

Tennessee State Improvement Grant

The Tennessee State Improvement Grant (SIG) supports professional development and technical assistance for educators by implementing scientifically research-based interventions to improve pre-literacy and literacy skills of children ages 2 – 22. These interventions focus on development of language and communication skills, pre-literacy skills, school readiness, and literacy skills in school-aged children in order to improve reading scores, support effective progression or transition through the educational process, and to reduce the number of children who require special education services. Improving parents' abilities to support and participate in their child's education and development of literacy skills is also a key focus of the SIG.

The efforts of SIG are intentionally designed to provide wrap-around support to the Reading First Initiative, and last year's efforts were targeted to pre-kindergarten classrooms, as well as to fourth and fifth grade teachers. During the coming school year, those efforts will be contin-

ued, but will be supplemented by the addition of middle school and high school interventions. The aim for SIG, once again, is to assist teachers and parents in helping to improve literacy success in children. Therefore, SIG staff will work with teachers and parents of preschoolers as well as elementary age, middle school, and high school students. Each school has asked for assistance from SIG in differing ways, so SIG staff members have created individual service plans for each school. SIG staff may be seen in the classrooms working with teachers who are learning new skills or tweaking already effective activities, or with parents who are asking for help with how to assist their children be more successful in school.

For more information about the SIG program or to find information that will be helpful to parents and teachers, visit the SIG website at <http://sig.cls.utk.edu>. For more information about the SIG grant or



Keplar student Logan Singleton and his mother, Kristi Luster, are happy about the Summer Reading program sponsored by SIG.

to find out how your school can be involved, please contact SIG Director Harolyn Hatley at 615-532-1659.

The SIG project was initiated in seven schools during the 2004-2005 school year and is being implemented in nine additional schools during the coming year. The new schools include elementary, middle, and high schools. The chart below shows the active SIG schools for the 2005-2006 school year.

SIG 2005/2006 SCHOOLS			
County	Elementary School	Middle School	High School
EAST TN			
Claiborne	Clairfield Elementary (K-8)		
Hawkins	Keplar Elementary (K-5)	Rogersville Middle (6-8)	Cherokee High School
Knox	Inskip Elementary School	Gresham Middle (6-8)	
MIDDLE TN			
Davidson	Kirkpatrick Elem School (K-5)	Dalewood Middle School (5-8)	
Cannon	Woodbury Grammar (K-8)		
Wayne	Collinwood Elementary (K-4)	Collinwood Middle (5-8)	Collinwood High School (9-12)
WEST TN			
Fayette	Somerville Elementary (K-6)		
Jackson/Madison	Beech Bluff Elementary (K-5)		
Memphis City	Hollywood Elementary School	Cypress Middle (6-8)	

Using Classroom Design to Facilitate Differentiated Instruction

by Tom Buggey & Suzy Page

Classroom management, instructional processes, and essentially all activities that occur throughout a typical school day are influenced by room arrangement. While traditional designs with desks in rows and the teacher's desk at the front of the room may have worked in prior years, today's emphasis on differentiated instruction and the recognition that all students deserve an appropriate learning environment have changed our perspective about classroom layout.

