

SEPTA NEWS

Volume 2, Issue 3

January 2005

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE — JANE HELLBERG

The school year is already approaching the halfway mark. While our children have been busy learning many new things in the classroom, parents have been busy learning new things about their children. After a child is welcomed into a family, and all the fingers and toes have been counted, life's journey with that child begins. Parents will, very slowly, discover the gifts that a child possesses. Each school year brings new skills for a child to master and some skills will prove more difficult than others. On occasion, children may need some extra help to learn and master a new skill. Parents can provide much of that help at home but the mastery of some skills can be greatly enhanced by a professional. Tutors and other professionals can make a

tremendous difference in the life of a child.

On January 20, Carolyn Machonis and Karen Kid from Kids Moves Pediatric Therapy in Mahopac presented an overview of occupational and physical therapy, and sensory integration. Children may receive therapy in school, however school therapy is only offered to a child when help is needed for academic success. The therapies offered at Kid Moves and other therapy centers help children to improve in all aspects of life; from feeling comfortable in their clothes to riding a bike. These types of therapies are paid for by the family, though a good portion is often covered by insurance.

The presentation was very informative and offered many insights

into why children sometimes behave as they do. Parents are welcome to call Carolyn or Karen at Kids Moves with questions about therapy or a child's abilities or behaviors.

The date of the next SEPTA meeting has been changed to March 22, 2005. Dr. Robert Milich, a clinical psychologist from Croton-on-Hudson who runs social skills groups, will be joining us in the SIS library at 7:30pm to discuss social skills.

Good social skills will help a child throughout their entire life. They make it easier to make a friend and to be a friend. Parents, teachers and coaches spend a lot of time with children and have the opportunity to help children improve their social skills on a daily basis. All are welcome to spend an evening with Dr. Bob and get some ideas about developing good social skills.

MESSAGE FROM SPECIAL SERVICES Barry J. Whalen, Director

Editors Note: With annual review time quickly approaching, it was decided to re-run last year's article regarding parent preparation for their meeting as those suggestions still apply.

As we approach the annual review season, I often hear from parents about their anxiety over these meetings. The staff and I have discussed ways to make your annual review meaningful and stress free, and I would like to share our ideas with you.

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 services 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.

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MEETING DATES

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

⇒ March 22

⇒ April 28

⇒ **May 16 - Budget Q&A - 9:30am at Primrose**

WHO IS THE PARENT MEMBERS ON THE CSE?

The Committee on Special Education decides a child's special education needs and services. The members of the CSE are:

- the Parents/guardian of the student,
- the director or assistant director of Special Services,
- the school psychologist,
- the child's regular education teacher,
- the child's special education teacher or service provider,
- a parent member,
- other individuals who have knowledge or expertise regarding the child (at the discretion of or you or the district),
- the child, 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.

The parent member of the CSE is a volunteer whose child is either currently receiving special education services or who received services within the last 5 years. The Special Education Training and Resource Center of BOCES offers training courses for parent member volunteers. The parent member of the CSE may perform a variety of services at the

meeting including: listening, taking notes, making suggestions, or helping the parent at the parent's request.

The Board of Education appoints parent members for one year and they may be re-appointed if they wish to continue volunteering. The Special Services office keeps the list of Somers' parent volunteers.

Parent members are required to attend full CSE meetings and meetings to discuss a more restrictive environment. Parents who do not wish to a parent member present at their CSE meetings may sign a waiver to that effect.

tuskers training club

Tuskers Training Club provides both challenges and fun for our children with special needs. We have a great group of athletes. At this time we are in middle of our Floor Hockey season and practicing for our Basketball season. Practice is every Tuesday in the Primrose gym from 6-7pm.

For more information please click on Ask the Elephant.

