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PLS Update, Fall 1993

Malcolm Price Laboratory School

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Strategic Planning and School Improvement

by Linda Fernandez

The MPLS faculty and staff have been working steadily toward the development and implementation of a Strategic Plan on which school improvement planning will be based. The Strategic Plan was developed through intensive work by faculty and staff during the fall of 1992 and fine-tuning by the Strategic Planning Committee during the spring of 1993.

The purpose of our Strategic Plan is to provide a defining framework for the direction and goals of our organizational activities. It is grounded on our mission as defined by the Code of Iowa, our philosophy of child-centered and developmentally appropriate teaching and learning, and our belief system. The Strategic Plan is a multi-year commitment with specific focus areas identified and selected for special attention or emphasis during each school year. In this manner, we maintain consistency of vision and purpose, but have the flexibility to adjust as we grow and as our program confronts new demands.

The next step in making our Strategic Plan work is the development of a 1993-1994 School Improvement Plan which will focus our activities and allocation of resources for the year. Using the Strategic Plan Focus Areas, the NCA Self-Study, the NCA Accreditation Report, and other data, MPLS departments and units have developed improvement plans for this school year. Our inservice days in September and October were used to develop and polish the department and unit plans. Collectively, these plans comprise the MPLS 1993-1994 School Improvement Plan. As a part of the plan, evaluation criteria are necessary. As we proceed through this year, we will evaluate our progress toward meeting our School Improvement Plan goals. This information will then be used to analyze our 1993-1994 Plan and develop the 1994-1995 Plan.

Malcolm Price Laboratory School Strategic Plan
(Focus areas for the 1993-94 school year are indicated by boldface type.)

Quality instruction is based on:
I. An educational program consisting of
   A. clearly stated student outcomes,
   B. research-based curriculum design, and
   C. research-based instructional delivery.

II. An on-going assessment of the Malcolm Price Laboratory School's
   A. educational program,
   B. students, and
   C. faculty, staff, and administrators.

III. An environment which is
   A. safe and secure,
   B. collaborative and
   C. optimal for learning.

IV. School-community relationships which are strengthened by
   A. effective communication and
   B. substantive involvement.

Quality teacher education is based on:
I. Clearly stated student outcomes.

II. Dynamic teacher preparation which includes
   A. educational opportunities in the Malcolm Price Laboratory School
   B. instruction of University courses by MPLS faculty.

III. Assessment of
   A. MPLS teacher education opportunities and experiences,
   B. teacher education students, and
   C. MPLS faculty, staff, and administrators.

IV. Meaningful collaboration by all Teacher Education Faculty.

Quality educational outreach is based on:
I. Clearly stated outcomes and

II. Services provided to
   A. educational agencies,
   B. professional organizations,
   C. communities and
   D. educators.

For more information on the strategic planning and school improvement process contact Dr. Linda Fernandez, Director, Malcolm Price Laboratory School, University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, Iowa 50614. Telephone (319) 273-6171.

In-Service Opportunities

In the summer 1993 edition of the PLS Update we listed names of Price Laboratory School faculty and corresponding areas of expertise for in-service in the schools of Iowa. We are very interested in providing on-site in-service for teachers visiting the Laboratory School as well. Opportunities for first-hand observation in classrooms and follow-up sessions with PLS faculty tailored to the particular needs of the district may be scheduled. To take advantage of either of these opportunities, please contact Lynn E. Nielsen for elementary programs (319) 273-2138.
Early Childhood Special Education
by Darlene Cooney

"In a rapidly changing multicultural society, educators must direct themselves to the creation of an environment in which all students can develop their fullest potential..." This is the basis of the philosophy of Malcolm Price Laboratory School which supports the practice of serving children with all types of needs. It is also the rationale for including children with special needs in the PLS nursery-kindergarten program. This is the second year that PLS and Area Education Agency 7 (AEA-7) cooperatively are providing an educational setting for children with varying disabilities.

Integration of children with special needs is not only desirable but legally mandated. Public Law 99-457 requires that children with special needs receive educational services in the least restrictive environment and to the maximum extent appropriate be educated with children who are not handicapped. Therefore all children with disabilities have the right to associate with their non-handicapped peers to the maximum extent possible.

There are many reasons to provide opportunities for children with special needs to play, learn and interact with their non-disabled peers. For children whose learning rates and styles are different, the benefits include learning age-appropriate social and play skills, communication skills, independence, friendships, and a more positive self-image by having the opportunity to do what other children can do.

For children without disabilities, opportunities for positive interaction with children with disabilities enables them to become more sensitive to needs of others and to appreciate individual differences at an early age. Non-disabled children have opportunities to become role models, thus increasing their confidence. They also enjoy the benefits of friendships. Research studies show that non-disabled children do not imitate the socially unacceptable behaviors sometimes demonstrated by children with special needs. Research also shows that the educational progress of non-disabled children is not impeded in any way by the inclusion of special needs children in the educational setting.

The nursery-kindergarten program at PLS is designed to meet the needs of not only the typical early childhood student, but also the needs of children with disabilities. Lessons are developmentally appropriate--that means that they are designed to insure success to the child at whatever level of mastery he or she is working. Children are encouraged to explore materials, make guesses based on their experiences and observations, and contribute to discussions. Social interactions are modeled and encouraged.

Currently we have eleven children with varying degrees of special needs in the nursery-kindergarten program. Their placement in the program of PLS was the culmination of an extensive evaluation which determined that the education program at PLS would meet their educational needs. Each special needs child has an Individual Educational Program that specifically indicates their goals and objectives for the year.

A full-time early childhood special education teacher, Darlene Cooney, is assigned to the nursery-kindergarten. It is her responsibility to see that the individual educational goals of the special needs students are addressed. She does this through individual instruction, whole-class instruction, and consultation and planning daily activities with the early childhood teachers, Dr. Holmes and Mrs. Vincent. Two teacher associates are assigned to the program to assist Mrs. Cooney in her work. AEA-7 provides varying support services in the areas of speech clinicians, psychologists, consultants, physical and occupational therapists, and social workers.

Successful integration depends heavily on the attitude of all staff involved in the program. Here at PLS we have professionals who appreciate the value and uniqueness of every child. Diversity is valued and equal status is given to all children. This caring attitude makes integration a positive experience for special needs students.

For more information on full-inclusion of early childhood special education students, contact Mrs. Darlene Cooney, Malcolm Price Laboratory School, University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, Iowa 50614. Telephone (319) 273-2007.