
SPECIAL EDUCATION NEWSLETTER

Staff Member of the Month

Toni Gonzales- 9th Grade Co-Teacher and Case Manager



Toni Gonzales was born and raised in Gary, Indiana. She graduated with her B.S. in Land Use Planning with an emphasis on Geographic Information Systems and a minor in Geography from Metropolitan State College of Denver. Toni worked in the GIS field for 7 years, first for Space Imaging, a satellite imagery company in Thornton, Colorado. Missing her family, she returned to the Chicago area and worked for Commonwealth Edison, an energy company, then worked at Rand McNally making digital maps.

Toni decided to return for her master's in special education, fueled by her nephew who is on the autism spectrum. She earned her M.Ed. from the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC). She began her career in special education working in Chicago

Public Schools (CPS). After a very short period at CPS, she began working at Chicago International Charter Schools, Ralph Ellison Campus and remained for eight years. While at Ralph Ellison, Toni worked as a teacher, the Special Education Coordinator and Department Chair.

During her tenure at Ralph Ellison, Toni decided that she wanted to improve her skills as a teacher of reading, and decided to return to college where she earned her second M.Ed. from UIC, this time as a reading specialist.

After CICS-Ralph Ellison, Toni moved to Baker College Prep, A Noble Network of Charter Schools, where she worked as a literacy special education teacher for grades 9 - 11. After that, she returned to Chicago International Charter Schools, Wrightwood Campus working as a special education teacher with grades 3 - 5. After that, Toni again decided to leave the bitterly cold Midwest, which has brought her to the state of Maryland and here to the SEED School of Maryland where she is the 9th grade special education teacher.

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During her free time, Toni takes baking classes, which nurtures her passion for the culinary arts. She also enjoys spending time with her 2 Champion Bullmastiffs, Gunther and Daisy, while preparing Daisy for her upcoming AKC Grand Champion dog shows.

Accommodation of the Month: Extra Time

In the classroom:

- Allow student to complete work in the evening and turn in the next day.
- Allow student to have a reduced number of problems if they can't complete in allotted time.
- Ask case manager for individualized ideas.

In the dorms:

- Allow student slightly longer to process directions and complete tasks.
 - Allow student more time for homework or character education assignments.
 - Keep in communication with teachers and case manager about how the student is doing so the work can be adjusted if need be.
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Strategy of the Month: Brain Breaks!

As teachers we are often concerned with finding the time to cover all of the material in the curriculum in the duration of the class. We have so much knowledge to impart and often it feels like we will never make it through everything. This makes the idea of working breaks into the classroom routine seem ludicrous. However, these quick and easy breaks can often be the key to helping students remain focused and understand the material.

Brain breaks should be worked in at least once every hour and can look different in every room. Typically they should be a fun but structured activity that involves movement and should take less than 5 minutes. Some teachers will have students brainstorm several activities and then place them in a container to be selected from each day. Other teachers prefer to pre-select the activity each day.

Some great examples of quick, easy brain breaks are:

- Quick dance party (turn on music and do goofy dances at your seat)
- Chair dips or wall push-ups
- Charades (can even be related to content)
- Yoga or breathing exercises at desks
- Riddle of the day or brain teasers

All brain breaks won't look the same but the basic idea is to ensure that students receive a quick minute to refresh and refocus so they are ready to absorb more information. These breaks may seem silly at first but you will be amazed at the difference in your students' retention if you work in 1-2 each class period!

Proactive Teacher Tips by Dr. Lando

Students learn more effectively when behavior concerns do not get on the way of a great instruction. By being proactive, teachers provide the opportunity for all students to be actively engaged in the lesson. This can sometimes be a challenge. Some useful tips are shared below:

1. Know the students and establish connections with them. People respond better to people who they have a positive rapport with. For the hard-to-reach students, build the trust slowly and incrementally. Do not rush this process.
2. Effective instructional preparation. Consider all aspects of your lesson (Time, resources, strategies, worksheets, pacing, student characteristics, etc.) and plan with each factor in mind.
3. Create consistent and predictable classroom routines. Let the students get the flow of how your class operates. Keep this routine and announce changes in advance.
4. Set simple and clear classroom expectations. Please keep them to five utmost, involve the students in creating expectations and state them in positive terms.
5. Reasonable flexibility to accommodate student differences. Making adjustments as needed for

students who are struggling academically may decrease classroom behaviors. Again, this will be part of the instructional planning once you know your students.

