



Successful Inclusion: Providing Literacy Opportunities to Students with Autism

Nancy Brady, MA-EdSP, ATS

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Moderator: Chantal Sicile-Kira

Guest Speaker: Nancy Brady

Chantal: Good evening, and welcome to Moms Fighting Autism Webinar. My name is Chantal Sicile-Kira. I'm the moderator this evening for the webinar that is on successful inclusion providing literacy opportunities to students with autism. Before I start this webinar, however, I do want to make a few very important announcements. Today is March 23rd. However, the month of April is autism-awareness month. To highlight autism-awareness month, there are a couple of things happening. First of all, I have my fourth book coming out, later on this week actually, on March 25th. This book is called *41 Things to Know about Autism* and it's a great book for either people who have just had their children newly diagnosed, and it's also a book that I wrote so that parents can hand this book to their parents, their relative, their neighbours, people who want to know more about autism but don't necessarily have to teach their children. So there are all the kinds of questions that

people ask me when they find out that I'm an autism specialist. Like they say, „Why does my neighbours' kid always carries a red plastic snake?“, or „Why doesn't that kid look me in the eye?“, „I'm a grandparent. What can I do?“, „I think my child has autism. What can I do, where should I go for assessment?“. So this book is a really good way to share information during April-awareness month.

Secondly, Moms Fighting Autism in honour of autism-awareness month is hosting a free virtual conference on two days, Saturday, April 10th, and Sunday, April 11th. The wonderful conference, there are two keynotes, one of them is Temple Grandon, the other one is my son, Jeremy Sicile-Kira and myself, and Jeremy will be presenting using his Powerpoints with voice output, as he is basically non-verbal. We have so many great speakers lined up on so many different topics, such as communication, floor-time, ABA (Applied Behavior Analysis). We have someone talking about marriage and the stress of autism or having a child with autism on the marriage. We have people doing an intro on the GSCs diet, on biomedical, lots of different topics, even someone speaking about toileting. There are going to be, in all, 16 presenters over those two days and they are free for those who want to tune in directly and, again, it will be on momsfightingautism.com. So you'll probably be hearing more about that online. Mark that in your calendars now.

Right now, I would like to tell you a little bit about our speaker for this evening. Our speaker is Nancy Brady. She is an inclusion specialist and Assistive technology specialist, who strives to include those with the most severe disabilities in general education classrooms. She has been working for the past seven years on including those with autism and who are non-verbal in the general education classroom environments, advocating for them and emphasizing literacy opportunities to the use of Assistive technology. Nancy has a Bachelor's Degree in Communication Studies and Sociology from UC Santa Barbara and a Master's Degree in Special Education from Chapman University. She received her certificate in Assistive technology through the Orange County Department of Education and California State University, Dominguez Hills, in 2009. Nancy completed the Mentorship Project for Communication Partner Support through WAPADH (Whittier Area Parents' Association for the Developmentally Handicapped), in Santa Fe Springs, in 2008, and the FC Institute Summer Conference at Syracuse University in New York, in 2005 and 2006. Nancy is a professional member of RESNA and a parent member of TACA (Talk about Curing Autism Now). Nancy's agency, which is called S.T.A.R. (Supported Typing and Autism Resources), is located in Laguna Hills, California, and it teaches those who are unable to communicate verbally an alternative communication strategy using Assistive technology. Welcome, Nancy!

Nancy: Thank you, Chantal, and congratulations on your book coming out next week.

Chantal: Thank you very much! It always feels like I'm having a baby when I'm having a book coming out [*laughs*].

Nancy: I love it.

Chantal: Nancy, I'm so thrilled having you on this show and I would like to start by asking you a little bit about inclusion, but my first question is going to be why did you get involved in inclusion, what is the motivation behind this?

Nancy: Little did I know when I graduated from UC Santa Barbara many years ago with a Communication Studies degree that I would end up having a son who has autism and needed to learn how to communicate. I think back then I got that degree because I thought that was easy and I realize now that it's very complex and the whole situation of having a son with autism, who struggles to communicate verbally, is overwhelming. So I've been on the autism journey since he was diagnosed, in 2000. Nicholas is non-verbal, he does have some language for basic wants and needs, but for any higher level thinking he has to use an alternative communication strategy in order to get his thoughts out. He came along in our lives and our family believes in the principle of inclusion. How can you exclude a member of your family? It's just a philosophy that, as a family, we embrace. And because of that, Nicholas, despite of his disability, has always been included in everything that we do as a family. And so for me that carried over to his neighborhood school. I saw no reason why he should have to be in a bus to go a special school across town, when his sisters went to our neighborhood school and when people that knew him in the neighborhood went to that school. That's kind of started my whole mantra and mission on inclusion as right, and how our family looks at things. Nicholas has always been included, even with his lack of verbal speech, as a toddler, I sent him to a regular preschool and he had an aide that went with him to a regular preschool. And that was just kind of what we did. Every year, that was in the back of or head when we had our IEP (Individualized Education Program) meetings and so currently Nicholas is fully included, he is in the sixth grade now. He does have a one-on-one aide that goes with him and he's doing great: just got straight A's on his last report card. Actually, one B, but he's doing really well. So that's kind of how I got started with the philosophy of it, but then I realized that in dealing with the professionals at the school I kind of felt that I needed to even the playing field a little bit, so that they would respect my input at an IEP meeting not just as a parent, but as somebody who knew what they were talking about. That's when I went back to Chapman to get my Master's in special education and, right after that, the Assistive technology specialist certificate. And now I'm helping others, not just my son, but helping others in their quest to be included as well.

Chantal: Right. Now, did you have any experience with autism spectrum disorders before having your son?

Nancy: No, none.

Chantal: That's very interesting.

Nancy: Very interesting. Even though that was what my background was in, Communication Studies, it just wasn't problemized back in the early eighties.

Chantal: Right.

Nancy: So yes, no experience at all until he came along and now I'm the best expert in his case.

Chantal: That's right. It's quite interesting how you kind of felt motivated to go to school in order to be taken seriously as someone other than a parent in IEP, because of course, having my son Jeremy, I totally understand that feeling and I think that's part of the reason why I wrote the books, besides helping parents. I thought, well, this is also going to help me. I'd gathered all this

information and put it in one place and it can help people at the school too understand that I'm not here just as parent. But it's really interesting because at the school they still consider me just as any other parent, it doesn't matter what I've done. To them I'm just a parent. And I always remember Temple Grandin telling me that you're never an expert in your own backyard. She's actually never built a meat packing facility in the state that she...

Nancy: You know, that's really true, and, I tell you, what's interesting to me is that the IEP meeting is supposed to be the IEP team. I was taught, when I went back to get my Master's, that the most important people on that IEP meeting are, number one, the parents, and number two is the general education teacher on that IEP team. Those are the two most important players. Yet for some reason, when you're in a meeting, those two supposed to be the most important players get the least amount of input into the decision making, or they may feel like they get the least amount of input into the decision making. So, I don't know, having more degrees and more credentials makes me an expert now? Probably not, I'm just a team member again, but at least I know what I'm talking about.

Chantal: Exactly, and you know for yourself what you're basing your opinions upon.

Nancy: Right. And you can make well thought out decisions based on that. It's not just gut feeling anymore, it's knowledge. And knowledge is power.

Chantal: Right. Also, I think that I need to disclose here that I've known Nancy and I can vouch for her experience, because she is the inclusion specialist for my son, who is severely impacted with autism. But I have to also say that Nancy and I had met previously at a couple of different conferences.

Nancy: That's right.

Chantal: When I opened the front door, and there was my inclusion specialist I went "Oh, my God, it's that woman I know from the conferences".

Nancy: That's right. The world's gets smaller, you know.

Chantal: It gets smaller. Well, I'm happy to have her on Jeremy's IEP team. Before I start asking you questions that people have sent in, and there are quite a few, I wanted to talk a bit more about some other aspects specific to inclusion. I know that parents often get confused about the difference between an accommodation and a modification. Could you explain the difference?

Nancy: Yes. A lot of it comes from the curriculum that's being taught in the general education classroom. And that curriculum goes straight to the state's standards. So whatever state you're in, your Department of Education has come up with standards that they expect classroom teachers to teach to the students in their classes. And of course, you know there is lots of testing with no child left behind right now, that those standards are being taught and that schools are accountable for meeting those standards. So when a child with a disability goes to a general education classroom, they have a couple of options. First, you can provide accommodations to the curriculum. That means that they are being taught the exact same state standards as the typical kids in the class but they can have accommodations to help them meet those standards. For instance, some typical

instructional accommodations that could occur could be regarding the classroom environment. They could have preferential seating. If they're easily distracted, you probably don't want to seat them right next to the door, that's always opening and closing, with people going in and out, then, for lightning coming in from a window rather than fluorescent lightning, so those kinds of classroom environment accommodations. They can also do accommodations on how the teacher presents the lessons. For instance, every key point the teacher makes can be written visually on the board, so that there's a visual enforcement of the auditory direction. They can be provided with actual visual aids at their desk, so rather than be told a list of directions, the directions can be written ahead of time and handed to the student. Those are the types of lesson presentation, things that a teacher can do to help accommodate a learner with a different way of learning.

Chantal: Accommodation can also be, in test taking perhaps, to have more time to take a test, for example.

Nancy: Correct. That's another category: test taking. They can take open book tests. That's an accommodation, it's not changing the curriculum. They can be given the exam orally versus having to read it themselves. The whole test can be done in multiple choice, rather than like, let's say, essay or something to that effect. Those are accommodations that can be made without changing the curriculum. On that same level, assignments: instead of having to do 20 math problems, they can say, ok, you do 10. You can reduce the level of reading that they're doing. You can have them have an extra set of books at home, so that they can study ahead for the next day's work and be prepared. So those are all like assignment test taking kind of accommodations. Behavioral support in the classroom is also an accommodation that can be given. Things like positive behavior supports, frequent breaks, if they need to get up and leave and walk around the field and come back in and sit down and do more, those are accommodations that can happen without changing the state's standards of the curriculum, versus the modifications where the actual state standard for the classroom is changed. So, for instance, a student with a severe disability can absolutely be included 100% and be doing something different than the rest of the class. An example would be in sixth grade math. If they're learning fractions, maybe the learner that we're talking about, with the disability, is still on, you know, multiplication. And they can be working one-on-one or whatever their situation is at their desk with what their ability is. And that's modifying the curriculum. That is also possible with inclusion, so either one is ok.

