

# Project MAX: Statewide Parent Network

*Leading change, fostering high expectations, and presuming competence*



MAX Statewide Parent Network Quarterly Newsletter

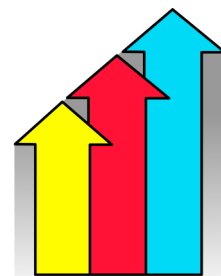
Fall 2016

## About Project MAX

The purpose of Project MAX is to increase the capacity of Pennsylvania schools to provide all students, including those with complex instructional needs, with the maximum access to the general education curriculum and PA academic standards. A core issue that prevents high levels of learning is a culture of low expectations.

Join families in Pennsylvania Statewide Parent Network to help encourage higher expectations for students with complex instructional needs.

Maximizing  
Academic Access,  
Expectations, and  
Learning



Supports for Educating Students  
With Complex Instructional Needs

## Parent Voice

### Katy B.

Some of my thoughts when I was asked to be on Project MAX were: *What is Project MAX? How can I help, I don't have a teaching degree. Will this affect his IEP?* I was worried that he would have to take more tests. I didn't know if my input would be heard.

The first year of Project MAX was amazing. We were all concerned and afraid of how we could implement this program into our classroom. We were given a lot of tools and information but it was up to us to get together and slowly work it in. We saw changes right away after we left the conference. Our minds were filling up with ideas. When we met each month, my ideas were not only listened to but put into the project.

Some changes that were made were the children were given homework, but I had stated that it needed to be something manageable because a lot of special needs kids have therapies after school or siblings that have after school sports. So we came up with the idea to have the children pick a book out and send it home with them to read or be read to. Then the parents would sign the paper that it was done and another book was sent home. I really liked it and my son, Andrew, felt such pride to be like his brother when we all sat down to do everyone's homework.

Another change was that my son Andrew for the first time had a curriculum goal in his IEP. Nothing was changed in his IEP but a goal of reading comprehension was added. That made my husband and I smile after our meeting. Also I got in touch with the principal and had website changes made to make the parents feel more part of the school district and that school.



I would like to tell parents that Project MAX will change the way you view your child and his education. Why can't our children have some of the same curriculum and just teach it a different way? The confidence that I have seen in my son with this project is amazing. By just adding a little curriculum our first year we have seen the school become very inclusive of my kid's classroom. Before it was *us* and *them* and now we are building a bridge that makes it possible for my son's class to meet and be included in a regular classroom activity.

I would like to tell teachers that it is not a sprint it's a marathon. We implemented stuff out slowly but the impact was huge. If you have a parent that you can bring on board, bounce ideas off and help with the bridge between the classroom and parents. Make small changes like a bulletin board, having homework to take home, monthly newsletters to inform parents of the activities and curriculum that month. Send ideas on what to talk about with their child during dinner or on weekends. Reach out to other Project MAX classrooms and get some of input of what worked and what didn't.



## MAX in the Classroom

Project MAX has infected Greensburg Salem Middle School with positivity and solutions. As we began the process a year ago, we were unsure of the method of implementing Project MAX. We were uncertain of how this would look in our building and classrooms. Our big question was how we were going to provide each student with the means to access grade level content when students face learning, physical, sensory, and emotional barriers but we were ready to dive in and figure it out. Through the process we acquired a hefty amount of knowledge and resources, changed our mindset, experienced success and failures, but most of all boosted our collaboration time. Through collaborating with our colleagues and parents, we have balanced each other. Each team member brought their own expertise to ensure student success.



Jessica Haerr, Life Skills and Maxine Forbes, 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Science

Collaboration between teachers and parents across school and home environments to share ideas, successes and brainstorming solutions to challenges together is undoubtedly a key to our success with the program. We have come to realize that the kind of teaching that helps a student who has complex needs often helps every student – all of whom deserve to receive information in a way that makes learning both accessible and challenging. We have learned that students with complex needs do not need to complete every tiny detail of each lesson. As a team, we pick the most important aspects of the lesson including learning targets and vocabulary, to ensure that the student will be able to understand the same big ideas as his/her peers.

By taking risks and accepting some failure as we learn together, we began filling our resource bucket. As the MAX team gains knowledge, we share out with our entire school's professional learning community. Parents are the glue to the project, reinforcing academic content, behavior, and allowing their children to be challenged and to struggle. The end result is truly inclusive instruction that recognizes the individuality of each learner. The project may focus on students with complex needs, but Project MAX is changing the way we deliver education to all students with phenomenal results! You never know what a student can do, unless you provide them with access and ask the tough questions. Presume Competence.

