

# Virginia DEClares

## Spring 2009

VA DEC Web Site: <http://www.soe.vcu.edu/vadec/>



### DEC– Who We Are

The Division for Early Childhood (DEC) of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) is a national, non-profit organization of individuals who work with or on behalf of children with special needs, birth through age eight, and their families. Founded in 1973, DEC is dedicated to promoting policies and practices that support families and enhance the optimal development of children. Children with special needs are those who have disabilities, developmental delays, are gifted/talented or are at risk of future developmental problems. Additional information about DEC is available at [www.dec-sped.org](http://www.dec-sped.org).

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### President's Message

Dear VA DEC Members and Friends:

Good news! Yaoying Xu becomes your new president in July! It has been an honor to serve as your president but all that has been accomplished over the past two years is due to the real backbone of this organization - your board members! This incredible group of women has willingly given their time and talents to tirelessly serve Virginia's infants and young children with disabilities, families, and colleagues over *many, many* years. Thank you Board for your continued service and support!

Speaking of incredible individuals, we annually recognize an outstanding early childhood educator with the Nancy Fallen award. Dr. Fallen was a true pioneer in our field and I had the distinct pleasure of earning my Master's degree under her guidance. Read more about Dr. Fallen and the award in this edition of the newsletter. In fact, consider nominating a deserving colleague for this special honor!

The Nancy Fallen award will be presented at the Shining Stars conference in July. This is a wonderful time to reenergize yourself, learn new things, and mingle with colleagues. Plus, VA DEC will again hold a drawing for a free one year membership, so be sure to drop by our display booth and enter the drawing! We will also hold a VA DEC meeting at the conference. Look for more details later on our new website!

Hope to see you in July!

Belinda Hooper, VA DEC President

## Virginia DEC Web Site and Newsletter

The Virginia DEC newsletter and web site are designed to provide information and updates to VA DEC members on issues that are relevant to professionals working with young children birth to age five in Virginia. This issue of the newsletter is focused on inclusion and provides information about the many exciting initiatives in Virginia that support preschool inclusion as well as resources related to inclusion. The newsletter provides an overview of these topics but links for additional information can be found on the VA DEC website at: <http://www.soe.vcu.edu/vadec/>.

If there is any particular information that you would like to see included on the website, please contact Carole Ivey at [civey@vcu.edu](mailto:civey@vcu.edu).

## DEC Membership

We would like to send a special invitation to teachers and other practitioners who provide direct services to children and families to join our organization. For membership information go to: <http://www.dec-sped.org/joindectoday.html>

We would like to invite all current VA DEC members as well as those interested in becoming members to join us for our board meeting at the Shining Stars conference in July. The agenda for this meeting and our plans for a special "make and take" activity will be posted soon on the VA DEC website. Additionally, we will hold a drawing for a free membership to the Virginia DEC for new members at this meeting. Cindy Hudson, was the lucky winner of the drawing last year. Cindy shares the following thoughts about the benefits of being a VA DEC member.

*I would like to thank the VA DEC for the one year membership I received in July, 2008 at the Shining Stars Conference. Joining the DEC has been on my list of things to do since enrolling in the ECSE program at VCU. I decided to pursue a master's degree after working as an instructional assistant in an ECSE classroom for several years. Even though I am now a fully licensed ECSE teacher, participating in the Shining Stars conference was most helpful as I continue to learn best practices for my program. While at the conference, I attended the meeting for members and prospective members of the Virginia DEC and was the lucky winner of the free membership drawing! As a DEC member, I have received the quarterly journals as well as e-mails and information from the Council for Exceptional Children. I feel my membership in the Virginia DEC is*

*very important for my professional development as I am constantly seeking information that will improve my services to the children in my class and their families. Again, thank you for the membership. I now look forward to being a member for many years!*

*Submitted by Cindy Hudson, ECSE Teacher, Mehfoud Elementary School, Henrico County Public Schools*

## Mark Your Calendars

**Shining Stars: Charting the Future for Today's Children. Virginia's Sixth Annual Early Childhood Conference.** The conference will be held July 13-15, 2009 in Virginia Beach at the Wyndham Virginia Beach Oceanfront. Registration and session information is posted at <http://ttaconline.org>. Click on the events tab.