Chantal: Sound great. Now what is a bottom-up strategy?

Nancy: Well, this comes from just my experience with inclusion and a lot of times it's just not done right. It's frustrating for everybody involved, most importantly it's frustrating for the students. A lot of times it feels like they're being set up to fail. So I've taken it back a couple of steps. Again, I work with kids with severe disabilities, so most of them do have a one-on-one support person with them in the inclusive classroom, and that team, of that support person with the student is vital. They need to know each other and understand each other and trust each other. They need to be able to communicate with each other in any way that they can communicate. When that team is strong and when that support person is given a little bit of autonomy to do what's best for the student, then you can do miraculous things. The first thing that happens is that it takes a lot of the pressure of the classroom teacher. In a lot of situations, she has 30 kids in there that she is trying to

teach. Having a child with special needs or autism or who is non-verbal or whatever, she may not have time to give to that person what they need. So it's vital that the communication partner or the aide and the student - that that team is strong and that they are successful with whatever the teacher is teaching. So a bottom-up philosophy comes from that foundation. It's the bottom brick in the house that we're building. It also includes the parents, so that support person, the aide, is often a *liaison* between the classroom teacher and the parents or the home team, for homework. The classroom support person or the paraprofessional is a vital component and should not be underrated. I think that too often, in an inclusion situation, they're not given autonomy and they're not given the power that they need to make it work. And that person needs to be trained. They need to be trained on what the student needs. Every student with autism is different, so that's why it's important that that base team be strong. And then she'll know that "Oh, gosh, I can see a behavior coming on, we might want to take a break now. Let's walk outside so we don't disturb the class." Or: "I know that you can do these problems, because you've done them before, so let's focus right now and do these problems that the teacher assigned." And that comes from that strong unit of the student with the severe disability and the aide working together. Does that make sense?

Chantal: Yes, it does, very much so.

Nancy: And I think the important thing too is remember that the classroom teacher may have, especially if she's a general education teacher, a general understanding of what autism is and she may know the student to some degree, but she is not trained, and probably doesn't have the time, you know, with 29 other kids in the class, to be trained as a one-on-one aide would be. So it's really a team effort, with the teacher, the one-on-one aide, the student and the family. And taking it from a bottom-up way it works. It works.

Chantal: Right. So how important are the teacher's attitudes towards inclusion?

Nancy: It's huge. I always tell the teachers, when I go into a school and facilitate an inclusion process: "You need an open mind and an open heart". And with those two things anything can happen. But if you have preconceived notions, and unfortunately a lot of our teachers do, just based on the workloads that they have - "Oh, it's going to be more work" and "What more do I have to do?" - that's a bummer, but it's reality, it is what it is. So I always just tell them that if you have an open mind and an open heart, it's going to work. And we will support you, as a teacher, with whatever you need, any questions you have, we'll do whatever. The teacher just needs to remember that visuals and auditory and movement type things to appeal to different learning styles, that's just good teaching. It has nothing to do with teaching to a kid with autism. They should just be a good teacher and the student will learn. And we have the supports and place to help him learn, being one-on-one aide and any other resources that they have.

Chantal: Now, there are some expressions that are used in inclusion that I'm not sure I even understand what they mean. What are literacy ladders versus literacy webs? What are...

Nancy: Well, this comes from a great book that I recommend. It's by Paula Kluth, a professor and a researcher on inclusive classrooms, and it's called *You're Going to Love This Kid*, kind of like my Bible as far as inclusion goes. She talks a lot about the student with autism having to master, let's say, all their phonics, before they're taught to read higher level reading materials. And that's a

literacy ladder. We're typically taught as teachers that first you teach the vowel sounds and then they have the consonant sounds and then it's the blends and then it's the diagraphs and then they start putting the words together and you teach children to find out words and then they learn to read by that whole sounding out of the word and putting the word in the context of a sentence and asking "Does that sound right?" and "Does that look right?" and "Does that makes sense?". We teach kids to read that way. Well, what's fascinating to me is for kids who are non-verbal with autism we're not quite sure how they learn how to read, because they can't sound out the words. They may not be reading the same way the typical kids learn how to read. As educators we need to be open to that, so we look at it as a literacy web. For instance, you don't deny a third grader the opportunity to read *Charlotte's Web* because they can't sound out the word "web".

Chantal: Right.

Nancy: The whole speaking aspect of a non-verbal child with autism, as far as their motor planning and motor movement to make those sounds may never happen. So you don't deny them a higher level literacy opportunity because they can't sound out the words. So a literacy web means you presume confidence in the individual, you assume that they are learning, even though perhaps they can't demonstrate in our typical means that they are understanding IE (Independent Evaluation) speaking. So don't deny somebody and make them go the rungs of the ladder, make them go all over like a web - figurative visual there.

Chantal: It's interesting what you said about people learning to read differently, we don't really understand how, because Jeremy, my son, for the longest time kept pulling the books from the bookcase but the books – and I have tons and tons of autism books, because I reviewed them and people send me all the books that are coming out and so – he was always carrying around certain books, but it was really funny, because I didn't know how much he was reading on his own or what he could actually read, but he was always carrying around books that had the title of things we've been talking about. If he had been hearing conversations with my husband or someone else about the community or more community things that we could be organizing for Jeremy or trying to get ideas, he'd be reading books and carrying around books that would say things like "community inclusion with a person with ASD" or "your neighborhood with a child with autism". He was always picking up these appropriate books and one day I actually just started thinking about testing to see if he was really reading, because he would flip really fast through the pages of a book. Well, turns out he was really reading those books, because I asked him questions on books that I hadn't read, so I couldn't know anything about the books, in my mind hoping that I'm not even thinking about the books and he's not reading my mind.

Nancy: Right, right.

Chantal: He's reading when he does that, because he knows things that are in the books and he's telling me the contents, but it does not look like reading what he is doing.

Nancy: No, it doesn't, and that's another thing that educators have to remember. What's that old saying? If it looks like a book and it smells like a book, it's a book.

Chantal: Right, right.

Nancy: It's not necessarily that way with kids with autism. We don't have the answers and nor am I presuming that I do. So, from a teacher's point of view, we go with the least dangerous assumption, which is to presume competence. You presume that they are reading and then work at that level, versus presuming that they're not and keeping them at a really low level, like for instance a teenager reading rhyming books or something when they want to be reading *Harry Potter*. And then we wonder why we have behaviors, the frustration and that. Temple Grandin was one of my mentors when I've read her book and it talked about how she would look at a book and pick a visual picture of what she was reading. Often, it doesn't look like some of our kids are reading, they kind of glance at a picture and look away and process what they saw, that mental snapshot of the text.

Chantal: That's very interesting.

Nancy: We did ask a bunch of kids who don't speak and who are non-verbal how they learned to read and they all said kind of "I don't really know, one day I knew". A thing that will help is, when you're watching television, have the closed captioning on your TV. They're going to start to hear the dialogue and see the words at the same time. It's that the strong visual skills where they're associating the words with the picture of the word and they learn to read.

Chantal: Right. Whenever I used to ask Jeremy how did he learn to read, he always said "That's a mystery."

Nancy: Yes, the word of the day or whatever it was.

Chantal: And the other thing is he said "My mom read to me". And it's true that I always read to Jeremy when he was little and I always talked to him as if he understood everything, even though I had no clue. But I thought it's better to be presuming that he understands everything, because what if he does? If he does understand and I wasted my time explaining something, so what, so what's five minutes?

Nancy: Right. I couldn't agree more and I did the same thing and I think that more parents should do that. Just presume competence and treat your children as if they are getting it.

Chantal: Absolutely. We talked about this a little bit before, but how do you create a successful team for working with a student that's included?

Nancy: Well, it's based on the aide, and again, I'm assuming that this is somebody with a severe disability, who would be in the general education classroom and who would need an aide. Either someone with autism who's non-verbal and needs an alternate way to communicate or it could be another disability like cerebral palsy or Down syndrome. But that team is what's important. I believe schools should know the basics about autism by now and the basics about Assistive technology. It is required in IVEA (the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) that Assistive technology be addressed. It's an up-and-coming field and it's getting cheaper. It used to be very expensive to have big Assistive Technologies devices, that needed lots of planning and programming and stuff, but it's getting cheaper and it's getting easier. So I think one thing that the team needs is a low-tech, inexpensive Assistive technology device. And that can be something as simple as a whiteboard. I don't go anywhere without a whiteboard. You can easily put a "Yes" and a "No" on the whiteboard, you can ask the student: "Do you need to use the restroom, yes or no?" All of a

sudden you have a communication system for somebody who can't speak. That little piece of Assistive technology can translate to the classroom where, if the teacher is discussing something about how water evaporates when you boil it, it can be something as simple as "Do you understand what she's saying, yes or no?" So that little piece can make somebody successful in the general education classroom. Something as simple as that, that a trained aide would know how to use with the student.

Chantal: Right, so that's really a good point that you can have very high technology, but you can also have very low technology. I mean, as long as you even have a pencil and a plain piece of paper you can create your own letter board, you can create your own yes-no or multiple choice answer cards, as "A, B, C, D".

