

SEPTA NEWS

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EDITOR: NICOLE HOROWITZ

WHO WE ARE

The Special Education PTA (SEPTA) is a Somers Central School District parent/teacher organization whose scope and membership represents children in all four district schools, as well as, pre-school children and Somers children educated out-of-district. We work with the other Somers PTAs, and with other regional resources in an effort to develop a better awareness of the unique learning needs of all children. We are also a member of the National PTA.

SEPTA's goals are to secure the appropriate academic, physical,

emotional, and social education for our children. SEPTA meetings provide parents with a wonderful opportunity to network, listen to speakers, and keep

informed on local, state, and national levels.

OUR FUNDRAISERS

SEPTA's major fundraisers are the Holiday Happiness Plant Sale and the Holiday Gift Wrap. In recent years, funds have provided Books on Tape to SMS, occupational therapy

equipment to Primrose and ISIS, and Earobics (a speech and language program) to Primrose. We are also pleased to have provided ongoing funding for a social skills group, called *The Friendship Club*, at SIS.

Our future funding goals include enhancing the special education section in the Somers Public Library, bringing quality speakers to SEPTA meetings, and supporting enrichment programs for our children.

MEMBERSHIP

SEPTA's major source of income comes from the membership dues. SEPTA's services are available to all Somers parents, but without the money generated from the membership dues and the fund-

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MEETING DATES

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

- January 15th
- February 26th
- March 25th
- April 22nd
- May TBA

WHO WE ARE (CON'T)

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raisers, we would not be able to provide the services we have.

We encourage you to join SEPTA, even if you already are a member of another Somers PTA. SEPTA is not limited to a specific school, but instead covers all the schools in Somers.

The membership dues for one year are \$8.00. If you would like to join, you can do so at any SEPTA or PTA meeting.

For more information about membership and about SEPTA in general, contact one of the SEPTA officers listed below.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE BY JANE HELLBERG

Welcome to the first issue of the Somers Special Education PTA's newsletter, SEPTA News. We hope this is the first of many interesting and informative issues.

Our PTA community is comprised of parents, teachers, and administrators and our focus is on special education. Our goals are to create a

newsletter which provides SEPTA members with information they may need to better advocate for their child and to offer busy parents another way to stay connected to the SEPTA community. SEPTA offers parents the unique opportunity to work and learn together and to offer each other help and support.

In this issue you will find information about who we are, what is happening in our district, as well as what we have contributed and what we hope to contribute to the Somers schools.

We hope you enjoy this issue and look forward to seeing you at our January meeting.

MESSAGE FROM SPECIAL SERVICES

As I am writing this report the first quarter of the school year is rapidly approaching an end. The year so far has been very busy in the Special Services office as we work to comply with new state directives and establish our own initiatives to enable us to continue to adapt to the needs of our students in a constantly changing and challenging educational environment.

One of our initiatives this year involves the development of a

cohesive plan, K-12, in the use of technology as a support for our students. A committee representing staff from each of the buildings, as well as, district technology personnel has begun this process. We are also reviewing special needs students' performance in regard to the new standards and are analyzing data from their tests that will help the teachers as they work with them. The development of new programs in response to changing demograph-

ics and student profiles is also being discussed.

I look forward to our SEPTA meetings and sharing new ideas and events as they unfold. As always I want to keep the lines of communication open as we work cooperatively in the best interests of your children.

Barry J. Whalen
Director of Special Services

LEGISLATION - Caroline Angiello

Parents of children with special educational needs often require help understanding the nature and scope of their child's learning, social and/ or emotional issues.

Many parents have reported that they have benefited by being a member of a parent support group. They say that they have been assisted in many ways and have found that they have decreased stress, an increased ability to cope and better skills with which to support their child.

SEPTA, (Special Education Parent Teachers Association) recognizes the value of such support programs

and is strongly committed to the ideal of partnering with families and schools in serving children with different needs. SEPTA can provide valuable information regarding specific disabilities, federal and state special education laws, transition

programs, and important resources in which to en-

able children to become more successful in the learning environment.

Additionally, by being a member of SEPTA, parents, teachers and administrators have an opportunity to have an important voice in influenc-

ing state and national special education policy. Also, because SEPTA is a national organization, members have the opportunity to network with counterparts throughout the rest of New York State as well as the rest of the country.

To assist you in addressing the issues that may be important to your child visit yellowpagesforkids.com. This website was built by *Wrightslaw* and includes many different resources — government programs, grassroots organizations, and support groups. You will also find evaluators, therapists, tutors, special ed schools, and parent support groups.