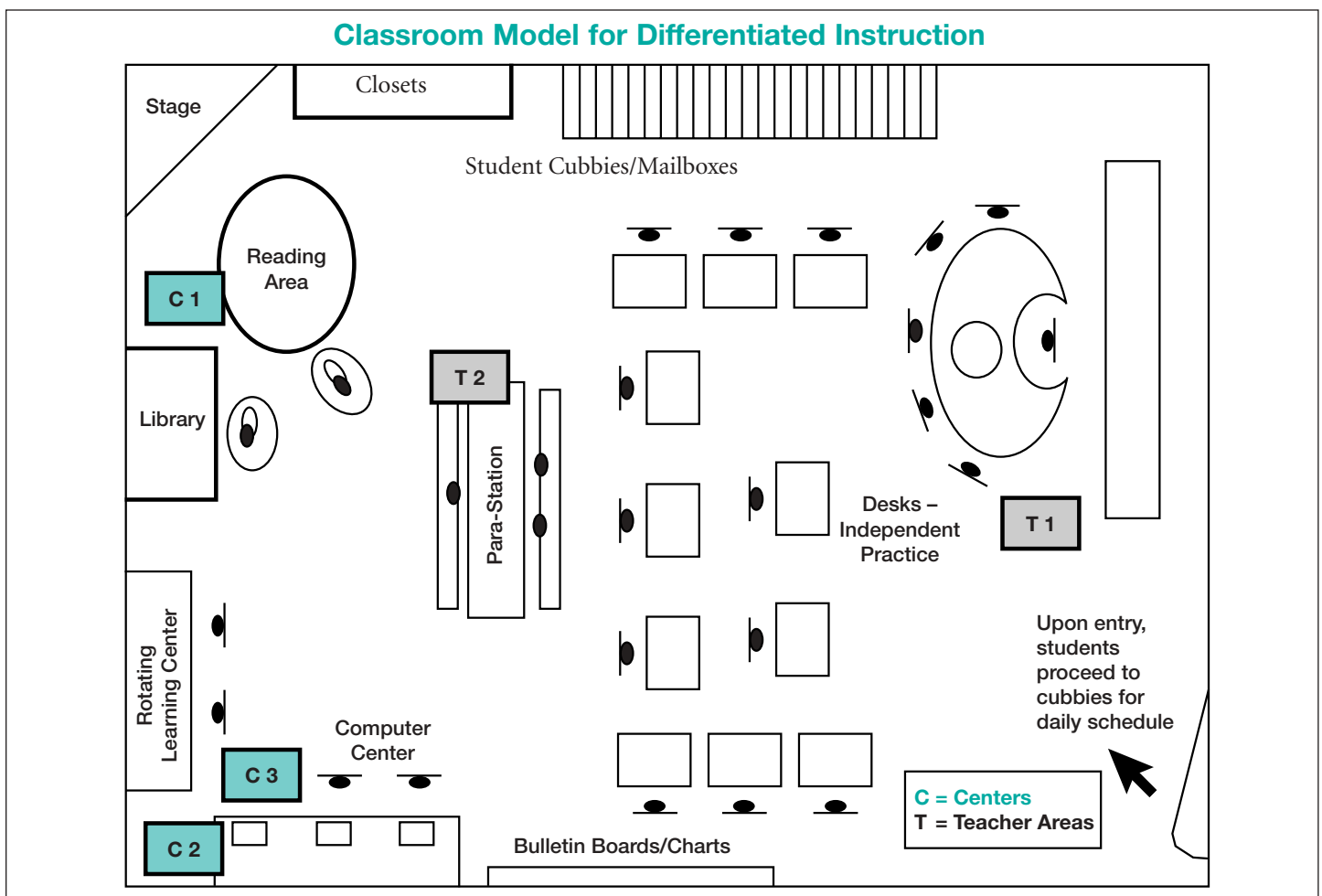
A sample classroom model is included with this article. The focus is on areas that work for students. Please note that space constraints and larger class sizes may, and often will, impact center placement. Adjustments to suit individual needs will be addressed following the layout description.

The classroom shown in the illustration is designed for elementary school

students. As one enters the room, an area to the left is reserved for small group, direct instruction by the teacher. In classes lacking space or furniture as illustrated, students may sit in chairs or on carpet squares with clipboards to participate in these activities. Desks for independent practice/large group instruction are arranged in a way that allows students to focus on instruction, yet easily slide together to facilitate partner and small group work. This area can be extended to add desks as needed. An alternative to this layout would be the placement of desks in pods of four that face the front, yet easily turn to allow small group activities. The paraprofessional location can also be used for parents or older students who may volunteer to assist in the classroom. If no individual serves in either capacity on a routine basis, this is a very good location for placement of the teacher's desk, as it

allows visual contact with each location in the room.

Please note that the model establishes centers around the sides of the room. If insufficient space is available for centers within a room, the next best alternative is suitcase centers that can be used on the floor, at a table, or in any other available space. It is recommended that a separate reading area be established so children can relax while enjoying a good book. Also, computer centers are usually separate as they are tied to outlet locations around the room. File folder centers are an idea that works when there is little space for centers. The file folders are easily stored and can be used at student desks. Another idea is one that is used by Egypt Elementary school in Memphis, where a lending library for centers has been established. Teachers are asked to contribute ideas and finished products



for centers, and a portion of the materials budget is spent each year to enlarge the library. Teachers may check out a center when needed.

The design of the room can be used to keep students organized during the day. The center areas are coded by either number, letters or colors. Each morning an individualized daily schedule is placed in students' cubbies/mailboxes. Students check off areas attended and write about the work they have accomplished in each area. These write-ups serve as graphic organizers for students with organization problems, as well as providing a schedule and record keeper for teachers and students. Ideally, once a routine has been established, transition time will be minimized and instructional time maximized.

