

The Oakland Schools Communication Enhancement Project

for Students with Significant Cognitive and/or Physical Impairments
2008-2011

With the premise that every child can and does communicate, the Oakland Schools Communication Enhancement Project was developed to provide teams with training in the use of strategies and tools to improve the communication skills for students with significant cognitive and/or physical impairments.

2010-2011 marked the final year in this planned three-year project. Teams from center-based and district-based programs which service students with significant cognitive and/or physical impairments participated in year three, as well as Oakland Schools consultants and staff who service this population.

Expected Outcomes:

1. School environment supports communication throughout the day for all students.
2. Teams implement effective tools and strategies to improve communication skills of students with significant cognitive and/or physical disabilities.
3. Teams network with others across the county to share strategies and ideas.
4. Students demonstrate growth along the communication continuum.

Objectives:

1. Increase participant awareness and understanding of strategies and tools to enhance communication for students with significant cognitive and/or physical disabilities.
2. Develop skills in team collaboration to support the communication needs of students with significant cognitive and/or physical disabilities.
3. Apply strategies and tools and evaluate effectiveness on communication and learning for students with significant cognitive and/or physical disabilities.
4. Share acquired knowledge of communication strategies and tools with peers to build capacity within the school environment.

Critical Components:

1. Use of assessment tool such as Communication Matrix
2. Communication opportunities in classroom activities
3. Script planning and implementation
4. Understanding and use of prompting hierarchy
5. Communication opportunities across school environment
6. Team participation
7. Administrator Support

Year One of the project consisted of six teams (13 classrooms) from center and district-based programs. These teams were selected from an application process. Year Two of the project provided additional training for Group A, the first year group, as well as adding Group B – an additional six teams (9 classrooms). Year Three continued to support the first 2 groups, as well as adding one additional group. Group C was made up of 9 teams (14 classrooms).

Training focused on developing skills and strategies with appropriate tools for emergent communicators, especially those at a pre-symbolic level. This included assessment techniques and implementation strategies in addition to tool kits. Tool kits consisted of resource materials, assessment materials and low-technology tools. Tool kits became the property of the school programs when the initial year-long training was completed. Video review was used throughout the training process. Homework assignments provided activities to be implemented between trainings. Email and an interactive Moodle site were used to maintain contact with participants between trainings.

Ms. Kelly Fonner, Assistive and Educational Technology Trainer and Consultant was the lead trainer. She conducted the training, site visits and video review along with the Oakland Schools Communication Enhancement Project Team.

In 2010-2011, Group A team training consisted of one day. They also planned a ½ day site training/consultation with Kelly Fonner and the Oakland Schools team. Group B team training consisted of three days. Group C team training took place over five days. Data collected from post-tests indicated all the participants increased their knowledge, attitude toward, and implementation of communication strategies in the classroom.

An Optional training on Adaptation Tools and Implementation was available in January to all participants.

Although the original 3 year project has come to a conclusion, it has been determined that the Communication Enhancement Project will continue with the following activities in 2011-2012:

Five day training for new first year groups

Three day training for second year groups

Support for centers through an all-day focused training in August with Kelly Fonner

Ongoing support for implementation to past participants through Oakland Schools Communication Enhancement team

Development of Professional Learning Community for those who have participated

Loan library available for Communication Enhancement Project participants

The Oakland Schools Communication Enhancement Project Team looks forward to continuing this exciting project to build sustainability and capacity with Oakland county programs working with this significantly impaired population.

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