

SEPTA NEWS



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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Jane Hellberg

Another school year is flying by and everyone is busy, busy, busy as usual! Luckily, sixty or so parents and teachers were not too busy to attend the November SEPTA meeting and hear Dr. Martin Kutscher's presentation on ADHD and Executive Skills. Dr. Kutscher is a behavioral neurologist who practices in our area. Several SEPTA parents have used his services and have liked him very much. It was a very informative evening and the audience was treated to a terrific presentation by an expert on these topics. He discussed tips on parenting, classroom modifications, and offered explanations as to why our kids sometimes act as they do. Dr. Kutscher's web site is www.kidsbehavioralneurology.com, where you can get more information, as well as purchase his books. If you would rather borrow the books, then head over to the Somers town library and

check out the copies that Dr. Kutscher graciously donated to SEPTA.

At the October meeting we had the opportunity to listen to an informative presentation on the components of a well-written IEP by Shelley Fleischmann and Anna Maggio. As the Director and Assistant Director of Special Services in Somers, Shelley and Anna are experts on this topic. They will be back to the SEPTA meeting scheduled for Tuesday, February 6 to discuss annual reviews. February is the ideal time to begin preparation, as annual reviews start in March.

This year we welcome Suzanne Katz as the new editor of *SEPTA News*. Suzanne is planning to publish two editions of the SEPTA newsletter. This is the autumn edition and there will be another edition in the spring. The SEPTA web site will continue to have the latest news about meetings for the

rest of the year, dates for Coffee & Conversations with Shelley and Anna at Bailey Court, the SEPTA Resource list, all previously published *SEPTA News* editions, as well as other information parents and teachers may find of interest with regard to special education. Please go to www.somersptacouncil.org and click on the yellow umbrella to get information about SEPTA. Information about upcoming meetings will also be provided in the individual school newsletters, and flyers will be sent home via backpack at Primrose.

Contact someone from SEPTA if you want to share information, get information, or are looking to find other parents to speak to. There's a lot to learn about special education and parents are one of the best resources available.

Happy Holidays!

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MEETING DATES

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

- ① January 16: Get Ready to Transition
- ① February 6: Prepping for Annual Reviews
- ① March 6: Eat, Drink & Be Healthy
- ① May 22: TBA

SEPTA MEETINGS

MESSAGE FROM SPECIAL SERVICES

Shelley Fleischmann, Director

SEPTA COFFEE & CONVERSATION

Shelley Fleischmann, Director of Special Services, hosts an informal chat with parents once per quarter, to discuss what's new in Special Services and to answer any questions they may have. Two sessions have been held already. All parents and other interested individuals are welcome!

COFFEE & CONVERSATIONS will be held on *Wednesdays, 9-10am*,
in *Bailey Court* on the following dates:

- ❖ February 28
- ❖ April 25

Please RSVP to Jane Kasack at 277-3777

THE NEXT SEPTA MEETING

GET READY TO TRANSITION!

For classified students, preparation to leave high school begins in middle school. Whether or not your child's goals include college, get ready to make the goals a reality!

Host: Kerry McKenna

Date/Time: Tuesday, January 16, 7:30 PM

Location: SIS Library

(Snow date is Thursday, January 18)

OTHER SEPTA MEETINGS

This spring, SEPTA is planning meetings on a wide array of interesting topics. In addition to the January meeting on transitioning from high school, there will be a February 6 meeting on preparing for Annual Reviews (which begin in March). And on March 6, nutritionist Kathleen VanHavere-Bruno will discuss what your child should be eating, drinking and supplementing his/her diet with, to maximize good health and brain power. **Save the dates now!**

Legislation

Ask Questions, Take Action to Help Prevent Violence in Schools

National PTA *This Week in Washington* — October 10, 2006

PTA urges parents to ask questions and take action for their children's safety in the wake of the recent shootings across the country. These unfortunate incidents send an urgent call to parents to be involved in their children's lives — at home and at school. Moreover, these senseless acts of violence are not simply family or school problems; communities must realize the shared responsibility, and work with parents and school administrators to identify safety issues.

According to the National Crime Prevention Council, the crime rate can decrease by as much as 30% when a violence prevention initiative is a community-wide effort. All parents, students, school staff, and members of the community need to be part of creating safe school environments for children. Many PTAs are working to identify the causes of school violence, as well as possible solutions for violence prevention.