6. Building a community of support with staff working with the same students. Fellow teachers, administration, student support team, special educators may provide useful ideas. Do not die alone! Try the new ideas, invite others to provide support.
7. Setting high academic expectations and, consistently, holding students accountable to those standards diminishes classroom disruption.

In conclusion, it is almost a guaranteed fact about behavior management that, even with effective planning, unforeseen events will occur in the classroom. A great step is for teachers to be proactively and deliberately aware of how they will respond or react in such situations. Remaining calm, consistent and intentional will minimize the disruption. Teacher response during crisis will be covered in the next series. In all, be clear, concise and consistent.

Psychologist Corner: Can Mindfulness Make Us Better Educators?

A new study suggests that training educators in mindfulness not only reduces burnout but also improves their performance in the classroom. Below I have listed some mindfulness resources and a few free Phone/ Tablet Apps that you can use yourself or with your students that promote overall social, emotional, and physical well-being! Take a Look!

Apps:

Insight Timer-Guided Meditation; Calm; Breathe; Take a Break; Pacifica; Mandala Coloring Page Game.

<http://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2015/08/mindfulness-education-schools-meditation/402469/>

<http://www.mindfulteachers.org/p/free-resources-and-lesson-plans.html>



Director's Corner



Reading case law is a love of mine as a special educator and life-long learner, and now in each edition of our newsletter, I will have a section designated 'my corner' where I will be able to share my love of case law pertaining to students with disabilities with all of you! For me, it doesn't get much better than that! Happy reading and happy learning!

Ensuring that students with disabilities receive the services outlined in their Individualized Education Plans (IEP) and their 504 plans is essential to creating equitable classrooms where students receive the instruction that they need in order to be successful. Student engagement and success are end goals that we all have as educators; therefore, it is important to keep in mind that IEP and 504 plans are critical supports for teachers to make those goals realities for their students. Although some students who qualify for special education accommodations and services via IEP or 504 plans may appear capable and independent, the services outlined in those plans exist in order to help students gain access to the general education curriculum. There are instances when teachers have refused to allow students to receive their accommodations and services outlined in their IEPs. Please remember that an IEP is a legally binding document, and as such, there are legal ramifications for not implementing accommodations and services written in an IEP. The 1992 case of *Doe v. Withers* centered around a history teacher who refused to give special education accommodations and services to a student with an IEP. Despite the repeated attempts by school officials to have the teacher implement the accommodations and services, the teacher continued to refuse. What makes this case so remarkable is that it was the first case in the United States that resulted in monetary damages against a teacher for refusing to implement accommodations and services outlined in a student's IEP. With the jury ruling in favor of the plaintiffs, the history teacher had to pay \$15,000 in damages. Additionally, he lost his job and teaching certificate. Although this case could operate as a cautionary tale for resistant teachers, I share this in the hopes of highlighting the importance and responsibility that teachers have to implement accommodations and services as outlined in IEP and 504 plans. For information about this case visit: http://www.wrightslaw.com/law/caselaw/case_Doe-Withers_Complaint.html

OUR TEAM

[Sarah Strycula](#)- 6th Grade Case Manager

[Linda Still](#)- 7th Grade Case Manager

[Steven Douglas](#)- 8th Grade Case Manager

[Toni Gonzales](#)- 9th Grade Case Manager

[Francis Lando](#)- 10th Grade Case Manager

and 504 Coordinator

[Kristi Fausel](#)- 11th and 12th Grade Case Manager and Special Education Coordinator

[Brian Fausel](#)- Pull-Out Specialist

[Patricia Richardson](#)- Director of Special Education

[Ryan Brown](#)- School Psychologist

[Louisa Footman](#)- Social Worker