Nancy: Yes, you can. Anybody can train the aide and if you get an aide who feels comfortable and feels autonomous in that she can work in the classroom with the student, she's now in power to create her own choice boards as she goes along. So yes, "A, B, C, D", and if you think about it, that's the SAT test when they graduate high school, it's an "A, B, C, D" choice. So if we can get our kids who aren't speaking to be able to make those kind of choices, then they're on their way, that's test-taking right there.

Chantal: Exactly. Now, a big, important aspect that most people don't realize about autism is the whole motor planning component. I mean, there are people who understand more about, for example, sensory integration and how even someone with Asperger's syndrome may have a clumsiness or problems with sensory issues and perhaps very slight motor planning issues. But for people like my son, who I've been told ever since he was little "Oh, it looks like he has CP (Cerebral Palsy)", but he doesn't have CP, but he has those motor planning issues. How those that work into the whole autism thing?

Nancy: Well, I think it's making a huge impact on the medical aspect of autism as well as the educational part of teaching the kids with autism. When we realize that, for instance, performance, you know, speaking – if a child can speak, they're considered high functioning, and if they can't speak, a lot of times they're considered low functioning. That is not the actual definition of those terms. High functioning is somebody who can take an IQ test and pass it, get up there, that's considered high functioning. But unfortunately, in education and in schools it comes down to verbal language, and speaking is a motor skill. So if you don't have the motor ability to make sounds or, for whatever reason, if you have apraxia or whatever, you have word retrieval issues, you can't get the word from your brain to come down to make your lips move and your tongue move and your teeth move, to make the sound, you're not going to get your answer out. And I think a lot of times our children are characterized as, you know, having an intellectual disability, when it's not at all, it's a motor planning disturbance. Anne Donnellan at University of San Diego, she's kind of like the guru in this, with Marta Leary, I think that was the conference I met you at, Chantal.

Chantal: It was.

Nancy: Yes, "Movement differences and diversity in autism and mental retardation". I think our society is based on appearance, and if you have somebody who moves differently and looks

differently and acts differently, we think that they're intellectually disabled. And that may not be the case at all.

Chantal: In fact, I need to specify that when you talk about including people with the most severe disabilities in general education in the work that you do, you're talking about severe disabilities in the sense of motor or physical, you're not talking about intellectually because, unless they have a way of communicating, you don't know how smart they are.

Nancy: That's correct. You can have somebody who may appear, and I use that word term loosely, may need to pace the back of the room, they need to move in order to listen, may need to flap and rock their body while they're sitting in their chair, in order to listen, will never have eye contact with you, because they're listening to their teacher, they can't do the two senses at the same time. There's some sort of motor disconnect going on there and if they can't speak, I'm presuming competence. So these kids can learn, a lot of them are very bright, a lot of them love being in the inclusive classroom where actual learning is occurring. And they can do it. So you start with presuming competence, and you look at the behavior or whatever movement that they have going on as a manifestation of their disability, not that they're checking out or they're not paying attention. Sometimes they have to move in order to pay attention. It's the exact opposite of what it appears.

Chantal: Right. Jeremy is, I know I keep bringing him up, but he's a good example of what you're saying, because he constantly, when he's writing long papers for example – he's spelling it out on the letter board or keyboarding it into the computer at home – , he likes to be rocking and moving. If he gets the rhythm going, he can go really fast. He likes to have music on, because the music helps him set his rhythm, but if we tell him to completely sit still, he can't do that. It really helps him to focus to have a part of his body moving in a rhythmic manner.

Nancy: Right, and the whole movement issue, I remember this from a teacher, I was in a classroom and she was very worried that the movement was going to distract the other students in the classroom, and it was really funny because I went in and observed: when you start really paying attention to the other kids in the classroom, there is so much movement going on with typical kids.

Chantal: Those kids are normal.

Nancy: Yes, they're dropping pencils, they're scratching, they're taking clothes off and putting jackets on their desks and getting up and sharpening pencils, there's a lot going on in the classroom. Somebody who's sitting at a desk with an aide and who's rocking and flapping in order to pay attention, it's really not that noticeable, unless you think it is.

Chantal: Right. Before I go on to asking you questions that have been sent in, would you like to talk a little bit about the presuming competence and what you mean by the least dangerous assumption.

Nancy: Well, again, that comes from an educator's point of view and I was trying before this conference call to find out who it was, and I want to say it was Rosalind Oppenheim, and she wrote it like back in the seventies, when she was working with kids with autism. As a teacher, you don't want to presume that somebody can't do something, because then they will never try. And you've

just lowered that expectation of what they will ever be or succeed in life. As a teacher, what does that say about you? So you want to flip that around and always presume that they can do it, and presume that they do understand, and presume that they are listening, and presume that they are smart and want to be challenged that way. Because then you'll try and you'll have high expectations and 9 times out of 10 – the typical kids too – they're going to arrive to the level that you expect them to be at. So you need to set the bar high. If you presume competence, it's the least dangerous competence. You can't screw up that way, versus if you presume they're incompetent and never expect them to do anything. Then they won't.

Chantal: Exactly. Good point. Ok, so I'm going to start with some simple questions. These are two questions from Maurine, in South Ozone Park, New York. She asks: "What is inclusion?" and "When is inclusion best?"

Nancy: Well, I think inclusion, if you look it up in the dictionary, it's "to be included", it's "to be part of something". And so a lot of schools will call it mainstreaming, but I think we're tending to go toward inclusion meaning "you are part of something". It could be with anything, it's a philosophy, it's not just a strategy for doing something, but it's a philosophy of how you live your life. As a family do you include everybody, do you include people who are different? Are you accepting of differences? That type of philosophy you can embrace. However, most often, inclusion is thought about like in the school system and it's typically thought of taking the kids with the disability, who would be in special education, and put them into the regular education classroom. A lot of times it's called mainstreaming and it's done on a temporary basis, where they may go in for, you know, 30 minutes of mainstreaming, to listen to the science lecture. Well, that's not really inclusion. That's visiting. There is a difference, students feel that. If you feel like you're not part of something, especially kids, they know. So I think the school district, from the principal to the staff, to the teacher, they all have to embrace the whole philosophy of inclusion. And it's based on IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act). If you look at the law, it actually says that special classes, special schooling or removing the kids with disabilities from the general education classrooms it only occurs if the severity of the disability is such that you can't achieve satisfactory success without aids and services. And that's the key. I think for successful inclusion you have to use those supplementary aids and services. And it's written in the law. That's Congress wants our kids included in regular classrooms with their typical peers, using supplementary aids and services. And that's kind of the starting point. So, for my philosophy, I believe that inclusion is best from day one, that you embrace it and then you work you little tail off to make it successful. And it's hard work, it's not easy.

Chantal: *[laughs]* It is hard work.

Nancy: Very hard work.

Chantal: Nothing that is worth anything in life is easy, as far as I'm concerned.

Nancy: So true. And sometimes you wonder like "Oh, gosh, why did I sign up for here with this inclusion stuff?", but if you think about the opposite of it, it' to be excluded, and who wants to be excluded from anything, especially from something like learning?

Chantal: Your students are going to grow up to be people in the community and so they need other people, other children in the classroom who are neurotypical, to understand that these people are part of their lives and if they also don't have that inclusion it is negative for our society as a whole, because they would never be accepting differences or understand that people may look different, but they're actually just like us.

Nancy: That's correct, and I think more and more, just because there are so many kids with autism now who are aging out of the school system and going to work, we're seeing people with disability in our communities. And I love it, because my daughters embrace kids with disabilities, it's no big deal, they grew up with it, it's just part of life, versus when I was in elementary school and I remember this very clearly: the special education kids were in a special place across the school. There was no inclusion, there was no integration, and that was wrong. Special education is a service, it's not a place.

Chantal: That's very true.

Nancy: The sooner that we forget that it's a special education class, or a special education place or a special school, and just make it a service, the better everybody's going to be.

Chantal: Right. So I'm going to continue here with some questions. Here's one from Sheryl Boyman in Boca Raton: "The IEP team decided my child could not succeed in the general classroom. They set my daughter up for failure by not having a paraprofessional trainer to work with my daughter. We had mediation that I've lost. I now have my daughter at home and we are homeschooling with total isolation. Any ideas?"

Nancy: Well, I'm looking at this question, Sheryl, and I'm thinking there is an opportunity here. If you, having her at home and homeschooling her, can somehow get her involved, perhaps with a paraprofessional or a friend or maybe even a high school student who wants to get community service hours or something, and get her signed up in some sort of a class through the community center, or perhaps through your church or your synagogue, something where she is included and it's being successful, you might be able to go back to your school district and say: "Hey, listen! She's been attending Sunday school for the last year, with the help of an aide, and she's doing great. She's turning in her work, she's participating, there's no behavior, can we give it a try again at the school?" So sometimes there's a lot of opportunity when you're at home and in the community to kind of do inclusion on your own and make it work and make it successful, and then go back and say let's try it again, now that we have the supports in place. I worry, when you say "setting you up for failure", a lot of that is if that team – you know, with the paraprofessional -, wasn't built first. And that unfortunately it's in the law, the supplementary aids and services in the regular education classroom.

Chantal: It's like they're supposed to show why your child is not, in the regular education classroom, but people don't realize that.

Nancy: Correct. And not only that, but you can't change a placement unless there's a signed IEP.

Chantal: Right.

Nancy: So I don't know how they were removed from that classroom, maybe they were just visiting in the first place or whatever.

Chantal: You know, I have had Jeremy educated in a variety of manners, but when we moved here, back to America, from Europe, with Jeremy, I never thought inclusion could possibly work, because I didn't know how to do it, though it was my philosophy. But I also believe that because of a lot of the challenges that Jeremy faced he could really benefit from one-on-one on his own, so I organized the goals and objectives and I got the IEP team to agree, so that he was mainstreamed for a part of the day, but I couldn't base the mainstreaming on any goals that were academic, because we didn't have a way for him to communicate so we didn't know what was really going on inside his head. So I had goals written based on social things, as to why he needed to be in a mainstream classroom. So he was in mainstream classes based on social goals, but I didn't care, because my point was "I don't know if he understands or not, but he needs to learn how to act with other people in a normal environment, because that's what he is going to have, no matter what." Once he's out of school he's going to be with other people and after school as well. So I had no idea if he was learning, but it turns out that's why he's so advanced now, because he was soaking in everything he heard in those classrooms. But the point is that wasn't inclusion, it was mainstreaming, but at least it was a foot in the door. I was able to get the inclusion later on, because of the fact that I had this mainstreaming in place, that it was successful to a point.

