

# The T/TAC Telegram

Volume 9, Issue 3, February/March 2005

Northwestern  
Consortium



T/TAC

Linking People & Resources

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Northwestern  
Consortium T/TAC  
This newsletter is a  
collaborative effort by  
the Northwestern  
Consortium of the  
Training & Technical  
Assistance Centers  
(T/TACs), which  
includes James  
Madison University,  
co-directed by Cheryl  
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Placement, editing,  
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of the T/TAC  
Telegram by  
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## Autism and Assistive Technology

By Linda Oggel, M.A., CCC-SLP and Sue Palko, M.Ed., T/TAC at VCU

### What is Assistive Technology?

Assistive Technology (affectionately known as AT) is "any item, piece of equipment or product system, whether acquired commercially, off the shelf, modified or customized, that is used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of children with disabilities." (IDEA, 1997) This includes a range of devices from light tech to high tech and also includes software. An AT service is "any service that directly assists an individual with a disability in the selection, acquisition or use of an AT device." (IDEA, 1997)

AT devices are utilized in some form by nearly every member of society. Day planners, large grip pens, PDAs (personal digital assistants), eye glasses, TV remote controls, soft grip kitchen cooking utensils, and anti-skid mats under rugs are just a few examples of AT items our readers might use. For people with disabilities, including those with autism, AT not only makes tasks and activities easier, but also AT makes them possible.

As the number of public school students with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) increases—a 339% increase from 1992 to 2002 for VA, according to USDOE statistics—(Schafer Autism Report, retrieved 2.18.03. [www.SAR@topica.email-publisher.com](mailto:www.SAR@topica.email-publisher.com)) so does the number of educators looking for ways to help them. One way to help is through the use of assistive technology. The use of AT often gives a student access to the general education curriculum by improving and/or increasing the following:

- Communication
- Social skills
- Attention
- Organization
- Academics
- Independent daily living skills (adapted from Susan Stokes, 2000)

### AT Abounds!

#### Communication

Communication challenges, a primary marker of autism, may often be the barrier to inclusion, or fully accessing the general curriculum for students with ASD. The following sites offer helpful information and resources:

- \* Visual schedules, [www.dotolearn.com](http://www.dotolearn.com), or [www.portacom.bc.ca/](http://www.portacom.bc.ca/), or [www.usevisualstrategies.com](http://www.usevisualstrategies.com), or <http://card.ufl.edu/visual.html>

- \* Object and Picture Exchange Communication Systems, [www.pecs.com](http://www.pecs.com)

- \* Voice Output Communication Aids (VOCAs):
  - CheapTalk 4, [www.enablingdevices.com](http://www.enablingdevices.com), a four-button device with five seconds of recording time for each button

- Voice in a Box, [www.neatinfo.net/equipment/voiceinabox.html](http://www.neatinfo.net/equipment/voiceinabox.html), a multi-message device with 16, 24, or 40 message buttons

- Go Talk, [www.mayer-johnson.com](http://www.mayer-johnson.com), a lightweight device with nine messages and four levels and six minutes of total memory

- Talk Pad, [www.frame-tech.com/](http://www.frame-tech.com/), a four-message device that allows for 15 seconds of recording time

- \*-Tech/Speak, [www.amdi.net](http://www.amdi.net), a 12 level device with 32 messages per level

#### Social skills:

Students with ASD, by definition, also have difficulty with social skills. Some AT that can assist students to understand the nuances of social relationships include:

- \* *Navigating the Social World*, [www.jeaniemcafee.com](http://www.jeaniemcafee.com), a resource for working with students with high functioning autism or Asperger Syndrome
- \* *Social Stories™ and Comic Strip Conversations*, [www.thegraycenter.org](http://www.thegraycenter.org), a source for the *process* which results in a *product* (Social Story) to help students with autism

- \* *Gaining Face*, <http://ccoder.com/GainingFace/>, a software program to help people recognize the meaning of others' facial expressions

### Attention:

Attention can be an issue for many students, including students with autism spectrum disorders. Some AT ideas that can be used to help maintain a student's attention to tasks are:

- \* *Time Timer*, [www.timetimer.com](http://www.timetimer.com), a visual timer and timer software
- \* Forewarning boards, [www.cesa7.k12.wi.us](http://www.cesa7.k12.wi.us), to let a student know that an activity is about to end
- \* Visual schedules, [www.dotolearn.com](http://www.dotolearn.com), or <http://card.ufl.edu/visual.html>, or [www.portacom.bc.ca](http://www.portacom.bc.ca), or [www.usevisualstrategies.com](http://www.usevisualstrategies.com) to let the student know what is next and to allay confusion
- \* Behavior cue cards (e.g., stop, wait), [www.mayer-johnson.com](http://www.mayer-johnson.com), or [www.usevisualstrategies.com](http://www.usevisualstrategies.com) to give non-verbal cues
- \* Overhead projector to use with or without verbal information

### Organization:

Students with ASD often have difficulty with planning and organizing (known as executive functioning).

Some AT to help in this area includes:

- \* Day planners (from office supply stores)
- \* Highlighter tape (from office supply stores) for color-coded cues
- \* Post-it notes for giving a written or hand-drawn picture
- \* Visual schedules, [www.dotolearn.com](http://www.dotolearn.com), or [www.portacom.bc.ca/](http://www.portacom.bc.ca/), or <http://card.ufl.edu/visual.html>, or [www.usevisualstrategies.com](http://www.usevisualstrategies.com)
- \* "To do" lists
- \* *Inspiration* software, [www.inspiration.com](http://www.inspiration.com), designed for use by students in grades six to adults to assist with brainstorming ideas, organization, outlining, and much more.
- \* *Kidspiration*, [www.inspiration.com](http://www.inspiration.com), the younger version of *Inspiration* and a good resource for graphic organizers
- \* PDA (Personal Digital Assistant), [www.dell4me.com](http://www.dell4me.com), or <http://store.palmone.com>, or [www.handspring.com](http://www.handspring.com), used to help with scheduling and organization

### Academics:

As we discussed earlier, many individuals with autism learn best when information is presented in a visual format. Teachers can make academic material more visual through the use of the following:

### For Reading use:

- \* A small "window" cut from an index card to restrict the view of a sentence to a few words at a time
- \* A ruler or index card for tracking
- \* Highlighters or a colored background to make words stand out
- \* Graphic organizers to help with comprehension, [www.eduplace.com/graphicorganizer](http://www.eduplace.com/graphicorganizer), or [www.inspiration.com](http://www.inspiration.com), or [www.graphic.org](http://www.graphic.org)
- \* Single word scanners such as a reading pen, [www.wizcomtech.com](http://www.wizcomtech.com)
- \* Talking word processors such as *eReader*, [www.cast.org/ereader](http://www.cast.org/ereader), or *IntelliTalk 3* [www.intellitools.com](http://www.intellitools.com), or *Type and Talk*, [www.texthelp.com](http://www.texthelp.com), or *Write:OutLoud*, [www.donjohnston.com](http://www.donjohnston.com), software programs that read text out loud
- \* Electronic books, [www.kurzweil.com](http://www.kurzweil.com), or [www.cast.org](http://www.cast.org), or Living Books<sup>®</sup>, [www.classsource.com/livingbooks/index.html](http://www.classsource.com/livingbooks/index.html)
- \* Word prediction programs such as *Co:Writer<sup>®</sup> 4000*, [www.donjohnston.com](http://www.donjohnston.com), or *Read and Write*, [www.texthelp.com](http://www.texthelp.com), software programs that reduce the number of keystrokes needed to encode a word

### For Math use:

- \* A talking calculator, [www.lifewithease.com/talkcalc.html](http://www.lifewithease.com/talkcalc.html), which speaks numbers after they are entered
- \* Graph paper to assist in keeping numbers aligned
- \* An abacus as a manipulative
- \* Talking watch, [www.azhearing.com/low\\_vision/products1/talkingwatches.htm](http://www.azhearing.com/low_vision/products1/talkingwatches.htm), that speaks the time
- \* *Coin-U-Lator*, [www.AttainmentCompany.com](http://www.AttainmentCompany.com), a calculating device using visual cues (coin/dollar pictures) for addition and subtraction functions.
- \* *Intellimathics 3*, an interactive math software designed by Intellitools for K-5 learners which features virtual manipulatives, [www.intellitools.com](http://www.intellitools.com)