One of the great advantages of a differentiated classroom is the opportunity for Mastery Learning. The keys to Mastery Learning are planning, assessment, and progress monitoring. Assessments will determine starting points for instruction, i.e., a baseline. Students have individual goals based on personal progress rather than competing with the entire class on the 0-100% continuum. This will provide for many students the great motivator—hope.

A differentiated classroom as shown takes time to establish. "Baby steps" are called for so teachers and students can get acclimatized, but once the routine is established, great things can be achieved. Decades of research on this approach in special education classrooms have proven the success of this method. Overall outcomes for students receiving special education services are not always promising; however, when this type of "precision teaching" is in place, outcomes are extremely good.

For more information on this topic, please contact your SIG service provider or do an Internet search for Mastery Learning, Precision Teaching, Curriculum-Based Measurement, or Learning Center Management.

Revisit us next month for the second article in this series—ideas and suggestions for preschool classroom design.

SIG Service Providers



Katherine DeVault is the Pre-K coordinator for the SIG grant. Katherine visits the preschools across Tennessee that feed into SIG schools, working with teachers to develop new strategies for teaching pre-literacy skills and providing materials and consultation to SIG schools and preschools.

Katherine earned a dual Bachelor of Arts degree from Middle Tennessee State University in history and anthropology. During this time, she worked for the Park Service doing archival work and educational program planning. She also spent a summer conducting field research in Costa Rica. After college, Katherine moved to Boston, where she was a freelance writer and an editor for *America on Line*.

In 2002 Katherine returned to East TN and enrolled in the Master's program in Early Childhood Education. She was employed as an autism specialist/discrete trial therapist by the Washington County Department of Education's Office of Special Education until taking her current position with East Tennessee State University and the State Improvement Grant. In her personal time, Katherine enjoys reading, traveling, and being outdoors.



Suzy Page is the SIG project coordinator for grades K-12 in West and Middle Tennessee excluding Davidson County. A native of the Hampton Roads area of Virginia, Suzy earned her B.A. in political science from Roanoke College, Salem, VA. She later added a Masters' degree in secondary curriculum and instruction from the University of Memphis, along with graduate and post graduate work in gerontology and elementary curriculum

and instruction. Suzy's professional history is long and varied. After seven years in the housing industry specializing in low income housing for older adults and adults with developmental disabilities, she completed a 15-year teaching career that included all grades from 1-12 in both rural and urban, public and private settings. For 15 months she served as the Coordinator for the Mississippi Professional Development Initiative Plan at the Early Childhood Institute where she negotiated agreements between community colleges and universities and consulted on an Early Reading First grant for Mississippi State University. During this time she gave numerous presentations on both the state and regional levels. Presently, Suzy travels across Tennessee visiting SIG schools in West and Middle Tennessee.



Kandy Smith is the project coordinator for grades K-12 in East Tennessee and Davidson County. Kandy's educational background includes a double major in English and Education from Belmont College, a Master's degree in supervision and administration from Tennessee Tech University, and she has recently been a doctoral student at Western Kentucky University but is moving her program to the University of Tennessee.

Kandy's work experience includes 21 years teaching high school and middle school English and high school Spanish. She holds a library science certification and served as part-time librarian at two schools and was a principal for 10 years in a K-6 elementary school. She also has coached volleyball, basketball, softball, golf, and soccer at the high school level. Kandy lives in Carthage, TN, and has two children: Shelley, a senior at Tennessee Tech University majoring in psychology, and Sam, a junior at Smith County High School. Kandy's personal hobbies include working with the music program at her church, golf and reading.

Are Parents Important in School?

As a parent, you are the most important influence in your child's success in school and in life. In today's changing economy the need for advanced skills and technical knowledge is growing. Showing our children that we value learning and think education is important is one of the best ways we can help them in school. When you are involved in your child's education, your child achieves more. Decades of research show that when parents are involved students have

- Higher grades, test scores, and high school graduation rates
- Better school attendance
- Increased motivation and better self-esteem
- Greater enrollment rates in education beyond high school

You can help your child succeed by providing a home that encourages learning and supports your child's physical,

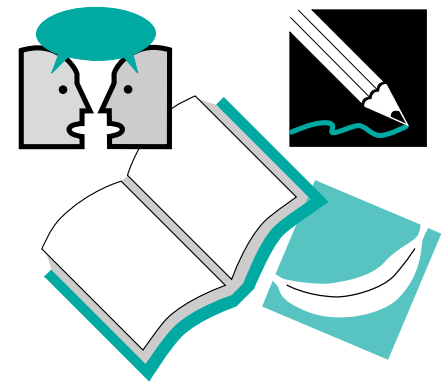
mental, and emotional development. You can also help your child's academic experience by working with the school and community groups that have an impact on your child. Family Involvement starts

at home, with what you do to help your child learn and to show how much you value learning in school and in everyday life. Involvement continues with your participation in classroom activities and school events and through communicating with your child's teachers about your child's progress. Showing

your child and his teachers that you care about their conduct and what they learn are positive steps toward helping your child be successful!