PTA believes that parents need to be involved in reviewing and creating school safety policies at the local and state level. To be involved, parents also need to be informed. Below are several questions parents can ask about the safety of their school communities:

- ❖ What is the school's procedure for getting information to parents in a crisis (website, phone tree, e-mail, etc.)?
- ❖ Does every teacher have a copy of the emergency procedures clearly posted in the classroom? Are the procedures reviewed with the children?
- ❖ Does the school practice emergency procedures with the children (much like a fire drill)?
- ❖ Does the school review its safety policy from year to year? Does this review process involve parents?
- ❖ How can I find out about community-wide violence prevention programs?
- ❖ Are there conflict management and peer mediation programs offered in the school?

Additional resources on school safety are available at PTA.org, the website of the National PTA.

Public Schools Outperform Private Schools, New Study Says

National PTA *This Week in Washington* - July 25, 2006

On Tuesday, July 14, the U.S. Department of Education released a study comparing mean 2003 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading and mathematics scores of public and private schools in 4th and 8th grades. (The mean is the average value of a set of numbers.) The study found that when scores are adjusted for socioeconomics, race and other characteristics, public school students do as well or better in some categories as students in private schools.

When school means were adjusted, the average for public schools was significantly higher than the average for private schools for grade 4 mathematics and not significantly different for reading. At grade 8, the average for private schools was significantly higher than the average for public schools in reading but not significantly different for mathematics.

The executive summary, along with the entire report, is available on the National Center for Education Statistics website.

Parent-Teacher Conferences

Parent-Teacher Conference Prep

From: *GreatSchools.net* Staff, October, 2006

These tips and questions will help you make the most of your parent-teacher conference.

Before

Make an appointment.

Ask your child:

- ❖ What do you like best about school?
- ❖ Is there anything you're having trouble with at school?

Make a list:

- ❖ Think of just a few important things to ask or share with the teacher.

During

Listen carefully.

- ❖ This is your chance to find out how your child is doing.
- ❖ Try to understand the teacher's point of view.

Ask questions:

- ❖ What is your child doing well in? What does he or she need to work on?
- ❖ If you're not sure you understand, ask the teacher for examples.
- ❖ Find out what support your child can get at school.
- ❖ Get specific ideas for how to help your child at home.

Questions for the Teacher

How is my child doing in class?

How is my child doing in reading?

How is my child doing in math?

What are his best subjects?

Are there areas where he needs extra help?

Questions for the Teacher (continued)

What should I know about homework?

How much time should my child spend on homework?

When should homework get turned in?

What can I do at home to help?

What if my child is behind?

How can you help my child in areas that are hard for him or her?

Are there programs at school that can help?

What activities can I do at home to help?

What if my child is ahead?

Is my child getting enough challenging work?

Does the school have a program for gifted students?

How can I get my child tested for it?

How is my child doing in general?

Does my child get along with other children?

Does my child participate in class activities?

How is my child behaving?

How can we stay in touch?

When is a good time to talk with you if I have questions?

How can I keep track of how my child is doing?

More Students Needing Extra Help Turn to Overseas Tutors

From: *The Journal News*, October 12, 2006

College admissions cause achievers to seek extra help

Kellie Patrick

The Philadelphia Inquirer

It's 8 p.m., and Sneha Abraham is ready for her geometry lesson. She turns on the computer in her brother's bedroom, and soon receives an email hello from a tutor in India.

Abraham — a junior at East High School in West Chester, Pa., who hopes tutoring will boost her score on the coming SAT — is one of a growing number of students whose tutors live and teach outside this country.

There is a strong demand for tutors in the United States, propelled in part by high-achieving students shooting for admission into competitive colleges and by others who qualify for publicly funded tutoring because they attend a failing school under No Child Left Behind. Some online, offshore companies already provide NCLB tutoring; others say they will apply to states soon.

Can students learn this way? Critics say in-person tutoring is best and warn that no one monitors what these companies offer.

But those who use or sell online tutoring say it can be as effective and at less cost.

"It has helped a lot," Abraham said. "Sometimes, the teacher will go over stuff we hadn't gone over in class yet, and so I get it two times. It's not that I enjoy it — I don't really like doing math — but I understand it."

For the last several years, tutoring companies such as TutorVista, based in Bangalore, India, have been forming expressly to meet U.S. demand. It has 1,200 students so far, including a dozen in the Philadelphia region and 130 tutors. By next year, the company expects to have 4,000 students.

Other companies, including California's Growing Stars, which has 500 students, are headquartered here, but have offshore tutoring centers — similar to the call centers used by credit-card companies.

