

### **Slide 1 Road to Destination Inclusion (HARRY):**

Thank you, Renee, and hello to everyone who is tuning in live! During our presentation today we hope to ignite others to include students in their Destination Imagination program that fall within the 13 categories of special education as defined by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA); *especially* those students that may not have the ability to participate independently.

### **Slide 2 Parent Power (MICHELLE):**

We'd like to start by pointing out that we are parents, not special needs educators or professionals – so we aren't offering this as a case study, but as a possible route on your own district's roadmap to including special needs students into Destination Imagination or other STEAM-based extracurricular programs.

***(IF RENEE HAS NOT INTRODUCED THE PANEL):*** On our panel today are members of Centerville City School's Destination Imagination program.

As a DI Alumni, Megan Sparks knows the benefits of being a DI team member, and she and her husband, John Sparks, have been DI Team Managers for 14 years, coaching team members from all levels (RS/EL/ML/SL). Megan is also the current Centerville City Schools School Board President. For the past eight years they have had their own children in the Destination Imagination program, and their eldest child is special needs.

Michelle & Harry Oxrider are the District Coordinators for Centerville City Schools, accepting the position in August 2021. They have been part of the DI community for over 15 years as team parents, Team Managers, and on the Executive Board of the Centerville DI Parent Support Group and as a part of the Ohio Region 12 Board..

We are committed to growing awareness of the benefits of Destination Imagination in our district, and especially within the Special Needs community. Our goal is to encourage and educate others how to include all types of participants into their programs and tournaments.

### **Slide 3 - Preview (HARRY)**

Today we'll review how we came to recognize a need for our program to expand and the steps we took to address that expansion. We'll discuss what a team meeting could look like, how to choose a challenge, and how to showcase at your tournament.

#### **Slide 4 CDI Special Stars Program (Michelle & John):**

(MICHELLE): In 2015, a spark of an idea started in the minds of John and Megan Sparks. While volunteering as Team Managers for their eldest son's Rising Stars team, they realized how much he had benefited from the Destination Imagination program.

(John): Our oldest son started on a Rising Stars team, which worked out well since there are no non-interference policies for that age group. However, once he aged out of the Rising Stars portion of DI, we wanted to figure out a way to help him continue in the program.

(John) Zac is a child on the autism spectrum and has apraxia - there is a disconnect between his brain and mouth, which limits his ability to form words verbally. Like most autistic children, he gets distracted easily and has a hard time focusing on tasks. A lot of one-on-one intervention & assistance is needed. He has interests in writing (both letters and numbers), trucks/cars, and enjoys physical activity. We felt he would benefit most with occupational therapy related issues because he has sensitivity to materials, and he, along with several of his current teammates, would then have exposure to and desensitization to paper mache, play dough, and other activities where you get your hands dirty, as well as other motor related skill such as using a drill and screwdriver, cutting, drawing, painting, and gluing.

#### **Slide 5 – DEFINING OUR SPECIAL STARS (HARRY)**

Our Special Stars are students who spend part of their day in a dedicated Special Needs classroom, &/or need adult assistance to participate. These students may have communication, learning, or physical disabilities.

Incorporated inclusion is the goal, but our primary emphasis with the Special Stars is to give these students the experience of Destination Imagination when in a situation they are unable to participate in a traditional team setting.

We will talk a bit later about how to determine if the student needs to be on a Special Stars team or a traditional team.

#### **Slide 6 - PATHWAY TO PERMISSION (Megan)**

(Megan): Once we realized there was a need, I approached my former Team Manager, who was also a member of our school board and member of our Regional board. He offered his support,

Our then-current Regional Board President, contacted DI Inc to talk about

How could you get permission? Our recommendation is to start with your school district, and then approach your Region.

Should participate in Region activities, but not State or Globals due to issues surrounding travel.

### **Slide 7 - PICTURES OF FLYERS (Megan)**

Talk about recruitment.

- Work through school to publicize
- Special needs social media groups
- Word of mouth
- Show interested parents the team's YouTube videos to explain how DI works
- Team size of 2-5 members works best because lower numbers are less overwhelming, able to provide more attention to each team member, and is easier to manage.