KID Foundation

The KID Foundation (and STAR Center) is a research and advocacy group lead by Lucy Miller, PhD, OTR. Dr. Miller, an associate professor of rehabilitation medicine and pediatrics and is the Director of Sensory Processing Treatment and Research at the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center, is one of the foremost and important researchers of sensory integration in children. She is in the process of ground-braking research that will help legitimize Sensory Processing Disorder, and greatly enhance understanding of sensory integration problems and how to treat them. However, NIH has cut funding for her research. It is urgent the Dr. Miller get funding to continue her research, and she is asking the special ed. community for help. Her letter follows:

Dear Folks:

This is difficult for me to say but I wanted to let everyone know what's going on with our research program here in Colorado. We just

heard the big NIH grant that we were depending on wasn't funded. As a result, we only have enough money to last through next month. [December]

Something that I have only shared with my husband and handful of friends and colleagues was that if the grant didn't come through this time, I was going to shut down my Research Program. It killed me to say that, especially considering how close we are to a number of major discoveries. Over the weekend, I told a couple of friends and colleagues about my plans and people begged me not to stop. And I don't want to shut down but I can't tell you how hard and frustrating it's been. And how can we continue without financial support? We need a small team to make the research program work, and people means salaries.

So we're at a crossroads. I care too much to just shut down and actually just recently we've developed a really good plan to move forward

so we won't have to be dependent on NIH funding, but it's going to take some time to make the plan happen.

So as hard as it is for me to ask for help, I'm writing to ask you for your assistance. We're reaching out to friends, family, colleagues and anyone who might be interested and able to help us. We're trying to raise a total of \$200,000 over the next 6 months. If you can help in any way, it would mean so much. No amount is too small. And if you know anyone who has access to a foundation of any sort please tell them about us.

Your help right now will make all the difference.

Thank you,
Lucy Jane Miller
KID Foundation
1901 West Littleton Blvd.
Littleton, CO 80120
www.KIDFoundation.org/help

LEGISLATION

Reauthorization of IDEA

Memo from the State Education Dept. to Organizations, Parents and Individuals Concerned with Special Ed.

The President signed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act on December 3, 2004. In many key areas, the proposed changes in federal law strengthen, support and are in alignment with our current State and local efforts to improve education results for students with disabilities. This bill, which reauthorizes the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and amends other Acts, includes landmark changes to:

Improve accountability & results for students with disabilities.

- ⇒ Aligns the accountability systems for students with disabilities with the NCLB Act in such areas as performance goals and indicators, data reporting and priorities for federal and State monitoring.
- ⇒ Defines "highly qualified special education teacher" for special education teachers teaching to alternate achievement standards for students with significant cognitive disabilities and for special education teachers teaching multiple subjects to students with disabilities.
- ⇒ Requires guidelines for appropriate testing accommodations for State and district wide assessments.
- ⇒ Replaces the Comprehensive System of Personnel Development requirements with State requirements to develop and maintain provider qualifications.

Improve services to students with disabilities.

- ⇒ Adds interpreter and school nurse services as related services.
- ⇒ Addresses the needs of students who are in foster care, children who are homeless, migratory children and children with limited English proficiency.
- ⇒ Increases districts' responsibility for consultation with private schools regarding identification of and service provision for students who are parentally placed.
- ⇒ Requires that individualized education programs (IEPs) of students with disabilities address academic and functional achievement.
- ⇒ Promotes the use of scientifically and peer-based research in instruction of students.
- ⇒ Ensures the availability of materials in accessible formats for students who are blind or print-disabled.
- ⇒ Requires State and district wide assess-

ments be developed and delivered in universal design formats.

- ⇒ Supports early intervening services (prereferral).
- ⇒ Provides states flexibility to allow a parent to choose to continue his/her child in an early intervention program through age five.
- ⇒ Strengthens planning for transition from early intervention to preschool and school to postsecondary.
- ⇒ Consolidates transition planning requirements to begin at age 16 (previously 14 and 16).
- ⇒ Enhances behavioral supports in schools and improves the quality of interim settings.

Reduce procedural and paperwork requirements.

- ⇒ Reduces the content of IEPs (eliminates short-term objectives for most students with disabilities).
- ⇒ Reduces number of times procedural due process notices must be sent to parents.
- ⇒ Streamlines discipline process while maintaining the basic procedural rights of parents and students.
- ⇒ Allows 15 states to apply for waivers of federal statutory or regulatory requirements to reduce excessive paperwork and non-instructional time burdens.