## Teacher Appreciation Week, May 4-8, 2009

The first full week of May is National Teacher Appreciation Week with May 5<sup>th</sup> recognized as National Teacher's Day. Communities across the country are planning activities to recognize teachers for the contributions that they make in teaching and caring for the children in the community each and every day. Take time this week to do something special for teachers. Visit the National Education Association website at: [www.nea.org/teacherday/](http://www.nea.org/teacherday/) to learn more about the origins of this week and for ideas and activities to recognize teachers

## Exceptional Children's, May 10-16, 2009

Learn more about ways you can promote community awareness of the importance of services for children with disabilities during Exceptional Children's Week by reading Selina Flores article in this newsletter. Visit the VA DEC website to read the ECW proclamation.

## Exceptional Children's Week

Since the initiation of Exceptional Children's Week (ECW), the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) has sought to promote public awareness for children with disabilities and garner support for special education. The Division for Early Childhood (DEC), a subdivision of CEC, is made up of individuals who promote policies and evidence-based practices that support teachers, related service providers, paraeducators, and families of young children with developmental delays or other disabilities, birth through eight. DEC has been advocating and supporting individuals who work with or on behalf of children with disabilities for over 36 years. The

Commonwealth of Virginia's Chapter continues to extend and enhance the mission of DEC to support early childhood special education and early childhood teachers, speech-language pathologists, physical therapists, occupational therapists, paraeducators, and families with infants and young children with special needs in their local communities. We support our members through a network of collaborative partnerships on all levels of governance and education, as well as, dissemination and use of innovations in research, best practice, and current issues through various media and professional development events. Each year VA DEC recognizes the second week in May as Exceptional Children's Week.

The goal of ECW is to create public awareness about children with disabilities and enhance understanding and acceptance of the needs and capabilities of individuals with exceptionalities. ECW provides an opportunity for communities to celebrate collaborative partnerships, successes, and the accomplishments of children and their families with exceptionalities. The following is a list of activities offered for consideration to promote and celebrate ECW.

Activities to promote community awareness include but are not limited to:

- send a copy of the Governor's Proclamation to your mayor and request a city-wide proclamation;
- send letters to the editor of your local newspaper;
- sponsor an art exhibit at a local mall, library or administrative office featuring the works of children with special needs;
- invite and partner with other organizations that focus/support individuals with exceptionalities such as United Cerebral Palsy, The Autism Society of America, Down Syndrome Congress, etc. to participate in the activities;
- invite a supportive local politician, a local business partner or a school board member to an inclusive classroom to share in activities with students;
- present awards to local individuals who have done something special to help students with special needs (i.e., outstanding general educator, outstanding principal or outstanding special educator). For additional ideas for ECW, or throughout the year email Selina Flores at [selinaf@vt.edu](mailto:selinaf@vt.edu).

Submitted by Selina Flores, ECSE Coordinator,  
Virginia Tech T/TAC

## National Updates

Due to the advocacy efforts of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) and the organization's members and supporters, the *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act* (ARRA) that was signed into law by President Barack Obama more than doubles the current federal allocation for the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA) over the next two years. Not since 1975, when IDEA was first passed, has the federal government demonstrated such commitment to special education. Visit the DEC website at [www.dec-sped.org](http://www.dec-sped.org) to learn more about the impact of this historic legislation.

## Inclusion Research

Creating inclusive educational programs for diverse groups of young children is a complex and often daunting task. Traditionally, educational practices have reflected a "one size fits all" approach to both curriculum and strategy that ignores fundamental individual differences. Educational programs for young children often reflect practices that homogenize settings to produce an unrealistic uniformity among students that is not reflected in the pluralistic societies in which they live. We now recognize the value that is added to the preschool education experience by diversity and have attempted to identify critical aspects of successful inclusive programs.