Nancy: I agree and I think that's why if you have an opportunity to get your child into a general education classroom using whatever means - if it's social -, that's awesome, go for it. Not only that, but it's well documented in the research that kids with autism learn social skills from their typical peers. They don't learn social skills from the other kids in the special education classroom. So if that's the talking point that you want to use to get in there for an hour or two a day, or whatever it is, go for it. And then work backwards from there. In other words, after you get them in, slowly, slowly try to increase the time.

Chantal: Right.

Nancy: And the same thing, you can do that at home and in the community. Get them into situations, socially, probably with an aide – and I'm thinking like maybe some sort of a class that they might take at the community center or a fitness class or a dance class or whatever, that they can do with typical peers, cooking class, that kind of thing – and show that it's working and get them in that way.

Chantal: Okay. That sounds great. Here are questions from Hope in California: "Hi, Nancy! Thank you for conducting this webinar. As a parent who believes in inclusion, here are my worries and questions:" – there's a bunch of them, Nancy.

Nancy: Okay. *[laughs]*

Chantal: "How do you convince the IEP team members that inclusion will help my child?"

Nancy: Well, you can use research. If you just go to Google.com and you google "inclusion research" you're going to get a whole bunch of different legal briefs and stuff that talk about cases and research studies that had happened that show that kids who are in the regular education

classrooms have higher test scores than the kids who are in special education classrooms. So that research it out there. If you want to go and find that, that can be something to present as far as hard facts with your team. The other is get a copy of the law and quote it verbatim that special classes, separate schooling and removal of kids with disabilities from the classroom only occurs if the nature or severity of the disability is such that they can't achieve satisfactory success with supplementary aids and services. I say that like in my sleep almost.

Chantal: I just want to say, for those that are listening in the United States, we're talking about the laws of the United States and that every state in the United States has an organization. For example, in California it's called Protection & Advocacy. If you google your state and "protection & advocacy", you will find information on the Internet with the way that IVEA, the law for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, they offer most of the time a copy of the law in language that most of us can understand and they also supply it in all different languages as well. So it simplifies it. In California they do it in a question format, and it tells all your rights in there, so that's where you can get the information that Nancy's quoting right now, that can give you things to discuss about your rights in IEP meetings.

Nancy: And what's part of that IVEA law, here in the United States, is that the general education classroom is the least restrictive environment. You start there, that's where you're suppose to start when you're doing an IEP. And it says in that same law that the student's IEP must include how they will participate in the regular education class. And if they can't, it needs to say why, with valid reasons. So start with that least restrictive environment being the regular education classroom and, then, why can't they?

Chantal: Okay, right. Question number two: "What can you ask from a classroom teacher and aide to help your child to be successful in inclusion. Doesn't it depend basically on the child as well?"

Nancy: It absolutely does depend on the child and I think the parent knows the child best, better than anybody, so the relationship that the parent has with the aide is the most valuable piece of the equation. The aide and the parent need to work together with the student to make that bottom-up inclusion strategy work. The teachers now about inclusions, they're taught this in their credential program. They know about the Universal Designs for Learning and differentiated instructions, meaning teaching all types of learners, those who are advanced and those who are struggling. That's what is in their credential program. So you can ask the classroom teacher to - I don't want to say be a good teacher -, but if you have a good teacher they're going to be teaching using visuals, using auditory learning, using movement in the classroom, they're going to do a lot of stuff to keep the kids engaged. So good teaching is just good teaching for everybody, for a student with or without a disability. But I think that you can ask from the aide is to really know and understand your child. Train the aide. Have them work with your child over and over and over again, to the point where they can see a behavior coming on before it actually happens, and that's that trusting bond.

Chantal: I need to point out as someone with lots of experience of having aides or tutors and support persons at home at school: The most important thing is the connection between the aide and the child. You can have the best aide in the whole world, who's trained in I don't care how many

treatments and therapies, but if they don't click with your student – and it's not a judgment about them or a judgment about your child, it's just that we all have different types of friends, we all respond differently to people -, if there isn't that connection between the two of them, no training is going to help.

Nancy: I absolutely agree. There are people I choose to hang out with because I feel good around them, and then there are those that we just don't click. And the same happens with our kids. There may be aides that they just don't click with.

Chantal: The aides might click with another kind of a child, and it works out great.

Nancy: Correct.

Chantal: I know, for example, an aide in my son's school district. She was not a good match at all with a couple of kids. It was constant problems, but then she got matched with this other student, completely different type of student, it was like night and day. She did her best and the student did her best, because they clicked. That was a perfect match.

Nancy: Absolutely. If you have the ability to choose an aide - a lot of times that's just not possible, you're assigned an aide -, don't settle for that aide. I've done it before and I said: "You know what, this is not acceptable, this is not working, we need somebody new." You know, the squeaky wheel gets the grease, so you can be vocal in that way and fight for somebody who's going to be a good team member with your son or your daughter.

Chantal: But hopefully, if you have a good case manager, the case managers they'll know the aides and they'll also know your child and they'll have watched interactions and they're usually pretty good about – if you're lucky enough to have that kind of case manager, who's on top of it, that they'll have picked out what personalities won't go together and usually they're pretty good about making matches, but again, that's only if you have a teacher who's really doing what all teachers should be doing.

Nancy: Yes, absolutely.

Chantal: It's kind of hard sometimes, there is all the extra stuff that they are asked to do as well.

Nancy: I know, but I think the main point is to remember that that relationship is really important and not to overlook it. So often, it gets overlooked. I've had people say to me: "Oh, we don't want the aide doing the teaching, we want a certified teacher doing the teaching". Well, they're not doing the teaching, they're just forming a bond and a trust and a mutual respect for each other. And that's really important and, I'm telling you, for inclusion to work, that bond has to be strong.

Chantal: Okay. Here's another question: "How to deal or teach your child to deal with students who bully or point out the child's weaknesses?"

Nancy: Well, I really have no patience for bullying. Just from an educational point of view, it's zero tolerance. If somebody's getting bullied, you just go to the teacher and you turn them in. I've

empowered all of my kids, my son with autism as well as daughters, who are typical: “That is just zero tolerance, you turn them in.” There’s no excuse for it. The other thing that you can do is empower the other kids in the classroom to take an active role to help look out for the kids with special needs in the class. Actually, I was reading a research paper – I can’t remember where I saw it, it came across the Internet the other day - , and it talked about high school kids and it said 80% of high school kids would absolutely feel comfortable helping someone with a disability who was in their class, if they were asked. But the problem is they’re not asked. So, from a teacher’s point of view, you need to empower the kids to be helpers. Again, that knowledge is power and, as a classroom, every kid in that classroom should be looking out for the kids who need a little extra help, so that the bullying doesn’t occur in the first place. So I don’t know if that is the correct answer, but it’s being open with the need for help as well as zero tolerance.

Chantal: Right, good answers. Last question from Hope: “Does the child get extra time and help to complete tests in an inclusion classroom?”

Nancy: Absolutely, that is an accommodation that has nothing to do with whether they’re in a regular classroom or a special education classroom, that’s an accommodation that can be written in their IEP without a problem.

Chantal: Okay. I’m going to continue with some questions. Here’s from Rebecca in San Diego: “My son likes to set his own rules. Example: He gets upset in a group setting and if he isn’t the first one to win he will be upset and throw a tantrum and major meltdown. If he isn’t the one to take the front seat of the car he will have a fit if his brother wins the seat first. He doesn’t understand the concept of winning and losing. I know that’s not specifically an inclusion question, but it is part of this problem in a group setting.”

Nancy: It is, and a lot of this stuff is hard, you have to be so consistent, as a parent and as a teacher, with consequences and rewards. If you look at it from the behavioral point of view, yes, you can be upset that you lose, because sometimes it’s kind of a bummer if you lose. I think that’s very typical, but it’s the degree of the tantrum or something that you might want to work on. So, I believe a lot can be done in positive behavior support, which means you catch him being good, so on the days when they don’t have a fit you reward them, you let them know you appreciate them not having a tantrum about this, that it’s kind of a bummer, but you appreciate that and you reward them when you catch them being good. And if you do that over and over and over again on a consistent level you’ll start to see the behavior change that way. The only other suggestion that works pretty well with this kind of stuff is writing social stories about it and helping the student to see it from someone else’s perspective. Let them know what the behavior was, let them know how their brother or sister thought of it and how it made them feel, and then give them a strategy for not doing it next time.

Chantal: Okay, sounds good. Are you ready for some more questions?

Nancy: Yes, go for it. Bring it on.

Chantal: Okay. Here’s one from Shrutsy , in Suwanee, Georgia: “Hi! At age three, my son was diagnosed with autism, while the public school system gave him a severely developmental delay

diagnosis. He was functioning at an 18-month level, with severe speech delay. Now, at five, he is entering mainstream kindergarten. The development pediatrician has removed the autism from his diagnosis, the school system had him tested on a GPT (General Processing Tree) profile test, where he scored between average and above average level. Speech was reduced to one day a week, and OT (Occupational Therapy) on consultation. He is entering general education this year, in grade kindergarten. What are the things I should look at? I'm mainly concerned about his focus and his functioning in a class with 25 kids – presently he only has 10. The school system has offered paraservices for 30 minutes a day. I'm looking forward to any suggestions you have."