The following article was written in response to teachers' pleas for help from parents. It was adapted and excerpted with permission from *Busy but Balanced: Practical and Inspirational Ways to Create a Calmer, Closer Family* (St. Martin's Press) by Mimi Doe, M.Ed.

Showing your child and his teachers that you care about their conduct and what they learn are positive steps toward helping your child be successful!



10 Ways for Parents to Help Teachers

1. Create a smooth takeoff each day. Give your child a hug before she ventures out the door and you head to work. Look her in the eye, and tell her how proud you are of her. Your child's self-confidence and security will help her do well both in school and in life.

2. Prepare for a happy landing at the end of the day when you reconvene. Create a predictable ritual such as 10–20 minutes listening to your child talk about his day—before you check phone messages, read the mail, or begin dinner. That way you are fully present to listen, and your child has a touchstone he can count on between school and home.

3. Fill your child's lunchbox with healthy snacks and lunches. Have dinner at a reasonable hour and a healthy breakfast. A well-balanced diet maximizes your child's learning potential.

4. Include calm, peaceful times in your children's afternoons and evenings. Maintain a schedule that allows them to go to school rested, and if they are sick, have a system in place so they are able to stay home.

5. Remember it's your children's homework, not yours. Create a specific homework space that's clutter-free and quiet. Encourage editing and double-checking work, but allow your kids to make mistakes as it's the only way teachers can gauge if they understand the material. It's also how children learn responsibility for the quality of their work.

6. Fill your child's life with a love for learning by showing him your own curiosity, respecting his questions, and encouraging his efforts.

Conference Opportunities Sponsored by State Improvement Grant

Opportunities were provided SIG teachers to attend two conferences this summer. The first conference, the SIG Summer Institute, was for teachers of 4th and 5th grades and above and was held at the Nashville Holiday Inn Select from July 15-18. Over 85 teachers from SIG schools across Tennessee attended this event, learning new strategies for assessing students in reading abilities and for working with students of varying abilities and levels. Comments from the teachers who attended the workshop were positive, and a larger conference is already in the works for next summer with additional opportunities for teachers from elementary, middle, and high schools to collaborate and learn literacy strategies from each other.

In late July, preschool teachers from SIG schools were invited to attend the annual Early Education Conference at East Tennessee State University. A special pre-conference session was presented for SIG teachers by Sharon MacDonald, a frequent keynote and featured speaker at national and state early childhood conferences. Ms. MacDonald conducted a half-day workshop on strategies to use with young children to increase their learning and their fun. SIG teachers were also invited to a literacy banquet at which children's author, Pam Schiller, spoke. As a result of these opportunities provided through the State Improvement Grant, SIG teachers will go back to school armed with new knowledge and strategies to help students succeed!

Spotlight on SIG Partner: Vanderbilt University

(RTI) Responsiveness-To-Intervention: Identifying Children with Learning Disabilities

The present method of determining whether a child has a learning disability is based on evidence of a “significant discrepancy” between the child’s achievement and his intellectual ability (often determined through IQ scores). A major concern with this method is that it forces schools to wait until a child has failed before he is eligible to receive help in the form of special education intervention services. Often, a significant discrepancy is not observed until the child is in fourth grade, causing a loss of valuable time that could have been spent helping the child.

An alternate to the discrepancy model of learning disability identification and one specifically identified in the 2004 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), is the **Responsiveness-to-Intervention (RTI)** approach. In the RTI model, student progress is assessed through some form of monitoring. Students who receive research-validated instruction but are not achieving at the same levels AND/OR rates as their peers are provided with more intensive interventions. These interventions might include options such as a double dose of regular, research-validated classroom instruction or preventive tutoring in a small group setting. Students who continue to experience academic difficulties, in spite of increasingly intensive interventions, would then be considered as possible candidates for special education services. Some of the expected benefits of the RTI system would be that children’s learning difficulties are identified sooner, before they

reach a point where it’s difficult to catch up; and more time will be spent on instruction rather than testing, with a strong focus on student outcomes. Although identified in IDEA as an option for identifying students with learning disabilities, states and local districts are not compelled by law to use RTI.

