Peer to Peer Support Programming for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder
What is Peer to Peer?

Peers model typical academic and social behavior in educational environments throughout the school day and provide support for students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) to promote independence and socialization. Teaching peers to interact with, and support, their peers with ASD by increasing social and learning opportunities within natural environments leads to new skills, and a sense of belonging that only comes with being in class with peers and participating in typical school activities.

Benefits for Students

When students with ASD learn alongside their same age peers learning expands to a wide range of social, academic and self-determination skills. When provided with learning opportunities within inclusive environments, students with ASD have authentic experiences within which to share their talents and strengths within the school culture and their communities.

Research suggests that peers who participate in peer support programs gain a number of skills, including organization, responsibility, problem solving, decision-making, and accountability (Carter, Cushing, & Kennedy, 2009). Preliminary data collected through START suggests that peer support programs benefit a range of peers. When academically or behaviorally “at-risk” students participated as peer supports for students with ASD, they have showed improved GPAs, decreased absences, and reduced behavior problems in the semester they began as a peer support.
Peer to Peer Support for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder

• Why??

• What are the processes??

• What is the process (medium) for general education students to connect with students with ASD?

• Recruitment, Training and Maintenance
Social Competency Research

• Students with adequate social skills are more likely to have positive outcomes, while significant social difficulties place the child at risk for developing later problem behaviors (Koegel, Koegel, & Surratt, 1992).

  (Accepted with Typical Peers – ASD)

• Venter, Lord, and Schopler (1992) conducted a study of children with autism and found that social skills during childhood were strong predictors of adult adaptive functioning.
Social Competency Research

• Educational programming for students with ASD should include goals for improving social skills with both adults and peers (National Research Council, 2001).

EBP – NOT A CHOICE

• Weiss and Harris (2001) refer to the scarcity of research targeting social skill development in adolescents and older students.
  – Many interventions targeting social skills development have inadequately addressed the social validity of outcomes.
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**Evidence By Domain and Grade Level**
Based on evidence reported in EBP Brief Overviews

July 2, 2009
Social Competency Research

• The more traditional approaches to teaching social skills have not been highly effective as indicated in a meta analysis conducted by Bellini et al., (2007).

  BRIAN

• Many peer-mediated intervention programs are too narrow in scope, such as the Circle of Friends approach, to produce significant long-term impact on participants.

• Efforts to successfully teach social skills to students with ASD can be undermined by problems with generalization to new settings, people, and materials (Parsons & Mitchell, 2002; Zager & Shamow, 2005).
What Does This Research Mean To Us?
Social Competency and ASD

Research summarized by Rogers (2000) indicate a shift in the field of ASD, from:

Adult-Directed Instructional Strategies TO Peer-Mediated Interventions

Numerous studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of peer-mediated strategies to facilitate social interactions.
Social Competency and ASD

• The National Research Council report (2001) recommended that students with ASD be taught skills in natural contexts.

• One suggestion is the use of multiple peers in various settings to improve generalization (Kamps et al., 1997; Kamps et al., 2002).

DON’T LIKE ALL PEERS
Social Competency and ASD

Another suggestion is providing more time for instruction and social interaction with typically developing peers a strategy that will likely result in both quicker skill acquisition and better maintenance of improvements (Strain, Kohler, Storey, & Danko, 1994).

NOT COOL
Evidence Based Practices: Social Skills and Peer Mediated Instruction and Intervention

“Peer mediated instruction and intervention has been shown to have positive effects on academic, interpersonal and personal-social development and may be the largest and most empirically supported type of social intervention for learners with ASD”

(Bass & Mulick, 2007; Maheady, Harper & Mailette, 2001; McConnell, 2002)
Goals for Students with ASD

✓ Socialization Skills
✓ Independent Skills
Development of the Concept

Local School District - 7000 Students

40 Miles North of Detroit, Oakland County, Michigan

Center Program for Students with Autism

13 Local School Districts in Oakland County
Send Students to the Autistic Program
Two Things We Were Doing OK

• 4th and 5th Grade Students coming down during indoor recess.

