

SEPTA NEWS



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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Jane Hellberg

It has been a busy year for SEPTA. Meetings this year have offered parents the opportunity to discuss and learn about what makes a good IEP, how to make the most of your annual reviews, transition planning for students after high school, good nutrition tips, and executive skills. There have been two newsletters, lots of informative emails, and Coffee & Conversation groups with Shelley and Anna.

For many of us, SEPTA is an essential network of parents, teachers, and administrators which enables many of us to stay connected—to one another as well as to the school community. It provides an opportunity to discuss special education topics, make a friend, be a friend, and

benefit from all the collective knowledge that we, as busy parents, have picked up along the way

SEPTA is a volunteer organization and the time to volunteer for next year is now. If SEPTA is to continue as a PTA, it needs leadership for next year. Without leadership for next year, SEPTA will not be able to continue working for us all.

If you are interested in becoming a leader in SEPTA for the next school year or in participating in any of the various committees, please contact Jane Hellberg at 245-0358 or janehellberg@aol.com.

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MESSAGE from SHELLEY FLEISCHMANN, *Director of Special Services*

What Parents Can Do to Prepare for Annual Reviews

The annual review is a formal meeting at which parents and staff discuss your child's progress over the past school year. Parents are very important members of the Committee on Special Education and are there to learn about their child's educational growth. It is important to review your child's current IEP and the IEP 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 him or her so that you can share your questions or concerns. This will help us to focus the meeting on the issues that are most important to you.

If you have had any test administered by someone outside the school, please share it with your child's special education teacher prior to

to the meeting. This allows everyone the opportunity to read and digest what is in the report so that it can be discussed in a meaningful manner at the annual review meeting. After discussion of the current school year, the recommended program and services for the following year will be discussed.

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 with 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.

IMPORTANT DATES

- 🕒 SEPTA MEETING: Tuesday, May 22, 7:30PM, SIS Library, Topic TBA
- 🕒 CANCELLED: April 25th Coffee and Conversation with Shelley and Anna

LEGISLATION

Congress Cuts Student Loan Interest Rates — From *PTA.org, This Week in Washington, January 23, 2007*

On Tuesday, January 16, the House adopted legislation that cuts student loan interest rates by half for students from low-income families. This legislation, the College Student Relief Act of 2007 ([H.R. 5](#)), also reauthorizes portions of the Higher Education Act, which had been scheduled for full reauthorization in 2005. The bill now goes to the Senate for consideration.

If enacted, the bill, adopted by an overwhelming majority in the House, will cut the interest rate on subsidized [Stafford loans](#) for undergraduates from 6.8 percent to 3.4 percent by 2011. Stafford loans are need-based student loans from the federal government. Interest that accrues on these loans while the student is in school (at least half-time) is paid by the federal government on the student's behalf. The estimated \$6 billion cost of the plan to cut the interest rate will be offset by reducing federal subsidies for lenders.

Stafford loans are one of several forms of federal aid for postsecondary education. For more information on the different forms of federal aid, visit the [Free Application for Federal Student Aid website](#).

PTA applauds the House for adopting this important legislation and hopes this legislation will make college more accessible to all students. Making sure college is affordable for every student is vital to keeping our postsecondary schools diverse and able to attract the best and the brightest.

TO SOME AUTISM RESEARCHERS, HEAD SIZE MATTERS

HONOLULU ADVERTISER

SAN FRANCISCO, Dec. 21, 2006 (UPI) —

Large brain volumes and craniums appear to be a family trait in about one of every five children with autism, one team reported in a study published in the Archives of General Psychiatry.

In another investigation, scientists who measured the head circumference of children at birth and then two or three years later found as newborns, nearly all of the youngsters later diagnosed with autism had abnormally small heads that, in 90 percent of the cases, swelled to unusual proportions by toddlerhood.

"The clinical onset of autism appears to be preceded by two phases of brain growth abnormality: a reduced head size at birth, and a sudden and excessive increase in head size between 1 to 2 months and 6 to 14 months," the researchers noted. The accelerated growth crams into a short time span an inordinately intricate and immensely important process of nerve-cell connections that typically takes many years.

