Promoting Relationships and Learning
Through Peer-Mediated Interventions: Practical Strategies with Strong Evidence

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Reflecting on Your School

- Where are the rigorous and relevant learning opportunities in your school and community for all students?
- What opportunities do all students have to develop valued relationships with their peers?
- How might we promote social interactions and shared learning within these existing activities for students with autism?
- What roles might peers and paraprofessionals play in this process?

The Relationships of Students with Autism

Indicators of Friendships and Peer Relationships During Middle and High School

Frequently see friends outside of school:

- ID: 22%
- Multiple Disabilities: 14%
- Autism: 6%

Never or rarely receive phone calls from friends:

- ID: 42%
- Multiple Disabilities: 38%
- Autism: 84%

Get together with friends outside of formal groups at least once per week:

- ID: 54%
- Multiple Disabilities: 38%
- Autism: 24%

Relationships During Elementary School

Never visited with friends during the previous year:

- ID: 17%
- Multiple Disabilities: 21%
- Autism: 32%

Never or rarely receive phone calls from friends:

- ID: 50%
- Multiple Disabilities: 64%
- Autism: 81%

Invited to other children's social activities during the previous year:

- ID: 80%
- Multiple Disabilities: 74%
- Autism: 68%

Fostering Social Connections and Communication

1. Shared Activities
2. Communication Access
3. Proximity to Peers
4. Shared Interests & Motivation
5. Prepared Peers
6. “Just Enough” Support
7. Data-Driven Reflection and Refinement

Data Sources

- Observational Study of Elementary and Middle School Students Who Use AAC
  12 students, 64 full-class observations
  Chung, Carter, & Sisco (2012)

- Observational Study of High School Students in General Education, Special Education, and Other School Settings
  16 students, 320 10-min observations
  Carter, Hughes, Guth, & Copeland (2005)

- Observational Study of Middle and High School Students in General Education Classrooms (Academic and Elective)
  23 students, 102 full-class observations
  Carter, Sisco, Brown, Brickham, & Al-Khabbaz (2008)

- Intervention Study of High School Students in Inclusive Academic and Elective General Education Classrooms
  150 students, 900 full-class observations
  Carter & Asmus (2010-2014)
At Your School...

- Are students with and without disabilities present in the **same places**?
- Are students with and without disabilities there at the **same times**?
- Are students with and without disabilities engaged in the **same activities**?

**Reflecting on Your School....**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Settings</th>
<th>Same Place?</th>
<th>Same Time?</th>
<th>Same Activities?</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cafeteria (During Lunch)</td>
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<td>Hallways and Courtyard</td>
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<td>Academic Classes</td>
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<td>Elective Classes</td>
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<td>School Clubs</td>
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<td>Extracurricular Activities</td>
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<td>Field Trips</td>
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**A Picture of General Education Participation In Pennsylvania...**

- Intellectual Disability
  - Mostly General Education: 43%
  - Mostly Special Education: 11%
  - General and Special Education: 12%
  - Elsewhere: 34%

- Autism
  - Mostly General Education: 23%
  - Mostly Special Education: 43%
  - General and Special Education: 11%
  - Elsewhere: 23%

**Not Even Present In the Classroom...**

- Large Group: 39%
- Small Group: 19%
- Independent: 18%
- No Instruction: 11%
- Gone: 5%

Source: Chung, Carter, & Sisco (2012)
2. Proximity to Peers

Number of peer interactions when students are NOT in proximity to peers

Source: Chung, Carter, & Sisco (2012)

42%

Average percentage of time students were in close enough proximity to peers to talk with one another

Source: Carter & Asmus (2010-2014)

3. Communication Access

60%

Average percentage of time students were NOT in proximity to their AAC device

Source: Chung, Carter, & Sisco (2012)

With Whom Do Students Interact?

93%

Adults

5%

Peers

2%

Adults & Peers

Source: Chung, Carter, & Sisco (2012)
4. Common Interests & Motivation

92% Percentage of students who wanted to keep spending time with their peer supports

Source: Carter & Asmus (2013-2014)

Common Interests & Motivation

Bucks Connect Mentor Survey

- Books
- Sports
- Movies
- Video games
- Cooking
- Sewing
- Pets
- Building activities
- Playing an instrument
- Playing sports
- Which one(s)?
- Which one(s)?