• Weekly team meetings…True Brainstorming: all ideas are good ideas and the best idea in the room stays on the table
The LINK Program

• 1990 – 17 Study Hall Volunteers

• 2002 – 800 General Education Students 72 Students with ASD

• Utilizing the Most Appropriate Resource in Public Education to Teach Social Skills to Students with ASD
Post High School Vocational Placements

- Oakland University - Library
- ACO Hardware
- Independence Township Library
- Bank One - Clarkston
- Dunkin’ Donuts
- Subway
Post High School Vocational Placements

- F.Y.E. - Great Lakes Crossing
- Target
- OATS Horse Farm
- C.C.A.
- William Beaumont Hospital
- The Greenery
- Overtyme Restaurant
Philosophical Departures

1. If you exist - you have entry level skills.
2. Same aged/Cross Aged Peers moderate behaviors of students with ASD.
3. Abandon existing educational technology.
4. General Education Curriculum Partnering
5. Experimental Approach
Two Primary Goals for Students with ASD – Same for all Students in Public Education

• Socialization Skill Development

• Independent Skills
Change the Culture of a Building, District, Community

- Not all students are bold
- Bullies = Great Peer to Peer Support Students
- Knowledge is Important
- Information is Important
- Intimidation by Staff = Developmental Level

- Jerimiah – Building Culture
- Byant – K- Mart – Community
Peer to Peer Supports ARE NOT…

• There to Tell the Students with ASD what to Do

• Students in the General Education Classroom Telling their Peer with ASD What to Do

• Paid Staff

• Aides
Peer to Peer Supports Are…

- Participants…
- They are kids
- They Are there to Act and Be Kids
“Educators, even the most well-meaning and attentive, remain anthropologists of – not participants in – student life.”

Paula Kluth

“You’re Going to Love This Kid”
Two Ways to Address A Socialization Deficit

• **Utilize** social skills curriculum to **teach** isolated social skills to students with autism spectrum disorder in specific settings and then **practice** isolated skills in a generalized setting.

• **Teach** general education students about autism spectrum disorder and specific information about students with autism spectrum disorder in their building. **Develop** tolerance and acceptance within the general education population. Students with autism spectrum disorder will then be able to **practice** social skills in all settings within the building gaining competency in natural environments.
Peer to Peer Support Programs

Teach general education students about Autism spectrum disorder and specific information about students with autism spectrum disorder in their building. Develop tolerance and acceptance within the general education population. Students with autism spectrum disorder will then be able to practice social skills in all settings within the building gaining competency in natural environments.
Simmons-Mackie and Damico (2003)

“Describe that “social skills, when dissected into parts lose their overall contribution towards creating social competence. Once the skills are taken out and treated as a skill, they are no longer working as part of a social framework”
Definition of Medium of Exchange

• The medium of exchange is any material, task, prop, interest area, etc. that connects a student with autism to a general education peer or staff person

• Typically the medium of exchange is something that does not require language for the connection or interaction to occur
Medium of Exchange

Material

A.I. Student

LINK Student
Examples of Medium of Exchange

• General Education Curriculum
• Encyclopedic Interests
• Computer Interests and Related Technology
• WII
• Computer Games
• Jigsaw Puzzles www.jigzone.com
• UNO, Topple, Trouble, Jenga, Simon
• Top 40 Music
• T.V. Show Theme Songs
Awakenings
Medium of Exchange

• Try to discover the interest areas of the student with autism to develop mediums
• Motor Planning and Organization
• Staff and LINK Students may need to initiate the medium in the environments for students with autism
• Staff and LINKS are excellent resources in developing new mediums
Behavior of the Student with Autism and the Medium of Exchange

• Allow Behavior (Interest Area) to Occur

• Follow the Lead (Student with ASD or LINK Student) (Connor)

• Develop the Medium (Ryan)
Teacher and Medium of Exchange

Role
- Enrich
- Participate
- Model
- 80-120
- Evolve
- Helper
- Coach
- 15-20

Content
- Age Appropriate
- Fun
- Interactive

Diagram:
- Teacher
- Medium
- A.I. Student
- LINK
- Interactive
Care for the student
Respect for the Disability
LINK Program Benefits Students with Autism

