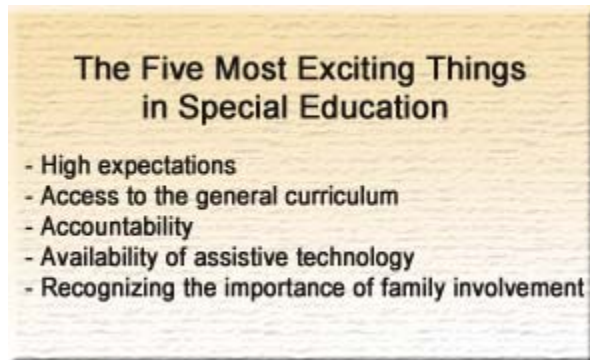

A Look at the State of Special Education



Dr. Judy Schrag is the co-principal for the Education and Human Services Group and past director, Office of Special Education, of the U.S. Department of Education.

During a recent visit to Georgia, Dr. Schrag provided some perspective on the state of special education and the SPDG program.

Dr. Schrag has done much work in the area of improving family engagement for SWD in schools as director of the US DOE Department of Special Education program.

Under her leadership the funding for national parent training and information centers (PTI) began.

Her interview will be posted on this web site in two parts.

Q. What brought you to Georgia for a visit?

For the past four years, Education and Human Services Group has been the third party evaluator for your statewide State Professional Development Grant (SPDG). Howard Schrag and I, as co-principals of Education and Human Services Group, have had the pleasure of serving as third party evaluators for your Georgia SPDG and, as such, to work with Dr. Julia Causey, director of the Georgia SPDG, and the other SPDG staff.



The purpose of our visit to Georgia was to meet with the SPDG staff and the staff of the Pioneer Regional Educational Service Agency (RESA) to discuss activities of the SPDG during this school year and the data/information that will be gathered during the school year to document the progress and outcomes of the SPDG project.

The overall mission of the GA SPDG is to reduce dropouts of students with disabilities and increase the graduation rate of these students. The SPDG staff are working with approximately 164 schools around the state in Cohorts 1, 2, and 3 to support the school efforts in these important areas. Each year of the SPDG, we are learning more about which strategies in these schools are being effective based on outcomes of their students.

Q. What is the most exciting thing happening in Special Education right now?

Wow, this is an important, but complex question because there are many exciting things happening in special education right now. **I think one of the exciting things in special education today is that teachers, educators, and others are having**

high expectations for all students—including those with disabilities. For many years, expectations for students with disabilities were too low. Federal and state laws across the country are emphasizing the importance of high expectations, along with the second exciting thing happening now in special education—that is that **students with disabilities now have access to the general education curriculum and are included within general education classes to the greatest extent possible.**

A third exciting thing is that **students with disabilities are included within the overall accountability system within each state—and take the same assessments with or without accommodations.**

There are many exciting things in special education today. A fourth area is that states are now implementing early intervening services---not just early intervention programs and services at the preschool level, but those early supports when struggling learners have difficulty in the classroom. A few years ago, these students were often automatically referred to special education if they were struggling in their classes. Now, more and more schools are implementing problem solving and a multi-tiered system of support to address the academic and behavior support needs of all students.

In Georgia, the schools are implementing a multi-tiered system of academic and behavioral support called the Georgia Pyramid of Instruction.

The increased availability of technology and assistive technology devices and services is also a fifth exciting change in special education today. Technology and assistive technology are helping ensure that students with disabilities can more effectively access the general education curriculum.

Although there are more exciting changes in special education, the last area that I would talk about is that **parent involvement and parent/family engagement is an integral part of schools across America.** Georgia has an excellent Parent Support Network, including Parent Involvement Coordinators that support all students, State Advisory Panel for Special Education that has parent membership, parent mentors across the state, Babies Can't Wait, the state protection and advocacy office, and the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities---all of these provide supports for parents across Georgia.

When I was the Director of the U.S. Office of Special Education Programs, we began the funding of the national parent training and information centers (PTI). These PTI centers have done outstanding work across the country including your own Georgia Parent to Parent PTI Center.

One of the goals of the Georgia SPDG, which I have first hand knowledge about, is to increase parent engagement through the involvement of a Circle of Adults Focusing on Education (CAFÉ). Under the leadership of Dr. Causey and Ms. Patti Solomon, a CAFÉ was piloted during Years 1-2 of the SPDG in two schools—Manchester High School in Meriwether County and Rutland High School in Bibb County. The goal is to

get 10 new CAFEs during this school year and next (Year 4 and 5 of the SPDG). As a part of the SPDG, Ms. Patricia Davalos has been providing specific services and support for Latino families.

All of these parent engagement efforts are being implemented in close coordination and involvement of Georgia Parent Mentors.