Although there has not been a "standard" definition of the term *inclusion*, inclusive early childhood programming typically involves three main aspects: 1. Full participation of children with disabilities in everyday life activities with their typically developing peers at school and community settings; 2. Goals and objectives are developed and implemented through team collaboration by parents and professionals; and 3. Child outcomes are measured periodically to ensure the effectiveness of the program (Guralnick, 2001; Hunt, Soto, Maier, Liboiron, & Bae, 2004; Odom et al., 1996; Siegel, 1996).

The following list includes some recent studies that examined the effects of inclusive educational programs on the development and learning of young children with and without disabilities. Electronic articles are available via the VA DEC webpage at <http://www.soe.vcu.edu/vadec/>.

Grisham-Brown, J., Ridgley, R., Pretti-Frontczak, K., Litt, C., & Nielson, A. (2006). Promoting positive learning outcomes for young children in inclusive

classrooms: A preliminary study of children's progress toward pre-writing standards. *Journal of Early & Intensive Behavior Intervention*, 3(1), 171-183.

Hamilton, D. (2005). An ecobehavioral analysis of interactive engagement of children with developmental disabilities with their peers in inclusive preschools. *International Journal of Disability, Development & Education*, 52(2), 121-137.

Hawkins, S. R., & Schuster, J. W. (2007). Using a mand-model procedure to teach preschool children initial speech sounds. *Journal of Developmental & Physical Disabilities*, 19(1), 65-80.

Kemp, C. (2003). Investigating the transition of young children with intellectual disabilities to mainstream classes: An Australian perspective. *International Journal of Disability, Development & Education*, 50(4), 403-433.

Macy, M., Bricker, D. (2007). Embedding individualized social goals into routine activities in inclusive early childhood programs. *Early Child Development and Care*, 177(2), 107-120.

Odom, S. L., Zercher, C., Li, S., Marquart, J. M., Sandall, S., & Brown, B. H. (2006). Social acceptance and rejection of preschool children with disabilities: A mixed-method analysis. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 98(4), 807-823.

Tsao, L., Odom, S. L., Buysse, V., Skinner, M., West, T., & Vitztum-Komanecski, J. (2008). Social participation of children with disabilities in inclusive preschool programs: Program typology and ecological features. *Exceptionality*, 16(3), 125-140.

Submitted by Dr. Yaoying Xu, Virginia Commonwealth University

## Preschool Inclusion Initiatives

### Include Me

The Partnership for People with Disabilities "Include Me" is an initiative working to increase the capacity of child care centers in the greater Richmond area to provide quality inclusive early childhood education for children with disabilities. Through this project center teachers receive assistance in the form of trainings and consultation services throughout the year. The aim of the project is to increase the skill and comfort level of early childhood educators to provide

community-based, inclusive care and to strive to meet the needs of all young children in their programs. To date, Include Me has worked in 30 centers providing training and technical assistance for their teachers. In addition, Include Me staff have conducted workshops at local, state and national conferences in an effort share the model and expand opportunities for children with disabilities to be included with their peers. As part of Include Me, training sessions for hundreds of early childhood professionals have been held across the central Virginia region on the benefits of inclusion for all children.

Submitted by Mary Lynn White, Partnership for People with Disabilities

### SpecialQuest and the National Professional Development Center on Inclusion (NPDCI) State Team Updates

In February of last year Virginia was one of ten states selected to receive technical assistance through SpecialQuest Birth-Five a Head Start/Hilton Foundation Training Program that is funded by the Office of Head Start. One of the major goals of SpecialQuest Birth-Five is to work with State Leadership Teams to embed the SpecialQuest approach, materials and resources into their state systems to promote high quality inclusive services for young children birth-five with disabilities and their families. A state Leadership team, headed by Kathy Glazer, Director of the Office of Early Childhood Development has worked to create a vision for Virginia on how to embed the SpecialQuest approach into Virginia's plan for Professional Development. The SpecialQuest approach includes materials and resources consisting of the following:

- The SpecialQuest Multimedia Training Library (English and Spanish)
- The Web-Based SpecialQuest Multimedia Training Library
- The activities of the SpecialQuest Community of Practice

A statewide Early Childhood Summit is being planned for this summer in conjunction with the Shining Stars Conference. During the "summit" participants will be introduced and trained on the SpecialQuest approach for programs and communities. Stay tuned for more information.