Encourage cooperation with parents in the special education process.

- ⇒ Allows changes to IEPs without IEP meetings in instances when parents and schools agree.
- ⇒ Allows exceptions to IEP team members when parents and schools agree.

Ensure less adversarial methods are used to resolve disputes between parents and school districts.

- ⇒ Requires a due process complaint notice to be submitted by the party initiating an impartial due process hearing.
- ⇒ Gives schools and parents the opportunity through IEP resolution sessions to meet to resolve issues.
- ⇒ Requires impartial hearing decisions to be based primarily on the issues affecting the provision of a free appropriate public education to the student as opposed to procedural issues.
- ⇒ Allows attorney fee reimbursement to a State or school district for complaints that are frivolous, unreasonable, or without foundation or that are for improper purposes.

Focus federal and State monitoring, technical assistance and enforcement on meeting performance goals and indicators to improve

the outcomes for students with disabilities.

Establish a seven-year course to fully fund IDEA and increase the State's discretionary dollars.

- ⇒ Increases the proportion of the State's allocation that can be retained by the Department to support improved services to and outcomes for students with disabilities.
- ⇒ Provides a state the option of using 10% of its State-level funds to establish an LEA Risk Pool to assist local educational agencies (LEAs) in addressing the needs of high need students with disabilities.

Provide flexibility in the use of IDEA funds by school districts to support improved achievement of students with disabilities.

- ⇒ Allows LEAs to use up to 15% of IDEA funds to support early intervening services, prereferral services, administrative case management and high cost special education services and, in certain circumstances, implementation of NCLB requirements.

Provide federal grants and national activities to support State and local efforts to improve results.

- ⇒ Supports personnel development and preparation of beginning special education teachers.
- ⇒ Provides supports to improve results for children with disabilities.
- ⇒ Promotes the use of scientifically based research in the instruction of students with disabilities.
- ⇒ Supports systemic school interventions to improve behavioral supports in schools.
- ⇒ Promotes accessible textbooks for print-disabled individuals.
- ⇒ Establishes a National Center for Special Education Research and promotes the dissemination of scientifically-based instructional practices.

Most of the 2004 IDEA amendments in Parts A, B, and C and subpart 1 or Part D become effective on July 1, 2005. The highly qualified teacher provisions and subparts 2, 3, and 4 or Part D become effective upon enactment of the bill of December 3, 2004. Federal regulations to implement IDEA must be completed within 12 months of enactment, and NY State must align its own laws and regulations governing special education.

Updated information will continue to be provided on the Department's web site at www.vesid.nysed.gov as to the status of this bill and implementation actions by the Department. Questions regarding this memorandum may be directed to the Special Education Policy and Partnerships Unit at 518-473-2878.

Medical And Therapy News

Strength and Endurance Building

New Program Offered at Once Upon A River by Jonathan A. Slater, MD

Once Upon A River is a unique center where innovative programs have been developed to benefit children with special challenges. Dr. Jonathan Slater, a child psychiatrist and Marital Arts instructor, has teamed up with Shihan James Chillemi and Sensei Robert Chillemi of New York Goju Karate Association.

Under Shihan James Chillemi's guidance, Dr. Slater and Sensei Chillemi have been teaching karate to children with both emotional and physical challenges, and their Martial Arts program has proven to be quite a success. The

children discover strength, discipline, self-esteem, and confidence through a very personalized program developed to meet each child's needs. These are the skills that give children the tools they need to negotiate and connect with the world around them.

Once Upon A River is interested in offering a "Strength and Endurance Building" class through a combination of gymnastics, calisthenics, fun and games. This class would be geared toward children with low muscle tone, often associated with sensory/neurological disorders.

Their studios are readily available and are located in Irvington. The goal is to make the program as accessible and affordable as possible. Actual cost and days of offerings will be determined based on participation.

If you are interested in this program, please contact Lori Slater at info@onceuponariver.com or at 914-591-6868.

As Martial Arts may not be for everyone, Once Upon A River also offers art therapy and music lessons.