Nancy: Well, you have got to have a great relationship with the classroom teacher on this level, because he's going in without an aide I understand, and it sounds like he's doing great. You need to be really on top of it with the teacher, whether if just maybe a weekly email, saying "How did he go this week?" or "How did he go and what can I do? Do you need any help? Is there anything you have questions with?" – Be available for the teacher and work closely with her, so that if you do see signs of maybe some slippage in grades or some social problems, that you can step in with resources and strategies right away to fix it. The paraprofessional for 30 minutes a day – you need to decide where best to use her or him, and the teacher, again, might be the best person to suggest that. In kindergarten classrooms a lot of times they do centers, so that might not be the best place for a paraprofessional, because they're small groups anyway. Maybe you need the aid on the playground, for the 30 minutes of lunch and recess. Maybe that's the place to use her or him. But I think it's important to work really closely with the teacher, to be open with any fears that you have and let the teacher be on the lookout for it, so that she can let you know, as a parent, and then you guys can provide whatever strategies you need to fix it right away, before it disintegrates.

Chantal: Okay. Good. Here's one from Ivone, Gulfport, Florida: "My husband and I have guardianship of our grandson. He was diagnosed shortly after his second birthday. Everyone says that he is non-verbal, but he does speak when it suites him. How can I get the school system in our county to give him more speech therapy? I think that Sean is holding out on all of us, simply because that is one thing that he can control in life. We have purchased a learning program called <Talk to me 100>, very reasonably priced, but when I tried to use it with him he keeps pushing the <Stop> word on the board. So even when he doesn't speak, I know that he understands most of everyday language".

Nancy: Wow. Does it say how old he is right now?

Chantal: No. It doesn't.

Nancy: Because I'm just thinking he sounds like he's really on it and he's really smart. I've done a lot of reading on kids who are non-verbal and a lot of them say that that talking is scary, they're afraid they may say the wrong thing, they're afraid to pick a chance and even try, so they do hold within sometimes. I think that in a caring environment, where he feels comfortable, you're going to probably get more language, like at home – when he's talking to you at home it sounds like he does that. I would say the best way to maybe cross over to an educational point of view from this question is with choices – go back to the white board and use four choices, and it can be as simple as "What do you want for breakfast?" And if he's not going to answer you verbally than he can point

to one of the four choices for breakfast, and whatever he points to is what he gets. So he starts to correlate that – pointing to words gets him whatever it is he wants. The same thing with the Assistive technology device: you can use something as simple as a Go Talk 12, where you can pre-program in boards using your own voice – it has a little voice recorder in there – very inexpensive, I think it's like 30 dollars. You can program in "I would like a muffin", "I would like a pancake", "I would like toast", "I would like orange juice", whatever the choices are for breakfast and then they learn that when they point and touch the answer and they make a choice, that's what they get. They start to learn that the language is associated with what they're given or what they're choosing. So stick with the choices maybe and make it meaningful to him, so that it's not just a bunch of random words, but it's something that's important to him, maybe a preferable item: breakfast, lunch, dinner choices works well as a starting point.

Chantal: Okay, very good. Now here's a question I'm not sure that you can answer, but I'll ask it anyway and you can just tell me if you can't. It's from Hugo in Mexico City: "Hi! My name is Hugo Arcie, I'm a visual therapist from Mexico City. My question is how can I help children to symbolize..."

Nancy: Meaning like visualize?

Chantal: ", because the child has a big problem in his area, how in your practice do you make that work?" I guess he's translating it into English, so it's hard. How can I help children to symbolize? I'm not sure what he means.

Nancy: I don't know Hugo if this is what you mean or not, but associating a word with a picture is a simple way of creating that symbolization between the written word and what it is – it's that visual processing, the visual picture. Get a yellow sticky pad and go around your house and label everything: toilet, refrigerator, microwave – they're going start reading that way – if that's what he means, I'm not sure.

Chantal: Maybe he'll write in if he's listening. I know he was listening because he commented something before.

Nancy: Okay.

Chantal: Elizabeth from Toronto: "I'm the mother of a son with autism, he's ten years old and high functioning. As you are a professional in this field please let me know if it is okay that I work with my son after school, helping him with academic work to reinforce his knowledge and then I give him free time to play computer games, watching TV, shopping or other sports activities? Because my son has some behaviors that he does not want to work at school and they complain that I work too much at home."

Nancy: Wow, I think that's great. Elizabeth, keep doing it, that's fabulous.

Chantal: It says: "Please advise me if I'm doing ok or if I'm giving too much work to my son".

Nancy: I don't think that his behaviors at school have anything to do with what you're doing at home. If he didn't want to be doing the work with you at home you were going to see behaviors at home. He's going to let you know that he doesn't want to do it. But it sounds like you're doing a

great job at home and you're actually making progress and teaching him some literacy skills and some academic work there. I wonder, and again you didn't write this, but I wonder if perhaps they're not challenging him academically at school, and that's why they're seeing the behaviors. That maybe you're being more successful at home and you're kind of pushing him along and school is kind of dragging a little there. Does that make sense?

Chantal: Yes, it does.

Nancy: That may be the behaviors. Maybe he's bored at school, because it's not challenging, I don't know.

Chantal: It could be.

Nancy: I have seen kids – very funny, it was in a psychologist report at an IEP meeting – he talked about how in the general education classroom the kid would sit quietly at his desk and kind of look around the room and stare at the bulletin boards and then versus education in the special education classroom, where they were working on I think it was colors and I think he was 10 years old – rocking, moving his chair, not paying attention and flapping his pencil – you see, all the behaviors. So I would rather have someone sitting quietly, looking at a bulletin board, while the teacher's talking, in a regular classroom, than learning colors when you're 10 – that's kind of presuming incompetence and no wonder you have the behaviors: the kid is bored.

Chantal: Right, exactly. Here's a question, Anne, from Raymore: "I believe my son has high functioning autism. He has a severe language delay, walks on his toes and flaps his hands when he plays by himself, hums to himself, etc. Academically he's doing okay, but he's only in kindergarten. He at times mimics what others are saying in class. Is there anything I can do about this so I can keep him in a regular classroom? We have had issues with him mimicking Down syndrome children when he was in preschool."

Nancy: I'm wondering if by mimicking you're mimicking echolalia language, when he's just repeating what he hears...

Chantal: That is what it sounds like.

Nancy: I don't believe that your son is doing it on purpose, I'm going to presume competence in him and believe that he's not doing it on purpose and that he doesn't know that might hurt somebody's feelings. That you can teach through a social story, by giving him the perspective of how it might make somebody feel when you repeat things that you say. My other thought, just from the first reading of this, is that it might be that whole motor control problem again. A lot of times, when you have a motor disturbance and a movement difference – you know, languages blurted out that doesn't mean to be blurted out - you say things that you don't mean to say, that you just can't control. It's a fascinating area - it's the appearance of behavior. We have to be careful people that we don't label people and presume incompetence by the way that they're acting and looking. So I don't know in that case...

Chantal: Okay. Hugo from Mexico City wrote in and said that his question was "Can you talk about the symbolization?" I think it was what you were describing.

Nancy: Where you take the word and put it with a visual image of it, so that you teach somebody how to read that way? There are some programs that you can get writing with symbols, where you actually can use Assistive technology with picture icons and even boardmaker icons to write sentences. And a lot of that is great for young kids who perhaps aren't spelling yet, that they can use icons and picture icons to say what they want. However, I tend to go more toward actually teaching them the written word and teaching them how to spell, for two reasons. Number one is literacy skills, reading and writing. If you can teach them how to read and write and spell, than they can pretty much say anything. And then number two is: Quite often, when you're using Assistive technology and a text system or a boardmaker, perhaps the thing that they're trying to say is not on their choice board.

Chantal: Right.

Nancy: There's nothing more frustrating than that. A dear friend of mine, who tries to communicate, really wanted to take ballet lessons and "ballet lessons" was not a choice in her text board. And finally, when she learned how to spell, she typed to her mother "I want to take ballet" and now she's a ballerina and she takes ballet classes and she's beautiful at it. So yes, I would say use the pictures with the words, but teach the words, teach our kids how to spell and how to read and to write and reinforce that over and over again, because then they can ask for anything, even though they don't have the verbal language to do so.

Chantal: Right. Here's a question from Jennifer, in Anniston, Alabama: "How do I convince my child's school staff that he should be in a general education classroom instead of the autism unit? He's almost eight years old and I'm worried that he is missing his chance to learn with other children, who have the skills he lacks. Why does he have to be in the autism unit to get the skill teaching he needs?"

Nancy: I agree with Jennifer 100%, I think that's wrong. In 1954, Brown versus The Board of Education made it illegal to segregate in this country based on race, but here we do it on disability. We segregate our students based on our disability label and I think that's wrong. Jennifer, if I were you, I would get a copy of the IDEA law here in the United States and go in and talk about least restrictive environment, go in the types of accommodations that Congress wants our kids to have in the least restrictive environment, use what Chantal said earlier and even let them know that you're willing to have him in the general education classroom purely for social reasons, if that's what it takes, but know that when he's there for whatever reasons, he's going to be learning. There is a market difference between a first grade special education classroom and a first grade general education classroom. It's night and day between what's going on there academically in those classes. And as you get older, the content changes even more. A sixth grade general education classroom versus a sixth grade special education classroom is night and day in respect to the material that they're using. The first focuses on life skills, which is good, but you need to ask yourself "Do I want the school teaching my child life skills or would I like to teach them as the parent, and have the school actually teach academics and literacy?"

Chantal: Right.

Nancy: So I'm with you Jennifer, go for it. Take all this information and go get them.