## Presuming Competence

**Presuming competence is the heart of Project MAX and it begins with a mindset. When families and educators assume that children with complex instructional needs are capable of learning, vast opportunities present themselves. As we presume competence in our students, our expectations grow, and our behavior changes.**

**We begin to speak in age respectful ways and we become confident that the students benefit from having information and experiences that are the same as or similar to their peers. The results may not be immediate, but over time, presuming competence makes all the difference.**

***“The greater danger for most of us lies not in setting our aim too high and falling short; but in setting our aim too low, and achieving our mark.” –Micheangelo***



## From the Parent Partners

### **The 2016 National Autism Conference**

What a great first week in August at the National Autism Conference at the Penn Stater Hotel and Conference Center in State College. Talking with individuals with autism, family members, educators and other professionals made us so acutely aware of the rich diversity that we have come to embrace when we think of autism.

There were so many wonderful presentations and topics to choose from, it was hard to decide. As past participants of the conference, we have learned to prioritize and attend the presentations that are not being videotaped, leaving the others to be viewed at a later time.

Feel free to visit the Penn State website <http://autism.outreach.psu.edu/> to view clips on the Autism Conference.

You can also visit the PaTTAN website at <http://www.pattan.net/Search?st=videos&search=transition%20conference> for additional resources on the Transition Conference.

## **Summer Conferences and Events**

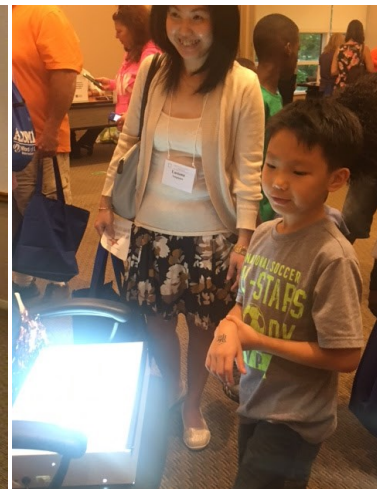
A series of events held during the summer provided parents a forum to network and exchange information on Project MAX, including the Pennsylvania Transition Conference, the National Autism Conference, and Low Incidence Institute.

At the Transition Conference held in third week of July, a youth panel discussed the positive outcomes of having high expectations in the own lives, especially in their transition into adult life.

In August, our parent partners talked with individuals with autism, family members, educators and other professionals at the National Autism Conference at the Penn Stater Hotel and Conference Center in State College. Some of the partners attended non-recorded sessions among the different presentations and topics, leaving others to be viewed at a later time.

During the Summer Institute at the Low Incidence Institute, also in August, local education agencies entering Project MAX this year had the opportunity to learn more about how the implementation of the program within schools has brought educational changes for all students, including those with complex instructional needs. A Carnival evening of fun and games was shared between families and other agencies serving children with special needs.

### **Carnival Night at Low Incidence 2016**



## Join the Discussion

We continue to look forward to hearing families and educators exchange strategies and ideas that will make positive changes in education happen for our children. Join us as we learn what it means to believe in the abilities of all students!

### Upcoming Trainings:

1. Presuming Competence: Fostering High Expectations
2. Access to the General Education Curriculum Across Settings
3. Maximizing Communication and Learning for Your Child
4. Collaborating on School Teams in Ways that Make A Difference
5. Leading Change

The trainings are interactive and have parents providing their own life experiences and feedback for all the attendees. We also talk about the tenets of Project MAX and the impact across the state.

Want to know if a training is happening in your area? Contact Lorie or Tammi @ [1-866-950-1040](tel:1-866-950-1040) or Enid or Yovana at a la Línea de Asistencia del Proyecto MAX: [\(215\) 595-5866](tel:215-595-5866) (Español e Inglés) or email the Parent Partners at [parentnetwork@pattan.net](mailto:parentnetwork@pattan.net). We look forward to hearing from you.

## Save the Dates

- **Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) Conference:** March 8th - 10th at Hershey Lodge and Conference Center
- **2017 Autism Conference:** July 31-Aug 3, 2017 at the Penn Stater Hotel

Look for upcoming Parent Scholarships on these conferences!



HUNE 215-425-6203



PEAL 866-950-1040



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