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Ensuring Equity



in Education for all Students

Personalized Programming and Equity

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Centre for Academic and Personal Excellence's (CAPE) charter is focused on a personalized program for each student predicated on the concept of equity. Every student matters, every student counts, every student is unique, and every student has specific needs and strengths. The personal and social variables within these priorities are not, and should not, be obstacles to achieving one's educational potential. Rather, all individuals are programmed for fairly as they strive towards their personal best.

While most schools write support plans for coded students, our school develops Individualized Program Plans (IPP) for all students. With parent and student input, IPPs are developed with the student's learning strengths and preferences identified. Goals are specifically chosen through a triage process which identifies an area that negatively impacts a student's learning. Strategies are



These Grade 5 / 6 students are eager to share their thoughts.

then selected to complement the student's skillset. Three times a year, student growth and the effectiveness of strategies are evaluated by the partners.

Overt teaching of fair versus equal occurs in all classes throughout the year. Students come to understand that they will receive the

support they need when they need it, and thus, they build trusting relationships with teachers and other adults.

When discussing student needs, staff (administration, current and previous teachers, and assistants) often confer as a team to review student needs and brainstorm support strategies. This leads to out-of-the-box solutions. Based on the needs of each student, administration develops an individualized support plan that is shared with staff to assist with the implementation of the IPP.

By arranging time tables and work spaces, students are able to move to other classes for one or two subjects, eat lunch with other groups or in other locations to support social needs, establish mentor relationships with older students, and facilitate community partnerships such as those with Big Brothers or Big Sisters. One routinely may see a student checking-in with an identified adult of trust, perched upon a ball chair or rocker, taking a work break, using headphones, handling a calm box, or receiving exam supports.



These tables with number cards are used in the Grade 1 / 2 class.

Exam supports range from writing exams one page at a time to increasing white space or writing time; from regular work breaks to assigned readers and scribes; and from writing in isolation to writing in very small groups. Accommodations are developed from assessment data and included in IPPs to ensure continuity when students transition to other schools.

While all supports have been developed in response to student needs, some strategies have proven highly effective for groups. For students who have had great variance

between their academic and social abilities, the development of individual time tables to accommodate both types of needs has proven successful. For social and physical activities, the students were kept with their age peers. For academic classes, the students were placed as “leaders” in the grade that matched their understanding. These students acted as mentors for younger students in many social ways, while benefitting from the academic program that was suited to their level.

Students with complex needs and a history of failure have benefitted from unique

personalized wraparound programs involving the school, behavioural consultants, home support and respite workers, teams of physicians, and other knowledgeable health practitioners. These aids collaborate to support the student and work with parents to increase capacity to support high-needs children.

Deficits in literacy development demanded a review of our literacy program. This review resulted in our current literacy program that provides targeted group supports. The Director of Student Services works closely with a literacy support educational assistant to provide research-based, data-driven instruction in letter-sound recognition, decoding, chunking, fluency, vocabulary development, and comprehension. The multi-age groups vary in focal area.

Membership is fluid so that, as students grow to meet grade expectations, they transition from one environment to another. In the first year of our literacy program, we identified students who were not growing at acceptable rates but were already accessing universal and targeted supports. Individual supports were then tailored through additional literacy time.

This meant that students were receiving three doses of research-based, individually-tailored literacy instruction daily to bring them up to grade expectations. We are now entering year three of this program, and, once again, it will see slight modifications in response to a significant increase in enrolment.

For the past three years, a very small group of Grade 9 students in our Integrated Setting for Enrichment Education (I.S.E.E.) program were in need of significant enrichment and process development. A pull-out program was designed specifically to address these needs. In spite of the small group size, each student received instruction to the specific depth and breadth to sustain their inquisitive, highly-capable minds; yet, they addressed the deficits in process development.

While in high school, one student accelerated her program significantly; one worked on a science fair project and was invited to participate in the National Science Fair; another applied and was accepted to work at a university on a research project over the



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summer months; and another student was able to advance his understanding in math and science, and acquire the skills to be successful with higher-level thinking.

This type of personalized program is continuing within the 2019-20 academic year. We are programming once again for a very small group of highly capable Grade 9 students by structuring a combined Grade 9 / 10 program that is tailored to each student's current level of mastery; enriched Grade 9 review and distance learning / teacher-directed Grade 10 instruction for three students, and enriched Grade 9 for one student. The group remains together for emotional support and socialization. Parents of these students support this approach because the students' best interests have been considered by addressing the incongruent development through adapting the program.