In addition The National Professional Development Center on Inclusion (NPDCI) located at the Frank Porter Graham in North Carolina began working with

Virginia in 2008 to ensure that early childhood teachers are prepared to educate and care for young children with disabilities in settings with their typically developing peers. In addition to Virginia, NPDCI is collaborating with seven other states including: Georgia, Minnesota, Oregon, and Pennsylvania, New Mexico, North Carolina and Illinois. One Leadership team was formed to advance the SpecialQuest and NPDCI efforts across the state.

Virginia has been fortunate to receive technical assistance from both SpecialQuest and NPDCI and our State Leadership team continues to work to advance the efforts of both grants across the state. To read more about SpecialQuest and NPDCI go to: <http://community.fpg.unc.edu/npdci> and <http://www.specialquest.org/> and stay tuned for additional information related to these efforts.

*Submitted by Sandy Wilberger, Co-Director, VCU T/TAC*

### **Inclusive Placement Opportunities for Preschoolers (IPOP)**

The Virginia Department of Education's Training and Technical Assistance Centers (T/TACs) in each of the superintendents' eight regions are in the fifth year of accepting applications for technical assistance for developing a division/community team to implement inclusive preschool opportunities. This is an ongoing statewide initiative to support a continuum of inclusive options for preschoolers with disabilities. The purpose of the initiative is to increase opportunities for children with disabilities to be included in settings with children without disabilities in the school divisions' preschool programs and in their community preschools.

The IPOP initiative is currently working with 22 teams located across the state and providing long-term technical assistance from their regional T/TACs to support the initial development or the expansion of inclusive options. Teams from school divisions currently involved in IPOP include: Alleghany County, Chesapeake City, Danville City, Fairfax County, Franklin County, Goochland County, Gloucester County, Greenville County, Halifax County, Hampton City, Loudoun County, Lunenburg County, Lynchburg City, New Kent County, NREP, Portsmouth City, Prince Edward County, Rockingham County, Roanoke City, Smyth County, Sussex County and Washington County.

IPOP teams are implementing a variety of inclusive models including collaborating with Virginia Preschool Initiative, Head Start, Community Preschool Programs and reverse inclusion. This year IPOP

teams in Chesapeake, Goochland, Gloucester, Greenville, Loudoun, Lunenburg, New Kent, Prince Edward, Rockingham, Smyth and Sussex are also participating in The Star Quality Initiative- Virginia's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS). The Star Quality Initiative features four standard areas for programs, which will be rated on a five-star scale of increasing quality, like hotels or restaurants. The four standards in the Star Quality program are: education, qualifications and training of staff; interactions between children and their teachers and peers; staff to child ratios and group size; and program environment and instructional practices. These standards have been selected as a result of a thorough review of research and best practices in other states. A strong body of research suggests that early care and education programs that focus on improvements aligned with these four standards yield positive outcomes for children.

Participating IPOP programs are assessed by trained and experienced Star Quality Raters, who are regularly tested for consistency and reliability. Thorough on-site visits are conducted to determine which Star level a facility will receive, providing a consistent measure of program quality and clear information and accountability for parents. This user-friendly rating will be a powerful consumer education tool for families, informing them about quality as they consider options of child care and preschool programs for their children. After a program has been rated, they will work with Star Quality Mentors to draft and implement a quality improvement plan to assist the provider in improving the level of quality education and care they provide.