### For Writing try:

- \* *Picture It*, [www.slatersoftware.com](http://www.slatersoftware.com), which pairs a visual picture or symbol with a typed word
- \* *Writing with Symbols<sup>™</sup> 2000*, [www.mayer-johnson.com](http://www.mayer-johnson.com), which pairs a visual picture or symbol with a typed word
- \* *Write:OutLoud<sup>®</sup>* [www.donjohnston.com](http://www.donjohnston.com), which reads aloud the typed words
- \* *AlphaSmart<sup>®</sup>* as well as the Dana, [www.alphasmart.com](http://www.alphasmart.com), small word processors
- \* *Co:Writer<sup>®</sup>*, [www.donjohnston.com](http://www.donjohnston.com), which aids in word prediction and spelling
- \* *Intellikeys<sup>®</sup>*, [www.intellitools.com](http://www.intellitools.com) an enlarged keyboard that enables users to easily type, enter numbers, navigate on-screen displays and execute menu commands
- \* *Read and Write*, [www.texthelp.com](http://www.texthelp.com), a software program featuring speech feedback, phonetic spell checking, and word prediction

- \* *Clicker*, [www.cricksoft.com/us/](http://www.cricksoft.com/us/), a computer program that enables students to write with whole words, phrases, or pictures

### Independent Daily Living Skills:

To increase independence for students with ASD you can try:

- \* Non skid materials to hold things in place (from "dollar" type stores)
- \* Color coded materials to draw attention to something
- \* Velcro, [www.fastenation.com](http://www.fastenation.com), or [www.sammonspreston.com](http://www.sammonspreston.com), to attach or fasten items; aids with fine motor skills
- \* A pump toothpaste dispenser
- \* Recipes enhanced with picture-word sequences <http://card.ufl.edu/visual.html>, or *Boardmaker™* pictures [www.mayerjohnson.com](http://www.mayerjohnson.com)
- \* visual sequencing for dressing, cooking, washing, toileting, etc., [www.dotolearn.com](http://www.dotolearn.com), or [www.portacom.bc.ca](http://www.portacom.bc.ca), or [www.usevisualstrategies.com](http://www.usevisualstrategies.com)

These are only a few ideas to get you started in using assistive technology to help your students with ASD access the general education curriculum. Read through the rest of the Telegram to find even more!

(This article is an edited version of original text that appeared in the VDOE Autism Enews, Spring 2004. To subscribe to this free electronic publication, visit: <http://www.ttac.odu.edu>. Reprinted with permission).



### Putting Student Success on the Map by Ed Kelliher, M.Ed. VDOE Region 5 T/TAC at James Madison University

Today's young people, with amazing advances in technology, are bombarded with information on a daily basis. They connect through Internet search engines, chat rooms, E-mail, and cell phones, and stay informed viewing media entertainment. During the school day, these (our) students receive information through lectures/presentations, student groups, and assigned curriculum materials. Very often they are exposed to more information than they know how to or can handle.

In light of this, a good question to ask, as educators, is how can we begin to guide our students through this information overload? An information lifeline that we can add to instruction is to teach effective strategies that will help our students to learn and organize when they listen, speak, read, and write. One such summarizing strategy, that can be easily applied in all content areas and will provide enhanced opportunities for student success, is "mind mapping."

Mind maps, as with geographic maps, provide an information guide that can be used by students to effectively interpret and outline educational materials. To help guide your students to better understand and remember the important issues in the materials they read and hear, consider teaching them the following five steps to complete a mind map.

First, **skim** over materials before reading them. Read the introduction, conclusion, key headings, or chapter headings. When skimming through text, check out diagrams, pictures, or graphs. This gives students an overview of what they are about to read, puts it in context, and may give them some clues as to where the most relevant parts are located. Second, **read** the material in one sitting (chunking it, if necessary, into manageable sections) and re-read any parts that raise questions. Next, **draw** a map – jotting down connected information from memory. Most students find it useful to turn their page on the side and do a map in "landscape" style. With the main idea or topic in the middle of the page, connected ideas expand out from the center in all directions. Both *Inspiration* and *Kidspiration* software ([www.inspiration.com](http://www.inspiration.com)) provide easy-to-use templates for quick map drawing.

