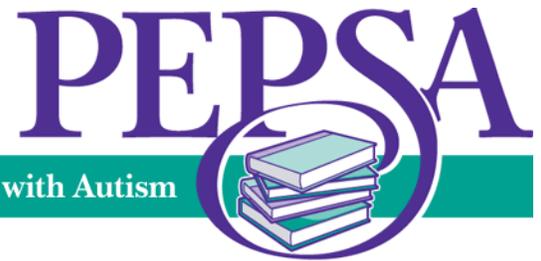




Florida Department of Education



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## **LUNCH BUNCH: A Social Interaction Group for Talented Teens**

The purpose of this project was to provide an environment of information and acceptance to middle school students with communication issues. Many students with ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder) feel as if they have no peer group and they are unable to relate to those around them. This project was developed as a result of parent concerns regarding their teen's daily social lives and teacher concerns regarding these students involvement in the school community as a whole. Pragmatic issues and perception issues affect us all but none more than the middle school student who is challenged in terms of communication.

Potential participants were identified through IEP (Individual Education Plan) goals, parent request and by the CARD Center as needing assistance with social issues of a variety of sorts. Meetings were held with the administration of the school and CARD personnel to present the program and an outline for its implementation. Parent information letters and permission forms were sent home to describe the program and to request additional information from parents as to what they thought their child's specific needs were.

The curriculum was developed into a 9 week plan called "Lunch Bunch" and involved presentation of a topic, informal discussion and related activities such as writing, role playing or games. Students came to the classroom once a week during their lunch to eat, talk, share and basically relate to each other in a guided but informal atmosphere with others who had similar concerns and needs. The topics of the weeks included; 1) Introduction and Rules of the Group 2) What is ASD and Why Do I Feel Different? 3) Learning Differences and Self Advocacy 4) Test Anxiety and Accommodations 5) Emotions and Stress Management 6) Stress Management: Prevention and Relaxation 7) Dealing with Negative Feelings and Criticism 8) Bullying and 9) A Celebration of our Differences.

Evaluation of the program involved a notebook/journal kept by each student in which they were encouraged to complete activities related to the topics of discussion and make their own entries. The notebook also included a "friend contact" page so that the students could stay in touch with each other outside of school and through the summer.

The benefits of this program that were witnessed were the reduced feelings of isolation, increased willingness to reach out to others, an acceptance of differences, and a sincere appreciation of each other. This program's success delighted all the participants and it will be continued next year.