Chantal: Here's a question from another Jennifer, in West Dundee: "My son has PDD (pervasive developmental disorders) in his verbal. He's in third grade, but he has difficulties participating in language arts in the inclusion classroom, because his reading level is at a low first grade level and he is unable to blend sounds. In this situation, the child is learning insignificantly behind the rest of the class, in first and the second grade the work could be modified more easily. Since the reading has increased, this seems more difficult. Any suggestions? He's currently beginning SRA (Science Research Associates) to attempt to improve his reading skills and he no longer attends the inclusion class. What has your experience been with reading programs like SRA Reading Mastery or Wilson Reading Programs?"

Nancy: Okay, there's a lot in this question. I'm not a reading specialist, so I don't have hands-on experience with those particular programs. I do have other reading programs that I've worked with. Lindamood-bell is one that comes to mind for visualizing and for comprehension. I've worked a lot on that. But here the net of the question is what can we do when a child is at a different level than his peers in the class? I believe he's in the third grade and he is at first grade reading level, is that what you said Chantal?

Chantal: He's at a reading level of low first grade.

Nancy: Okay. So, I would do a couple of things, just quick ideas. Ask the teacher if you can have a reading book that he can take home with him, and then find out what stories they're reading in class. Then work with him specifically on those stories ahead of the time. It's called front-loading the material. You can front-load the material, so that when he goes to class next day, not only does he have a good idea about what the story is going to be about as far as comprehension goes, so he can participate with the class that way, but you might also want to have him practice reading a paragraph or two, and then let the teacher know: "We practiced this paragraph, maybe when you call on him you can have him do this paragraph." There might be some memorization that occurs when he practices it ahead of time, but I think that's okay, because that's going to make him feel included, it's going to make him feel successful in the classroom. So again, what kind of supports can you give him to make him successful? And the teacher should work with you on this. So I think that's the net of the problem. Do whatever you can to make him feel successful when he's in there, so that he's not pulled back and he can still do the same story and the same reading, but to a lesser degree. Modify it just a little bit for him, so that he can still participate. And then as far as your other reading programs go – gosh, there are so many of them out there right now – I wouldn't want him to be missing classroom time in order to do a computer program, I would rather it be after school or even going to a learning center on a Saturday or Sunday and playing catch-up that way, because the older you get in school, the more important that you're there in the classroom and not pulled out, because you miss so much instruction when you pull out. And then you also miss some of the fun stuff, like art and music, if that's still on the schools. That's usually when our kids get pulled out to go to academics and that stuff it's just as important. So maybe do the reading programs and the computer reading programs on your own.

Chantal: Okay. Good question and answer. Here's Russell, from Dublin, California: "Our son is in an LASS class – Language and Social Skills – and he is four years old, will be five in November. His class does several activities of first graders for inclusion purposes. We think the inclusion school is

going really well and we're glad to have it as a part of his school day. We also have a six years old daughter at home, who is in first grade. Should we try, the four of us, several activities at home like they do in school to mimic the same type of inclusion? If so, what are some of the best activities to do at home with the two kids together?"

Nancy: Yes, I think that would be really smart. First of all, you've got to remember that for a four-year-old, language and social skills is their curriculum, so I think the type of class he's in is perfect, because if he is getting typical peers to emulate, then you're right on, because that's what four-year-olds do, they're learning those types of skills. But yes, you can absolutely prepare him for the future in a general education classroom, by playing board games at home with the family, showing him the rules of how to play a game and going on outings and including him in being a part of everything that your family does. Educational outings are great, whether it's to the zoo or to a museum or one of those kids' science museums. Give him the opportunity to learn, just what you do with your older daughter, presume his competence. Whatever you did with your elder daughter when she was four, you should be doing with him. If you know that he's getting it and you presume competence in his abilities, then you guys can do anything. The world opens up and you realize that he needs actually to be out there in the world, learning, whether it's going to the grocery store with you and just buying groceries. All that is important and it should just best be part of your family life. Whatever you did for your daughter, when she was for, do for him.

Chantal: Okay, great. Amarie in Denville has a question. She was wondering if you will be doing a webinar to help teachers with inclusion and management for a child with Asperger's. She said that her son Josh is having problems with the personal space around the children.

Nancy: I don't know about that, but I do know that you have to be so concrete with kids with Asperger's as far as understanding the social rules. Again – social stories and really spelling it out. The other thing that is really interesting about this question from Amarie is that the motor planning comes into play again too - the whole sensory integration and motor planning awareness of kids with Asperger's. Do they understand what they're own personal space is? If they do, is it perhaps that they just can't control their bodies to stay in it? I laugh sometimes, because when my son gets out of the shower, I say "Stay on the bathmat and drip off". But for the life of him, he cannot make his body stand on that bathmat and then I get water all over my floor, driving me crazy. But that's a motor awareness and a sensory awareness of where his body is in space. For a kid with Asperger's, I think it could be the same type of issue, and you just have to work on it. You have to work on using a visual space that he can see, like a towel or a mat, and practicing it, and then using social stories to make him aware of his classmates' feelings when he does invade their space, and then lastly, empowering the kids in letting them know why he might be doing that. And I think kids are so underestimated sometimes – if we just explain to them why these things are happening, they're pretty cool with it all. They'll just go "Oh, that's just Nick, you know, bumping into me again because he doesn't know where his body is in space." But if you don't tell them, then they get mad: "Stop bumping into me!" So I think we've got to give our typical peers a little bit of credit here and bring them in as helpers, a little bit more than perhaps we are.

Chantal: Yes, good point. Here's Shelly, in Woodinville, Washington: "Nancy, we have tried several Assistive Technologies at home to support our 10-year-old mid-level autistic son, who loves

his computer-time and really relates to the consistency and predictability of computers. At school he is half day in a learning center, with a one-on-one paraprofessional. The district has very tight budget strings and it will not send him to training or purchase any software, so we try some software at home each year. In the past few years, we have used Teach Town, Mavis Beacon Typing, Clicker 5, various Disney learning CD-ROMs. We were about to head start online program for a year trial. We have been looking for a 12-week program called Fast ForWord, for a reading boost. 1. Do you have any suggestions for a six-year-old reading level? He has executive planning, expressive-receptive difficulties, but we want to give him as much support as possible.” That’s number one.

Nancy: Okay. I do know about Fast ForWord. It’s an auditory processing program, a lot of a speech therapist can do it in their office. It’s a lot of repetition, but it’s very effective. So if you can think that he can sit at the computer for that long and do the activities over and over again until he masters it, I think that you’re going to see auditory processing really increase and improve with that. A lot of the computer programs that are out there – the home ones that you can get at like Best Buy or Cosco, the educational learning ones – are very good, a lot of them are just as good as the stuff that they have in the schools that are very expensive. A lot of these software programmers charge school districts an arm and a leg for these programs, but the home versions can be just as effective, like the ones that you talked about. One thing that kind of crossed my mind is that if he is 10 years old now, I’m just thinking maybe you might want to go toward something like Bookshare.org, which is a website that has all sorts of books online, that you can read them on the computer and these are typical book, like *Charlotte’s Web* or *Harry Potter*, *Roll of Thunder*, *Hear My Cry*, that kind of stuff, that schools are reading. A lot of these books are on Bookshare.org. If you have a disability, you’re even able to get a membership free, through the Department of Education and Special Education. So you might want to look at that for some actual reading online, where he’s being read to, but it’s the computer, so he’ll like that. That might work for him with his age. I wouldn’t want to have him do a lot of the Disney stuff, because he is 10, so you want to increase it and try some literacy computer software that it’s a little bit more challenging for him.

Chantal: That is right. Here’s a question from Brenda, in Blue Springs: “What are some milestones to look for in order to know if an autistic child is actually prepared and ready to be included in the classroom, say like kindergarten or first grade? I have a four-and-a-half-year-old grandson, he cannot recall shapes or any colors yet, he can’t say his ABC’s in order, only spotty and sporadic. I’m assuming that, by age three or four, there are certain milestones that he should master in order to be ready for the classroom.”

Nancy: There are. However, with autism it’s a whole different ball game here. He’s four and a half and she says he can’t recall shapes and colors – I’m not so sure about that, I wouldn’t have that opinion set in stone. He might not be able to tell you, and if there is a motor planning disturbance, he might not be able to reliably point yet. A lot of times, just pointing to an answer takes considerable motor planning and needs to be practiced over and over again in order to accurate, so that you can have reliability and accuracy in answer. I would presume competence in his ability, just keep doing what you’re doing, keep assuming that he knows and go for kindergarten, just go for it. I think that in kindergarten a lot of the same skills that they do in preschool are reinforced when they start learning letters and things. One thing that fascinates me is a lot of our older kids who are non-verbal – letters were just a phenomena to them. One kid actually said: “The individual letter made

no sense to me, but when you put it in a word and I had the whole word there, then I could visualize something and I got it, it clicked.” Again, it’s that literacy ladder - just because they may not be able to identify a letter doesn’t mean that they can’t identify words. So we’ve got to try.

Chantal: Right.

Nancy: Presume competence and start having them try words instead of letters and see what happens there. Performance doesn’t always mean intelligence, so presume that he’s competent, that perhaps there’s just some sort of a motor disturbance going on, where he’s not able to get the accurate information out, in a way that we can relate to. It might be our problem, not his.

Chantal: Right. Here’s Elaine from Boston: “When deciding on the student’s participation in an inclusion class, what practice do you feel to be most critical to assess for it to be a beneficial experience? Please let us know your thoughts on not only the students, but also the classroom teachers, student population supports and so on.”

Nancy: I think the most important and the most critical thing to determine is if your team is strong, if your paraprofessional or you one-on-one aide is a strong team with the student, if the parents are behind it, if the teacher has a open heart and open mind and it’s excited to have that student there. That’s the most important thing. It’s critical. To stand in an aide with a student who are ill-prepared and don’t know each other – and the aide doesn’t feel confident that she can do what needs to be done to make the child successful, perhaps she doesn’t know how to make a choice board or maybe she doesn’t know how to take an assignment the teacher gives and create it so that the student can do it. When that breaks down, inclusion is not going to work. The teacher is going to rely on the aide and the student to make it successful. I can’t stress it enough. That is a huge component, it’s critical for successful inclusion. As far as what a student needs to have in order to be included I think it’s just a desire. I mean, who doesn’t want to be included? So, if they want to be there and the classroom feels good to them, it’s a good environment, they feel safe and secure and excited to be there, that’s good enough for me, let’s try. And then make it work.