U.S. students are linked by the Internet

with overseas tutors who often hold advanced degrees, but will work for much less than most American tutors.

Offshore, online tutoring is just the beginning of what Don Knezek, chief executive officer of the nonprofit International Society for Technology in Education calls "the globalization of education."

Education officials in the Philippines, Jamaica, India, Malaysia and Costa Rica want to train their teachers to U.S. education standards, he said. Some will come here to teach, while others tutor or teach online.

Right now, much of the appeal of overseas tutors — both for employing companies and hiring parents — is their cost.

"In India, in the tutoring biz, you get the same quality of skill for less than half-price," Knezek said.

Abraham studies with Growing Stars — the California-based tutoring company that has its tutoring center in India.

Director of enrollment Wayne Burckhardt said families pay a setup fee of \$150, then \$25 per hour of tutoring. There are extra fees, ranging from \$75 to \$125, so tutors can have the same textbook. And there are package deals that bring down the hourly rate, he said.

Kaplan, one of the best-known tutoring companies in the United States, charges \$1,999 for 20 hours of one-on-one academic instruction in the student's home — about \$100 per hour. Kaplan does not have online tutoring. It does have an online, self-guided SAT prep program that costs \$399.

There are many online tutors, but qualifications vary. Eric Jordan, student/tutors coordinator for the New York-based tutoring clearinghouse www.tutorsteach.com, said the online tutors who list with his company charge from \$15 to \$50 per hour.

Growing Stars founder Biju Mathew got the idea for his company when he moved from India to California six years ago and was shocked at the cost of hiring tutors for his children.

TutorVista charges about \$100 per month for unlimited tutoring. There are no set-up fees, but students are

responsible for buying some equipment.

Krishnan Ganesh, 45, the company's founder and chairman, used to run one of the biggest call centers in India. About a year and a half ago, he came to the United States and, through interviews across the country, learned that Americans would be comfortable with Indians teaching their children.

Tutors, who are generally schooled in British English, learn American teen slang to help them communicate with their students. Some use American-sounding nicknames at first. Glenmore Wilkinson, 44, is tutored nightly by TutorVista tutors in statistics and microbiology to help him prepare for a nursing program at the Community College of Philadelphia.

He has no trouble understanding his TutorVista tutors without whom he said he could not have done well in statistics.

TutorVista tutors are trained in American teaching methods and learn what is taught in certain states so they can be assigned students from those states.

TutorVista tutors make about \$300 to \$350 per month in U.S. dollars, depending on experience. All have teaching experience — 10 percent were previously tutors, and the rest were have taught in schools or universities. Many have master's degrees.

TutorVista tutor Suresh Basappa, 28, works from 1:30 to 10:30 a.m., India time, as a math tutor. He holds a master's degree in math and an MBA. He finds his salary "competitive" and enjoys sharing his love for mathematics with his students.

Critics say online tutoring is not as effective as the in-person kind.

"I still believe tutoring is a kind of process where you need to be in front of the person you're tutoring," said Lynn Giese, interim president of the National Tutoring Association and coordinator of peer tutoring at Columbus State Community College.

Knezek, of the International Society

More Students Needing Extra Help Turn to Overseas Tutors (continued)

From: *The Journal News, October 12, 2006*

For Technology in Education, takes a buyer-beware approach since he knows of no outside monitors.

Online tutoring is "an industry in its infancy," he said. "I think you'll find the quality and effectiveness uneven."

Annette Riffle, the general manager of the Kaplan Premier Private Tutor Division, said face-to-face tutoring can help better build the kind of rapport in which the tutor knows when to change teaching methods to help a student learn.

Bassapa, the online tutor, wrote in an e-mail that his biggest challenge is "you have to understand the individual only by the way he speaks."

But proponents say many young people have no trouble, because they are used to communicating electronically."

Abraham, who has been with Growing Stars since the end of last year, had been tutored in math by a college professor who charged \$45 per half-hour to go to her home on Saturdays. There were frequent scheduling problems.

Abraham was initially skeptical of the online option.

"At first, it was kind of weird to talk to someone I couldn't see and probably wouldn't ever see," she said. But she's at ease talking on the phone and through instant messaging — she recommends against online tutoring for anyone who is not — and was soon comfortable.

At Abraham's recent session, her tutor, whom she knows only as Rekha, mapped equations on a graph.

Abraham could see the problems her teacher was typing immediately, via software that linked their screens into a virtual whiteboard.