The following specific examples further illustrate our personalized response to specific student needs and our focus on equity.

- For student OL, having cognitive delays as a teenager created an increasing level of confusion, anger, and defiance.

Behaviour referrals increased and staff reported OL's increasing struggles and noted rising incidents of rigidity, opposition, and refusal. Making changes to OL's timetable, providing him time with age peers for social activities, and

being in core classes with students at the same academic level proved highly effective. OL demonstrated the ability to act as a leader for younger students, assisted with leading gym classes, had no behaviour referrals, and was requested by


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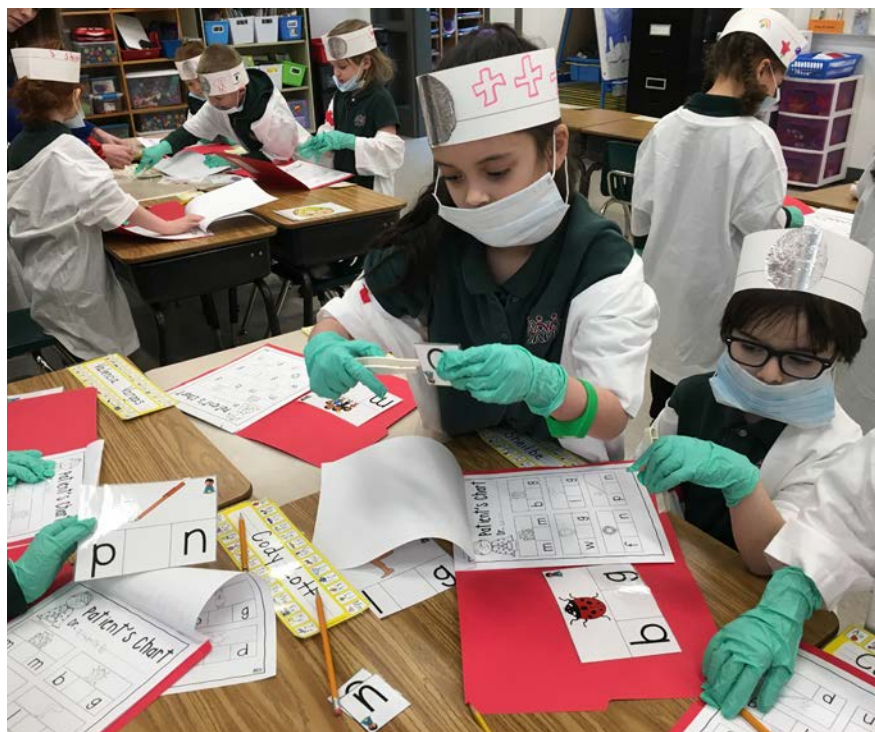
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other teachers to act as a helper during peer-mentoring activities.

- When a medical crisis impaired AK's ability to attend school, programming needed to be flexible and responsive to her needs. Literacy and numeracy time was reassigned to assist her in mastering core material. When her condition worsened, assignments were reduced to focus on core content to assist her in meeting Grade 9 objectives and prepare her for high school. Assignments were sent electronically with weekly hand-ins rather than daily. When AK could attend school, an administrator worked with her daily to provide one-on-one re-teaching and introduction to upcoming concepts. As a result, AK was able to complete Grade 9 content and is attending high school with her peers.
- TK struggled with learning how to read. While being eager to learn and willing to do the work, diagnosed delays were proving to be a difficult hurdle. Staff worked with his parents so that they acquired an understanding of the delays, and together they were able to develop an aggressive three-year plan to increase literacy skills from basic symbol-letter-sound recognition, to blending, chunking, and reading. TK's confidence blossomed in year two when he could read short books repeatedly. In year three, building on the work from previous years and



K-LC vowel surgery engages students in their learning.

continuing to have a triple dose of literacy every day, a repetitive reading program was implemented. He showed gains of two years in just nine months.

This flexible, responsive program relies heavily on the building and maintenance of relationships and partnerships, on assessments and personalized learning profiles and plans, on tracking and monitoring. Teamwork, shared knowledge, mutual

support, and parental involvement are crucial to its effectiveness. ■

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