

Summer fun for special needs students

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Chippewa Valley teacher Kelly Bock leads campers during a creative learning summer program field trip on July 22 at Waldenburg Park. (Photo by Patricia O'Blenes)



Chippewa Valley schools speech pathologist Amy Vitale chases a camper around the circle during a game of duck, duck, goose at Waldenburg Park on July 22. Vitale is one of five professionals who work with the district's creative learning summer program. (Photo by Patricia O'Blenes)

CLINTON TOWNSHIP — Chippewa Valley Schools held a program for students with special needs this summer, offered by the district's Creative Learning Program. The summer program concluded on July 23, after two weeks of learning, playing and gaining real-world experiences.

Adam Blanchard, the director of the district's special services program, thought the program would be a great way for students with disabilities to experience a summer program through the district that they may otherwise not be able to.

"I think ours is pretty unique in the sense that we would look at students with multiple types of disabilities," Blanchard said. "We have students with physical impairments and cognitive impairments, so we were really taking a much wider spectrum of students."

Twelve students signed up for the program, which provided them with different themes each day that incorporated a balance of academic learning and real-world applications.

Teacher Kelly Bock described a typical day during the program.

“The age group is first through fifth grade, so it’s a wide range of ability. We go through a morning activity, the days of the week, the calendar, then we read a book based on what we’re going to do that day,” Bock said. “Last week, we had the fire department come out, so it was all about fire safety. All of our crafts and projects are around that particular thing or theme we do that day.”

In addition to the fire department visit, the program included a “Wet and Wild Wednesday” in which students learned about the oceans, lakes and marine life, while also getting to play water games. The program also visited the Sanders chocolate factory and Waldenburg Park.

“The students love it. It’s an awesome opportunity because they see each other every day in school, and now they have the opportunity to see each other over the summer. They’re friends, so they’re very close,” Bock said.

The feedback that the program’s organizers received, Blanchard said, showed that parents were grateful for giving their kids the same opportunity as students without a disability.

“I think oftentimes, parents of kids with disabilities, they see the opportunities that general education students without disabilities are afforded, and I think this has allowed parents to enroll their kids in something and feel comfortable that they’re in good hands, that they’re being supported and they’re safe,” Blanchard said. “The feedback has been wonderful.”

Districtwide, Blanchard said, there are roughly 1,700 students with disabilities, with 160 enrolled in the CLP.

“What we try to do is provide them opportunities through special education, in conjunction with general education, to find what is important for them to walk away from Chippewa Valley Schools learning or having learned,” Blanchard said. “We really try to be creative with the programming we provide for our students with disabilities.”

The CLP allows flexibility for students to receive a diploma or certificate of completion at the end of high school, and allows for students to continue to receive educational services until they’re 26 years old.

The CLP varies from student to student, but frequently involves a mix of traditional and special education courses along with training in functional living skills.

“We also do some work experience with these kids, so during their junior and senior year, we might utilize the hospital setting, or we have students that actually go from the high school back down to the elementary and work in some of our elementary classrooms,” Blanchard said. “We’re not looking so much at curriculum; we’re looking more at what classes provide them the greatest opportunity for them to reach their individual potential.”