

SEPTA NEWS

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE — JANE HELLBERG

Once again this year SEPTA was very fortunate to share in the profits from the district wide gift wrap fundraiser which was held this past fall. Each PTA generously gives \$750 of their school's profits to SEPTA. This is the second year SEPTA has been provided with this wonderful opportunity and we wish to extend special thanks to the PTAs in Primrose, SIS, SMS and SHS for their generosity.

At our February meeting Barry Whalen and Alethea Schepperly were joined by a panel of teachers from SIS and SMS, Ellen Paul, Robin Tepper, and Julie Kottler, to discuss transitioning between schools.

Thank you to the entire panel for the helpful information they provided to parents.

SEPTA has also been working on introducing the SPARC Kids Express program to Somers. SPARC is a not-for-profit agency which conducts an after school program called Kids Express. This program emphasizes positive social skills development. It is currently offered for grades K-5 in the Yorktown and Lakeland school districts. If all goes well, the Kids Express Program would begin in Somers in fall 2004 for grades 3-5, and would be open to all students at SIS.

In March, a tea was held for

all SEPTA presidents within the Westchester/East Putnam Region PTA. It was a wonderful opportunity to exchange information about programs and happenings in other school districts. It was also a wonderful opportunity to share our newsletter. We received rave reviews for our efforts!

Our next meeting is April 22nd. Hope to see you there. Happy spring!

Inside this issue:

Do's & Don'ts for IEPs	2
Role of Temperament . .	2
Legislation	3
Medical & Therapy News	4
Parent Prog. Summary	5
Resource List	6
Bully Proofing Steps	6

MEETING DATES

All meetings are at 7:30pm in the SIS Cafeteria

- April 22nd-C.H.I.L.D. Meeting in Scarsdale. See attached flyer.
- May TBA

MESSAGE FROM SPECIAL SERVICES

Barry J. Whalen, Director

Each year as we approach the annual review season I often hear from parents that they get very anxious. The staff and I have discussed ways to make these meetings meaningful and stress free. I would like to share the following ideas with you so you may better prepare for your child's annual review.

The annual review is a formal meeting at which parents and staff discuss the student's progress over the past school year. The parent is a very important member of this Committee and is there to learn about their child's educational growth. Therefore, it is important that you review your child's current I.E.P. and the progress reports that were sent home during

the year. As you do this formulate questions you would like to address at the meeting. If your child's special education teacher has not already contacted you, please call so you can share your questions or concerns. This will help to focus the meeting on the issues most important to you. If you have had any tests administered by someone outside the school please share it with your child's special education teacher prior to the meeting. This allows everyone an opportunity to read and digest what is in the report so it can be discussed in a meaningful manner at the annual review.

After discussion of the current school year the recommended program and ser-

vices for the following year will be discussed. Again, prior to the meeting you should discuss your thoughts with the teacher. This may relieve the anxiety some parents feel when they come to the meeting.

Finally, keep in mind that everyone at the CSE meeting has the best interest of your child in mind. Although there may be a difference of opinion on occasion in regard to certain issues or recommendations, by working cooperatively they should be able to be resolved. Our goal is to reach consensus at every meeting and by working together there is an excellent chance that we will do so.

DO'S AND DON'TS FOR IEPs Adapted from 3/94 issue of *Parents, Let's Unite for Kids*

The IEP is a valuable tool for describing your child's educational program and for keeping track of your child's progress toward individual goals. A carefully designed IEP can focus resources and clarify what should be taking place in the classroom.

At their best, IEPs are a marvelous invention and every child in school should have one. The very best IEPs should:

- ◆ Incorporate the parents' best hopes for the child
- ◆ Point toward a future of full involvement in the community
- ◆ Embody high expectations for accomplishment
- ◆ Recognize the need for individualization and accommodation

- ◆ Emphasize functional skills
- ◆ Use *people friendly* language
- ◆ Represent realistic assessment of what can be done in the course of a school year
- ◆ Be workable, usable documents that will govern classroom activities every day
- ◆ Be written as a team at the IEP meeting
- ◆ Be flexible documents that can be changed as the child changes.