The IPOP manual which describes the process used with teams to create or expand placement options and training modules shared with IPOP teams can be found at [www.ttaonline.org](http://www.ttaonline.org). The Superintendent's memo for the new round of applications for the Inclusive Placement Opportunities for Preschoolers Initiative was posted on Feb. 27, 2009 and can be found at the following link:

[http://www.doe.virginia.gov/info\\_centers/administrators/superintendents\\_memos/2009/047-09.shtml](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/info_centers/administrators/superintendents_memos/2009/047-09.shtml)

*Submitted by Sandy Wilberger, Co-Director, VCU T/TAC*

### **Spotlight on IPOP Sites**

#### **New Kent County Public Schools**

After applying for and receiving the IPOP Grant in May of 2005, we formed a comprehensive team consisting of teachers, a paraprofessional, parents,

administrators, a school psychologist, a private preschool director, and a mental health employee. The team met monthly during the initial stages of our systems change process. Our main focus has been on Reverse Mainstreaming, meaning that more than half of our students enrolled do not have special needs. Prior to the 2006-2007 school year, we had no inclusive options for our preschoolers with special needs. Since that time, we have become a fully inclusive program. Our students with special needs are included with their typically developing peers in the classroom 100% of the time. Each of our four classes is grouped primarily by age. Classes are taught by certified teachers, some with their master's degree in ECSE. A highly qualified paraprofessional supports each classroom.

Almost immediately, we saw improved behaviors. We also see improved language development and personal-social skills. Cooperative play is an area where the children are teaching each other every day, with less supports needed from adults! In the area of adaptive functioning, we see children progressing through toilet training more quickly and becoming more independent during meal times. Our home school collaborations seem stronger as well. More families attend school functions and participate in Home Visit Programs.

We encourage other school divisions to visit an IPOP model site and to APPLY FOR THE IPOP GRANT! This year, we began participating in the statewide Quality Rating and Improvement System. Participation in this project will improve our program quality and allow us to network with other school divisions. The future looks bright for early childhood education, both in New Kent and in the state. We hope to continue strengthening our inclusive practices. In the future, we would like to see more collaboration with our Head Start classes and community preschools.

*Submitted by Remle Sherman, ECSE Department Head, New Kent Elementary School*

## **Roanoke City Public Schools**

Roanoke City Public Schools is an urban division in southwest Virginia with a strong commitment to early childhood education. We are in Year 3 of our participation in the IPOP Project. An IPOP team of 13 individuals including teachers, coordinators, and a related services provider works together to expand the continuum of service delivery options available for children with developmental delays/disabilities, and to improve services to all children.

In 2006-07, our first year of IPOP participation, the

team created a summary of our program offerings, and reviewed 16 different inclusive models of service delivery including school-based models, home- and community-based models, and collaborative models with Head Start. We brainstormed strengths and barriers of each option, and made recommendations to school and Head Start administrators regarding which models should be expanded or piloted. Teachers and administrators received inservice training, and several new models of service delivery including collaborative and group inclusive models were implemented for the 2007-08 school year. During 2008-09, our third year, two additional models--consultative and combination--have been added.

Currently our inclusive option models include:

- Collaborative Model: In three of our schools, an ECSE teacher and her paraprofessional co-teach with one or two early childhood teachers. Children with IEPs are fully included throughout the day.
- Combination Model: Three of our dually licensed teachers teach classes of 12 four-year-old students. Eight of the students are VPI students while four are ECSE students. The teacher serves as both the general and special early childhood educator.
- Consultative Model: 25 of our preschoolers are fully included in community-based Head Start or school-based Virginia Preschool Initiative classrooms. They are served by one full time itinerant ECSE teacher or by one of several ECSE teachers who teach a half day self-contained class of two and/or three year olds and who provide consultative services for the remainder of the day.
- Group Inclusive Model: Many of our remaining ECSE classes partner with general education preschool classes within their buildings to provide inclusive opportunities during part of the school day.

Other placement options are determined on a child-specific basis and include a dual enrollment model with Head Start, a class that serves preschoolers with autism, and homebased services.

