

Hocus Focus: Teachers learn magic to use in special needs classrooms

By Becca Owsley

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Special education teachers hope learning tricks of the trade from magician Kevin Spencer will help them uncover magical secrets to use in the classroom.



Magician and educator Kevin Spencer talks Wednesday to Hardin County special education teachers about incorporating magic into their classroom.

Kim Adkins, director of special education for Hardin County Schools, said utilizing hands-on training instead of the typical "sit-and-get" training would help teachers work on "attention, fine motor skills and problem solving" for students.

Thirteen teachers from elementary and middle schools in the district attended Wednesday's workshop event at the system's central office, she said.

Spencer of Hocus Focus, a student-centered, experiential-based academic and functional curriculum, led the training.

"It's an arts integrated teaching approach to working with students of all abilities, but I specifically work with students with learning disabilities or social-emotional behavior," Spencer said.

Hardin County Schools is the lone site in Kentucky participating in the teaching and research program that goes beyond learning magic.

"They will learn how to use magic in their classroom and we will train them on how they can measure the impact it will have on their students and then will participate in research for us on a much broader scale across the country," he said.

Karen Rock, a Rineyville Elementary School teacher, said in her 24 years of teaching the training was the best she had attended.

"It's teaching academics through using magic and teaching them magic tricks to get them excited about it and tying it into our core content," she said.

She learned magic tricks using ropes, paper clips and rubber bands. The program also provided lesson plans and access to Spencer's website to interact with him, she said.

Rock teaches children with behavioral issues and she can see how these tricks can help the students be excited about learning, she said. Through the entire presentation, she thought of specific students impacted by this type of teaching.

Rock said the students also will be able to share what they learn in groups and with their peers.

Davisa Fogle, a G.C. Burkhead Elementary School teacher, said attendees were not just learning magic tricks but also how to engage the special needs population in the school. They can incorporate math, science and language arts by using magic tricks.

"It's a different kind of learning," she said.

It also teaches critical thinking skills like learning how to fix what they did wrong, not giving up and trying again, she said.

"It's a good lesson for anyone to have, but especially these kids," she said.

As a classroom co-teacher and resource teacher, Fogle usually works with third-grade students who have a range of special needs such as Down syndrome, autism, learning disabilities and behavior disorders.

The program is in coordination with the Hardin County Schools Performing Arts Center at John Hardin High School.

Director Bart Lovins has known Spencer for 15 years through arts and education conferences. After attending a conference in New York last year, Lovins saw a presentation on the Hocus Focus program and knew it would be beneficial to bring to the area.

The program allows students to video chat with Spencer and other classrooms to learn and perform the magic, but through the PAC, Hardin County is going to be able to take it to another level. Some of the students learning these tricks will be able to join Spencer on stage as a part of his performance May 5 at the center.

"It's that culminating aspect of it that's so exciting to me," Lovins said. "When it's live, it's really special."

Many of these students have been to the center but haven't been able to be on stage and perform in front of their peers and family, he said.

"Anytime I can bring arts into the classroom and it's making a difference in our student's lives, that's a very important part of what we do," Lovins said.

Spencer said the performance in May is family- and sensory-friendly as well as accessible to kids who have different abilities.

"I'm excited to be here and have been looking forward to this for a long time," Spencer said.

To learn more about Hocus Focus, go to www.hocusfocuseducation.com. To learn more about the performance in May, go to www.thepac.net.

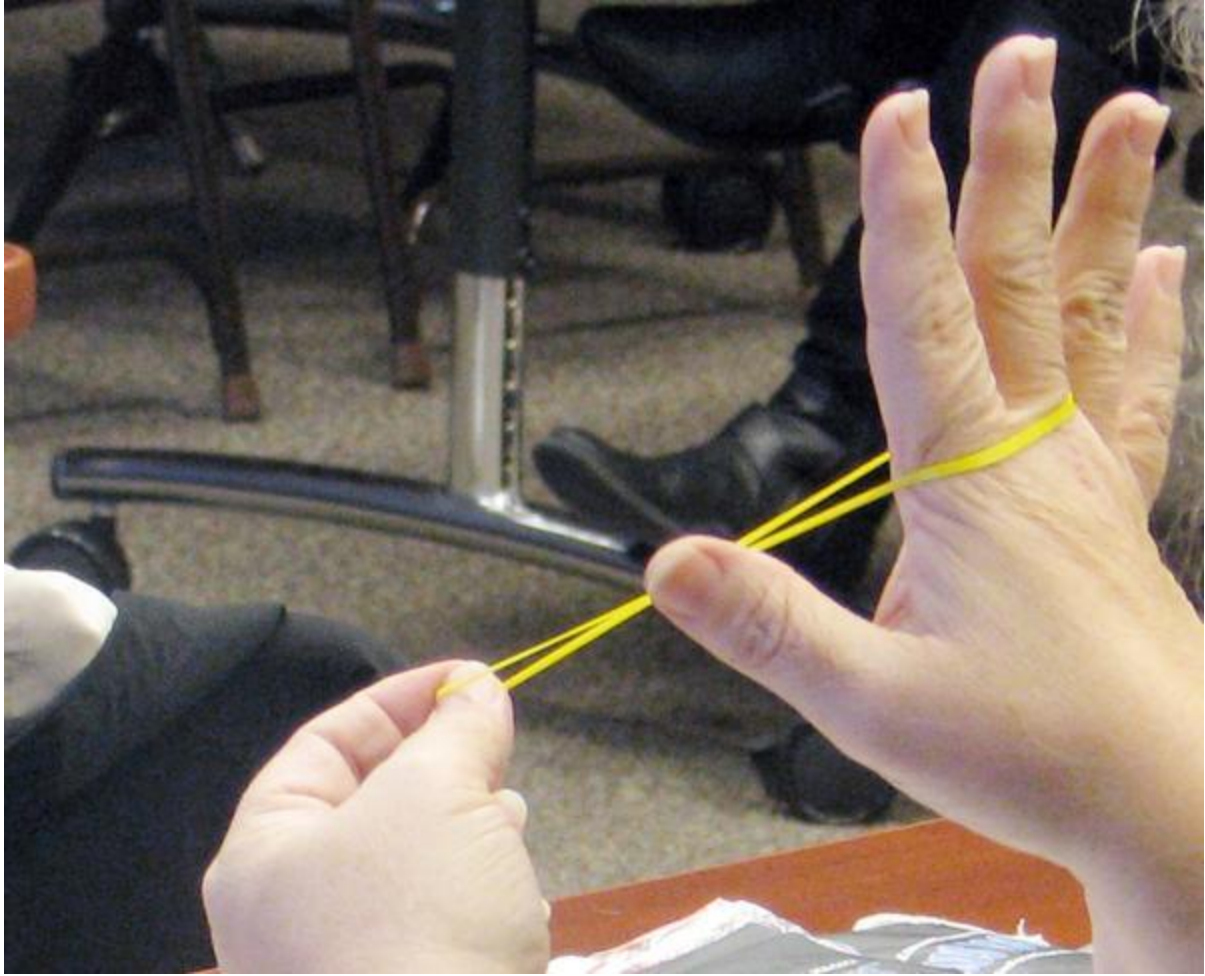
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Sylvia Stuckey, right, of J.T. Alton Middle School and Becky Signorino of Woodland Elementary School learn a magic trick Wednesday using rubber bands to later teach in their classrooms.



Kevin Spencer of Hocus Focus illustrates a magic trick Wednesday to special education teachers in Hardin County Schools to incorporate in their curriculum.



Sylvia Stuckey, a J.T. Alton Middle School teacher, learns how to do magic by using rubber bands.