Adolescent Depression and FDA Proposed Medication Guide*

submitted by Lisa Immerblum

Adolescent Depression is increasing at an alarming rate. Recent surveys indicate that as many as one in five teens suffers from clinical depression. This is a serious problem that calls for prompt, appropriate medical treatment. However, few children or teens exhibit the classic symptoms of adult depression (insomnia, sadness, passivity, loss of libido, and loss of appetite), so parents should be aware if their child often oversleeps, over eats, and feels irritable and aggressive.

It is extremely important that depressed teens receive prompt professional treatment.

Left untreated, depression can become life threatening. Each year almost 5,000 people, ages 15 to 24, kill themselves. Suicide is the third leading cause of death in adolescents. The most common and effective ways to treat depression in adolescents are: psychotherapy; cognitive-behavioral therapy, interpersonal therapy; and medication.

If medication is needed to help

your child's adolescent depression it is important to know that although the FDA has long required that medications be screened for safety in adults, approximately 75% of drugs approved for use in the US have never been subjected to comprehensive pediatric studies.

Although some antidepressants can help teens, the brains of young people may be more sensitive to daily fluctuations in drug levels and these pharmacological changes themselves may foster destructive thoughts and behavior.

During a recent clinical trial of the antidepressant, Cymbalta, scientists learned that hallucinations and paranoid delusions can occur when a patient is in withdrawal from an antidepressant. Additionally, the FDA found in analyzing data from multiple clinical trials that twice as many children taking antidepressants considered or attempted suicide as children taking placebos.

Due to these findings, The U.S.

Food and Drug Administration recently proposed new medication guidelines for using antidepressant medications in children and adolescents. To try and prevent self-injury to children and teens using antidepressants pharmacists are required to include a warning letter that cites the FDA's findings when dispensing packages of antidepressants; and children taking antidepressants must be stringently monitored by doctors.

A list of medications for which pediatric studies are urgently needed is published annually in the federal register.

For more information contact: The National Mental Health Association (702) 684-7222/ www.nmha.org or the U.S. Food and Drug Administration at (888) INFO-FDA (463-6332)/ www.fda.gov.

*Sources: NMHA Fact sheet; U.S. FDA and "The Pediatric Gap", *The New Yorker*, January 10, 2005

Ten “Must-Know” Facts About Educational Testing

by W. James Popham

Source: National PTA, *Our Children*, Vol. 28, No. 3, p.4-6

All parents, especially those with children in school, need to know about the educational tests their children take these days with ever-increasing frequency. Typically, those tests will not only have a profound impact on a child's progress in school, but will also make a big difference in what happens to a child when school is finished.

The potential impact of educational tests rose dramatically when, in early 2002, President Bush signed into law the No Child Left Behind Act. This important new federal law makes students' test performances the chief determiner in how schools (and teachers) are to be evaluated. Given the heightened significance of today's tests, parents should become aware of what makes such tests tick. Presented here are 10 “must-know” facts about educational tests; each is followed by a brief explanation and an action implication for parents.

Fact 1. Educational tests are much less accurate than most parents believe.

Students' scores on educational tests (whether teacher-built classroom tests or state-wide or nationally standardized tests) are usually reported in numbers, which sometimes even include a decimal point. Such numbers, unfortunately, often convey to parents a picture of measurement precision that is simply unwarranted. A child's test performance on a given day can be greatly influenced by both physical factors (such as the child's having a cold) and emotional factors (such as the child's having had an argument with family or friends). In addition, the tests themselves only sample a child's skills and knowledge, and this sampling is often far from sufficient.

Action Implication: *Never place all that much confidence in the accuracy of your child's performance on a single test. Only when the results of several different tests are reasonably consistent should you attach substantial significance to your child's test performances.*

Fact 2. Educational tests allow teachers to make inferences about a student's unseen skills or knowledge, but these inferences may or may not be valid.

The skills and knowledge children possess can't be seen. When Sally correctly spells all 25 words on her teacher's spelling test, the teacher infers that Sally is a good speller. Similarly, when Jane misspells more than half of the test's 25 words, the teacher infers that Jane's spelling skills are weak and need to be improved. If, on the basis of a student's test

performance, an accurate inference is made about the student's unseen abilities, measurement experts call this a valid inference. But people, not tests, make these inferences. And people have been known to make mistakes.