For parent resources visit:
www.yellowpagesforkids.com

The Somers SEPTA HOLIDAY PLANT SALE

Forgot to order your holiday plants? Not to worry — The following items will be available during the Holiday Happiness Craft Fair at Primrose, on Saturday, December 6th, from 10am-3pm.:

- 16" Wreath w/bow - \$15.00 each
- Poinsettia (6" pot) - \$10.00 each
(or two for \$18.00)
- Christmas Cactus - \$10.00 each
(Assorted Colors — 6"pot)

Brand New This Year

- White Pine Toping (30ft) - \$18.00
- Mixed Candle Ring w/Conges - \$18.00
(12" ring of Nobel fir, incense cedar and Oregon berryed juniper.)
(Candle included)

EDUCATION LAW INFORMATION

from the 5/03 issue of *fast Facts*, the N Y state PTA's newsletter

Maybe you've heard of the *No Child Left Behind Act* or the *Secondary Education Act*, but do you know how they relate to you and your child's education?

If you're not sure, the National PTA has a new brochure that can help you. *An Overview of the New Education Law* provides basic information regarding the law, as well

as, relevant topics for parents and their involvement in their child's education.

To view this new brochure on the National PTA's website go to www.pta.org/ptawashington/issues/overview_03.pdf. Or visit their website at www.pta.org to

find other resources on the law.

The National PTA has available three resources regarding the law.

Medical And Therapy News

Timothy's Law by Caroline Angiello

Bill Numbers Assembly 8301 (Passed) and Senate 5329

Parents who have children with severe mental illness are often faced with difficult challenges. Parents may need to refer to mental health experts for assistance because of the nature of their child's illness.

According to the National Institute of Mental Health 1 in 5 children have behavioral, emotional, or mental, health problems

Currently, many private health insurance plans provide a lower level of coverage for mental health and chemical dependency services than for physical medical services.

Thousands of parents have relinquished custody of their children to the state to secure publicly funded services when their private health insurance has run out, in fear that without adequate coverage, their child may be violent or suicidal.

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, one in five children has behavioral, emotional or mental health problems. Without

adequate mental health services, these problems may result in school failure, alcohol or substance abuse, family problems, violence or even suicide.

Mental health treatment has improved dramatically in recent years and most mental illnesses are as treatable as general medical conditions.

Some say that equal mental health benefits are too expensive. A recent actuarial study conducted by Price Waterhouse Coopers estimates that the price for parity is estimated at only \$1.26 more per month for full coverage. Furthermore, a recent Zogby poll showed that 81% of New Yorkers said that they are willing to pay the estimated \$1.26 more per month for full coverage.

Timothy's Law is a parity bill introduced last session. The bill is named after a 12-year-old boy named Timothy O'Clair who hanged

himself in his bedroom closet on March 16, 2001.

Timothy's Law would require private health insurance companies to provide the same level of coverage for mental health and chemical dependency care that they provide for physical health care.

You can help to encourage lawmakers to make Timothy's Law a priority this year by contacting New York State Senate Majority Leader Joseph Bruno today:

Telephone: (518) 455-3191
Email: BRUNO@senate.state.ny.us

Tell him you support Timothy's Law and urge him to support Timothy's Law and ask him to help pass it this year!

For more information please contact www.timothyslaw.org

Parent Group by Barbara Probst

"This isn't the child I dreamed of raising ..."

For many of us, the dream of raising a child didn't turn out the way we imagined.

If your child has physical, social, emotional, behavioral or educational difficulties, meeting with others who face similar issues and

are struggling with similar feelings can be a tremendous support.

Six-session parent support groups, led by an experienced clinical social worker, are held on Saturday mornings in Somers. The group includes practical information as well as open exchange. One or both par-

ents may attend.

For information or registration, call 914.271.1266 or email barbprobst@aol.com.

FEATURE ARTICLE

Eye on Special Education by Stephanie Fehr, Sp. Ed. Chair, New York State PTA

Adapted From: *New York Parent Teacher* magazine October, 2002

SAT FLAGS

Flagging on the SAT and other standardized assessments was slated to end this past September. Advocates for disabled students have long denounced flagging as stigmatizing and discriminatory. Now, colleges will have no way of knowing if a student is using extended time or needed the schedule adjusted because they could not attend the Saturday testing. An additional writing assessment section will be added to the SAT's. Diagnosed disabled students need to be sure they will continue to receive proper accommodations when they register for these tests.

ACADEMIC INTERVENTION SERVICES

Academic Intervention Services (AIS), determined by the level scored on New York State assessments, must be provided to all designated students including Special Education students. When a student is assessed in 4th and 8th grades and already receives support services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the goals and skills listed on the Individual Education Plan (IEP) are usually accomplished in a Resource Room. But, AIS skills must be reinforced through the regular education staff in special AIS classes or by individual assistance for the student. Once the higher level (levels 3 and 4) is achieved, a student may be removed from the AIS only by the regular education departments. Parents should check to see that a classified student who needs AIS is receiving those services.