### **Slide 8 - WHICH TYPE OF TEAM? (John)**

Rising Stars should be an Integrated team.

However, once the student reaches the competitive challenge stage, if the child requires the assistance of an adult to participate, the child will need to be on a special needs team.

If the student is in a typical classroom on an IEP, and is only pulled from class for services, they are likely able to participate on a traditional team.

### **Slide 9 – BENEFITS FOR THE SPECIAL STARS (Megan):**

There are traditionally limited opportunities for extracurricular activities or after-school programs for Special Needs groups. Special Needs students are normally underserved in communities, which makes them an untapped market. Incorporating a Special Stars program into your Destination Imagination program allows students the opportunity to:

- Have non-pressurized peer interactions.
  - If it's an "off day", it can wait! Play & socialization together is more important than always trying to get things accomplished.
  - don't be afraid to change directions during a meeting
- Spend time doing "fun" activities, while learning together.
  - Field trips-Monster Mash challenge we went to Young's Dairy to look at the animals, etc...
  - Have meeting just for team building
- Learn real-life skills that aren't necessarily taught in the classroom.
  - Screwdriver...

- Experience teamwork & accomplishments together.
  - Applause, acknowledgement, etc... Noise sensitivity - headphones.
- Expand time spent on skills or topics of interest.
  - Trucks - build; Lego World;

### **Slide 10 – CHOOSING A CHALLENGE (John)**

As you already know, the selection of a DI challenge to work on is important to determine what content and experiences will be learned during DI practices and the season. We have found that the theatrical, scientific, engineering and service learning challenges seem to be the best fit for the special stars team. More on-the-spot challenges, such as Instant Challenge or Improvisational, are probably not recommended, because with the case of our son and peers repetition and habits seem to be the best approach for creating a presentation. Since the Improvisational Challenge is fluid, it isn't a good choice for the Special Stars where they typically require repetitive items that can be practiced - there are also usually minimal props to work on and most team members do well with hands-on activities and props. Also, for the Technical challenge, the complexity of technical design has been too daunting to try yet with the teams we've had - this may change as they age or perhaps as Zac approaches high school.

Other than the considerations just mentioned, we follow the same team challenge selection process as competitive teams. The team members are read or presented with the summaries for the challenges of what topics they will learn about and are polled on their interest areas. For special stars team members that are less expressive/verbal, parents provide input as to what areas they have shown interests in. Aspects of the challenge, whether it includes a requirement to build a certain structure or to perform a type of service project, and also discussed with the team members. Parents will also consider the best aspects to provide an education of the learning topic for the challenge for earlier practices, such as reading through books, watching videos, or by discussion and examples of the principal.

We also encourage use of expressive skills and consider ways that could be implemented during the season; for example, Zac really likes hot wheel cars, so over the years he has learned how to draw them, make replicas out of play-dough, and how to make props (cut, glue/tape, paint) to look like them, and also what they will be called and how they can be incorporated into the presentation. There are also examples of use of letters, numbers, and drawings integrated into the solution and performances in our sample presentation videos. One area we do not currently put emphasis on learning like a traditional team are the project management, schedule and goal setting skills. The parents and coach usually keep track to make sure the presentation elements are ready in time for the tournament.

### **Slide 11 - TEAM MEETINGS (Megan)**

Manipulate the environment to best suit the team's needs-schools are not always the best place for this.

- Hamster going on a playdate
- Running around the school because it was in a loop

Break time is very important for this population.

- Work for 10 minutes you can have a 5 minute break

Visual clues for the schedule of the meeting.

- Picture Schedule

Team-building in every practice.

- One of the top goals is to work on socializing skills
- Building relationships that expand into other areas of life

### **Slide 12 - SKILL BUILDING (Megan)**

Amount of adult supervision can vary depending on skill - scissors may need only 1:1, but when we work with power tools we definitely need at least 2 adults with each child for safety purposes, regardless of age of child.

Project planning, kid interests, past experiences.

