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State Improvement Grant Welcomes New Director



Dr. Kathy Strunk, new director of the Tennessee State Improvement Grant

The State Improvement Grant has a new director—**Dr. Kathy Strunk**. Kathy replaces Dr. Harolyn Hatley, who resigned in October. Dr. Strunk was already a member of the State Improvement Grant's staff, as co-chair of the Early Childhood work group and a member of the Management Team. These former duties allowed her to jump right in and begin her new duties as SIG's Grant Director.

Kathy graduated from Vanderbilt University in May, 2004, with a Ph.D. in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies. Her research and professional interests have

focused on school leadership and school improvement. Her dissertation examined issues related to Tennessee's first public school funding mechanisms, illuminating citizens' perspectives toward the state's first system of mass education and how it was funded. In 2002, Kathy was awarded the Distinguished Academic Achievement and Service in Leadership and Organizations Award by the faculty of the Department of Leadership and Organizations, Peabody College. She has presented papers at three major educational conferences and her first

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SIG Schools Across the State

During the 2004-2005 school year, eight schools signed on as SIG schools. With an additional 11 schools joining our ranks for the 2005-2006 year, there are now 19 schools working with the SIG grant. Each school's needs are different; therefore, SIG staff members have worked with schools in various ways. To keep staff in SIG schools aware of what is happening in other schools, we will highlight two schools per issue. Because the initial SIG efforts began in East Tennessee, we are beginning with **Keplar Elementary School** in Hawkins County and **Inskip Elementary School** in Knox County.

Keplar Elementary

Located in upper east Tennessee is Keplar Elementary School in Rogersville/Hawkins County. Keplar is a small rural school with an enrollment of less than 100 students. Keplar's principal, Sandy Williams, was enthusiastic about allowing SIG staff members to work with her teachers and students. Mrs. Williams welcomed SIG to classrooms to work with

individual teachers and to PTA meetings to conduct sessions on reading and parent involvement. Pizza, beverages, and dessert were provided by SIG staff, along with door prizes of Wal-Mart gift cards.

A summer reading program was initiated and each student who participated received a free book. Wal-Mart giftcards were also provided to volunteers who helped remodel the library, and mini-blinds will be purchased soon. SIG staff purchased a supplementary reading program for the school, Houghton Mifflin's *Soar to Success*, as well as content area leveled readers that will enhance students' reading skills. DIBELS assessment materials were also provided to teachers. Mrs. Williams and two Keplar teachers attended the SIG Summer Institute in July, and one teacher attended the ETSU Early Childhood Learning Conference, with a special ses-



Students Kaylee Snodgrass and Dillan Wilcox, teacher Karen Sizemore, and parent Karen Rines work on decorating pumpkins at Keplar.

sion devoted to kindergarten teachers in SIG schools and preschool teachers who teach children who feed into SIG schools.

Most recently, a family literacy night was held at Keplar by Jackie Noe, Reading First Coordinator at Keplar Elementary School. Mrs. Noe planned and conducted a fun night in which children read to their parents and decorated pumpkins and parents learned the importance of reading aloud to their children and

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Dillan Wilcox reads to his aunt and uncle, Callie and Danny Ward, at Kepler's Fall Family Literacy Night.

strategies to make reading more fun and effective. SIG staff members assisted Mrs. Noe in this effort, and are ready to join in the fun again in the next session, tentatively scheduled for January.

Inskip Elementary School

Inskip Elementary School is located in the northern portion of Knoxville, TN. Student enrollment in kindergarten through 5th grade is just over 400 students. Inskip's principal, Elisa Luna, agreed to allow members of the State Improvement Grants' team to provide appropriate teachers with professional development opportunities in reading skills. Because students in grades K through 3 are participating in Reading First strategies, SIG's goal is to wrap around Reading First, preparing teachers with the knowledge and strategies that will help them assist children to begin reading readiness in pre-kindergarten classes, and to continue to make reading progress as they enter 4th and 5th grades.

During the spring term of the last school year, a reading consultant from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, was hired to provide 3 all-day reading development sessions for 4th and 5th grade teachers focusing on differentiated learning, grouping, and reading strategies. Teachers were asked to complete wish lists of books they would like to purchase for their classrooms and SIG provided numerous books. Skills development for teachers continued in July at the SIG Summer Institute, where 10 Inskip teachers and an assistant principal attended a three-day

workshop devoted to reading. Additional training and advice in reading strategies has been provided by the SIG school service providers, who work with teachers individually in their classrooms at the request of individual teachers or principals, covering such areas as grouping, reading circles, individualized instruction, and learning centers. In addition, SIG provided leveled readers and DIBELS materials to Inskip teachers.

