

October 1, 2008

To Whom It May Concern:

As an administrator for Stanislaus County Office of Education, supervising the Early Start of California Grant, for our local planning agency, it is important to share the superior collaboration model that we have implemented in our recent partnership with Modesto Junior College.

Our 07-08 school years began with a partnership to provide service to families with children age's birth to 3. All children receiving this service have been identified eligible for Part C services of IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act). The funding for our services comes from the Early Start of California Grant and is a required service of our SELPA (Special Education Local Planning Agency).

Following the federal and state regulations to provide such services, it is clearly stated that this population of students is to be served in their "natural environment" and to be community based.

Prior to our partnership with Modesto Junior College, our services were provided in a group setting at one site only. Students were bussed from all over the county and were provided services in a classroom setting. As a program, we valued and supported the participation of the parents and conducted home visits to support the link between school and home. However, the parents were not typically part of the services and therapy that their child received while on our campus.

Due to the need to serve students and families in their community and to involve parents as their child's first teacher by supporting families by working together to advance their child's development, we implemented regional community based programs for Stanislaus County and began partnerships with other agencies for the use of facilities and resources.

Our infant developmental specialist, Carrie Lambertson, was assigned to the school districts that surround the area of the West Campus of Modesto Junior College. She had the foresight to envision a coordinated program, involving parents as lifetime learners to support their child with special needs. After discussing ideas with Pam Guerra-Schmidt, her support for this integrated program made securing

the community based location at the Mi Wuk Children's Center, a painless task. It was a beautifully coordinated effort on behalf of the staff at Modesto Junior College and supported by Dr. McKinnon. Details and ideas were discussed and planned for, in a thoughtful manner, involving all key players in a series of planning meetings.

We are now entering 08-09 as our second year of partnership. We currently have 16 families attending this community based collaborative program each Friday. The program is designed as a college course where parents can voluntarily enroll in the class to earn college credit. The fees are supplemented by the Early Start grant funding to provide this as an opportunity for the families. This alone allows the parents a painless opportunity to continue as students at Modesto Junior College and advance their goals in education, supporting lifelong learning for many parents that never considered themselves to be college students.

This program has been very successful with parents and is now a highly sought after program. Parents are waiting for openings to participate. As for our Infant Developmental Specialist, she says, "professionally, it was one of my most rewarding years as an Infant/Toddler teacher; I experienced so much growth with my students and saw how confident parents were in being the best teacher for their child with developmental delays. I am so grateful to MJC for their out reach to our families who have the challenge of raising a child with special needs." As an administrator of this program and in the background of developing this opportunity, it is a pleasure to work with such professional individuals such as Dr. McKinnon, Pam Guerra-Schmidt, Colleen Norby, Sherri Suarez and Karen Tabacco. They have been innovative, supportive, and critical thinkers to the details. This program is expected to be a state model and is clearly the best example I know that supports the community. It is a pleasure knowing that this model program will be highlighted and discussed at the Early Childhood Special Education Field Meeting in Sacramento this Fall, sponsored by the California Department of Education.

In appreciation for the support of Modesto Junior College,

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Administrator Early Start/Early Intervention