The value of this type of map is that it will show areas that are clearly understood as well as uncertainty in the areas in which students are unsure. **Studying** the map to discover gaps in knowledge assists students as they can refer back to the source material to fill them in. Finally, provide opportunities to **personalize** student maps using different colors and symbols, and add comments/questions relating to relationships, implications, alternative approaches, usefulness, and personal experience. The personalizing stage is especially helpful in the learning process. Encourage students to address all questions raised and to keep returning to their mind map to plug in the answers.

#### References:

- Buzan, T. (1991). *The mind map book*. New York: Penguin.
- Jacobs, H. (2004). *Getting results with curriculum mapping*. Alexandria: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.



**Direct Vocabulary Instruction  
is Fundamental  
to Student Success**

**by Melinda Bright, M.Ed.  
VDOE Region 5 T/TAC  
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Struggling readers make up about one fourth of the secondary school student population and hail from a variety of subgroups to include students who are second language learners, students who are marginalized from the culture of the school, students with disabilities, and students who have received inappropriate reading instruction (Southwest Educational Laboratory, 2000). The challenge for secondary educators to foster an environment which provides opportunities for these students to master content knowledge is exacerbated by the slow reading fluency rates and low comprehension levels for grade level text. In this age of accountability, it must be the responsibility of all teachers to meet the needs of readers at all levels in an effort to move them toward their reading potential.

Multiple dimensions of reading contribute to the problems of struggling readers. Within that realm, the ability to unlock words and their meanings is essential to reading comprehension; therefore, it is imperative that secondary teachers plan meaningful vocabulary instruction for struggling readers. Providing explicit instruction and intensive practice are major tenets in facilitating mastery of key vocabulary for these students.

Teachers may use the following guidelines to provide this instruction and practice:

- Studies show that students must be exposed to a word in context at least six times to gain enough experience to remember its meaning.
- Instruction in new words enhances learning those words in context. Even a minimal amount of superficial instruction has been shown to improve students' chances of understanding words in context. The ability to comprehend new words has been shown to increase by a factor of one third.
- Associating an image with a new word is one of the best ways to learn it.
- Research shows that direct vocabulary instruction does increase student comprehension of new material.

- Student achievement will increase by 33 percentile points when vocabulary instruction focuses on specific words that are vital to students learning new content (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001).

Typically, in a secondary classroom setting, students "learn" new content vocabulary by looking at the new word, hearing it, pronouncing it with the teacher, spelling it, writing it, looking it up in a dictionary or glossary, and using it in a sentence. There is nothing wrong with this method, but it should not be used relentlessly. Another general process for teaching new words has been outlined by Marzano, Pickering, and Pollock (2001), including these five steps.

1. Present students with a brief explanation or description of the new term or phrase.
2. Present students with a nonlinguistic representation of the new term or phrase.
3. Ask students to generate their own explanations or descriptions of the term or phrase.
4. Ask students to create their own nonlinguistic representation of the term or phrase.
5. Periodically ask students to review the accuracy of their explanations and representations (pp. 128-129).

Furthermore, words should be taught in a variety of ways to meet the needs of diverse learners and to maintain interest. For example, Chapman and King (2003) suggest assigning each student a word to teach to others using one of the methods from the Learn a Word Choice Board illustrated below (p. 90).

<b>Connect the word with something in the student's world and discuss it.</b>	<b>Locate the word in the text, and read the paragraph to get context meaning.</b>	<b>Create a design that depicts the meaning of the word.</b>
Make a mnemonic to remember the word and its meaning.	Make a word puzzle or game.	Contrast the word with something else.
Write a poem with the word, its meaning, and facts about the word. Illustrate it.	Tell a story using the word three times in the plot.	Teach the word and its meaning in a memorable way to a classmate.
Explain how the word is used in the text.	Divide the word into syllables. Chant and tap syllables.	Create a song, poem, cheer, or rap using the word as the topic.
Role play the meaning.	Design a banner or flag for the word.	Sell the word by writing an ad for it.

These activities provide a means of adding contextual information which will improve comprehension when the words are encountered in the future.