In addition to working with teachers, SIG staff members have been working with parents. Another goal of the SIG grant is to increase family involvement in children's education. To support that goal, a SIG member spoke with parents about the importance of reading and family involvement during the March PTA meeting, providing information along with pizza. Also in support of parental involvement, 3 focus groups were held with parents who had volunteered to give their input about a literacy toolkit being planned for parents as part of the SIG grant. Parents gave suggestions about what they would find beneficial in a toolkit about learning, used the trial kits with their children, and met again to provide input on their beliefs about the value of the toolkit. Their suggestions have been incorporated into the toolkit that will be provided to parents during literacy workshops in SIG schools in 2006.

Next month we'll feature some SIG activities that have taken place in schools in West Tennessee.

New SIG Director,

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major publication was published in 2004.

Dr. Strunk was the Tennessee Department of Education's Special Education Preschool Coordinator from September 2004-October 2005 and also worked for the Tennessee Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental

"I am looking forward to working with everyone involved with the State Improvement Grant. Our grant has great potential to influence improvement in our schools and it is exciting to be a part of that."

Relations from January-June, 2003, where she calculated school and district-level fiscal capacity to fund public schools. Kathy holds a master's degree in School Counseling and a dual bachelor's degree in Music and Elementary Education. She has served as a university teaching and research assistant, school counselor, elementary school teacher, and private piano teacher. Her public school experiences include leadership of staff development and family involvement.

Kathy is mom to two sons, Jordan, 23, a mechanical engineer, and Jacob, 17, senior at Goodpasture Christian School. She enjoys spending time with her family and friends, watching football, playing racquetball, taking Pilates classes, playing the piano, reading, and writing. Her family lives in the Green Hills area of Nashville.

Kathy commented on her new position, "I am looking forward to working with everyone involved with the State Improvement Grant. Our grant has great potential to influence improvement in our schools and it is exciting to be a part of that." SIG staff members welcome Kathy and support her in her new role.

Ten Ways for Parents to Help Teachers

(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.)

1. Create a smooth take-off 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. 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 provide 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.

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.

Ten Ways for Teachers to Help Parents

(Written by Reggie Curran and Inspired by Mimi Doe's article: Busy but Balanced)

1. Create a smooth send-home each day. Take the time to say a few words of support to my child at the end of the class or the day. If my child feels she is important to you, she will work hard to make you proud of her.

2. Begin the day on a happy note. Create a routine so that my child will know what to expect. Take a few minutes to allow him to remember what he learned previously. Review what was discussed yesterday before jumping in to a new subject, and help him connect what you are teaching him to the real world. That way he'll see the relevance of what you're teaching.

3. Take the time to give yourself a break at lunch time so that you will be prepared to work with my child. Get enough sleep so that you are ready for a class full of students. Keep your energy up!

4. Try to remain calm and soothing, even when my child or others are making it difficult to do so. Your calmness may help to bring my child's behavior back in focus when he has been upset, embarrassed, or worried.

5. I understand that homework may help my child to review and practice what has been learned, but please remember that you are not my child's only teacher, and that he may have homework from all of you. Don't give busy work just to give him something to do. Be sure the assignment is reasonable, important, and that he has enough time to complete it.

6. Respect and nurture my child's curiosity by showing him that his questions are important. Treat my child fairly and with respect, and keep him safe from ridicule and bullying.

7. Share with my child your ideas about what he can do to improve, and about books and websites that he can understand that will help him with what he is learning.

8. Consider me your partner. Let me know what's going on with my child, not just the bad, but the good too. Email me, call me, or send me a note about her performance. Don't expect me to read your mind – I'll only know my child needs help if you tell me. We both want the best for my child.

9. Set up a routine at school so that my child knows what is expected of him. Be fair and consistent—keep the same rules every day for everyone.

10. Let me know what I can do to help my child. Take the time to work with me to let me know his strengths and weaknesses so I can help him succeed.

SPOTLIGHT ON SIG PARTNERS

Family Involvement Specialists, Joy Hudson and Janie King

We are fortunate to have two **Family Involvement Consultants** as part of the SIG team. Both are employed by the State of Tennessee; their responsibilities include participation on the No Child Left Behind intervention team, review of Local Education Agencies' School Improvement Plans, providing professional development training on family and special education issues, learning and sharing latest information from conferences and workshops, and working with parents who have concerns about school issues.