Rekha asked Abraham to show her work, say her answers out loud and then write them down. She also had to explain the "why" behind her answers.

"It's really hard to fake understanding something when she is asking you to do problems and talking to you — she can hear your voice," Abraham said. Besides, she said, she can be tutored in her pajamas if she wants to.

Abraham's mother, Mary, said her daughter had become a better student since she began studying with the tutor. "I wish I had known about it earlier," she said. She plans to eventually sign up her younger children, now 13 and 14.

New Phonics Phones Aid Kids' Speech

From: *The Detroit News, October 18, 2006*

Candice Williams/The Detroit News

Fowlerville — Reading time is a little bit quieter in Theresa St. John's first-grade classroom when her students speak into their new phonics phones.

The teaching tool — made of PVC plastic piping in the shape of a telephone receiver — allows St. John's students to clearly hear the words they say and helps improve their speech.

"It amplifies the sounds so they can hear themselves really well," said St. John, a teacher at Smith Elementary.

Smith and Kreeger Elementary, Fowlerville Community Schools' two elementary schools, received the phones last month from the Livingston Sunrise Rotary and Livingston County Boy Scouts of America. The club bought materials for 500 phones, and local boy scouts assembled them during summer camp.

"Some of our teachers had them already, so it was nice to get the donation," said Jim Kitchen, principal of

Smith. "We get lots of support from the Rotary and the community in general."

The phones are an inexpensive device to help children improve their speech, said Jim Lawrence, a member of the Livingston Sunrise Rotary.

"You speak in one end and immediately hear yourself in the other," he said. "When you and I are talking to each other you hear the sound bouncing off the walls. This allows students to focus on what they're saying."

Lawrence, also a member of the Brighton Kiwanis Club, got the idea to donate the phones after the Kiwanis Club did a similar project for Brighton Area Schools. The Rotary Club wanted to give phones to the rest of the county, he said.

"I heard very positive feedback from Brighton Schools, and when I heard that the other districts didn't have this access, I wanted to see if the club wanted to sponsor this program," he said.

Last school year, Rotary gave 2,000 phones to Howell Public Schools, Pinckney Community Schools and Hartland Consolidated Schools. The project was completed with the Fowlerville donation.

"The kids use it so they can hear themselves speaking for articulation," said Lynda Henderson, principal of Farley Hill Elementary School in Pinckney. "They can hear themselves loud and clear. We use them for revision and editing. Quite often what children write and what the reader hears or reads is different. They are able to read the story to themselves."

At Smith Elementary the phones are mainly used at the first-grade level and are built into literacy time each morning. St. John sees an improvement in her students' speech.

"It especially helps kids that have difficulty hearing the sounds," she said. "They are really surprised at how well they can hear."

Large Subset of Learning Disabled Children Can Be Quickly Identified by New Diagnostic Device

Evanston, Ill. — A new easy-to-use diagnostic tool that can quickly identify a sizeable subset of learning disabled children is now commercially available. That's good news for youngsters aged 8 to 12 who, once identified, can receive auditory training that can improve their academic learning.

"Learning disabilities are believed to affect nearly one in 10 children, but their cases are difficult to pinpoint," says Nina Kraus, Director of Northwestern University's Auditory Neuroscience Laboratory. She and Northwestern researchers Trent Nicol and Steven Zecker have found that a third of the 1,000-plus children they have tested show a dysfunction in the way the brainstem encodes basic sounds of speech.

BioMAP (Biological Marker of Auditory Processing) is based on more than a decade of neuroscience research at Northwestern University. It is expected to become one of the most important resources for learning disabilities specialists trying to identify appropriate treatments for children with dyslexia and other language-based learning disabilities. Bio-logic Systems Corp., a Natus company, of Mudelein, Ill., holds an exclusive license from the University for the technology.

"The beauty of BioMAP as a diagnostic tool is that it does not require a child to follow directions or perform an assigned task," says Kraus. "Instead, it objectively measures whether a child's nervous system is able to accurately translate sounds into brain waves." If it can't, the affected child will have difficulty discriminating between speech sounds. And that difficulty at the most fundamental level complicates a wide range of learning activities, including reading and writing, Kraus finds.

Getting objective measures from BioMAP software is simple. "All a child needs to do is stay awake and sit quietly for 20 or 30 minutes," says Kraus,

Northwestern's Hugh Knowles Professor of Communication Sciences, Neurobiology and Otolaryngology. In fact, BioMap testing can occur while a child watches a video. At Kraus' lab, researchers place non-invasive electrodes on a child's scalp and an earpiece that delivers carefully crafted acoustic sounds in one ear. As a child watches a movie, researchers measure the brain's responses to the acoustic sounds.