A poorly written IEP can lead to vagueness in programming and a lack of accountability. Parents should watch for the following characteristics of ineffective IEPs:

- ◆ No accounting of the progress made on the current IEP
- ◆ No information about the student's current level of performance (e.g., goals should relate to the current level of performance)
- ◆ Too many goals (e.g., four or five goals are usually enough)
- ◆ Vague and immeasurable goals and objectives
- ◆ The same goals being repeated year after year
- ◆ The amounts and types of related services needed are not specified
- ◆ Goals are the same for every child in the special education class
- ◆ Goals are unrelated to academics or to functional, real life activities
- ◆ Placement determined before need is established
- ◆ Regular classroom is not offered as an option
- ◆ Goals are written for school staff rather than for the child.

The Role of Temperament in Assessment*

The first step in figuring out how to help your child is a good assessment. Assessment may include observations and records contributed by your child's teacher and pediatrician, formal testing by a psychologist or pediatric neurologist and, in some cases, a psychiatric evaluation.

All of this can provide useful and important information about factors that contribute to your child's difficulties. What's often missing, however, is an understanding of how temperament - yours as well as your child's - affects the way these factors manifest and interact in real life.

Temperament was first studied by a team of doctors from New York University who conducted the groundbreaking New York Longitudinal Study. Starting in 1956, the project followed 133 people from infancy to adulthood and identified nine fundamental traits of temperament. Stanley Turecki's book *The Difficult Child*, first published in 1985, showed how temperament affects behavior and family life. Based on the New York study, Turecki cited ten aspects of temperament: activity level, self-control, con-

centration, intensity, regularity, persistence, sensory threshold, initial response, adaptability, and predominant mood.

In my own work with families of difficult children, I also include fundamental tempo, as well as source of energy and renewal (self or others).

Similarities and differences in temperament between a child and his parents can have an enormous impact on daily life. A child with low adaptability, for example, will become upset - irrational, "locked-in" and inconsolable - when there's a sudden change of plan and what he's been expecting has to be altered or delayed. If the parent has high adaptability and a quick tempo, enjoys change and spontaneity, he won't understand the child's reaction. Suggesting wonderful alternatives or asking "why can't you just ... ?" doesn't work. As reactions bounce back and forth and gather momentum, the situation can quickly escalate into a full-scale meltdown.

Simply identifying a child's issues without placing him in the context of his family gives an incomplete picture.

What's a minor irritation in one context can be a major difficulty in another. A useful assessment must include an impartial look at everyone in the family system.

When I work with parents, the first thing I do is ask each of them to fill out a detailed questionnaire. Based on their responses, we work together to identify core issues and agree on one or two specific things to try. Parents' report on what happened when they tried this strategy provides important feedback that helps us refine our assessment.

In short, without taking into account the nature of the people involved, so many well-intended and well-conceived intervention plans just lead to frustration and disappointment! Including temperament in the assessment is a step toward making a plan that will actually help.

*For additional information, call 271-1266 or e-mail barbprobst@aol.com

LEGISLATION - Caroline Angiello, Chair

NYS Assembly Passes Timothy's Law

Albany, NY – The New York State Assembly voted on March 3rd, 2004 to end the discrimination faced by thousands of New Yorker living with mental illness and chemical dependency with their passage of Timothy's Law. The legislation sponsored by Assemblyman Paul Tonko (D-Amsterdam), Assembly Mental Health Committee Chair Peter Rivera (D-Bronx) and other members of the Assembly will allow for parity in insurance coverage for mental health and chemical dependency services.

Timothy's Law is named after Timothy O'Clair who, at the age of 12 in 2001, completed suicide. The O'Clairs spent years trying to access mental health services for their son, however

the many limitations found in health insurance coverage for individuals in need of mental health and chemical dependency services restricted access to necessary treatment.

"It is our mission to increase access to necessary mental health and chemical dependency services for both children and adults in New York state."