Action Implication: *When your child's teacher makes a test-based inference about your child's covert skills and/or knowledge, do not automatically assume that the teacher's inference is valid. It probably will be, but it may not be.*

Fact 3. High-stakes tests, depending on the particular way they are constructed, can have a decisively positive or negative effect on a child's education.

When students' performances on a test have important consequences for students (such as grade-to-grade promotion or diploma-denial) or for those students' teachers (such as test-based evaluations of a school staff's effectiveness), the test is referred to as a “high-stakes test.” If an inappropriate high-stakes test is used, its impact on schooling can be quite harmful. Such high-stakes testing may cause important but untested content to be eliminated from the curriculum. Also, students will often be forced to take dull, excessive test-preparation drills. Some teachers, because of pressures to raise their students' test scores, may also engage in dishonest test-preparation or test-administration practices.

On the other hand, if an appropriate high-stakes test is employed, it cannot only supply accurate evidence for school evaluations, but can also help improve the quality of teachers' instruction. Everything hinges on the appropriateness of the particular high-stakes test that is used.

Action Implication: *If your child attends a school in which a high-stakes test is used, try to discover (by speaking with teachers, administrators, and other parents) what effect, if any, that test seems to have on instruction. If inappropriate high-stakes assessments appear to have a negative impact on your child's schooling, join with other parents to demand more instructionally beneficial high-stakes tests. If it turns out that the use of inappropriate high-stakes tests (or, indeed, any other unsound use of tests) is based not on a district decision, but on a state-level requirement, offer to help district officials transmit your concerns to relevant state authorities.*

Fact 4. Although achievement tests are designed to assess a student's skills and knowledge, and aptitude tests to predict a

student's success in a subsequent academic setting, it is sometimes difficult to tell which is which.

The Iowa Tests of Basic Skills, the Stanford Achievement Tests, and the California Achievement Tests are examples of widely used nationally standardized achievement tests. These tests are intended to measure significant skills or bodies of knowledge that children should learn. A standardized aptitude test, on the other hand, is intended to predict a student's subsequent academic performance. The SAT and ACT, for example, are aptitude tests administered to high school students to predict what grades those students will earn in college. The ACT and SAT are widely used as college admissions exams.

Although the purposes of aptitude and achievement tests are different, the actual items used on the two types are often similar. **Action Implication:** *Both aptitude and achievement tests can give you a relative picture of your child's current performance levels. But because aptitude tests play a significant role in determining which colleges your child will be able to attend, you must give careful attention to those tests. (See Fact 7.)*

Fact 5. Traditionally constructed standardized achievement tests can provide parents and teachers with useful information about a student's relative performance levels.

A standardized test is administered and scored in a standard, predetermined manner. For more than 75 years, almost all of America's standardized achievement tests have been based on a comparative approach to measurement. In this approach, one student's score is interpreted according to the scores of a representative collection of other students who, having taken the test previously, are described as the test's norm group. For example, if a student's score is (according to the norm group) at the 65th percentile, the student outperformed 65 percent of the students in the norm group. Comparisons based on such traditionally constructed standardized tests can be very illuminating. For instance, when parents learn that their son has scored at the 87th percentile in mathematics, but only at the 23rd percentile in reading, those parents can work with their son's teachers to improve his relatively weak reading skills.

But, because a student's relative standing typically doesn't change rapidly, traditionally constructed standardized achievement tests need not be administered yearly to supply

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Facts About Educational Testing (con't)

parents with this kind of comparative information.

Action Implication: *If your district administers traditionally constructed standardized achievement tests at every grade level, this is overkill. Try to get the district's education policy makers to reduce the frequency of such testing.*

Fact 6. Traditionally constructed standardized achievement tests—designed chiefly to compare a student's test score with other students' scores—should not be used to evaluate school quality.