SPECIAL ED COMMISSION

The President's Commission on Excellence for Special Education finished a yearlong study and turned in its report to President Bush and Congress. Major findings included:

1. Currently the process takes precedence over results and bureaucratic compliance over student achievement.
2. The current system uses an antiquated model that waits for a child

to fail rather than using a model based on prevention and intervention.

3. Educators and policy-makers think of general education and special education as two separate systems.
4. When a child fails to make progress, parents have inadequate options and little recourse.
5. A culture of compliance has developed from the pressures of litigation.
6. Current identification methods lack validity, hence many students are misidentified, not identified, or not identified early enough.
7. Teachers need and want better preparation, support, and professional development.
8. Special education research needs enhanced rigor and long-term coordination.
9. The current system fails many children with disabilities. Too few graduate from high school or transition to full employment or post-secondary opportunities, despite the transition service provisions in the current IDEA.
10. Costs of special education services and programs are increasing but full funding, as designated by IDEA, has never been implemented.

Recommendations

There were three major recommendations from the report:

1. Focus on results not on process; raise expectations for student results instead of driving the system with process, litigation, regulation, and confrontation.
2. Embrace a model of prevention, not a model of failure; move toward early identification and shift intervention with scientifically based instruction and teaching methods.
3. Consider children with disabilities as general education children first. Share responsibility for students with disabilities; work toward inclusion rather than separation or isolating

students. Congress should provide full funding for all education programs, including special education.

New York's State Education Department has begun to implement these recommendations. But it is not complete. In raising the standards, assessments, and Regents exams for all students, special education students are placed in more general education classes rather than in separate programs. More special education students are taking and passing the assessments and Regents exams. The safety net has been extended until 2004 to ensure that students have an equal opportunity to pass the exams. The early intervention programs in reading and math encourage identification of those with special needs so that support services can be implemented earlier. Parent involvement is increasing for special education issues through the continuous improvement plan and implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).

What can you do?

You can be involved in your child's school and PTA. Network with other parents. Become knowledgeable about IDEA regulations and follow your due process rights. Support all teachers, regular and special ed. in helping children to succeed.

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, section #504 will be coming up for review and reauthorization in 2003. Section #504 is used in elementary, secondary and higher education systems and in the work world to assure equal access to programs and services. Learn about the recommendations, contact your legislators, and be involved in the process.

DYSLEXIA RESEARCH

Recent research found dyslexic children were less able to detect beats in sounds with a strong rhythm. This can influence the way children assimilate speech patterns, and may affect their reading and writing abilities. This research, although inconclusive, indicated that a common cause of dyslexia may be a family history of low blood pressure.

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 Shepperly
 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.

Auditory Processing Testing

Robin Zenchek Carmel 845-878-9078

Child Psychiatrists

Dr. Boris Rubinstein Hastings-on-Hudson 478-1330

Child Psychologists

Marta Flaum, PhD Chappaqua 238-1438

Educational Testers

Marta Flaum, PhD Chappaqua 238-1438
 Linda Silbert, PhD Strong Learning Center - Mahopac 845-628-7910
 (testing, tutoring, executive skills)

Eye Therapy

Dr. Robert Byne Optometrist - Mahopac 845-628-8363

Videos

The FAT City Workshop Tapes available through Westchester Library system
 Videos: Dr. Richard Lavoie *How Difficult Can This Be?*
Last One Picked, First One Picked On
When The Chips are Down

Websites

www.addwarehouse.com Purchase publications about LDs
 www.chadd.org CHADD Website
 Www.help4adhd.org CHADD National Resource Center
 www.ldonline.org Learning Disabilities Information

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

SPECIAL EDUCATION PARENT'S CAN DO LIST

- ◆ Learn the meaning of the New York State Regulations on Special Education Rights for your child;
- ◆ Assist your child in being a self-advocate in school and in the community;
- ◆ Work with other parents to ensure that IDEA, the Rehabilitation Act, especially Section #504, and the American Disabilities Act (ADA) remain viable laws (IDEA and the Rehabilitation Act, Section #504 are scheduled to be reauthorized in 2003.);
- ◆ Participate in regular, interactive and meaningful communication in your school district with teachers, administrators, and other parents;
- ◆ Become involved with the legislators in your district and state, and know the legislation that is relevant to your child's education and your community;
- ◆ Set a good example by being physically, mentally, and emotionally healthy;
- ◆ Set realistic goals for yourself, your family, and your child, and try to follow through on each of those goals. Do not try to be an over-achiever;
- ◆ Be available to speak on special education issues and network with other parents and teachers. Share information about special education legislation, and issues of concern for children.
- ◆ Advocate, advocate, advocate for all the children. But be an involved voice for the special education child who sometimes has no voice.

*Source: *New York Parent Teacher*, March 2003, Volume 34, Issue 4