For more ideas and strategies to vary and enhance direct vocabulary instruction, please consult the following resources in the Region 5 T/TAC lending library at James Madison, which can be accessed at <http://ttac.cisat.jmu.edu>:

Forte, I., & Frank, M. (2003). *If you're trying to get better grades and higher test scores: Reading & language*. Nashville, TN: Incentive Publications.

Higgins, J., McConnell, K., Patton, J. R., & Ryser, G. R. (2003). *Practical ideas that really work for students with dyslexia and other reading disorders*. Austin, TX. Pro-Ed.

Moss, B. (2003). *25 strategies for guiding readers through informational texts*. San Diego, CA: Academic Professional Development.

Silver, J. (2002). *Real-life reading activities for grades 6-12*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

#### References:

Chapman, C., & King, R. (2003). *Differentiated instructional strategies for reading in the content areas*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Marzano, R. J., Pickering, D. J., & Pollock, J. E. (2001). *Classroom instruction that works: Research-based strategies for increasing student achievement*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Southwest Educational Development Laboratory. (2000). *Building reading proficiency at the secondary level*. Washington, DC: United States Department of Education, Office of Education Research and Improvement.

purchase items the student uses successfully is emphasized versus using the materials from the kits on a daily basis. Currently there are six LoTTIE Kits™ available that encompass a range of tasks of varying difficulty. They include the original LoTTIE Kit™ (for writing, math, and organizational skills), and kits specifically for math, literacy, young children, special papers, and colors (visual perception). The LoTTIE Kit™ For Literacy will be spotlighted in this article.

The LoTTIE Kit™ For Literacy is designed specifically for older students in middle school, high school, and post-secondary settings to help with reading, writing, organization, and notetaking. Included in the LoTTIE Kit™ For Literacy are tools that cost less than \$50, some of which are available in office supply stores. Each kit comes with a handbook which lists all the kit items in alphabetical order with reader-friendly ideas and strategies to try short-term with struggling students.

Examples of a few of the tools in the LoTTIE Kit™ For Literacy include:

- 3 Point Erasable Highlighter – This two ended highlighter is unique in that students can highlight words they stumble across in reading, look up the meaning, and then erase the highlighting. Additionally, if students come across words they don't know how to pronounce, they can use the same highlighting technique and later look up correct pronunciation. Onion Mountain Technology cost: \$2.75.



## What is a LoTTIE Kit™ For Literacy and How Can It Help My Students? Debbie Yancey, M.Ed. VDOE Region 5 T/TAC at James Madison University



Onion Mountain Technology, Inc. has created a variety of LoTTIE (Low Tech Tools for Inclusive Education) Kits™ of low and mid tech assistive technology tools to try with students before spending time and money on more sophisticated assistive technology. One of the most important points that Onion Mountain Technology, Inc. emphasizes is that the LoTTIE Kits™ may be used as **informal evaluation** tools to provide teachers with a variety of different ideas and strategies, using low to mid tech assistive technology devices, to try with struggling students in inclusive settings. The recommendation to

- Bookmark Dictionary – If students need to find out the meaning of words without searching through a hardback dictionary or turning on a computer, this tool is exactly what they need. The keypad is thin and flexible so that the dictionary can actually be used as a bookmark, available at students' fingertips. This 80,000 word dictionary is also a spell checker with phonetic spell correction which offers students a suggested list of correct spellings for words they type. Another great feature of this dictionary is the "My Words" customized lists that student or teacher can enter into the dictionary. Franklin Co. cost: \$49.95.

- Highlighter Pens/Neon Pens/Highlighter Tape/ Page Markers and Flags – all of these tools have multiple uses, including making words a student misses when skimming stand out throughout the reading, drawing attention to something important without changing the information’s appearance, and marking information in different categories. Avery Co. cost: \$6.99.



- Plastic Reading Guide – This black plastic reading guide is the size of a credit card and provides a two inch area for students to use to write or read. This small guide can be moved along a line of text in tracking or blocking out distracting visual images around a word or small group of words. One imaginative idea is to use this guide vertically to help students attend to one column in math problems. Vision Dynamics cost: \$1.50.
- Pocket Magnifier – A credit card sized magnifying lens that helps students focus attention on one line of text when reading. Ultra-Optix cost: \$2.95.
- Portabook – Some students struggle with holding papers and textbooks. The Portabook is a compact, lightweight bookstand that opens to five different angled positions for holding books or papers. When the stand is closed there is enough room in the case to carry pencils, pens, and up to 25 sheets of paper. Page-Up Co. cost: \$19.95.