When using a comparative approach to measurement, it is essential that students' test scores be well spread-out by a test. Accordingly, the developers of traditionally constructed standardized achievement tests must include test items that produce the necessary score-spread. Examples of such items, however, are those more likely to be answered correctly by (1) students from economically advantaged backgrounds or (2) students with higher in-born academic potentials. Unfortunately, these items actually measure what students bring to school, not what students are taught in school. Such tests, of course, should not be used to evaluate a school's success. A school should be judged primarily by what students have learned there.

Action Implication: *Find out if students' scores on a traditionally constructed standardized achievement test play an important role in evaluations of your child's school. If so, work with other parents to get more suitable, non-traditional standardized tests used for that purpose. Standardized achievement tests can, and should, contribute to the evaluation of your child's school—but only if those tests are appropriate for that purpose.*

Fact 7. Even though only about 25 percent of a student's success in college is related to the student's score on aptitude tests such as the ACT and SAT, parents should (1) still help their children prepare for those tests, but (2) avoid conveying a negative impression to a child whose test scores are not particularly high.

The research evidence on this point is quite conclusive. There are many factors far more influential than aptitude-test scores in predicting a student's college performance. A student's motivation, study habits, and interpersonal skills play powerful roles in shaping collegiate success. Parents should not think that a child who doesn't earn super scores on a college admissions test is destined for failure-in college or beyond. Numerous students who earn lofty scores on the SAT or ACT take an

academic tumble when they get into college.

There are many important kinds of intelligence, and the "academic" intelligence measured by most standardized aptitude tests is only one.

Action Implication: *First, if your child doesn't score well on the ACT or SAT, do not conclude that your child is "not bright." And definitely do not convey any such negative impression to your child. Second, because ACT and SAT scores do, in fact, play a significant part in current college admissions decisions, be sure to provide your child with at least some preparation for those tests.*

Fact 8. Performance tests, although both difficult and costly to score, often yield the most valid inferences about a student's mastery of many significant skills.

Some of the most important academic skills are difficult to measure. For instance, to see whether students can write an effective essay, the best way to do so is surely to have students sit down and write such an essay (rather than answering a flock of multiple-choice items.) When students generate an original response to an essay-writing task, we call this a performance test. Performance tests require students to construct their responses "from scratch" rather than merely selecting their responses from the already-presented options in multiple-choice items.

Action Implication: *Find out the extent to which performance tests are being used to assess your child's mastery of significant skills. If these tests are not used, collaborate with other parents to urge that at least some key skills be assessed via performance tests.*

Fact 9. Although an individual student's attitudes or interests are almost impossible to measure accurately, assessing such affective outcomes on a group-basis can provide accurate and powerful evidence of the quality of a school's instructional program.

If parents set out to judge a school's quality, they should look at lots more than mere test scores. For instance, are students genuinely excited about what they are learning? Do students really look forward to going to school? Are students gaining increased confidence in their ability to use the things they are learning in school? These are important questions, and their answers all revolve around the kind of affect being promoted in a school.

The use of self-report affective inventories—that is, questionnaires completed anonymously by students—can supply educators and parents with important insights about students' affect. Such inventories, however, are not suitable for

identifying an individual student's affective status. Yet, when students' anonymous responses to such inventories are pooled to be analyzed all together, the responses yield a reasonably accurate picture of the affective status of a student group. Thus, it is possible to obtain, at little cost, satisfactory estimates of group-affect dealing with such variables as students' (1) perceived safety when at school, (2) interest in various school subjects, (3) attitudes toward learning, and (4) confidence in carrying out significant academic skills.

Action Implication: *Check to see if there is any affective assessment in your child's school. If not, urge that some group-focused assessment of key affective variables be initiated.*

Fact 10. Because educational tests (both teacher-made classroom tests and commercially developed standardized tests) vary in their quality, it should not be assumed that every educational test is a good one.

Many parents tend to defer to educational test-makers. That's unwise. Most of today's classroom teachers, during their teacher-preparation programs, were never required to complete even a single course dealing with test construction. It is not surprising, therefore, that some classroom tests will not yield valid score-based inferences about students' skills or knowledge. But even commercially developed standardized tests also vary in their quality. More and more standardized tests are now being required in education. Not surprisingly, there is a limited supply of test-construction expertise in our nation. As a result, today's standardized tests, even those created by reputable test-development firms, will sometimes fail to be at the high quality level that those firms would prefer.

