



# The BSE Communicator

A Quarterly Update from the PA Department of Education, Bureau of Special Education

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## A New Way to Share the "Good News"

**John J. Tommasini, Director**

Throughout the past few months I have been meeting with internal and external stakeholders involved with special education, including: parent advocates, teachers, school districts, intermediate units, administrators, staff members, state agencies and the newly formed Pennsylvania House of Representative's Subcommittee on Special Education.



Based on the feedback from these stakeholders, I believe there is a need to expand, but not be limited to, statewide change on technical assistance efforts to local educational agencies (LEAs), intermediate units, approved private schools and charter schools.

We will incorporate best practices and will continue to maintain the requirements set forth in state and federal regulations. My plan includes moving direct support to the school districts that have limited resources due to fiscal shortfall. We will move away from the focus on regulatory and compliance function to a "helping hand approach" to support all stakeholders who are in need of assistance.



The feedback gained also pointed to the BSE providing a way to share the good news about our programs and services and support opportunities for improvement. In addition to meeting with the BSE's many constituents, I am interested in providing updates through other avenues – the first being this newsletter, which will be distributed on a quarterly basis. Each issue will feature a central theme and updates on special education issues.

It is my goal to build upon existing relationships and form collaborative relationships between the Bureau of Special Education and those who work on behalf of students with special needs.



Under my watch as director, it is my goal to make inclusive practices a reality in all 501 school districts. To this end, we will continue to support and work collaboratively with the Advisory Panel on Least Restrictive Environment (LRE).

## Inclusive Practices: Questions & Answers

### **1 What will make inclusive practices a reality in the school districts?**

We need a strong commitment from every superintendent and school board member for support that endorses the Least Restrictive Environment as effective inclusive practices. We will be encouraging school districts to add inclusive practices language to their assurance statements.



**Commonwealth of Pennsylvania**

*Edward G. Rendell,  
Governor*

**Department of Education**

*Gerald L. Zahorchak,  
D.Ed., Secretary*

**Office of Elementary and Secondary Education**

*Diane Castelbuono,  
Deputy Secretary*

**Bureau of Special Education**

*John J. Tommasini,  
Director*

**Contact Us:**

Pennsylvania  
Department of  
Education

Bureau of Special  
Education  
333 Market Street  
Harrisburg PA  
17126-0333

717-783-6913  
pde.state.pa.us

**Editor:**

Marci S. Davis  
717-541-4960, x3922  
mdavis@pattan.net

## 2 What do you think are some of the barriers that exist in local school districts?

- Collaborative training of regular and special education staff teaching from different planned courses and using different materials to plan for implementation of inclusive practices is necessary. Any system-wide change cannot happen without training.
- Limited financial resources that restrict the training budget.
- Lack of a clear vision from school administrators regarding the commitment to supporting district-wide inclusive practices.

## 3 Where are some educators engaged in promising inclusive practices?

The schools shown below represent only a fraction of those currently engaged in effective inclusive programs. Visit their websites for contact information.

- Neumann College, Elwyn, Wallingford-Swarthmore (NEW-S) Project –www.wssd.org  
A collaborative, inclusive model for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder.
- Twin Valley Middle School, Twin Valley School District – www.twinval.k12.pa.us  
Co-teaching and other innovations.
- Pittsburgh Public Schools – www.pps.k12.pa.us/AcademicOffice/SpecialEducation  
A skilled team of inclusion facilitators work with teachers, families and schools to support development of inclusive programs.

## 4 What role do you see for the special education and general education teachers for providing inclusive practices?

Both teachers will need to be open to collegial collaboration and be willing to practice shared decision making when instructing students in the general education curriculum. The key to this effective collaboration between special education and regular education being successful will be continuous staff training in areas such as specially-designed instruction, classroom accommodations, progress monitoring and evidence-based instruction.

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## Over 1,200 Attend PDE Conference

The annual PDE Conference, held at the Hershey Lodge & Convention Center, had a tremendous turnout with over 1,200 persons with disabilities, parents, educators, administrators and other special education staff in attendance. Mark your calendar now for the 2008 Annual Conference, **“Indicators for Success: Improvement, Performance and Results,”** to be held at the Hershey Lodge & Convention Center on **Sunday, February 24 through Wednesday, February 27.**

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## Stay in the Loop!

Future themes of the *BSE Communicator*, based on input to the BSE, will include the following:

1. Exploration of a statewide parent summit on advocacy
2. Restructuring the Bureau to support a helping hand approach to school districts
3. Developing strategies to implement all 20 Indicators of the State Performance Plan