Once identified as part of the subset of learning disabled children with sound encoding problems, these children receive auditory training that boosts their ability to distinguish sounds. When researchers use BioMAP to re-evaluate the children after training, they find that the children show improved auditory processing ability that can later result in academic learning improvement.

On the other hand, traditional learning evaluations consist of behavioral measures that are subjective in nature and can be confounded by a child's attention span, memory, motivation, or failure to understand an assigned task.

When normal hearing children with auditory processing problems are referred to hearing clinics, they often only receive a peripheral hearing test. If that test finds no hearing problems, the young patients and their parents are sent on their way without gaining useful information.

In contrast BioMAP can provide important and practical information to parents and professionals interested in the diagnosis and treatment of children with learning, reading and listening problems.

Side Effects of Ritalin Greater in Preschool

From: *LATimes.com*, October 17, 2006

By Denise Gellene, Times Staff Write

The first systematic study of using Ritalin to treat preschool children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder has found that the drug reduced their symptoms but caused greater side effects than usually seen in older children, researchers said.

The findings mean "very small children may benefit but they should be closely monitored," said Dr. Thomas R. Insel, director of the National Institute of Mental Health, which paid for the \$18-million study.

Among the side effects, researchers said the drug appeared to slow children's growth rates. They grew about a half-inch less in height and weighed three pounds less than expected, based on estimates of their growth.

Stephen Hinshaw, chair of the psychology department at UC Berkeley who was not involved in the study, said the findings show that the drug should be given only to children ages 3 to 5 with more severe symptoms — and only if they can be regularly seen by their doctors. Ritalin, also called methylphenidate, is approved as a treatment for ADHD only in children age 6 and older.

The research was initiated in response to the outcry that ensued after the *Journal of the American Medical Assn.* reported in 2000 that as many as 200,000 preschoolers were on Ritalin, an unapproved, or "off-label," use of the drug.

The research, published in the November issue of the *Journal of the Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, was conducted at six academic centers in the U.S. over the course of 70 weeks.. It looked at 183 children with moderate to severe ADHD.

"You have children that are very aggressive and doing things that are unsafe, like running into the middle of the road or jumping off high pieces of playground equipment," said Dr. James McGough of UCLA, one of the study authors. "These are kids who, if they did not get treatment, would get kicked out of preschool."

Before being assigned to receive Ritalin, children and their parents received 10 weeks of behavioral therapy.

The children were then assigned to receive up to 22.5 milligrams daily of Ritalin. Daily doses for older children range from 15 to 50 milligrams daily.

Side effects, including insomnia, weight loss and decreased appetite caused 21 children, or 11%, to drop out of the study. One child had a seizure that was thought to be related to the medication.

Children who completed the study had improved symptoms according to assessments by their parents and preschool teachers. But about a third of parents reported moderate to severe side effects throughout the study, including emotional outbursts and irritability.

Researchers will follow the children for five years to see if their growth catches up as they get older.

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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.

Membership

If you haven't already, there is still plenty of time to join SEPTA. The SEPTA membership form is available on the SEPTA web site.

Check it out! Lynn Adams will be happy to sign you up!



PTA E-MAIL IS NOW AVAILABLE

Subscribe now to receive PTA and SEPTA updates by e-mail! To join, visit the Somers PTA Council website at www.somersptacouncil.org and click on the “Sign Up for E-mail Updates” box on the left side of the screen.

You will be taken to a website where you will be asked to re-enter your e-mail address. Enter the e-mail address where you want update to be sent. Click “Submit.” You will be asked to re-type your e-mail address. Below this there are two columns:

I. On the left side, check all the boxes that apply to your household so that you can receive the correct emails. Don't forget pre-schoolers! And if you work in the district, there are categories for you there as well.

II. On the right side, enter your first and last name and your children's names and grades. This is for PTA use only to ensure that you receive the correct e-mail updates. This information will not be made public.

Submit your form.

Shortly (minutes, if not seconds) after you submit the form, you will receive an e-mail requesting confirmation that you did indeed want to receive these e-mails. If you did not receive this e-mail, check your SPAM folder to see if it was delivered there. *You will need to click on the link in this e-mail to confirm your subscription.*

You've now been subscribed to our e-mail system! You should receive a welcome letter soon.

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We look forward to communicating with you in this new way!