### **Slide 13 - SKILL BLOCKERS (John)**

There are a few considerations to consider for registering at the Regional DI tournament. As mentioned in the team challenge selection slide, the improvisational challenge is not recommended. Up to this point we have determined that the team should also not participate in the Instant Challenge portion of the tournament for similar reasons. Without the up-front repetition, team members can get easily distracted from the task at hand. With parents on stage as well, the coordination needs to be planned out more in advance. Instant Challenge practices have not been explored yet or used much at our team practices. During our practice, we focus more on these areas for skill building and learning than we do with on-the-spot coping skills and quick thinking.

#### **Slide 14 - SPECIAL STARS AT TOURNAMENTS (John)**

At the DI Regional Tournament, the special stars will compete in the same presentation area as the other competitive teams, however they will be listed as an Exhibition or Showcase team. They are still on the tournament schedule and get the same type of experience as the competitive teams. Also, the special stars are not scheduled to complete an instant challenge at the tournament due interference and on-the-spot thinking considerations as explained on the previous slide.

#### **Slide 15 - SPECIAL STARS SHOWCASE (MICHELLE)**

We are fortunate that we have a Challenge Master, Marlaina Proehl, who is invested in the success of our program. She is a parent of two DI participants; elementary music teacher of five self-contained classes of students with multiple disabilities; a 19-year Scoring Appraiser of all levels from regional to Globals; a Regional & Affiliate Challenge Master and International Challenge Master at Global Finals in 2019 and 2020. She offers our regional appraisers training specifically on how to appraise and interact with the Special Stars teams, especially if they require any specific accommodations such as having sound sensitivities versus needing exaggerated audience applause. Our Region also verifies accommodations in the Prep Area to remind appraisers if there are specific environmental or behavioral needs for the students. She also changes the challenge rubric to a feedback form based on the Rising Stars format.

#### **Slide 16 - SHOWCASE FORMS (MICHELLE)**

As mentioned, the Challenge Master modifies the scoring form to make it more conducive for providing feedback to the team by allowing the Appraisers to celebrate what they accomplished, provide positive comments about their solution, and provide encouragement with what the students were able to create and perform. Here are examples from this past year's Service Learning challenge - both the DI rubric and the Challenge Master supplied format for our Regional Tournament. As you can see it includes elements used in the challenge without penalties for adult interference or items the team may not be equipped to handle.

#### **Slide 17 - VIDEOS (Megan)**

## **Slide 18 - ADMINISTRATIVE CONCERNS / WRAP-UP (MICHELLE)**

We hope that you've not only been touched by watching these amazing kids, but that we've ignited some sparks in each of you to reach out to this underserved and untapped market! One reason we've had the opportunity to do this is simply because our Region and school district have been so incredibly supportive. Don't misunderstand - it was not smooth sailing to launch this program; John & Megan heard "No!" plenty of times - but they remained dedicated to their idea, thought & worked outside of the box to get the necessary approvals, and we're now seven years down the road and still finding the journey to be challenging but any detours have only made the trip that much more interesting.

As we're all aware, as with any program, recruitment is key. It's imperative to get word out to the families. Advertise through any special needs' networks in your district or community. When recruiting, reach out to your school's special education staff and administrators - and keep in mind this is also a great time to solicit these same folks to become Team Managers!

One thing we heard from these families is that cost is always a big consideration to them. They often have extra expenses - medical, therapeutic, assistance - and they don't always have the money for extracurricular activities that may be available to their children. This year our Parent Support Group was able to help out with the costs for these students, and this past May our Centerville Noon Optimist Club gave us a scholarship fund to help defray expenses in the future - so be sure to reach out to your community organizations!

If you'd like to get a closer look at some of the documents & videos we've shown, please visit our website & look under the Ignite22 tab - that address will be provided on our next screen, so get ready to write it down!

## **Slide 19 - Moving Forward (HARRY)**

So where do we go from here?

We plan to continue trying to grow this segment of our program, and our "big picture" hope in the coming years is to have a stronger tie-in between our program and our school district. Our "small picture" hope is to create stronger tie-ins between our Special Stars and our traditional challenge teams, and within our teams overall, by setting up buddy teams, so that interested teams can learn from each other.

Interested in more information? Feel free to contact us at [centervilled2@gmail.com](mailto:centervilled2@gmail.com), or visit our website at [www.centervilled2.com](http://www.centervilled2.com) .

## **Slide 20 - Q&A (SPARKS/Oxrider)**