

A Place for Every Student

By Caroline Anneaux

The public schools of Anderson County strive to offer a quality education for every student, including those with special needs. Not only do the individual schools work independently to assess and match students up with programs designed for their special needs, the directors of special education services in each district get together and share ideas and concerns in order to make sure every child is taken care of while they attend school each week day.

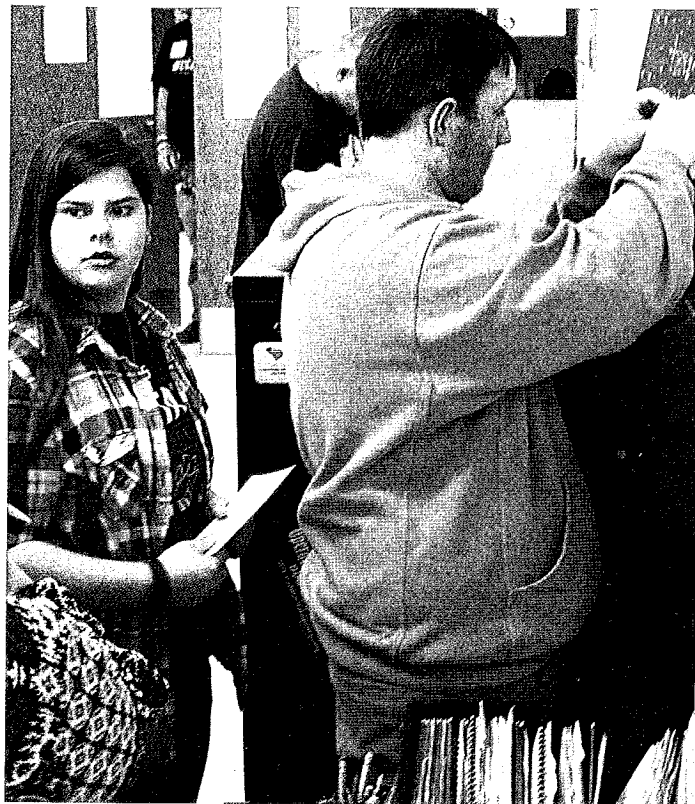
“Our district starts assessing children early on,” said Dr. Brenda Harper, Anderson School District Five’s director of special education. “BabyNet is a social services program in our area, and they help identify children under the age of three who show signs of not keeping up with their peers. By the time they reach us at age three, we are ready to place them in one of two amazing facilities we have for preschool children.”

West Market School of Early Education and South Fant School of Early Education are the two preschools run by District Five for children ages three and four. These preschools are for children with and without learning delays, and they have separate areas for children who require additional services. For instance, both preschools have sensory rooms which teachers use to help calm down autistic children. They contain massive swings where the adult can sit with the child, a crash pad which the child is safe to jump around on, and even soft lighting and blue lights to escape the harsh fluorescent lighting in the classroom.

“It takes a team approach to get the children the services they need,” said Andrea Borders, school psychologist at West Market School of Early Education and Glenview Middle School. “We are fortunate in this district that BabyNet helps identify special needs children under age three, and we are ready to pick them up at age three to begin work on reasoning and motor skills, speech therapy, occupational therapy, sensory issues and more.”

It is difficult to label some children as having learning differences when they are at such a young age. Some children are just a little slower to catch on, but they will eventually catch up to their peers. For those who will require more help in school, observing the progress of the students as they pass through classrooms in their early years will enable teachers and school counselors and psychologists to identify and place them in proper classroom settings in elementary and middle school.

Skip forward to high schools in the districts, and you will find programs for children who were identified early on as children with special needs, and who have



Students at Pendleton High School practice using a time clock in the PAES lab.

been a part of the special education program during their early school years.

“It is the people who make it work,” said Leigh Burton, director of special education in Anderson School District Three. “We have children in Crescent High School using the PAES [Practical Assessment Exploration System] lab and learning real life skills, pre-vocation, how to behave in the workplace and more. Our special needs teachers and assistants work with the children and the community to teach these students something useful for life after graduation or phasing out at age 21.”

The PAES program is a work development transition curriculum. It is utilized by several of the Anderson County districts, including Anderson School District Four. The classroom becomes a simulated work site and students are exposed to a variety of real-life working environments such as business/marketing, construction/industrial, consumer services, computer technology and processing/production. The teachers play the role of “boss” and the students are the “employees” in this program, which is designed to foster independence in these young adults with learning differences. They also

get "paid" with special vouchers to mimic a paycheck and may use those funds in school stores set up just for this purpose.

"The PAES program gives our teachers great information on the students," said Michael Shelton, director of special services for Anderson School District Four. "The data we get is incredibly helpful for setting up yearly IEPs [Individual Education Plans] for the kids. It works with students who are mild to severe and really helps them with encouraging independence."

"Special education is not a place, it is a service," said Shelton. He believes that the teachers and administration have real empathy for the students and care about each one individually.

"We have a foundation to do great things in the district and community," said Shelton. "We are just building on what is already in place. This district understands that our special needs programs are preparing our students for a future after they leave us. It is a win-win situation for everyone - including the employers who will benefit from getting dedicated employees who show up enthusiastic and ready to work every day for years."

A visit to Pendleton High School's PAES lab shows a group of approximately 20 students working independently on their assigned "jobs" in the classroom. Candice Davis, transition special



"I like cutting paper with the paper cutter because it is easier than using scissors. I also like it when we cook and make hash browns and cheesecake."

~ Ryan Klinkowski,
Crescent High School

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education teacher, and her assistants and student teacher stay busy going from student to student supervising their progression through the 264 jobs in the PAES program.

"As much as we want to help them with all of their tasks, it is so important to let them work as independently as possible," said Davis. "Our goal is for the students to be employable. We are so happy that the community businesses support us as much as they do. It makes it much easier to transition from high school, to Vocational Rehabilitation and on to real jobs."



"My favorite part of the week is when I work at Clemson Community Care. I get to help bag the food and walk customers out to their cars."

~ Kiarriah Baldwin
Pendleton High School

Students in Davis's classroom get on-the-job experience through Bi-Lo, Scott's Hill Equestrian Center, the dining hall at Southern Wesleyan University, Teal's Automotive, South Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation and many other businesses that open their doors to support these students on a daily or weekly basis.

Crescent High School in Iva also utilizes the PAES program. Special education teachers Haley Collins and Sylvia Bryant set up real-world working opportunities for the students when they are not in the PAES lab.

"My students love the PAES lab, but they also love getting out of the classroom and working in the community every day," said Collins. "The Town of Iva co-sponsors the Crescent High School Thrift Store on East Front Street. It is open every day from 12:30 to 3:15 p.m. Monday through Thursday, and our students and their job coaches operate it. Quality Foods in Iva also has a program for our students to help out in the grocery store."

The days of placing special needs children into self-contained classrooms all day are long gone in Anderson County schools. The students are learning inside and outside of the regular classrooms, attending classes with their peers and working towards transitioning into the community. ■

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