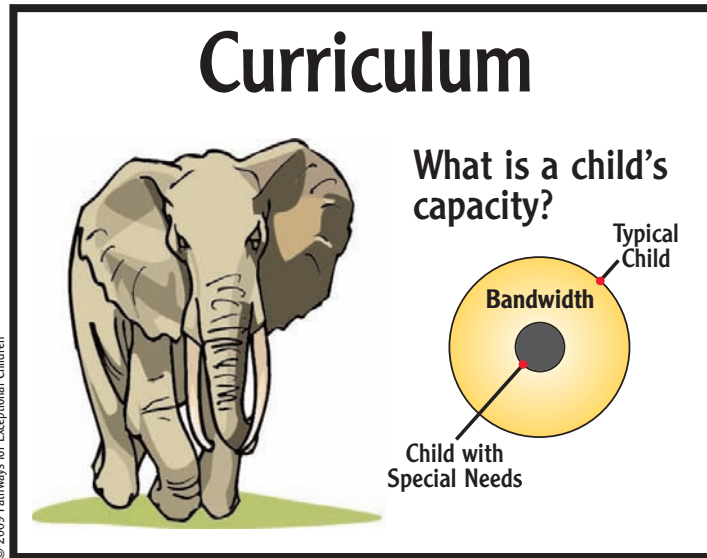


Curriculum versus Relevant Outcomes

STANDARD CORE curriculums in education have become the driving force of what our children are required to learn and proficiencies determined through standardized tests. Over time the curriculums passed down the pipeline to our children have expanded to about the size of an elephant. However, according to some experts, “more” is not always better and certainly does not translate to an increase in relevancy or student outcomes as they graduate from high school.

On April 25, 2008, the New Jersey Department of Education issued a report called “Re-Designing Education in New Jersey for the 21st Century.” The report states that, according to a 2005 Achieve, Inc. survey of college instructors, 42% of high school graduates are not prepared for college-level classes. It also states that only 25% of today’s New Jersey high school graduates will obtain a college diploma. Compound this scenario with disability and continue to force the same curriculum through an even smaller bandwidth or capacity in the same amount of time, and those with disabilities earning a college diploma sink to half those without disabilities. For children with disabilities who are more severely involved, the problem can sometimes sadly appear almost comical. A parent recently shared with me how her child with severe cognitive disabilities was given homework about Egypt when in reality she didn’t even know she



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lived in New Jersey. That is where the elephant or amount of curriculum drives meaningless outcomes instead of targeting increases in function or independence.

We must “escape from old ideas” and more carefully define what the purpose of education is for the disabled. As with all education, outcomes and employment should

“The difficulty lies not so much in developing new ideas as in escaping from the old ones.”

— **John Maynard Keynes, Economist**

guide the curriculum process. When appropriate, children with disabilities need to have the irrelevant trimmed off the elephant and be given more well thought out and planned assistance from the educational system. They also need more from their communities than what schools can provide alone. More has to be done

and the onus cannot fall on just education.

Over the past six years, Pathways has progressively moved to develop after-school programs that focus on complementing and reinforcing what schools provide. We have successfully divided standard core curriculums into smaller pieces where functional relevancy and final outcomes are the driving force, not the quantity of curriculum or test scores. When children can learn naturally and progressively, the quantity and personal expectation of what they feel can be accomplished begins to grow exponentially.

After-school programs can creatively dovetail off standard core curriculum and can be made much more motivating through what the child deems as important and relevant in their world. For example, a child who loves music but has difficulty reading or speaking can improve these abilities through DJ equipment and Karaoke

where the computer cursors through the words on the screen while the child speaks or sings into a microphone. Reading and speech become something they need in order to accomplish their love for music and to perform. Couple that with the more specialized help they receive in school, a trained mentor, and an applauding audience and almost anything becomes possible. All of this is based upon a simple recreational approach that allows these children to achieve their goals and dreams in the context of life while giving them every opportunity to share it with and experience it out in the real world or their communities. Talents are accentuated and disabilities are worked on as stepping stones toward achieving what the child deems as meaningful success. The child, their abilities and the community are given the opportunity to help drive outcomes, not just the elephant or their disabilities.

Pathways is very excited about our new programs coming in 2009, including some that will be designed and implemented by our Lead Mentors. They are planning a play that will be modified off “Peter Pan” and pillow polo, which is a sport where social skills will be accentuated. We look forward to the new year and continuing to become an organization where ideas and innovation continue to drive our purpose, which is to increase outcomes for our children and the involvement of our communities!

—Melinda Jennis,
President, Pathways



Exploring Animal-Related Careers: A Winning Combination

Project Win-Win's "Pet Care and Grooming" class brought about great success as the kids learned about businesses and careers

in pet care. On the business side, the kids used computers and several software programs to develop company logos, flyers, databases, budgets, invoices and contracts. On the medical side, they researched animal diseases and created veterinary health intake forms. Mock pet stores and grooming salons were an ideal setting for learning tools of the trade, customer assistance, and handling money transactions.



Various professionals from NJ were invited to present to the class, including K9 Kennels of Fanwood, TLC Services Mobile Pet Grooming of Newton, Audubon Society of Ringwood, and Jean Bearle and her daughters, Morgan and Abbey, from Canine

Companions for Independence, a nonprofit organization that enhances the lives of people with disabilities by providing highly trained assistance dogs and ongoing support. The Bearles brought two dogs and demonstrated how

they are trained to help those with disabilities and provide companionship.

The class took a field trip to PETCO in East Hanover to meet the staff and mingle with birds, lizards, fish, and furry friends. The kids also got hands-on experience as volunteers at the Montville Animal Shelter cleaning cages, feeding, and playing with the animals. Finally, the kids gave powerpoint presentations to their parents and the class about the careers they had chosen.



Parents received an hour of training about the program and future plans we have to ally with Centenary College. A special thanks to all who donated their time to teach about their professions and provide demonstrations. Our next class will focus on mosaic tiling, woodworking and housepainting trades.

Lead Mentors Speak About Inspiring Change

The Lead Mentors of Pathways were asked by the parent leaders in Morris Plains, New Jersey to come and speak to their mentors on December 14, 2008. The Lead Mentors spoke about some of the projects they are working on, which include legislation, advocacy, and building new programs. They did a terrific job talking to the mentors and inspiring them toward becoming leaders in their communities.

About 35 mentors attended from Morris Plains and afterwards got a

chance to socialize while having pizza and fun at Powerhouse Studios. Thank you to Morris Plains for inviting us!!



Recreation Programs: Upcoming programs are posted on our website at the beginning of each month. You can visit www.montvillepec.org and click on "Children's Programs," or the Recreation Department's website: www.montvillenj.org. Click on Municipal Services, then Parks & Recreation, then Forms & Flyers.

Park Ridge, NJ Celebrates its Programs



Stacy Laxer is a special mom of a child with disabilities, and known for her tenacity. Two years ago, she called Pathways for help in training mentors and initiating programs for children with disabilities in her community. Since that time, she has successfully advocated for and received both



financial and administrative support and approval from her district to implement the mentor training for the entire 5th grade in both elementary schools this year, and over the past two years, sponsored the training of over 200 mentors. Stacy, with the help of her mentors and other parents, has developed swimming, yoga, snow tubing, talking book programs using computers, and much more. These photos show a holiday gingerbread decorating class that took place in December 2008. Thank you to the school district and community of Park Ridge for becoming such a great example of opportunity and inclusion for all children in Bergen County. Of course we thank Stacy for her leadership, tenacity, and love for our kids!



What a child needs to be exceptional.