Oh Tex, I'm being dragged down by paperwork and rules. Last month I was worried that I wouldn't be Highly Qualified and what to do about that. I finally got that straightened out, and then I found out that I might not be certified. This is my fifth year to teach and I read that I have to renew my teaching certificate with the State Board of Educator Certification. I also heard that if I didn't do this then I would no longer be Highly Qualified. If I'm not HQ, then I could lose my job. This sounds like an unending circle and I'm getting dizzy.

Help me please,

Goin N. Circles

Dear Goin,

Goin, you are exactly right, you are going in circles and it's all true. It even makes Tex dizzy too! The facts are this: if you received a teacher, administrator or paraprofessional certificate after 9-1-1999, you must renew your Texas certification with SBEC every five years. The good news is that once you are Highly Qualified (under NCLB) you stay Highly Qualified unless you change the subject you teach, move from one level to another (as in elementary to secondary), or fail to renew your certificate.

Keep those certifications current, Goin. Tex thinks you are an awesome teacher and he wants you out there with the children!

Your friend Tex

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Disability Harassment Is Against the Law

A recent workshop by attorney Jim Walsh focused on the issue of disability harassment. Federal law prohibits harassment based on “race, age, gender, **disability**, and religion” and states that schools have a duty to create an environment in which all students feel safe and protected. A letter from the US Department of Education addresses this issue and states that “Disability harassment is defined as intimidation or abusive behavior toward a student based on disability that creates a hostile environment by interfering with or denying a student’s participation in or receipt of benefits, services, or opportunities in the institution’s program.” Disability harassment can be verbal, non-verbal, or physical, and can occur between adults and students, students and students, or adults and adults. Name-calling is specifically listed as an example of disability harassment. BISD Board Policy also prohibits harassment based on disability. Campus administrators must be contacted if any type of disability harassment is suspected.

Harassment is a form of bullying and many of the procedures to prevent and deter bullying are appropriate techniques to eliminate disability harassment. These actions cannot be tolerated and educators must react quickly and responsibly to stop harassment and prevent it from occurring.

Special Services Department Mission Statement

The mission of the special services department is to provide and support customized educational opportunities for students, staff, and families.

Special Services Staff

- * Betty Grubbs, Ph.D.— Director
- * Cindy Dubuis, Consultant Elementary
- * Patti Mullen, Consultant Preschool
- * Patsy Stanley, Consultant Middle School
- * Margaret Sanders, Consultant High School
- * Anna DeLeon, Consultant Bilingual /ESL
- * Judy Beverly, Coordinator Health Services
- * Cheryl Oberkircher, LSSP
- * Barbara Creason, LSSP
- * Laurel Strahan, Ph.D., LSSP
- * Mark Schmidt, Ph.D., LSSP
- * Emily Kent, LSSP Intern
- * Paty Soto, LSSP Intern
- * Jamie Thomas, Speech Supervisor
- * Mary May, Social Worker

e-xtra Special
HERO



*Special Services salutes
the following BISD staff
members for efforts that
go “above and beyond:”*

*Kelley Boone, Loretta Daffern,
Denise Jones, Linda Robinson,
Pam Runnels, Joyce Thompson,
and Mary White, Central Office
secretaries*—for their constant help in
answering questions and solving
problems.