One of the goals of the Tennessee State Improvement grant is to increase family involvement in SIG schools. Research indicates that when families are included and involved in their students' educational programs, results show an increase in student academic achievement and attendance, and a decrease in drop-out rates.

Following are ways in which a family involvement consultant can assist teachers and parents in your school:

- Provide training for school staff and parents on respecting opinions and suggestions, helping to make

parents feel welcome and included, and believing parent participation makes a difference

- Helping parents understand their roles in a child's education
- Helping teachers feel prepared to work with parents
- Providing awareness training about poverty issues for parents and teachers
- Providing information for parents and teachers about special education issues
- Helping parents to understand and advocate for their children's rights in schools



Joy Hudson is the Family Involvement Consultant for public schools in East Tennessee. In addition to all of the duties listed above, her responsibilities include participation on the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Intervention Team, as well as review and evaluation of the Local Education Agencies' School Improvement Plans.

Joy's background in School Psychology also makes her a perfect fit for her added role of RTI responsibilities. RTI (Response to Intervention) is a new method for determining whether a child has a learning disability, due to changes in the reauthorization of IDEA 2004. RTI will allow teachers to use interventions with students in the general classroom who are struggling to keep up with classmates, rather than wait until a disability has been diagnosed. Joy will be able to work with school systems and families to help them understand how RTI differs from the discrepancy model of disability identification. In her personal life, Joy cherishes her husband and her daughter, who recently earned her Doctor of Pharmacy degree and moved to Nashville to begin her career as a Pharmacist.

Joy can be reached at 423-614-8753, or emailed at Joy.Hudson@state.tn.us.



Janie King is the family Consultant for public schools in West Tennessee. Janie has a Bachelor of Elementary Education degree and Masters' degrees in Special Education and Educational Leadership. A former elementary teacher, Janie is a firm believer in literacy-based classrooms and collaborative learning, and she would

welcome the opportunity to visit classrooms to share her knowledge and experience with teachers who are learning how to adapt and modify classrooms and lessons to benefit children with special needs. Janie will take on the additional responsibilities of family involvement workshops and education, working with parents, teachers and state leaders.

Janie considers her daughter Claire, who is in her final year of law school, to be her greatest accomplishment.

You can reach Janie at 731-881-1414 or Janie.King@state.tn.us.



Both Janie and Joy welcome any questions you may have about family/school issues.

Family Involvement Workshops Planned for SIG Schools

Staff members of the State Improvement Grant have been busily working to create a toolkit that will assist parents and family members to support their children's school success. The toolkit was planned with the help of parents at one of the first schools to become involved in the SIG program—Inskip Elementary School in Knoxville, TN. Ten families whose children are students at Inskip volunteered to meet with SIG staff members to discuss items that they would find helpful and would like to see included in a toolkit that would give them information about helping their children in school. Their ideas were noted, and materials were created and/or found that would provide the information requested by parents.

Once the materials were put together into a trial toolkit, a second group meeting was planned. Four parents agreed to

take the toolkit home to try it out over the summer with their children. These parents marked the book, giving their input on what worked with their children and what didn't work. They gave their opinions about what they found helpful and suggested items to be deleted or added. Their ideas were brought back to the drawing table and the toolkit was reworked. The revised version was reviewed by a panel of SIG staff members, who made suggestions for further changes. The final edit is taking place at this time and will be printed when finalized.

The toolkit contains information about:

- the importance of families in their children's education
- how children learn to read
- strategies to help increase children's

reading ability

- activities to make reading more fun
- suggestions for books to read
- how to work with teachers and school administrators
- information about resources for parents

Each toolkit will also contain two books for children, as well as other items that will help to increase children's learning. The toolkits will be distributed at workshops that will be planned at SIG elementary schools between February and May, 2006. During the workshops, parents will have

opportunities to participate in several of the activities included in the toolkit and to ask questions about the kit, and each family will receive a toolkit to take home and keep.

Watch for announcements to find out when the Family Involvement Workshops will be coming to your school!