Orienting and Equipping Students

- About one another
- About effective communication
- About shared activities
- About others who are involved (adults)
- About...

What might students with and without disabilities know to feel **comfortable and confident** in their interactions and shared work together?
6. Just Enough Support

Percentage of time students are directly next to a paraprofessional in inclusive classes

Source: Chung, Carter, & Sisco (2012)

Trends in Paraprofessionals

Amount of quality training most paraprofessionals receive on fostering social relationships

Are Students Academically Engaged?

Interaction Rate by Instructional Arrangements

Source: Carter, Sisco, Brown, Brickham, & Al-Khateeb (2008)
Using the Most Natural Supports Available First

Can the student converse and participate...
• ...on his or her own?
• ...if given the right technology or adaptive equipment?
• ...if provided with some additional skill instruction?
• ...if shown how to use basic self-management strategies?
• ...with help from a peer, classmate, or co-worker?
• ...with occasional help from a special educator, job coach, service provider, or other paid staff?
• ...with ongoing help from a special educator, job coach, service provider, or other paid staff?

7. Data-Driven Reflection and Refinement

What impact do you expect these interventions to have?
What would look different if peer-mediated interventions went really well?
What could you point to that would suggest whether things were working as intended?
For students? For peers? For others in your school?
Social Interaction Opportunities and Outcomes

Are there people who...

• ...she can call (or text or “Facebook”?) in the evening if she has a problem to discuss or exciting news to share?
• ...will invite her to a sleep-over?
• ...know when her birthday is and will make sure it is celebrated well?
• ...notice when she is not present at a social event and follow-up to find out why?
• ...take the initiative to call her and initiate a shared activity?
Basic Steps...

- Identifying students with disabilities who need assistance to participate in class activities;
- Recruiting peers from within the same classroom to help provide some of these supports;
- Arranging for students to sit next to each other during class activities;
- Orienting peers to their roles, explaining the rationale for their involvement, and showing them basic strategies for supporting the academic and social participation of their classmate;
- Providing ongoing monitoring, feedback, and assistance to peers and their partners throughout the semester, as needed; and,
- Shifting paraprofessionals to a broader support role within the classroom through which they assist all students, as directed by the teacher.

Adults as Facilitators of Social Connections

![PACKERS: Strategies to facilitate peer interactions](image)

- **Proximity to peers**
  - Is the student close to and facing toward partner?
  - Does the student have similar interests as partner?

- **Access to device**
  - Are appropriate messages programmed in the device?

- **Create opportunities**
  - Are the student and peers working together?
  - Does the student and peers talk about shared experiences?

- **Keep monitoring**
  - Are peers talking to the student as seen in the video?
  - Do the student and peers understand each other?

- **Encourage students**
  - Are the student and peers aware they are doing a good job?
  - Did student and peers know they are doing a good job?

- **Reduce support**
  - Did peers provide natural support to the student?
  - Are they next, hold prompts, and task/role assignments?

- **Score interactions!**
  - Did the student and peers move with peers using the device?
  - Is the student getting to know more peers in the room?

Some Potential Advantages of Peers

- Peers are “experts” on social skills
- Peers are not as “stigmatizing”
- Peers are great problem solvers
- Peers are future supports
- Peers benefit...
- Peers are readily available

Launching Peer Support Arrangements

Where do you begin?
Implementing Peer Support Strategies

1. Planning for participation and supports
2. Recruiting peer supports
3. Equipping peers for their roles
4. Supporting students as they work together
5. Reflecting on the impact
6. Facilitating relationships beyond the classroom

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1. Planning for Participation and Supports

- What are all students expected to learn?
- What are the expectations general educators and club leaders hold for all students in this activity?
- What social, communication, and other IEP goals could the student work on here?
- How will the student be supported to participate in all of the learning and social opportunities that exist in this setting?

Source: Carter, Cushing, & Kennedy (2009)

Source: Chung & Carter (2013)
Examples of Support Behaviors...