In a healthy child, during this "period of plasticity," the brain gradually adjusts, adapts, assimilates and acclimates to its environment, emerging as the body's most exquisitely complex organ. In autism, this stage is fast-forwarded, spinning what should be a meticulously ordered progression in brain development into a frenzied jumble of "neural noise," researchers said.

Overwhelmed by the whirlwind of rapidly changing aberrant nerve pair-ups, the infant loses the ability to make sense of his world and withdraws, the scientists theorized. By the time the tot enters preschool age, the window of opportunity for making the right connections with the external world has passed, leaving the child bewildered by his seemingly senseless surroundings, scientists said. "Abnormally accelerated rate of growth may serve as an early warning signal of risk for autism," the study authors concluded.

If corroborated, the findings of head size as an indicator of autism could lead to very early diagnosis and effective biological treatment, or even prevention, of the disorder in certain cases, the researchers said. Support for the findings has come from several other investigative teams.

One group observed that, in general, children with autism show a brain enlargement by age 2. In the study, the researchers from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Duke University medical schools compared magnetic resonance imaging scans of the brain anatomy of 51 autistic toddlers ages 18 months to 35 months to those of 25 tykes without the disorder. They also took a look at head measurements of 113 youngsters with autism and 189 without taken during the first three years of life. Normal at birth, the head sizes of the children later diagnosed with autism began to balloon at around 12 months.

The scientists left open the question of why the roughly 5 percent greater-than-typical brain spread occurs and exactly what it means. However, they noted, indirect evidence suggests the growth spurt likely begins during the later months of a baby's first year of life, meaning it might be used as an early indicator of the disorder.

GIRLS AND ADHD: ARE YOU MISSING THE SIGNS?

SCHOLASTIC NEWS (NY), MARCH 1, 2007

When you think ADHD, do you think boy? You're not alone. Boys are three times more likely to be diagnosed with ADHD, even though they're no more likely to have it. Too many young girls are not getting the help they need.

By Caralee Adams

That's why teachers are so important. When it comes to learning disabilities, teachers are right there on the front line. We're often the first to spot a child's difficulties and to bring it to the attention of parents and specialists. It's important that we know the different ways ADHD may manifest in our girl students and the reasons we may miss it.

Alarming, some studies estimate that as many as 50% to 75% of girls with ADHD are missed. Worse, girls with ADHD are diagnosed on average five years later than boys—boys at age 7, girls at age 12. Five crucial years girls could be getting help are lost.

"ADHD is not gender-linked," says Dr. Patricia Quinn, director of the Center for Gender Issues and ADHD and an expert on ADHD in girls. Recent data shows medication for ADHD is dispensed equally to men and women. It follows that if adults are experiencing the disorder in equal numbers, children might too.

"The diagnosis should be 50-50 between boys and girls," says Quinn. So the big question is, why isn't it?

One major reason is that girls' symptoms manifest differently. "ADHD doesn't show up in the same ways in girls," says Kathleen Nadeau, a clinical psychologist in Silver Spring, Maryland, and coauthor of *Understanding Girls with AD/HD*. For instance, girls are much less likely to display hyperactive or impulsive symptoms. Instead, they may just appear "spacey," unfocused, or inattentive. Or they may have trouble staying organized or remembering directions or homework.

But even when these symptoms are clearly present, ADHD may be missed. Nadeau puts it bluntly, "Girls are less likely to be referred because they cause fewer problems in the classroom." Socialized to please their teachers and parents, girls can be very good at compensating for the disorder, making it much harder to spot. When teachers do see it, says Nadeau, "[girls'] behavior is often misunderstood as immaturity or lack of academic ability rather than as ADHD."

As educators, we need to be informed and aware. School is the number one place where ADHD gets identified, says Mohab Hanna, child and adolescent psychiatrist and author of *Making the Connection: A Parent's Guide to Medication in ADHD*. "This is the context where it gets magnified. Teachers interact with kids academically and see how they do socially. A lot of parents don't know what's normal."

So, what are the signs of ADHD in girls? Here are some of the cues you can look for and some simple ways to help.