"I would like to thank the Assembly

for taking action on Timothy's Law," stated Tom O'Clair, the father of Timothy O'Clair. "It is our hope that the Senate recognizes the importance of this legislation as well so that New Yorkers' will receive mental health and chemical dependency insurance parity. And, more importantly, so that no other family has to endure the tragedy that ours did."

Mental health advocates have been actively working this session and are pleased with the

passage of the bill. "The Timothy's Law Coalition, representing thousands of families, providers and clients of service, remains committed to moving Timothy's Law through the legislative process," said Paige MacDonald, Timothy's Law Campaign Co-Chair and Executive Director of Families Together in New York State stated, "It is our mission to increase access to necessary mental health and chemical dependency services for both children and adults in New York state."

Timothy's Law Campaign has formed to advocate the enactment of legislation for parity in mental health and chemical dependency coverage in health insurance plans. The members of the Timothy's Law Campaign are committed to creating a future where no family will experience the frustrations or tragedies caused by discriminatory insurance practices.

The Mission of the PTA

- ☞ To support and speak on behalf of children and youth in the schools, in the community and before governmental bodies and other organizations that make decisions affecting children.
- ☞ To assist parents in developing the skills they need to raise and protect their children.
- ☞ To encourage parent and public involvement in the public schools of this nation.

NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND

The following Briefing was in the March 1, 2004 issue of *The Journal News* in the Local News section:

Senator Charles Schumer, D-NY, has said that under Presi-

dent Bush's proposed budget, the No Child Left Behind Act would be under funded by \$700,000 in Putnam County, \$8.1 million in Rockland County, and \$19.1 million in

Westchester County.

An analysis is available online at www.senate.gov/~schumer/.

Medical And Therapy News

New Research on Dyslexia by Joel Schwarz

Even though there is evidence that dyslexia has a genetic basis, researchers will report new findings today (Feb. 12) that show children afflicted with the learning disability are not doomed to a life of reading difficulties.

The brains of dyslexic children can be "jump-started" with a three-week-long instructional intervention to help them use the same brain areas as normal readers, leading to better reading ability. This intervention was developed at the University of Washington by Virginia Berninger. She and Elizabeth Aylward, both of the UW's multidisciplinary Learning Disabilities Center, will discuss their findings at a press briefing during the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in Seattle. Also participating in the briefing will be Dr. Wendy Raskind, UW professor of medicine, who will talk about genetic influences on dyslexia.

"Most people think words are just words, but the human brain uses three neural circuits to code words in three forms, not just their meaning," said Berninger, a professor of educational psychology and director of the center.

She explained that the brain codes words by their sound (or phonology), by the parts of words (or morphology) that signal meaning and grammar, and by their visual or written form (or their orthography.)

"The teaching that gave dyslexic brains the jump-start was unique in that it made every aspect of reading words explicit. It drew their attention to the sound form, the meaning form

and the written form of words, and showed how to interrelate them," Berninger said. "While many educators debate whether phonics or meaning-based instruction is more effective, we found that an effective way to treat dyslexia is to show children explicitly how letters, sounds and meaning are interrelated."

The re-

... children afflicted with [dyslexia] are not doomed to a life of reading difficulties.

searchers used functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI) to measure the impact of the intervention that emphasized these three word forms on brains of fourth through sixth grade dyslexic children.

Aylward, a UW professor of radiology, said that images of the brain regions required for reading showed areas that had been relatively inactive in dyslexics began to respond like those of normal readers following the intervention. In addition, dyslexic children's skills improved on standardized reading tests.

The researchers also unexpectedly found cross-language coding improvements. Some of the dyslexic children only received sound training, but the post-intervention imaging showed improved brain activation in areas associated with the meaning form as well as the sound form. Similarly, children given instruction in the meaning form exhibited increased brain activation in the sound form in addition to the meaning form.

"Genes and neurons constrain learning, but instruction may exert effects on specific brain functions in specific brain regions," Aylward said. Language has multiple components, each of which has a different biological basis and must be orchestrated in very precise ways in instructional interventions for students who are at-risk biologically for learning to read."