Action Implication: *Do not give automatic deference to any educational test, either one that's created by your child's teacher or one that arrives, professionally printed, from a commercial test-development company. Use your own good sense in judging whether a given test is likely to yield valid inferences about your child.*

Wrap-Up

As you can see, these 10 must-know facts aren't all that intimidating. They're simply based on common sense and what's been learned over the years by measurement specialists. Do parents need to tackle all 10 action implications suggested here? Of course not. But undertaking one or two isn't a terrible idea.

UPCOMING WORKSHOPS/PARENT PROGRAMS

What Every Parent Needs to Know About the State Assessment

For parents of special education students in grades 3-8. The workshop will cover what tests are given; what the tests look like; what accommodations are allowed; and ways to help your child be successful.

Presented by:

Jennifer Hariton-Wilson,
Staff Development Admin., Rockland BOCES; and
Barbara Kestenbaum,
SETRC Project Dir. Rockland BOCES
Monday, January 31 9:30-11:30am
Rockland BOCES
65 Parrott Rd., Bldg. 10, West Nyack
Registration is required.
For information contact:
mnesbitt@pnwboces.org

Transition Fair

So, your child is heading down the homestretch, preparing to graduate from high school, what now? If you need answers, join us for a transition planning evening. Experts will be on hand to assist you and your child in making the right choices.

Monday, January 31 7:30pm

Mildred E. Strang Middle School
2701 Crompond Rd., Yorktown Hts.
For information contact:
Joanne Bartosch, Pres. Yorktown
SEPTA at svrcoord@aol.com

Breaking Down Barriers to Technology for Students with Disabilities

Presented by:

Kate Franklin, PhD and Karen Van Den Heuvel, OT

Monday, February 7 10am-12pm

Center for Interactive Learning,
School of Public Health
New York Medical College, Valhalla
For information contact:
Kate Franklin 914-594-4852

Giving, Giving In, or Giving Up? Strategies for Life with a Challenging Child

Struggling to manage life with a challenging child - or to manage challenging moments with any child - can be overwhelming. This workshop will cover topics including: understanding the role temperament; creating a benevolent environment; and identifying strategies that minimize "meltdowns" and foster real learning.

Presented by:

Barbara Probst, CSW
Monday, February 7 7:30-8:30pm
Ossining Public Library
53 Croton Ave., Ossining
Monday, March 7 7:30-8:30pm
Hendrick-Hudson Free Library
185 Kings Ferry Rd., Montrose
Registration is Required
For information contact:

Ossining - Jane Clark - 914-941-2416X316
Montrose - Jill Davis - 914-739-5654

Westchester ARC Family Resource Day

Key Note Speaker: Don Meyer, "The Role of Siblings." Other workshops for the day include: education advocacy, employment, guardianship, and trusts.

Saturday, February 12 9am-3:30pm

White Plains High School
550 North St., White Plains
For information contact:
Cassandra Leary - 914-428-8330X3347

Special Education 101 for Parents

It's time to go to your child's Special Education Meeting again and you can't help but wonder what the rules about special education are. What are your rights, options, and responsibilities? Whose job is it to decide when, how, and what happens? Come learn about IEPs, CSEs, service delivery, and the laws that govern them.

Presented by:

Lisa Ricci, MS, Ed., Disability Related
Educational Advocacy Mentor
Tues. February 15 or Tues. March 1
10am-2:30pm

Putnam Independent Living Services

1961 Route 6, Carmel
Registration is Required
For Information call:
Lisa Ricci - 845-228-7457

CSE Training for Parent Members

This workshop is designed to give Committee on Special Education (CSE) members a better understanding of the CSE. Topics will include: roles & responsibilities of CSE members; requirements of federal & state laws & regulations; IEP process; role of the parent member; and an overview of IDEA.

