

THE NAVIGATOR
Volume 02 Issue 007 - Fall 2011

Strategy Session



**SPED Boot Camp Prepares YCCS Teachers for
Increased Enrollment of Students with Special Needs**



Special needs students currently make up 20-22% of YCCS' total enrollment – a number that has grown steadily in size, in complexity of service requirements, and in expense each year since YCCS received its charter in 1997. There are 665 special needs students enrolled this fall in the 23 YCCS campuses. From August 15th - August 26th, 2011, YCCS held a “boot camp” at the Hype Park Ramada Inn for the 35 teachers who need to meet and exceed the challenge of providing high-quality, regulation compliant services to these students.

Chicago Public Schools provided funds for 35 teachers, and YCCS funded 4 regional case managers to meet the needs of these students. To demonstrate further commitment to special needs education at the campuses, YCCS provided each campus with a grant of additional operating funds to support this increased continuum of services in the SPED design. YCCS also purchased additional classroom materials for students needing intense interventions and more specialized support.

The purpose for the boot camp was to “jump-start” the school year by providing new hires and veteran special education teachers with an intense focus on the information they would need to have a productive and successful school year. The SPED Boot Camp set a precedent for organizing, arming, and training key education professionals in order to accomplish the most efficient assignment and application of resources to benefit students with special needs.

The primary focus was on the Individual Education Plan (IEP) and the services built into it. Student IEPs need to be current, accurate, specific to the student, and well-written because they provide the “roadmap” for the educational and related services that will give the collaborating professionals the best tools for service and monitoring student progress. Developed to provide each student the best chance to maximize his or her achievement, IEPs are literally “the heartbeat” behind the classroom and establish the framework for services throughout the year.

“The IEPs must be as accurate and complete as possible at the start because most YCCS students are 18-19 years old, they have been out of a formal educational environment from 5 months to 3+ years, and the average time they are enrolled is 15 months. They have to ‘hit the ground running’ with the best instruction YCCS can provide. There is no time to waste in building and increasing skill-levels in math, reading, and writing while they are concurrently completing credits to earn their high school diplomas as they develop and plan for post-secondary goals,” said YCCS Chief Education Officer Dr. Linda Goodwin.

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