• Peer Support
• Socialization Skills
• 1:1 Support
• Velcro Buddies
• Age Appropriate Expectations
• Independence
LINK Program Benefits
LINK Students

- Organizational Skills
- Diversity
- Collaboration
- Self Esteem
- Additional General Education Content
- Problem Solving
- Connection to School
- Responsibility
Reciprocal Benefits

1. Opportunities for learning in both populations of students.

2. Growth occurs in both populations.

3. Cost effective and productive.
Participating in Something that You Value or Care About will Greatly Increase…

The Likelihood of Your Participation in Other Responsibilities You May Not Care About
Peer to Peer Support

This program emphasizes treating students with dignity, having a systematic problem solving approach, providing social learning opportunities, and acknowledging the LINKS as the glue to make the delivery system possible.
Peer to Peer in Michigan

Peer to peer programs are underway in over 600 elementary and secondary school buildings in Michigan and could serve as demonstrations of the peer support practices.

Multiple Programs have Won State Awards
Peer-to-Peer Data
How can you demonstrate the importance of the Peer-to-Peer support program in your school?
Begin by thinking about all the participants who benefit from the Peer to Peer Support program

• Students with ASD
• Typical Students
• At-Risk LINK Students (e.g., students with low-GPAs, behavioral challenges)
• Teachers
• Parents/Families
Data from Schools in Michigan 2012-2013 School-Year

Thank you to:
Eastern Upper Peninsula/Sault Area
Grand Haven High School
Haslett High School
Hemlock High School
Lapeer West High School
Saginaw Public Schools
Triad for Peer to Peer Support

Student with ASD

Provides a Model for Student with ASD and At Risk Student

Peer to Peer Support Student

At Risk Peer to Peer Student
Pilot Sites

Pilot sites will be selected from districts identified with disproportionate suspension and expulsion of African American students with IEPs. If the practice shows evidence of effectiveness, the program can be expanded to other school buildings.

Saginaw Public Schools
Demographics

• Population decline
• Poverty
• High Unemployment rate
• Crime index 86% higher than Mi. avg.
• Schools closing / Students relocated
• Multiple administrative/leadership change
• ALL STUDENTS ARE AT RISK
Saginaw Public Schools: Data for 18 LINK Students with Disabilities

Learning Disabilities
AD/HD
Section 504 Plans
Peer to Peer Support Surveys
Case Conference
Student Example

example

the way forward ...
Jonathan’s Case Conference

Strategies to Utilize

• Review cafeteria schedule
• Dietary considerations
• Early dismissal, shorten time
• Remove variables - money, selection process
• Crisis person on-call
• Secondary: Observe, Inservice, VIP seating
• Idiosyncratic behavior
How to Support a Student with ASD During Senior Student Activities?

- Senior Skip Day
  - Lisa
- Senior Walk
  - Steven
- Year Book
  - Kelly
- Last Day of School
  - Robert
- Senior Prom
  - Jessica
- Cap and Gown
  - Mark
- Senior Prom Dinner
  - Cheryl
- All Night Party
  - Kim
To Date...Over 600 Peer to Peer Support Programs

In Michigan
Banquets and T-Shirts

• End of the Year
• Paper Plate Awards/Certificates
• T-Shirts designed by LINK Students
• Invite Families of Students with ASD and LINK Student Families
The Network

- Do the peer to peer students go beyond the school day?
- Personality of the Student with ASD
- Climate of the School Building and the Community
- Ian and the Grocery Store
- Dan and the Casino
- Ryan’s Party
Fidelity Checklist for Peer to Peer Support Programs
Organization of the Fidelity Checklist

• Secondary and Elementary Checklists
• Logistical Information – Building/District, Team Members Completing and Date
• Peer to Peer Program Implementation Summary: Score and Implementation %
• 3 Sections – Staff Preparation, Program Development and Program Implementation
• Each Statement is phrased to be answered Yes or No.
• Resources – Where to Find Resources Needed to Complete the Statement
Thank You For Your Time!