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By JESSICA CRAWFORD • Daily Leader When a special-needs child entered Vicki Adams' life years ago, she knew exactly what her career path would be. Because of all this child taught her, she went on to receive a master's degree in special education. Every morning when Adams walks through the doors of USD No. 480's Education Service Center as the district's director of special education, her work is nothing short of a labor of love.

Sadly, Adams department has seen a substantial amount of budget cuts recently from the state. The federal government is compensating for that right now, but the future is uncertain. Adams remains positive about the situation and has high hopes for her department. "There are quite a few budget cuts," she said. "We have lost money through special education and probably will anticipate losing more. Now, for the next two years we have ARRA (American Recovery and Reinvestment Act) money from the federal government that is kind of capturing what we have lost and making up for it. But, after 2012, it is unclear."

Regardless of funding issues, the special education department continues to go about doing what they do best, providing services for special students throughout the district.

"What we try to do is provide services for students with disabilities in their least restrictive environment," Adams said. "And that is so important because we still want to push them to be the very best that they can be and not let them think, 'I can't do this.' They really can."

It is important to identify special needs a child may have at an early as possible, Adams said.

"One of the main things we do is Child Find," she said. "We have screenings for preschoolers to see if we can identify any disabilities. That is big part of what we do, we try to identify students that have disabilities."

Many people may not realize that gifted students also receive special education services.

"Giftedness is also another area for special education," Adams said. "We do have gifted students within our district and that is something that is really important, knowing we have continued services and making sure everyone is going higher. Because they may think they don't have to work that hard. You still want to make sure they are doing as much as they can."

Adams feels it is very important for special education students to spend as much time with their peers in a regular classroom as possible.

“It is so important to have an inclusive environment,” she said. “What we are trying to do, what we are really focusing on is keeping those children with their non-identified peers as much as possible. Sometimes we do need for them to have intensive intervention and they need to be in a small group with that special education teacher – they need that one on one. Or they have other needs that need to be met and that is just the best place to do because by no means do we want to embarrass anybody.”

Continuing education, Adams said, is very important for teachers. Without that, she said, the students would suffer.

“We are here to meet the needs of the children,” she said. “We learn through continuing education, we have to be lifelong learners. The need is there, I think we are doing so many good things. Every child needs to have what they need.”

It frustrates Adams when special students are not treated with respect and dignity. All students, she said, have great potential.

“There are people that think that because they have a disability, they can’t do anything,” she said. “That is just not true. It is just a little section of their life that you have to accommodate. Of course, we always want the least restrictive environment so we always accommodate before we modify.”

Adams realizes the special education program would be nowhere without the teachers working within her department.

“I appreciate my teachers so much,” she said with a proud smile. “They do amazing things everyday.”

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