Sign #1: Nonstop Talking

Do you have a student who's always talking with her friends? It may not be that she's a social butterfly, she may have ADHD. This student may keep talking "accidentally" after being asked to stop, even though she doesn't mean to be defiant, says Nadeau. A girl with ADHD may also interrupt impulsively when you're leading the class. While a boy might leave his seat continually, many girls with ADHD express their restlessness verbally.

What you can do: Try seating your student near the front of the class and away from other talkative students. Throughout your lesson, pause periodically and ask students to buddy-share—exchange ideas, compare strategies. This is beneficial to all, but will particularly help your student with ADHD by giving her an acceptable outlet for talk. You might also try giving her a task such as handing out papers to help refocus her energy.

Sign #2: Friendship Troubles

Does your student barge into a group and, more often than not, find herself unwelcome? Sadly, girls with ADHD tend to struggle to fit in with their peers. "They can be talkative and outgoing, but by the end of the week, they may not have many friends because they got too bossy or interrupted too much," Nadeau says. A girl with ADHD may be slow to pick up on social cues and may even be verbally aggressive when she feels frustrated. Conversely, boys with ADHD are less likely to suffer peer rejection. The rules for boys' play are less stringent; their games are more physical. But for girls with ADHD—if they don't receive help and guidance—self-esteem can take a pummeling.

What you can do: Recognize that a girl with ADHD often needs help negotiating her relationships with peers. Be patient with her and—without making this student your focus—encourage your class to be patient and generous with other children's differences. Teaching social conventions explicitly—how to join a group in play or how to give a compliment—can make a world of difference. Calmly explain social conventions to her and give her an opportunity to practice. Lastly, "make your classroom feel like a safe place to make mistakes," suggests Nadeau. Understanding goes a long way.

Sign #3: Difficulty Paying Attention

It's tempting to describe the girl who fiddles with her crayons while you're explaining fractions, then quickly says, "I don't get it" as ditzy—a word that somehow seldom gets attached to boys. But trouble listening can be a symptom of ADHD. This girl may have difficulty listening and retaining multistep directions, says Nadeau. Finding it hard to stay tuned in when the teacher is talking for several minutes at a time is often a sign of the disorder.

What you can do: Try involving her in your lessons so those crayons aren't so alluring. Ask her to pass you a manipulative, for example, or keep time during round robin reading. You might also lecture for five or ten minutes at a time rather than 20. Again, it's important to model focused attention to the entire class, not just your ADHD students. Ask kids what someone who's paying attention looks like (shoulders squared, eyes on speaker, hands folded on desk, quiet). Then practice the behavior as a class.

When an ADHD student does drift off, draw her back in without reproach. Quinn suggests having a signal, such as a secret word, that you say as a cue to tune in.

Sign #4: Exceptional Messiness

While girls with ADHD are far less likely than boys to be disruptive in class, they are just as likely to have organizational problems. A very visible sign of a girl struggling with ADHD may be her disorganized desk or backpack. She may also have issues with homework and classroom rou-

GIRLS AND ADHD: ARE YOU MISSING THE SIGNS?

(Continued from page 3)

tine—i.e., she's not able to keep her papers in order or find a pencil when needed. While all kids can be sloppy at times, the frequency and degree may be a clue.

What you can do: A first step is to reduce the papers shuffling back and forth between school and home. An easy way to do this is to post your homework assignments and newsletters online (www.scholastic.com offers free homepages to teachers). Next, reconsider your assignments. Is your ecosystems poster project putting more emphasis on neat execution than on swamps and deserts? Offer students the opportunity to present what they've learned in different ways, whether it's a typed report or a skit.

Sign #5: Unfinished Work

Since girls may try hard to mask their disorder, teachers don't always realize how much they are struggling to finish assignments. They may appear shy and studious in the classroom and don't often stand out to teachers. Take note of girls who consistently fail to finish classroom assignments or tests in the allotted time even though they seem to know the material.

What you can do: Help break down work into smaller tasks to address sequencing problems. For students who are slow at processing, cut back on the number of questions or assigned problems. Ask yourself how many problems really need to be done to practice the learned skill. Since ADHD students can be inconsistent with their performance, it may be appropriate to allow them to retake tests now and then.