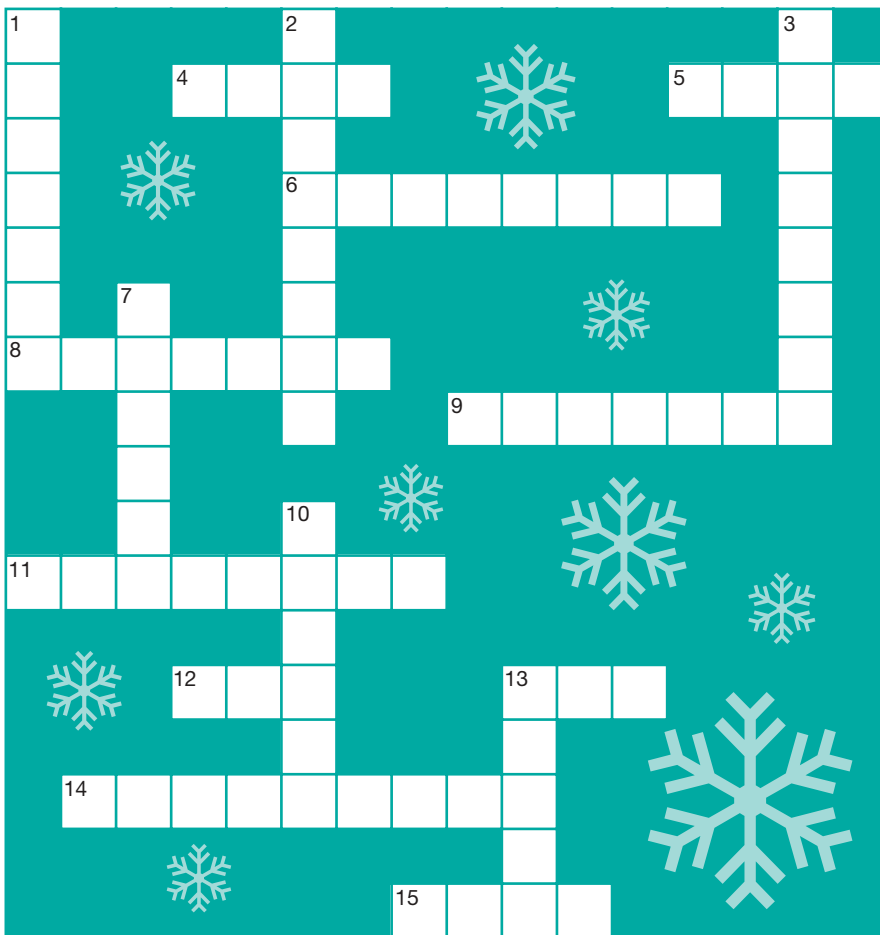
Winter Fun!

ACROSS

- A snowman's eyes are made of this
- Used to slide down a snowy hill
- Last month of the year
- Frosty the _____
- First month of the year
- Sports games played every four years
- Keeps your head warm
- When water freezes, it becomes _____
- Big professional football game in January

DOWN

- Gloves without five fingers
- Red winter bird
- Shortest month of the year
- Winter sport played on ice
- Coldest season of the year
- Eskimo's house



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Resources for Parents and Teachers

Elementary School Teachers

■ Kathy created her site, **Kathy Schrock's Guide for Educators**, in 1995, to help teachers easily wade through the myriad resources on the Internet. In 1999, Kathy partnered with DiscoverySchool (now Discovery Education) and continues to update the resources available on her site daily.

<http://school.discovery.com/schrockguide/>

Middle School Teachers

■ **MiddleWeb** provides a wealth of resources for schools, districts, educators, parents, and public school advocates working to raise achievement for all students in the middle grades.

<http://www.middleweb.com/mw/aaAboutMW.html>

Parents and Teachers

■ Wow! This site has so many great items it's hard to print a list. Items include graphic organizers to help children visualize what they are learning, activities for holidays, puzzles, books to print, crafts, maps, and many other fun activities.

www.enchantedlearning.com

■ Here's another site with great information about reading and fun!

www.starfall.com

Parents

■ This site will help you find just the right books for your child! Give **Bookfinder** the age of the child, the theme that interests her or him and whether it's a book to be read aloud or read alone. If you're looking for something specific, type in the author name or a word from the title.

<http://www.pbs.org/parents/bookfinder/>

<http://sig.cls.utk.edu>

**Check out
Tennessee's SIG
website for resources
and information about
the State Improvement
Grant, as well as
reading, parenting,
and teaching
strategies.**



**Tennessee State
Improvement Grant**

Advancing the Skills of Tennessee Students

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