

Chats & Chews: Partnering for Success of Students with Disabilities

*Lowndes Middle School
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National, state, and local standards have been established as foundations for what students should know and be able to do in core content areas. Lowndes Middle School administrators and faculty realized, however, that students attain these standards in different ways, at different times, and to different degrees of mastery. The school made an extra effort this year to partner with parents to ensure that students with disabilities made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) by establishing a parent-teacher program called Chats & Chews.

The special education staff took the lead in creating parent-teacher socials. They invited parents to meet their child's resource teacher, find out about the expectations for the year, discuss their child's performance on standardized tests, ask questions, and voice their concerns.

The first Chats & Chews session was held at the beginning of the school year, allowing parents to choose between a breakfast and a light dinner session. Teachers created a warm, informal, and non-threatening environment for parents to interact and share ideas. For the second event, in December, the school decided to hold only the more popular breakfast session. Attendance tripled. This session focused on enhancing study skills and creating a home environment conducive to learning. Parents received tips on organization and supplies, concentrating on the maintenance of students' notebooks. The staff taught parents how to set up study areas at home, and each parent received a portable study carrel to help get started.

Parents were excited about the information they received, and many left the workshops with renewed determination and greater understanding of how to make their homes good learning environments. The special education staff found that the workshops helped students succeed academically, and it plans to continue the sessions next year.

Lowndes staff met after the workshops to evaluate the practice and suggest improvements. The school also surveyed parents about the best times for workshops, topics they are most interested in, and volunteers for another workshop.

Thanks to the efforts of its staff and parents, Lowndes saw increases in its eighth-grade writing assessment scores for students with disabilities. Other test results are pending, but the school is confident that the trend will hold across all subjects. Lowndes remains committed to closing the gap in student performance and achievement, ensuring that special education students receive the guidance they need from both home and school. These parent sessions are a great strategy for accomplishing this goal.

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