Chantal: Right, very good. Here’s a very interesting question that I wonder about myself. This is from Shirley, in Victoria, Australia: “Can you tell me how the students who have gone through the secondary education system with aides fare when they leave this level of education?”

Nancy: A lot of them go on to college, with aides - that’s mostly has been my experience. That’s kind of what I have been working towards. The one-on-one aide is not really relevant to what they do after they finish high school, it’s just what the kid’s desire is, if they want to go on to college and keep learning. A lot of times there’s a workability-type program in our state, here in California, where an aide can help a student do whatever they’re doing, whatever kind of work they’re doing, so secondary education and higher education is not excluded from the dream here. If the kids are doing well in high school with an aide and academically they’re learning and it’s been successful, then why not go on to college. It can be done.

Chantal: That’s right. Okay, Lori, in Montgomery, Texas: “My son was in general education at the end of last year and I’m currently fighting with this school because he was pulled from the regular education classes back to self-contained. When they did this they decided to cease teaching

him grade-level education. Now my child is a year and a half behind academically. How can I pressure the school to put him back in the regular education classes and catch him back up, academically speaking?"

Nancy: I know that that's true. General education classrooms versus the self-contained special education classrooms – they're not teaching the same stuff. A lot of time, by law, they're supposed to, but they typically tend to focus on life skills and so algebra is not taught in the special education classroom – counting money is. And a kid might want to learn algebra, it could be important to him, so I agree that the academics are probably falling behind, based on a different placement. One thing though that can happen is placement can't be changed without an IEP, so they can't just remove somebody from one placement and put them in another unless there is a signed IEP there. So you might want to check the compliance on that, but I'm not quite sure what happened there. I think that at this point, and I think that we talked about this with another caller, you get out a copy of the law and you explain the least restrictive environment and you explain supports and services and you explain making the supports and services unique to your child so that that team is successful, and you talk about a bottom-up approach to inclusion. In your community, you perhaps even have examples of where your son has been included successfully and it has worked. There had been court cases that have been one based on somebody's participation in religious education classes – believe it or not. That they have done years of religious education and have been very well included and have been able then to get included into general education classrooms and school based on the success. At this point it might just be talking to the general education teacher and getting work to do at home to catch him up, because the longer he's out of the general education classroom, the further behind academically he will fall.

Chantal: Right. Good point. Here's a question from Laura, in New York: "My son attends a special education school. He's 19 years old and non-verbal. I feel that he's being treated as if he is a preschool-aged child. Besides that, they're not helpful with him having age-appropriate communication devices. I'm the one that's always fighting for what he needs and deserves and usually, it feels like a no-win situation."

Nancy: You know, hallelujah! Aren't we parents always fighting for what our kids deserve? I get it – it's exactly right. There is assistive technology out there, I think it's really important to get your son on a communication system. In don't know if he has anything in place, but that is vital. Again, go to low-tech Assistive technology. Do choices on a choice board. Get him able to communicate in some way, even if it's with a "Yes" or a "No", you can find out a lot of information by process of elimination. Whatever kind of school he's in, he needs to have a form of communication that works for him. Because he is 19, the iPhone and the new iPad that's coming out – those are some pretty cool devices that I think a 19-year-old would think he's pretty cool to have and there are some pretty cool apps that you can get for the iPhone or the iPod Touch: one of them is called "Yes|No" and it's a green "Yes" square and a red "No" square. When you touch the green "Yes" it says "Yes", and when you touch the red "No" it says "No". You can get that on an iPod Touch. So, a lot of the new apps that I think are going to be coming out with the iPad and you're iPhones and you're iPad Touches that might be really cool – and, again, they're not thousands of dollars, like some other Assistive Technologies devices are. So it might be a communication system that he can embrace.

Chantal: Right. That partly answers the question for someone here, I think, Crystal, in West Haven, Connecticut. But she also has another question, so I'm going to read the whole sentences: "I have been trying to find an assistive device above the springboard for my 16-year-old severely autistic and severely cognitively-impaired son who has never been able to go beyond requesting food and places of pictures." I need to stop and say that you don't know if he is severely cognitively-impaired if he hasn't been given the options to communicate.

Nancy: Again. Yes, right.

Chantal: Last part of her question is: "Is supportive typing only for high-functioning individuals or could you recommend something". Could we ever?

Nancy: Could we ever? It's functioning – how do you know? By the way that they appear and the way that movement presents itself that you don't know what's going on inside their heads.

Chantal: Yes. I mean I was told that my son was severely mentally retarded and that I should put him in an institution. And they told this to me and I was somebody who had spent my professional years getting people out of institutions, before having my son, and I have found a good institution for my son: it's called "college".

Nancy: *[laughs]* We are so proud of him, too.

Chantal: I am very proud of my son.

Nancy: He's doing amazing in college, it's huge. So again, a great point to always remember is just because you don't have a way of saying it, it doesn't mean that it's not in there. I think that we really, really have got to find a way to get out whatever it is in his head. We need a communication strategy that can work with him. Supportive typing is one, RPM (Rapid Prompting Method) is another, these are great strategies that have taught kids literacy skills and have taught them how to communicate – and they're independent now, using a variety of different devices. Now, was it easy and did it happen quickly? No! It was really a struggle and it's very difficult and it took years. It took my son almost two years to become an independent typer, and then, when he's emotionally upset or not feeling well, he can't do it independently, he needs support.

Chantal: Does he type with anybody?

Nancy: Well, he has preferred people, but he has about six communication partners right now that he'll type with, that have to get the system out for him, turn it on, sit him down, get him organized and then he can do it. And that took a lot of training, it wasn't like it happened overnight. And a lot of practice, and a lot of over and over again.

Chantal: There are some places to go for supportive typing or even other types of typing. For example, Nancy had mentioned the RPM, that's the Rapid Prompting Method, and you can actually look on the HALO (Helping Autism through Learning and Outreach) website.

Nancy: And I think it's soma-halo.org. Is that right?

Chantal: Something like that, but that's why I tell people to google all the words, because I get it confused.

Nancy: Good idea.

Chantal: What other types of places would you suggest people go look for?

Nancy: Well, they can get information from my website, which is SupportedTyping.com, all spelled out, and one of the agencies that I work with in California is WAPADH.org (Whittier Area Parents' Association for the Developmentally Handicapped), and it's in Whittier, Santa Fe Springs area – they do free communication workshops every month, to help people who don't have a means of communication to communicate. Other than that, I believe on the East Coast, Syracuse University has some places up there, I'm not too familiar with it, but if you google or if you come to my website or email me I can always try to find you somebody based on where you are.

Chantal: Okay. Here's Shruti, from Suwanne: "Hi! Regarding this term, motor planning," – this are people who are sending in questions, Nancy, while we've been speaking; so this person has talked about motor planning and she says "My son Ayush is reading at a grade two level, he is going to go to grade K, but his special education teacher keeps telling me that he cannot motor plan, for example his inefficiency in packing his school bag. So I'm working with him and he's doing fine. He can take off and wear his clothes. I'm confused, why does he lack motor planning skills so much? In his IEP they have a single goal of packing his bag. Thanks for hearing me."

Nancy: It's funny, because you think "Oh, somebody who can't pack their bag must not be smart." But no, the two are so unrelated. You can be completely intelligent, very, very smart and bright, but that whole "I've got to make my hands zip" or "I need to do this with my body to do this" could be very difficult. They don't know, it could be some sort of a wiring in the brain, there's just so much we don't know right now, but if we just understand that it's a very valid point in individuals with autism that the motor planning is a huge issue and it can be from things like inappropriate emotions. One of the things that my son does is when his sister will fall and will get hurt, like riding a bike or something, he laughs at her and she gets so mad at him, and we must go "He's not laughing at you, that's how it's coming out". The laughter is just an unexplained result of the inability to display the right emotion.

Chantal: That's funny because my son has told me - many times he's told me that and I've read that in other people's books who were typers – that they have, I wouldn't want to say hysterical laughter, but it's kind of like that's what comes out. With Jeremy is usually when he's embarrassed, like if he's had a toileting accident, when he was younger, and he would laugh, and it's so irritating, because you're thinking "What the heck is he laughing about, this isn't funny". But he was actually embarrassed, he was ashamed.

Nancy: Right. So the inappropriate emotions can be traced back to a motor planning disturbance, a movement difference.

Chantal: Right.

Nancy: It's a fascinating area that, again, we have to look beyond what the appearance of autism is. What's inside is more important and I think we're going to become a more tolerant culture and a more tolerant people if we can just get past what our eyes see and what our ears hear.

Chantal: Right. But in terms of the lack of motor planning skills that this man or woman is mentioning, that is a real problem and we do have to deal with it in terms of functional everyday skills, because this person is saying that his son is improving when he's practicing the motor planning things with him. Which is really good, because you want them to have as much use in functional everyday life as possible, in terms of all the things that take so much motor planning skills.

Nancy: That's correct. Occupational therapy (OT) is great with this kind of stuff. Hopefully there's maybe an OT program in the school that can help with this, but it's the whole step by step approach to getting things done and then just practicing and working on it and then eventually it becomes second nature. It may take a lot longer with our kids with autism than it does with someone who's neurotypical, but it can be done. And sometimes that's why handwriting is so difficult for our guys. Because just the thought and the motor planning that goes into creating a letter, like the letter "M" for example, you know, the up-down-up-down, it's very difficult. But if you do it over and over again you don't have to think about it anymore, you just do it, but it takes a long time and some never master it. It doesn't mean that you stop trying though. You keep trying, especially like you said, with the functional things that are so important in life.

