

“Literacy for All” - Students with Significant Disabilities

The Iowa Department of Education, Bureau of Student and Family Support Services has established two innovative 5 year projects to increase the communicative and literate lives of students with significant disabilities. These projects, *Literacy, Language, & Communication for Students with Significant Developmental Disabilities: Reaching Potential through Systemic & Sustainable Statewide Professional Development* and *Comprehensive Communication and Literacy Project* are designed to include collaborative partnerships spanning Higher Institutes of Education, Area Education Agency and Local school district personnel. Faculty of the University of Northern Iowa in the Center for Disabilities in Literacy, Language, and Learning and Dr. Karen Erickson, of the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill Department of Allied Health Sciences, Center for Literacy and Disabilities Studies are collectively sharing their expertise to support twenty-five classroom sites across the state of Iowa.

The reasons and purposes for supporting literacy and communication instruction for students with significant disabilities are grounded in the belief and knowledge that all students regardless of the level or nature of their disability have the potential to become literate adults when given the opportunity to be engaged in comprehensive literacy instruction. Research also supports the level of literacy to greatly impact the quality of life for individuals that includes employability, health, and civic engagement -all of which are valued and desired for students who face great obstacles in becoming independent within these activities.

In little more than two years of these projects, students with significant disabilities are demonstrating increased ability to communicate and grow in their literacy skills and challenge their teachers to provide greater levels of literacy instruction. As gains in literacy and communication skills are demonstrated, family involvement has increased and many are encouraged to consider educational outcomes not thought to be obtainable for their students.

Through support of these projects and belief of *Literacy for All*, the Iowa Department of Education is committed to eliminate the achievement gap and provide greater educational opportunity in literacy instruction that will lead to meaningful life outcomes for students with significant disabilities.

Emily Thatcher
Consultant
Bureau of Student and Family Support Services
Iowa Department of Education