

## Collaborating with Schools and Families by Julie T. Steck, Ph.D., HSPP

CRG/Children's Resource Group has a long history of collaborating with schools and families to meet the needs of children, adolescents and young adults. The two founding partners, Dr. Dennis Ray Kinder and Dr. Julie Steck, have their doctoral degrees in school psychology and worked in and with schools prior to working in behavioral health. The first four clinicians added to the staff were school psychologists with advanced degrees and experience doing evaluations in public school settings. These backgrounds gave the six clinicians a true understanding of children and adolescents as students, as well as the culture of school settings.

Much has changed over the past 20 years, but much has remained the same. The most change has occurred within the educational system. There have been increased demands on schools systems and teachers to demonstrate educational progress through standardized test scores. There has been less emphasis on "special education" and more emphasis on "general education." Laws have changed and the interpretation of laws has changed, too. The "lingo" has changed. But parents' and teachers' desires for students to be successful remains the same. So how does CRG collaborate with schools and families to assist students in being successful?

*First*, we at CRG believe that all involved with a student must have an understanding of the student's strengths and needs. This is done by reviewing all available information and records on a student, meeting with the student and the family, and obtaining information from the student's teacher(s). If further information is needed, additional evaluation is recommended.

*Second*, the information regarding the student's educational needs must be communicated to the family and to school personnel. This is done through a written assessment that is then discussed with the family. This process allows the family - and the student, when appropriate - to gain an understanding of the needs of the student and to begin to understand the process of obtaining effective supports within school settings. In addition, the family is educated regarding the educational terminology so that they may better communicate with school personnel.

*Third*, we try to educate parents about what is "reasonable" to expect a school to provide for their child or adolescent and what accommodations may be appropriate based on the available data. There are times when a parent wants something that won't be obtainable through a public school setting. At this point, CRG tries to help parents identify services or private school settings that might be appropriate for them to pursue on their own.

*Finally*, there are times when working directly with the family and school personnel through face-to-face meetings or videoconferences facilitates communication. Such meetings can allow all involved to feel heard and validated. At CRG we believe that our role is to advocate for students, not for parents or schools, and encourage schools to provide the highest level of education and intervention within the limitations imposed by financial constraints and the laws pertaining to education.