*Submitted by Dr. Jaye Harvey, Special Education Coordinator, Roanoke City Schools*

## **Inclusion Resources**

Partnerships for Inclusion now has a Spanish version of **QuickNotes: Inclusion Resources for Early Childhood Professionals, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition** that includes information sheets on topics related to high quality care of young children with and without

disabilities in a variety of settings. The content reflects current information and strategies based on the best available research evidence and professional wisdom from the early childhood field. The information is relevant to a wide audience of early care and education teachers, teaching assistants, administrators, specialists such as therapists, and early interventionists, and families. Additional details about this resource are available at: <http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~pfi> (click on "products").

### ***CARA's Kit-Teacher Version: Creating Adaptations for Routines and Activities***

provides guidance for how to make adaptations for daily activities and routines so that children ages 3-6 can successfully participate in classroom curriculum. The kit contains a booklet about adaptations to promote children's participation in the early childhood curriculum and a CD-ROM with resources. You can order this kit by going to: <http://www.dec-spced.org>.

## **Honoring Nancy Fallen**

For many years, the Virginia Division of Early Childhood has honored one of our own with an award named for Dr. Nancy Fallen. In mid-March, I spent a delightful afternoon with Dr. Fallen learning about her, her career and the beginnings of early childhood special education in Virginia. Dr. Fallen actually "birthed" the original plan for the "...Education of Young Handicapped Children in Virginia". Remember the boxes and charts we used those first years? Remember the "Gold" booklet? Well, if you look at page iii, second sentence you will see a single name, Dr. Nancy Fallen.

Originally from Charlottesville, Dr. Fallen came to be a teacher naturally and figured out how to teach people with disabilities organically. Dr. Fallen's older sister was born with Down syndrome and was her closest childhood playmate. They played house; they played school; they played shopping; they played nurse, they played dress-up; and they played social games.

After graduating from Mary Washington, she taught general science, 7<sup>th</sup> grade English and spelling, senior history and biology, and home economics in a small Loudoun County high school and had to serve lunch and sell ice cream. After two years, she left to become a Home Demonstration Agent with the Extension Service in Charlotte and Chesterfield Counties. She returned to education nearly a decade later to set her true career path – teaching young people with disabilities and later teaching educators

how to teach them!

She began a program for Richmond Public Schools teaching teenage girls with disabilities at Binford on Floyd Avenue. What did she and those young women do? They played house; they played shopping; they played school; they played dress-up; and they played social games. In a natural progression, she then moved on to Virginia Commonwealth University where she taught and inspired special educators for many years. Along the way, Dr. Fallen earned a Master's degree from the College of William and Mary and her Doctorate from the University of Maryland both in Special Education.

Dr. Fallen's conceptualization of special education instruction coalesced through experiences teaching a wide variety of subjects in that first Loudoun job, with the Extension Service and all their work with farm and other rural families, her work with those girls at Binford and most especially from her early experiences with her sister. All of these were brought together for the young children of the Commonwealth in the "Gold Book" *A Comprehensive State Plan for the Education of Young Handicapped Children Below Age 5 in Virginia*. That plan truly began services and programs for our young children. Thank you Dr. Fallen!

*Submitted by Linda Bradford, Nancy Fallen Award Recipient 2007*

## **Nancy Fallen Award Nominations**

Think about all the exceptional early childhood special educators you know and work with. Please take the time to nominate one of them (or yourself) for this award that recognizes an exemplary educator from our field. There are many in Virginia. The nomination needs only to summarize the person's accomplishments. We will follow up. Please submit your nominations by May 15, 2008 to Elaine Barker, 415 N. Kenmore St., Arlington 22201-1725 or [barkerva@aol.com](mailto:barkerva@aol.com).

Requirements for the award include:

- The nominee must be a current member of the Virginia DEC
- The nominee must be a professional currently involved with programs for young children with special needs, ages birth to five. She or he must have current or past direct service experience
- The nominee's name, address, telephone number, <sup>7</sup> and a brief description (less than 50 words) of his or her early childhood background must be submitted to the selection committee.