There are many other tools in the *LoTTIE Kit™ For Literacy*; this is just sampling to try for students struggling with reading. For a complete list of tools in the *Lottie Kit™ For Literacy* or descriptions of the six *LoTTIE Kits™* available from Onion Mountain Technology, Inc., visit [www.onionmountaintech.com](http://www.onionmountaintech.com) .

***K-W-L Plus: A Great Addition to What You Already KNOW***  
**by Gina Massengill, M.Ed.**  
**VDOE Region 5 T/TAC**  
**at James Madison University**

**K-W-L Plus** is a reading-thinking strategy that activates and builds on the student’s prior knowledge and natural curiosity to learn more. It is based on the three principal components of K-W-L: what is known about a particular subject (**K**), what the reader wants to know (**W**), and what is learned as a result of reading the text (**L**). **K-W-L Plus** adds mapping and summarization to the original K-W-L strategy, which adds the powerful tools of restructuring of text and rewriting to help students process information.

This strategy will improve students’:

- comprehension.
- summarization skills.
- abilities to relate ideas they read about.
- organization of information they learn from reading.
- vocabulary.
- opportunities for using their higher order thinking skills.

Procedures for Implementation:

K:

Step 1: The teacher provides a chart in which students fill in the K column - what they know about a topic.

K ( Know )	W ( Want to Know )	L ( Learned )
<i>KK</i>		

Step 2: Students categorize the information they have generated and anticipate categories of information they may find in the reading.

Step 3: The teacher leads a discussion to help students pull together information and formulate questions for reading.

W:

Step 4: As a result of sharing and discussion, students then fill in the W column of the chart - what they want to know about a topic.

K ( Know )	W ( Want to Know )	L ( Learned )
<i>KK</i>	<i>W W W W W W W</i>	

Step 5: Students read the selection.

L:

Step 6: Students fill in the L column of the chart listing the things that they learned from the reading.

K ( Know )	W ( Want to Know )	L ( Leamed )
<b>KK</b>	<b>W W W W W W W</b>	<b>LL</b>

PLUS:

The next two steps, mapping and summarizing, were added to the traditional K-W-L strategy to form K-W-L Plus.

Step 7: Mapping: Students use the K-W-L worksheet to construct a semantic map.

Step 8: Summarizing: Students use the map to produce a written summary.

Step 9: After learning K-W-L Plus under teacher direction, students implement it on their own while receiving corrective feedback until they can complete the task independently.

This strategy will help students improve their literacy by involving them in the learning process before, during, and after reading a passage. Another bonus of this strategy is that it can be used individually, in small groups, or with the entire class. It can also be adapted to all content areas of instruction.

References:

Bryan, J. (April 1998). K-W-W-L: Questioning the known. *The Reading Teacher*, 7, 618-20.

Carr, E., & Ogle, D. (April 1987). K-W-L Plus: A strategy for comprehension and summarization. *Journal of Reading*, 626-31.

Hanf, M.B. (January 1971). Mapping: A technique in translating reading into thinking. *Journal of Reading*, 14, 225-30, 270.

Ogle, D. (February 1986). K-W-L: A teaching model that develops active reading of expository text. *The Reading Teacher*, 39, 564-70.

Sippola, A. E. (1995). K-W-L-S. *The Reading Teacher*, 48(6), 542-543.

Winograd, P. (Summer 1984). Strategic difficulties in summarizing texts. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 19, 404-25.

**Practices Prove to Hold Promise for Students with Disabilities**  
**by Melinda Bright, M.Ed.**  
**VDOE Region 5 T/TAC**  
**at James Madison University**



A recent article in *Education Week* highlighted the first major analysis to use comprehensive student-level data to evaluate the achievement of students with disabilities on the Massachusetts state assessment. The study delineated five factors that impacted the performance of students with disabilities in 33 districts in the state:

- Alignment of curricula with the state's framework of academics
- Emphasis on inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classes
- Use of student-assessment data to inform decision making
- Maintenance of a disciplined environment
- Placement of strong leadership

The authors of this study set out to focus on what's working for students with disabilities that results in success on state assessments. Researchers found that in Framingham public school district near Boston, 84% of fourth graders in special education passed the language arts assessment and 77% passed the math test.

