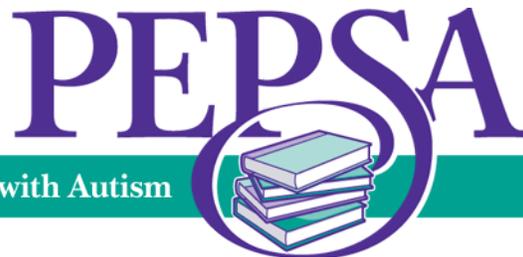




Florida Department of Education



Partnership for Effective Programs for Students with Autism

PEPSA 2009-2010

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## **Bringing School Buddies to the Community**

The Florida Inclusion Network (FIN) has continued to make the change for inclusion programs in Hillsborough County. Students on the Autism Spectrum (ASD) are being placed in the general education classrooms on a more regular basis. The purpose of this placement is to increase access for students with disabilities to the general education curriculum, and give them appropriate peer role models for behaviors. My experience has led me to believe that most students on the Autism Spectrum in the inclusion classes are being accepted as a classmate, but not a peer friend. A friend is invited to hang out with peers outside of school, interact in various activities, and socialize with others in and out of the classroom (and away from adults and initiators). I have not witnessed these experiences for my students on the spectrum. One of my student's parents invited the whole class to a birthday party at a local Pump It Up! Only two people attended the birthday party, a fellow student with ASD and me. It was heartbreaking to know that the parents planned for their son to have a fantastic party, and only two other students showed up. The purpose of this project was to assist students without disabilities in developing real relationships with peers on the Autism Spectrum, in and out of the structured school environment.

The project idea and purpose was discussed with a repeating third grade teacher from my first year project, and a rookie fourth grade teacher who was new to the school. My daily schedule included opportunities for my students with ASD to be "included" in the general education classroom with support from my paraprofessional or myself. These daily interactions allowed my students to become familiar with the GE classroom and students. Disability awareness lessons were implemented, and occasionally reviewed throughout the school year. Students were included in academic lessons, field trips, CBI trips, and extracurricular activities that made them seem a part of the school community.

Students learned from one another, and observations of the interactions were seen all across the school; from the principal to the classroom teachers. Several students were even invited to a bowling birthday party of a typical peer from the GE classroom, and another student was invited to a sleepover. In April 2010, students and teachers dedicated a day to "Celebrating Differences". Activities required students to work together and have fun. Celebrating Differences throughout the year promoted acceptance and awareness of everyone's differences, those with disabilities AND without. We learned that each person has something to offer others.

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Partnership for Effective Programs for Students with Autism - [www.doepartnership.org](http://www.doepartnership.org)

*The Partnership for Effective Programs for Students with Autism (PEPSA) is funded by the State of Florida, Department of Education, K-12 Public Schools, Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services, through federal assistance under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Part B.*