The State Improvement Grant’s staff members are pleased to announce the recent addition of the IRIS Center at Vanderbilt University to the SIG partnership. Lynn and Doug Fuchs, also from Vanderbilt, have developed a research-based nationally recognized RTI model and will work with the IRIS Center to translate their work into an easily accessible format for districts, schools, and teachers. The goal of this joint venture is to develop online, interactive training modules of RTI that can be used by districts statewide to train Tennessee’s teachers in this research-based model. Over the next year, four training workshops will be held providing educational professionals with an overview of the RTI process, strategies for assessment in the general education curriculum, reading interventions, and overall implementation of the RTI process. Individuals attending these trainings will then become trainers prepared to work with districts and schools choosing to implement RTI.

Additional information about RTI will be offered in future issues of *SIGnal*. For more information about the interactive modules developed by the IRIS Center, visit their website at <http://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu>.

7. Fill your home with books to read, books simply to look at, and books that provide answers to life’s many questions. The public or school library is an excellent resource.

8. Be a partner with your child’s teacher. When you need to speak to him or her in reference to a specific issue with your child, do it privately, not in front of your child. Make a point never to criticize your child’s teacher in front of your child.

9. Set up a system where routine items are easily located—such as backpacks, shoes, signed notices. Create a central calendar for upcoming events to avoid the unexpected.

10. Tuck a “love note” in your child’s lunch bag to let her know how special she is. Knowing they are loved makes it easier for children to be kind to others.

PARTNERS

I dreamed I stood in a studio and watched two sculptors there.
The clay they used was a child’s mind and they fashioned it with care.

One was a teacher; the tools used were books and music and art.
One, a parent with guiding hands, a gentle and loving heart.

Day after day the teacher toiled, with a touch both deft and skilled.
The parent labored side by side and all the values filled.

And when at last their task was done they looked at what they’d wrought.
The beautiful shape of the precious child could neither be sold nor bought.

And each agreed it would have failed if one had worked alone.
For behind the parent stood the school, and behind the teacher, the home.

—Author unknown

Center for Literacy Studies
600 Henley St., Suite 312
Knoxville, TN 37996

Resources for Parents and Teachers

Resources for Families

■ The **School-Home Links** activities provided on this site are keyed directly to reading activities that K-3 teachers typically do with children in school. These School-Home Links provide your family with an extra opportunity for learning at home. The School-Home Links are intended to be family activities. Your child will need your support in completing these activities.
<http://www.ed.gov/pubs/CompactforReading/table3.html>

■ The National Center for Family Literacy and ProLiteracy Worldwide, with support from Verizon Communications, have teamed up to create **Verizon Literacy Campus (VLC)** — an online training center developed to provide assistance to a wide range of organizations and individuals working in the literacy field. The primary VLC audiences are the general public, who are seen as potential literacy advocates and volunteers, current volunteers working in the literacy field, and program staff.
<http://www.literacycampus.org/course/>

Resources for Teachers

■ Vanderbilt University's **IRIS Center** is a national effort to ensure that general education teachers, school administrators, school nurses, and school counselors are well prepared to work with students who have disabilities and with their families. This

website contains modules and case studies that will help school personnel better understand and work within real life situations that may confront them in today's classrooms.

<http://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/resources.html>

■ **Sharon MacDonald** is a frequent keynote and featured speaker at national and state early childhood conferences. She has taught summer courses at Seattle Pacific University, WA for four years, and has written several magazine articles and teacher resource books. Sharon's website will be enjoyed by teachers of young children. One section of the website addresses environmental print, or the symbols, signs, numbers, and colors found in McDonald's, Wal-Mart, Exxon, Pizza Hut, 7-Up, and on websites, for instance. They offer excellent entry points for young children to begin to learn to read, write, and do math.

<http://www.sharonmacdonald.com/teaching-web.aspx>

■ SIG's own **Suzy Page** has put together a great resource for teachers. Suzy has taken Tennessee teaching standards and matched them with information from textbooks used in Tennessee schools. The information on this site will help you to set up and change the learning centers in your classroom.
<https://umdrive.memphis.edu/g-sig/>



**Tennessee State
Improvement Grant**

Advancing the Skills of Tennessee Students

Harolyn Hatley, Project Manager
E-mail Harolyn.Hatley@state.tn.us
Telephone 615-532-1659

Department of Education
Division of Special Education
7th Floor, Andrew Johnson Tower
710 James Robertson Parkway
Nashville, TN 37243