The report identified an emphasis on inclusion and shared ownership of students with disabilities. It was noted that Framingham has a "strong culture of inclusion and ownership of students with special needs" and has worked hard to provide teacher professional development to "reduce the barriers between regular and special education."

It is suggested that these practices be adopted by other school systems attempting to increase the success of students with disabilities.

Perhaps these findings affirm the efforts of local school divisions in our region, or maybe they provide some guidance for directing efforts.

**Reference:**

Gehring, J. (2004). Some Massachusetts cities show success with special education students, *Education Week*, 24(15), 9.



## CONFERENCES AND TRAININGS

### **Standard Technology for Students with Disabilities**

Students with blindness, low vision, and print disabilities are expected to gain improved access to textbooks thanks to a voluntary standardized format for electronic files now available. Textbooks and classroom materials produced according to this voluntary benchmark, called National Instructional Materials Accessibility Standard, will be in an electronic format that can be adapted to create products ranging from Braille editions of textbooks to on-screen displays of text and graphics. In past years, the lack of a standardized format meant that publishers had to produce materials in multiple formats—often causing delays that meant students with disabilities did not receive their textbooks in time for the beginning of the school year.

The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs provided funding to the National Center on Accessing the General Curriculum at the Center for Applied Special Technology, Inc. to convene an expert panel to establish a voluntary, standardized format for materials. The 40-member panel included educators, publishers, technology specialists, and advocacy group members.

In addition, the Education Department recently awarded CAST two grants to support further development of NIMAS and to provide technical assistance to states that are implementing the standard, in order to improve academic results for students with disabilities. For more information on the National Instructional Materials Accessibility Standard, visit <[www.cast.org/NFF/NIMAS](http://www.cast.org/NFF/NIMAS)>.

(From *The Achiever*, November 1, 2004,  
Vol. 3, No. 16)

March 3-5: *4<sup>th</sup> Annual Autism Conference: Leading the Way*. Richmond Marriott West, Glen Allen, VA. Contact Commonwealth Autism Service for information: (1-800) 649-8481, [www.autismva.org](http://www.autismva.org)

March 7-8: *Virginia's 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Infant & Toddler of Virginia Early Intervention Conference. Creating Connections: Making Meaningful Differences in the Lives of Families*. Hotel Roanoke, Roanoke. Contact Cori Hill for information, <[corihill@ntelos.net](mailto:corihill@ntelos.net)>.

March 14-16: *Virginia Transition Forum 2005. Connections for Life: Students... Community... Education... Employment*. Williamsburg Marriott, Williamsburg. Contact Dale Matusевич, (540) 831-5357 or visit the Web site at <[www.radford.edu/~conf-serv](http://www.radford.edu/~conf-serv)> and click on View Programs & Events.

March 18-19: *Virginia Branch International Dyslexia Association 29<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference. Achieving Success: Literacy through Research-Based Instruction*. Sheraton Richmond West Hotel, Richmond. Contact Carolyn Russ at (804) 285-1946 or <[VBIDA@hotmail.com](mailto:VBIDA@hotmail.com)> for more information.

April 5th: *Raising the Bar: Improving Services for Individuals with ADHD*. College Center, James Madison University, Harrisonburg. Contact Tony Tallent at Region 5 T/TAC @ JMU, (540) 568-3147 or [tallente@jmu.edu](mailto:tallente@jmu.edu), for further information.

July 20-22: *Virginia's 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Early Childhood Conference. Shining Stars: Charting the Future for Today's Children*. DoubleTree Hotel, Charlottesville. Registration materials will be sent in the spring. Contact Cheryl Henderson, Region 5 T/TAC @ JMU, <[hendercl@jmu.edu](mailto:hendercl@jmu.edu)> or (540) 568-3774, or Lynn Wiley <[hwiley@gmu.edu](mailto:hwiley@gmu.edu)> or Kris Ganley, <[kganley@gmu.edu](mailto:kganley@gmu.edu)> at Region 4 T/TAC @ GMU, (703) 993-3670 for more information.

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**Linking People and Resources**