Sign #6: Emotionality

So, you have a student who bursts into tears at the slightest reproach or turns into a ball of fury when play doesn't go her way. You think "Hannah's so sensitive," but it might be more than that. If she has ADHD, her impulsivity might make it hard for her to control her emotions. At the same time, compensating for ADHD in the classroom and on the playground is exhausting and may leave her depleted and vulnerable. We all want approval and success, and when it's hard to come by, the tears may seem to flow over the smallest incidents.

What you can do: Do what you can to help her feel like an important member of the class. Share with her some calming techniques that will help her regain control—e.g., breathing deeply, thinking positive thoughts, counting. Insist that all your students treat one another's feelings respectfully (even when a child seems to have too many).

As you read through these signs, did you find yourself thinking, "Oh my, this is so-and-so in my class?" If so, now is the time to initiate a conversation with her parents. Ask them what they are seeing at home and perhaps follow up with your school psychologist. You could be the one who helps her find the school success she deserves.

HELPING YOUR CHILD COPE WITH A LEARNING DISABILITY

PARENTS AND KIDS MAGAZINE (MA), FEBRUARY 20, 2007

(Response to a reader who had concerns about maintaining the self-esteem of her daughter, who had learning disabilities.)

You are right on the mark realizing that it is important for your daughter to maintain her self-esteem, which is strongly linked with social and academic success. The following suggestions may help her maintain and bolster positive feelings:

Teach your daughter about her learning disability, also known as a learning difference or learning style. Tell her that people with learning differences are smart and (exist) in every community. She, like so many other people with learning disabilities, is intelligent and will undoubtedly be successful through life.

Help her identify her strengths and weaknesses. When children understand their learning strengths and weaknesses- and ultimately how they learn best – they can be good advocates for themselves in school. You can help your child become a strong advocate by role-playing. Pretend you are the teacher and have your daughter communicate how she feels. For example, "Ms. Jones, I have a hard time with multiple choice questions but if you and I were to chat about the questions I'd feel more confident and could show you that I know about the Revolutionary War." I tell children from a very young age before an assessment that we're going to discover the best way to learn so we can tell teachers the best way to teach you.

Accept her and she'll accept herself. Highlight your daughter's strengths and accept her as she is and you will help her feel special and appreciated. Focus on what she likes to do. Praise her for the strong effort she makes en route to getting a job or school project accomplished. Show your pride. Her self-esteem will go way up. You will further empower her by letting her make decisions and solve her own problems when appropriate.

Be an active listener. Hear your child without interrupting. Listen without doing a side task. Maintain eye contact and nod slightly from time to time as you listen. In this way you acknowledge her feelings without being judgmental. You will hear both positive and negative thoughts and feelings, and she will get the message that every feeling is valid and every contribution valuable.

SCHOOLS GETTING TOUGHER ON INTERNET BULLIES

FLORIDA TODAY, MARCH 4, 2007

They're called the "plugged-in" generation for their tech-savvy skills and addiction to everything cyber.

But research shows no matter what their preference — MySpace or YouTube, chat rooms or blogs — the majority of today's teenagers are plugged into potential dangers.

"There's more dangers coming from in here than from outside the door now," said Jesus Martinez, resource officer at West Shore Jr./Sr. High School in Melbourne, Fla., as he tapped a computer monitor. "When students go online, they're open to the world."

According to i-SAFE Inc., a nonprofit organization that aims to educate students, parents and community members about online dangers and Internet safety, more and more students nationwide are engaging in high-risk behavior online, including cyber bullying — a growing trend.

The recent videotaped beating of a 12-year-old Melbourne, Fla., girl that was posted on the Web is the latest — and maybe most gruesome — example of just how bad the problem has become.

Last year, i-SAFE, a California-based organization that is funded primarily through the U.S. Department of Defense, surveyed 170,000 school-age children and found:

Nearly two-thirds of high school students admit to unsafe, inappropriate or illegal activities online.

Half of high school students "talk" in chat rooms or use instant messaging with Internet strangers, and one in five met face to face with someone they first made contact with on the Internet.

About 50 percent of high school students have posted personal information on their Web pages — such as name, age or address — that could help a stranger identify or locate them.