- Helping keep their assignments and class materials organized
- Reminding them how to follow established classroom routines
- Encouraging interactions with other classmates
- Helping them check the accuracy of their work and taking the time to explain
- Sharing work or assisting them to take complete guided notes
- paraphrasing lectures or rephrasing key ideas
- Prompting them to answer a question or contribute an idea during class discussion
- Helping clarify a key concept
- Helping them self-direct their own learning and self-manage their own behavior
- Writing down answers given orally or using a communication device
- Helping them to pass out class materials
- Walking with them from one class to the next
- Offering additional examples of a concept or idea
- Demonstrating how to complete a problem
- Highlighting important information in the text or on a worksheet
- Reviewing course content to ensure understanding
- Supporting involvement in cooperative group activities
- Teaching leisure and recreational activities during non-instructional times
- Helping them to “fit in” by learning accepted social norms
- Encouraging and encouraging them when they get frustrated
- Prompting them to use their communication book
- Exchanging advice related to a personal problem
- Sharing class materials
- Reading about a section of an assignment or textbook
- Redirecting them when they are off-task
- Inviting them to work together on a class project
- Showing them important classroom “survival skills”
- Reinforcing communication attempts
- Explaining how to do certain aspects of an assignment
- Writing down answers given verbally or when using communication devices
- Helping student pass out class materials
- Reinforcing the student to follow established procedures
- Encouraging interactions with other students
- Supporting involvement in cooperative group activities
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- Reinforcing the student to follow established procedures
- Encouraging interactions with other students

2. Recruiting Peers

- Student preferences
- Similar age
- Interpersonal skills and willingness to learn
- Expressed interest
- Consistent attendance
- Shared interests
- Existing social networks
## Avenues for Identifying Peer Supports

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<tr>
<th>Approaches</th>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Drawbacks</th>
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<td>Student-identified peers</td>
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<td>Class announcements</td>
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<td>Teacher recommendations</td>
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<td>Rotating peers</td>
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<td>Cooperative learning groups</td>
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<td>Peers from other settings</td>
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<td>Extracurricular groups</td>
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## Example Questions for Prospective Peer Supports

- How well do you already know ____?
- What interests you most about becoming a peer support?
- What expectations do you have?
- Why do you think it takes to be an effective peer support?
- Are there aspects of the experience you are worried about?
- What school and community activities are you involved in?
- What experiences have you had that you feel would make you a good peer support?
- What questions do you have about becoming a peer support?
- What do you hope to gain from this experience?
- Have you ever received support from your classmates? Describe the experience.

## 3. Orienting Peers Without Disabilities to Their Roles

- 40-60 min orientation meeting
- During lunch, before/after school, advisory, “down time”
- Ongoing monitoring and support from paraprofessionals, special educators, and/or general educators

**Questions to Consider**

- **Who** will lead the orientation session?
- **When and where** will the session be held?
- **What** topics will be addressed?
- **Which** students will be encouraged to attend?

## Example Discussion Topics

- Introductions
- Rationale for peer-mediated strategies
- Background about the student
- General goals in the class, club, or other activity
- Confidentiality and respectful language
- Expectations specific to the classroom or elsewhere
- Technology and communication systems
- Promoting class participation
- Student motivation and feedback
- When to seek assistance
- Discussion and questions
4. Supporting Students as They Work Together

- How will the team communicate about future lessons?
- Who will adapt materials?
- Who will train and give feedback to the students and their peer partners?
- Who will collect data on IEP goals and social progress?
- Who will model support strategies?
- What is the plan for dealing with inappropriate behavior of the peer partners or the student with disabilities?

Facilitation Strategies

- Modeling ways for students to initiate, maintain, and extend conversations
- Demonstrating how to converse with someone using an augmentative or alternative communication devices
- Highlighting shared interests, strengths, experiences, or other similarities among students
- Teaching and prompting critical social interaction skills (e.g., greeting classmates, requesting help, refusing support)
- Redirecting peers’ questions and comments away from the adult and to the student with disabilities (and vice versa)

Facilitation Strategies (continued)

- Interpreting the communicative intent of particular behaviors, as well as suggesting appropriate responses
- Highlighting students’ strengths and contributions to small-group and other projects
- Assigning classroom responsibilities requiring frequent interaction, such as small-group assignments and cooperative projects
- Ensuring students sit together and remain in close physical and social proximity
- Asking specific peers to provide particular support