Presented by:

Laurie Levine, Lower Hudson Regional Trainer

Friday, February 18 9:30-11:30am

Putnam/No. West. BOCES
Yorktown Heights

For information contact:
Laurie Levine at

llevine@pnwboces.org

Advocating for the Total Child

Dr. Risa Tabacoff is a psychotherapist who has been successfully treating children and adults for over 19 years. Her focus is enhancing the lives of children with special needs through proper assessment and remediation. She has an intimate knowledge of the intricacies of navigating successfully through school systems and of the special services providers needed to improve a child's success rate.

Presented by:

Dr. Risa Tabacoff, founder of Developmental Assessment and Intervention Center

Monday, February 28 7:30pm

John Jay Middle School Library
Route 121, Cross River

Many of these workshops were found in the Special Education Training and Resource Center (SETRC) brochure.

If you like to receive a SETRC brochure, call 914-248-2289, or you may access it on-line at www.pnwboces.org/specialized/SETRC/welcome.html

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.

OFFICERS

PRESIDENT Jane Hellberg
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“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 our new website
 address

We're on the Web!
www.SomersPTACo
uncil.org/SEPTA

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.

NYS PTA Special Education Chairperson

Josephine Macchia Dalerone@aol.com 631-893-5123

Groups

Barbara Probst Parent Support Groups 271-1266

Occupational Therapy

Kids Moves Pediatric Therapy Caroline Machonis, MS/OTR/L 845-621-1400
 Route 6, Mahopac
 Westchester Occupational Therapy Jane Soodhalter 730-0210
 Armonk

Books

Sensory Integration and the Child by Jean A. Ayres, et al
Changed by a Child: Companion Notes for Parents of a Child with a Disability by Barbara Gill
Emergence: Labeled Autistic by Temple Grandin
Thinking in Pictures: And Other Reports from My Life with Autism by Temple Grandin
The Explosive Child: A New Approach for Understanding and Parenting Easily Frustrated and "Chronically Inflexible" Children by Ross W. Greene
Right From the Start: Behavioral Interventions for Young Children with Autism for Parents and Professionals by Sandra Harris
Siblings of Children with Autism by Sandra Harris

Websites

www.caregiver.org/caregiver/jsp/home.jsp Family Caregiver Alliance provides info. about the needs of families & friends providing long-term care at home. Family CCA offers programs at national, state, and local levels to support and sustain caregivers.
 www.chadd.org Children & Adults with ADD
 www.cldinternational.org Council for Learning Disabilities
 www.dldcec.org Division for Learning Disabilities

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

Researchers Sketch the Anatomy of Insight*

That cartoon light bulb-over-the-head moment may be more true to life than animators ever believed. Sudden flashes of insight really do set off bursts of activity in the brain, says Jon Kounios, PhD, a psychology professor at Drexel University in Philadelphia. He and Mark Jung-Beeman, PhD, of Northwestern University in Chicago, gave their subjects a series of word problems designed to evoke a distinct "Aha!" response (e.g., What word goes with crab, pine, and sauce? Answer: apple). They then monitored participants' brains for rapid changes in electrical activity to determine whether the thought process excited certain regions. When people solved the problems working step-by-step,

the scans showed nothing unusual. But when an answer came to them suddenly, a burst of high-frequency waves appeared in the right temporal lobe - an area associated with making connections to distantly related subjects - less than a second before they hit the response button. "We think this burst represents the solution popping into consciousness," Kounios says.

They're conducting further studies to see how this part of the brain spurs split-second creativity, but Kounios believes he has some idea of how to court "Eureka!" moments. Rather than approaching a problem with tunnel vision, he suggests that

you make an effort to notice everything around you and keep your mind open and relaxed; you'll be more likely to trigger diverse associations within your brain that lead to unexpected answers. "Insightful people tend not to be narrowly focused," he says. "Their attention is spread out." It's reassuring that there's scientific justification for a wandering mind.

Editor's Note: I couldn't help thinking that the way to court eureka moments sounds a lot like ADD. Hmm.....

* By Elizabeth Svoboda. Source: *O, The Oprah Magazine*, December, 2004.