Raskin will outline the Learning Disabilities Center's effort to model the inheritance patterns and to map the location of

genes involved in dyslexia. This multi-generational study of 111 families with at least one dyslexic child involves genetic material from 898 individuals.

"While we hope to identify more locations where reputed genes for dyslexia may reside, what is exciting is that the behavioral measures used as clues to find those gene locations are yielding instructional clues for effective treatment," Raskind said.

"All of this research indicates that just because there is a genetic basis to dyslexia, it doesn't mean dyslexics can't learn to read," said Berninger. They and their teachers have to work harder, but these children's brains can function normally with extra help."

The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development is funding the research.

PARENT PROGRAMS BY NICOLE HOROWITZ

Throughout the course of our lifetime we make many transitions. Some are easy, some difficult, some are made by choice, and some are forced upon us. No matter what the case may be, transitions are, usually, faced with some degree of apprehension as we move into the unknown. There is no doubt, though, that transitions can be made smooth if we are introduced to our new place before hand and if we can find, to some degree, continuity from the old to the new. The faculty and staff in our schools understand this and have procedures in place to make the school-to-school transition as smooth as possible. Barry Whalen, Alethea Schepperly, Robin Tepper, Julie Kottler, and Ellen Paul spoke to parents at the February SEPTA meeting about the transition process.

Robin Tepper described the detailed meetings between special services, teachers and building principals regarding the different programs and a student's special needs when moving from 2nd to 3rd grade. In addition, the SIS teachers visit Primrose to see first hand what types of programs are being used during instruction time. Some of the things that are considered to make the transition from Primrose to SIS comfortable are: consistency in the language used during instruction by the classroom teachers, and continuity of curriculum so as to build upon the student's prior knowledge.

There are 2 models of inclusion classes at SIS and each grade level has two of each type. The first model is considered an inclusion class that is headed by a special education teacher who does push in programs with the special ed. students. The second model is considered resource and is headed by a mainstream teacher who is joined by a special education aid for push-in programs, in addition to the pull out math and language arts pro-

grams for special ed. students.

The model of inclusion class that is needed for a particular student is decided during the annual review, which takes place from March through May. Prior to their child's annual review, parents need to meet with the current teacher to discuss their child's needs for the following year. Should a student be placed in one model of inclusion class in 3rd grade, but ends up needing the other model, the change will be made in 4th grade.

There is no summer transition program for 2nd graders moving on to 3rd grade. However, there is a pen-pal program in which 2nd graders write to 3rd graders. This is followed by a visiting day at which the pen pals meet and the 2nd graders are given a tour of SIS.

SIS does have a summer language arts program that is not limited to special ed. students. This 4-week program concentrates on reading and writing to help 3rd and 4th graders further prepare for the 4th and 5th grades, respectively. The groups are limited to 10 students who meet for 2 1/2 hours a day. Placement into this program is by teacher recommendation only.

The transition from SIS to SMS follows a similar path. Julie Kottler described the visits SIS teachers make to the middle school to gain an understanding of their programs to ensure proper student placement. Again, there is a meeting between special services, teachers, and principals to decide if a student needs the inclusion model or the resource model of an inclusion class.

The middle school, also, offers a self-contained language arts class and a self-contained math class. With in these classes, the teachers try to match the group's needs and the way the group learns best in order to offer alternative instruction while still following the mainstream curriculum.

To meet the needs of special ed.

students each team has a special education teacher who acts as a case manager for approximately twelve students. The team teachers meet daily to discuss the needs of their students. Every other day, the special ed. teacher and students meet in the learning center, with an aid, to work on study skills, review concepts and preview concepts. In the resource room, where 5 students work with the special ed. teacher to review concepts, the level of comfort is such that students actively seek help for work that is troubling them.

Middle school students are offered even further support through social skills groups and adult mentoring programs.

SMS does offer a 3-week summer transition program for 30 children. During this time they are acclimated to following a schedule and changing classrooms and teachers for each subject. They also are introduced to the use of lockers, which seems to be their biggest fear.