About 40 percent of students in grades 4 through 8 have been bullied online, and 35 percent have been threatened online.

"What we've taught students in the real world — to not talk to strangers, to be kind and respectful to people — is not translating to the Internet world," said Ann Kirn, professional development manager who oversees i-SAFE programs in 12 states, including Florida.

Principals and teachers say students' online activities at night have worked their way into the school day, causing disputes between students and disruptions in the classroom.

Terry Humphrey, principal of Astronaut High School in Titusville, Fla., said the anonymity of blogs and chat rooms has allowed students to feel freer to gossip, make threats and spread rumors about each other. The results: a sense of fear and intimidation among victims who cannot identify their attackers.

"It doesn't come into the classrooms directly, but students come in with the baggage of what happened the night before; they're upset with each other, they're angry, and then it begins to affect school," Humphrey said.

Other school officials say the effects of social networking sites have cut even deeper, causing some students to miss school and others to become withdrawn, depressed and even suicidal.

"It's something that's affecting everyone, every family. It doesn't matter what economic background you are or what age group you are, it's a new arena and it's affecting everyone. The only way to fight it is through education," said Martinez.

That's a sentiment shared by i-SAFE's Kirn, who said students can't be expected to know the rules of the Web without guidance from adults.

"We need to provide them the tools, just as we do when they're learning to drive and getting their license," she said. "They need to be taught appropriate, safe and fair use of the Internet."

CYBER BULLYING

In the 2003-04 school year, i-SAFE America surveyed 1,500 students in grades 4 through 8 from across the nation on "cyber bullying." Here are some of the results:

- ❖ 42 percent of kids have been bullied while online.
- ❖ 35 percent of kids have been threatened online.
- ❖ 21 percent of kids have received mean or threatening e-mail or other messages.
- ❖ 58 percent of kids admit someone has said mean or hurtful things to them online.
- ❖ 53 percent of kids admit having said something mean or hurtful to another person online.
- ❖ 58 percent have not told their parents or an adult about something mean or hurtful that happened to them online.
- ❖ If you encounter cyber bullying:
- ❖ Tell a trusted adult and keep telling him until he takes action.
- ❖ Never open, read or respond to messages from cyber bullies.
- ❖ If it is school-related, tell your school. All schools have bullying solutions.
- ❖ Don't erase the messages. They may be needed to take action.
- ❖ If bullied through chat or IM, the bully can often be blocked.
- ❖ If you are threatened with harm, call the police.

SOMERS SPECIAL EDUCATION PTA**OFFICERS**

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“Together We Can Make A Difference”

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.

What is a CSE Parent Member?

During the course of the year, SEPTA has received a number of inquiries about the purpose and function of CSE Parent Members. We have decided to provide the overview below, to clarify the role of this important CSE member.

The Committee on Special Education (CSE) meets to discuss whether or not a student is eligible to be classified to receive special education services for the school year.

The members of a CSE (Committee on Special Education) include:

- You, the parent or guardian of the student
- A school psychologist
- Your child's regular education teacher
- Your child's special education teacher or service provider

A parent member

At the discretion of you or the district, other individuals who have knowledge or expertise regarding the student
The student, when appropriate

An individual who can interpret the instructional implications of evaluation results (who may be one of the district personnel indicated above)

If you wish the physician member to attend, you must make your request, in writing, at least 72 hours prior to the meeting.

In both the CPSE (Committee on Preschool Special Education) and CSE processes, a parent/guardian is notified by mail of the date, time, and location of the meeting. The letter will also contain information about who is expected to attend the meeting. Parents may choose to bring anyone they wish to the meeting. As with the CPSE meetings, there is a volunteer parent who serves as a **parent member**.

A **parent member** has a child who is currently receiving special education services. Parents who agree to become parent members are appointed by the Board of Education for one year. A parent may continue to act as a parent member for five years after their child has completed school. A parent member is always invited to a full CSE meeting (initial meeting) and to a meeting which may recommend a more restrictive environment for the student. Parent members may perform a variety of services at a meeting. They may listen, take notes, make suggestions or help the parent at the parent's request. If you do not wish the parent member to attend the meeting, you may request, in writing, that the parent member not attend.