Chantal: Right. Noah in Dallas says: "Can you please repeat that quote you say regarding the idea that you've mentioned that you can say in your sleep."

Nancy: Ok, now I'll concentrate and say it right. It's from the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and it's: "Special classes, separate schooling and removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only if the disability is such that success cannot be achieved satisfactorily without the use of supplementary aids and services". I think I screwed it up, can you believe that?

Chantal: You did, you did.

Nancy: I did. Maybe I should just say it fast and then I won't forget it: "Special classes, separate schooling and other removal of children with disabilities from regular educational classrooms occurs only if the nature or the severity of the disability is such that education in the general education class with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily".

Chantal: Perfect.

Nancy: So in other words, you've got to pull out all the stops first, before you remove them.

Chantal: Right.

Nancy: You've got to try the supplementary aids and services before you remove them.

Chantal: Okay. I'm going to speed up on some questions because we're going to be stopping soon, in about 15 minutes, and I have to leave five minutes at the end for announcements and also for you to give again your website. So here is Stacy, in Indianapolis: "My name is Stacy, I'm the parent of an 11-year-old who is in regular class and I am wondering where I can find out where the laws are for my IEP meeting. I have problems not knowing what I can actually get them to do. You understand budget cuts going one and they want to cut my child's one-on-one assistant." Well, I'm going to say something first, and that is to remind Stacy to look on your State of Indiana – just type in "Indiana" and "protection" and "advocacy" and I think that every state has also a Department for Developmental Disabilities, they would have it on there, and you can find out what the laws are for IDEA, how it's translated in your state, because every state applies to them a little bit differently, even though the general aspects, what Nancy is saying, are true on a federal level. The other thing that I want to say is that no one should be ever be mentioning budget cuts, because even though it is a reality, technically the law also states they're not allowed to approve or disapprove of things on IEP based on money. That is not supposed to be a part of the conversation.

Nancy: Correct. That's absolutely right. And also, if you have services now, if you have the one-on-one aide now, do not sign the IEP that takes that one-on-one aide away.

Chantal: Right.

Nancy: Just disagree and don't sign that new IEP, because if you have the service now, it should continue, unless they can't prove it that he doesn't needed in that placement. You don't change the placement because of budget cuts either.

Chantal: Okay. Julia, in Idaho: "I have a five-year-old with severe autism. He is currently in kindergarten, on a great IEP, with FTAVA aid. We're moving to another state in June. Will the IEP transfer over and how can I advocate to continue to give him the help he needs when we move?" Actually, it's not an inclusion question, but I can say anyway that IEPs usually – the law says that they stay for six months. So when you go somewhere else with your IEP, the IEP is supposed to stay the same, but over that six months they can be doing assessments, but they have to follow through and continue the IEP. Correct Nancy?

Nancy: That is correct. And when they get to the new school district, they this new school district will set up an assessment plan and do their own assessment and then probably call an IEP, usually within a couple of months of getting there, just to implement the one you have or to do a new one. But yes, services stay the same until another IEP has taken its place.

Chantal: Okay. Sue Clark, at Pasadena, asks: "Is there a particular school district in California that you know of that has done inclusion well with successful results in middle and high schools, that other school districts can learn from?"

Nancy: There's a couple that I know in California. First of all, Chantal, I think your school district down there has been fabulous. You're in a very good place down in San Diego. Again, it varies from individual to individual, so it's really hard to say "This one school district is fabulous for inclusion", I think it depends on each case. There have been some students that I know of in the

Carlstadt area that have done really well, some in the Newport Mesa that have done really well. Of course, Whittier is fabulous.

Chantal: Whittier is the place for them. I would suggest Whittier because even though you say that my school district is very good, it was not to begin with and it's only gotten that way because of tough administrator but also it does depend on each kid.

Nancy: On each, kid, right.

Chantal: Whittier has a long history of having people with more involved disabilities successfully included and I also have actually met one of the – I'm not sure if he's an administrator or a teacher, but he's the one in the high school transition program – so they're very forward thinking and actually he does go out and do some speaking, so I contact and look at the Whittier school district for the older kids.

Nancy: Yes. The other one that I know of it's in San Fernando Valley, in Woodland Hills. It's called the CHIME School and it's actually a charter school, and they're charter is based on inclusion, which is kind of neat. Sometimes charters are based on some other types of teaching methodologies, but their charter is specifically inclusion. They have very severe disabilities successfully included in their classrooms and that's kind of cool.

Chantal: Right, Very good. Mary in Virginia asks: "I have a four-year-old with autism who has the option of going to an inclusion Pre-K class next year. The Pre-K teacher is coming to evaluate him in pre-school this month. She'll be looking for what kind of accommodations will be necessary next year – IE (Independent Evaluation), one-on-one aide. We would like him to be included in Pre-K". What should we suggest to her?

Nancy: Again, some of those accommodations that I went through from the very beginning – it's kind of hard for a Pre-K, because they're still such little guys, but it might be things like special seating. Sometimes you sit them next to a really bossy girl. If there's a girl in the class who's kind of bossy and kind of a leader – great with our kiddos with autism, because she just kind of just take them under her wing. And it really helps. So you want to mention to the teacher that personalities of the kids in the class could be a real beneficial thing for him, special seating – if he needs it, lots of visual supports to go with the verbal directions, because a lot of stuff in Pre-K and kindergarten it starts out visual, but then they start fading the visual to auditory directions, and they lose a lot of the kids. So to keep the visual supports there, with directions written on the board - I would also say a reward system, that's on positive behavior support, so that you catch them being good. Social is important at that age – if you see any kind of situations that he's not playing with the other kids on the playground or he's not being asked to play or he doesn't know what to do, we need to get in there and give him some support so he can be successful socially as well.

Chantal: Great. Here's Susan Kuhner, from Harleton, Texas: "Can you name some of the reading programs that might work for a child with autism. Is there a website that I might go to do research on a program?" And someone else, Gail from Brooklyn, asked "What do you think of Lindamood-Bell for teaching reading?"

Nancy: Unfortunately I can't talk on a lot of the other reading programs, because I'm not familiar with them. I do know the DRA, which is the Developmental Reading Assessment, and then the corresponding books that go with it, but here's what good readers do: they don't sound out words phonetically. Good readers will look at a word and they're going to ask themselves – like when they're reading a sentence, they're going to look at the word in the context of the sentence, and they're going to ask themselves "Does that makes sense?", "Does that sound right?" and "Does that look right?". So when they're reading a word they're going to ask those questions, so a lot of it comes with language. The stronger your language skills are, the stronger a reader you're going to be. So that's where our kids with autism struggle. My son did Lindamood-Bell for almost three years, part-time, we did the "Visualizing and Verbalizing" program, it was fabulous for him and, as a matter of fact, based on his experience and where he was, they have since created a program called "Talkies". It's kind of like the pre-VV reading program and it got him to visualize things when he saw them in text and he saw them being read to him and it also taught me, the educator, to ask the right questions, when I'm reading a story to him, so that he can understand it and visualize what he's reading. So I'm a strong proponent of Lindamood-Bell, it's expensive but it was worth it.

Chantal: Do you think that's particular to maybe your son or do you think it's useful for everyone?

Nancy: They have a lot of research that shows that it's across the board, a very strong reading program not only for kids with autism but for learners who are struggling with reading. There's a lot of research supporting it and I like the program. So that's good. I also think that with our kids with autism, the whole language approach – where again, they're seeing the word and it's paired with a picture, lots of visuals. And then the kids who are non-verbal who can't read out loud and will never be fluent because they can't speak – don't presume that they are not reading. Put the closed captioning on your television, surround them with literacy. Read to them every night and let them follow along in the text while you're reading. Occasionally they glance at the text, they may not be staring at it word for word like a typical child will, but let them glance at the text as you're reading it to them and surround them with that. My son typed when I asked him "How did you learn how to read?": "I look at each word". And you could've blown me away, because I don't think that he's looking at each word, but he says he is.

Chantal: Okay. We're going to stop with the questions now, we didn't get to all of them, we got to most of them, but I think your such complete answers really helped out many, many people out there, Nancy. So I wanted you to take a moment to please remind people of your name and your website, so they can look there for more information.

Nancy: I would love to. My name is Nancy Brady and my website is SupportedTyping.com. I'm located in Orange County, California, and I just want everybody to make sure that they believe in their kids and they trust their instincts and presume competence always.

Chantal: I couldn't say it better, Nancy.

Nancy: Thanks, Chantal.

Chantal: Thank you so much for being a guest on our show. I'm going to give a couple of announcements here. I wanted to remind everyone that I have a book coming out, at the end of this week, called *41 Things to Know about Autism*. You can google "41 Things to Know about Autism" or you can find out more about my book on my website, which is - and I'm going to spell my lovely wonderful difficult name - ChantalSicile-Kira.com. I want to remind everyone that we're going to have a wonderful virtual conference put on by MomsFightingAutism.com. It's going to be April 10th and April 11th, which is a Saturday and a Sunday, free, 16 keynote speakers. One of them is Temple Grandin - I hope that everyone watched her movie on HBO. The other one is my son, Jeremy Sicile-Kira, along with myself, and we have many other speakers out there, that will be participating and will be sending out more information online soon. And I want to remind everyone that you have some feedback that you want to give about this webinar, you can call in at (877) 211-0212 and then press the number one. Thanks again Nancy for being our guest this evening. Nancy, can you hear me?

Nancy: Yes. I'm sorry. You are welcome, it was my pleasure, I had a wonderful time and I hope a lot more kids are included where they should be.

Chantal: Yes. And maybe we'll have you back again.

Nancy: I would love to, it was my pleasure.

Chantal: Okay. Thank you everyone for listening in. Remember, in April it's not going to be one person, you're going to have to full-day conferences, on April 10th and April 11th, and until then, be the change that you want to see.