In the high school, the transition is made smooth by maintaining the SMS team concept for the 9th grade students. In addition to each team having a special ed. teacher work as a case manager, there is also a guidance counselor who follows the 8th graders into 9th grade and then loops back to the middle school. After 9th grade the team concept can no longer be followed due to the number of subject areas that are added into students' schedules through electives. However, through the No Child Left Behind Act, the Education Department is moving toward requiring all special ed. teachers to specialize in a subject area.

Though transitions can be difficult, they are not inherently so. Our faculty and staff have a handle on change and are dedicated to creating a smooth progression through the grades.

OFFICERS

PRESIDENT Jane Hellberg
VICE PRESIDENT Lisa Immerblum
SECRETARY Laura Hanlon
TREASURER Katherine Realbuto

“Together we can make a difference.”

Somers Central School District

Special Services Barry Whalen
 277-3777 Alethea Schepperly
 Superintendent of Schools Dr. Joanne Marien
 248-7872
 Asst. Superintendent Mrs. Kathy Mason
 248-5531



PLEASE NOTE: The following is a compilation of resources that SEPTA members have used and found helpful. While SEPTA does not endorse any individual resource, we do hope that you find this list useful.

Educational Testers

Marta Flaum, PhD	Chappaqua	238-1438
Linda Silbert, PhD	Strong Learning Center - Mahopac	845-628-7910
	(testing, tutoring, executive skills)	
DAIC	Developmental Assessment & Resource Center	
	Dr. Risa Tabacoff	666-7687

Social Workers

Laura Hanlon	Somers	588-3870
Barbara Probst	Croton	271-1266

Books

Ayres, A., Jean, et. al.	<i>Sensory Integration and the Child</i>
Fisher, Gary L., et. al.	<i>The Survival Guide for Kids with LD</i>
Fisher, Gary L., et. al.	<i>When Your Child has LD: A Survival Guide for Parents of a Child with a Disability</i>
Gill, Barbara	<i>Changed by a Child: Companion Notes for Parents of a Child with a Disability</i>
Grandin, Temple	<i>Emergence: Labeled Autistic</i>

Story Books For School-Aged Children

Betancourt, Jeanne	<i>My Name is Brain</i>
Griffith, Joe	<i>How Dyslexic Benny Became a Star: A Story of Hope for Dyslexic Children and their Parents</i>
Janover, Caroline	<i>Josh: A Boy with Dyslexia</i>
Janover, Caroline	<i>Zipper: The Kid with ADHD</i>
O'Shaudgnessy, Ellen	<i>My Brother Sammy (Older Brother of an Autistic Child)</i>
Smith, Mark	<i>Pay Attention, Slosh</i>

* This is only a partial list and will be changed in each issue of the newsletter. For a complete list, please see our website.

HOW TO HELP: STEPS TO BULLY-PROOF YOUR CHILD*

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Let the school know your safety worries immediately. ◆ Keep a record of time, date, names, and circumstances to show a pattern of harassment. ◆ Urge your school to adopt a clear conduct code that enforces strict penalties for students who break the rules against bullying. ◆ Teach your child self-respect: confident kids are less likely to become a victim. ◆ Let your child know it is OK to express anger if done appropriately. ◆ Encourage friendships: there is strength in numbers. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Build social skills early. ◆ Help shy kids with social skills training: role play situations that have occurred previously. ◆ Explain the difference between telling and tattling: tattling is when you report something just to get someone in trouble. Telling is when you report that you or someone else is in danger. ◆ Stress the importance of body language: a "victim stance" may attract bullies. ◆ Teach your child effective skills for making friends. ◆ Don't advise either ignoring or physically attacking the bully. | <p style="text-align: center;">If your child Bullies Others</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Evaluate whether the behavior might be modeled from parents; of if bullying of a younger sibling is being tolerated. ◆ Do not use physical punishment for discipline. That encourages a child to humiliate or hurt others. ◆ Provide as much adult supervision as possible, ◆ Put an immediate stop to any bullying your observe. ◆ Emphasize praise and positive feedback. <p style="font-size: small;">*Source: Adapted from <i>USA Today</i>, January 4, 1995</p> |
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