Sources: Causton-Theoharis & Malmgren, 2005; Downing, 2005; Ghere, York-Barr, & Sommerness, 2002

Academic Supports from Peers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic-related supports</th>
<th>Examples</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Helping check the accuracy of assignments</td>
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<td>Sharing notes, assisting in taking notes (including guided)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sharing other class materials (other than notes)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rephrasing/rephrasing lecture or class discussion</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prompting him/her to contribute a question/idea during discussion</td>
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<td>Explaining a key concept or how to solve a specific problem</td>
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<td>Writing down answers given orally or with a communication device</td>
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<td>Providing instructions on how to complete a class activity</td>
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<td>Reviewing class content to ensure understanding</td>
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<td>Helping him/her participate in a group activity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Encouraging/honoring academic performance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reading aloud a section of a book or assignment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Modifying or adapting assignments</td>
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<td>Other</td>
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Social and Other Supports from Peers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social-related supports</th>
<th>Examples</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prompting him/her to interact with other classmates</td>
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<tr>
<td>Encouraging other classmates to interact with him/her</td>
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<tr>
<td>Making formal introductions to other classmates</td>
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<tr>
<td>Explicitly teaching specific social-related skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prompting use of an aided communication device</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reinforcing social/communication attempts</td>
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<th>Other supports</th>
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<tr>
<td>Helping him/her self-manage own behavior</td>
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<td>Redirecting him/her when he/she is off-task</td>
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<tr>
<td>Giving advice or providing emotional support</td>
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<tr>
<td>Helping student keep assignments or class materials organized</td>
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<tr>
<td>Helping student pass out class materials</td>
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<tr>
<td>Explaining or demonstrating specific classroom rules</td>
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<td>Explaining class/activity schedule</td>
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A Couple of Great Articles to Share with Paras

5. Reflecting on the Impact of Peer Supports
Classroom Observations

- Nature of students interactions with peers
- Types of conversational skills
- Modes of communication
- Persons involved in interactions
- Time in which students are engaged academically
- Time in which students work on activities aligned with the general curriculum
- Time in which students are working with a one-to-one adult support

“You can observe a lot by watching.”
-Yogi Berra

Conversations with Students with Disabilities

- Are you enjoying spending time with _____? Why or why not?
- What are some of the things you do together?
- What help do you find most helpful? Least helpful?
- What have you learned from working with _____?
- Do you consider _____ to be a friend?
- Would you like to continue working with _____? Why or why not?

Conversations with Peers Providing Support

- How would you describe your experiences?
- Did you enjoy serving in this role? In what ways?
- What things have been going really well? Not so well?
- In what ways have you benefited from this involvement?
- What changes have you noticed in your partner, if any?
- Has this been a beneficial experience for your partner?
- What additional help would you like to be effective in this role?

Student Feedback Form

- [Feedback questions]

Other Comments or Feedback:
Conversations with Educators and Paraprofessionals

- What is your overall impression of peer support strategies?
- How would you describe the experiences of students?
- How effective have peers been at providing support?
- What strategies do these peers still need to learn?
- What concerns (if any) do you still have?
- What sort of assistance would be most helpful for you?
- What have been the benefits to students with disabilities? To their peer partners? To other students? To school staff?
Conversations with Parents

• What does your child tell you about working with his or her peers in this classroom?
• What have you noticed that suggests your child is enjoying this experience?
• Does your child describe his or her peers as friends?
• Is your child connecting with his peers outside of school, by phone, e-mail, or in person?

6. Facilitating Interactions Beyond the Classroom

“Formal efforts to create more welcoming school cultures, expand the quality of opportunities students with and without disabilities have to get to know and spend time with one another, and strengthen the social skills and friendships of all students”

Peer Partner Programs

Discussion

Online Resource

http://www.pattan.net/Videos/Browse/Training%20Series/Starting+Points+and+Possibilities+Promoting+Inclusion+Learning+and+Relationships+for+Students+with+Complex+Needs
A Few Themes From This Work...

- Relationships matter!!!
- Relationships require support
- How matters as much as where
- Good support strategies should be good for everyone
- Doing things differently doesn't always require more resources
- Strategies should be effective and feasible