

SEPTA NEWS

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE — JANE HELLBERG

There is a lot happening in education these days and those who attended the first SEPTA meeting in October were awed by how much happens right here in our own school district.

We extend a big thank you to Barry Whalen and Alethea Schepperly for presenting an informative overview of the special education programs offered in the Somers school district on a school-by-school basis. A great deal of careful thought, planning, juggling, creative scheduling and ma-

neuversing goes into providing an education for a large and diverse population such as we have in Somers. It was wonderful to learn about how much Somers offers.

If you have anything to discuss with either Barry or Alethea, do not hesitate to call the Special Services office to schedule an appointment to speak to one of them.

SEPTA's next meeting will take place on November 18. Tracy Christen Reimann, a Somers mom and attorney,

will be the guest speaker. She will be discussing the importance of wills and trusts (trusts during life and at death, as well as trusts for special needs) which will be geared toward planning for children in case of the death of a parent.

All are welcome to the SIS library where we will have the opportunity to give some thought to a very important topic.

needs of all special education students. Teachers and staff in Somers are always fine-tuning programs to best serve the needs of their students. Therefore, it is difficult to predict the specifics of particular teaching strategies for a given class, as those specifics are tailored to best serve the needs of the students themselves. The core of the special education programs in Somers is remains constant, and are as follows:

(continued on page 2)

- Primrose**
- K, 1, 2 self-contained class
- Inclusion kindergarten
- Inclusion grade 1
- Inclusion grade 2
- Resource room
- Special class language arts

PARENT PROGRAMS By Nicole Horowitz

Special Education has changed in many ways since today's parents were students. Aside from changes in the law regarding disabled students, there has been a tremendous change in attitude toward students with special needs and the manner in which they are helped to receive the most from their education.

Thanks to experts like Dr. Mel Levin, Pricilla Vail, and Rick Lavoie, to name a few, there has been a paradigm shift in special education. Learning disabled students are no longer believed to be unable to learn or achieve at levels that their general education student counterparts. It has been proven that LD students can, and do, learn when their specific needs

are understood and addressed.

With the ongoing research in the areas of brain development, child development, the psychology of learning, and education, it was not surprising to hear, at the October SEPTA meeting, Barry Whalen and Alethea Schepperly, Director and Assistant Director of Special Services, respectively, talk about the fluid nature of the special education programs in Somers schools.

Because students do not all learn in the same way and weaknesses and strengths vary from child to child there is not one, single program that can address the diverse learning styles and

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MEETING DATES

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

⇒ November 18

⇒ January 20

⇒ March 10

⇒ April 28

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

PARENT PROGRAMS (CON'T)

Special class math
Related services
SIS
Inclusion grade 3
Inclusion grade 4
Inclusion grade 5
Special class language arts
Special class math
Related services
SMS
Inclusion class grade 6
Inclusion class grade 7
Inclusion class grade 8
Special class language arts grade 6
Special class language arts grade 7
Special class language arts grade 8
Special class math grade 6
Special class math grade 7
Special class math grade 8
Self-contained class
Resource room
Related services
SHS
Inclusion grade 9
Inclusion grade 10
Inclusion grade 11
Inclusion grade 12
Resource room 9-12
Self-contained class
Related services.

Additional programs are available to SHS students at the BOCES Tech Center. The Tech Center is open to all students and happily some students struggle academically have the opportunity to shine through their innate abilities and talents. Due to curriculum requirements and other restrictions, BOCES only accepts 11th and 12th grade students.

Parents of high school students who are interested in investigating a vocational education should contact their child's guidance counselor regarding the Tech. Center.

The fluid nature of special education in our schools seems to be successful. The special ed. students who took Regents Exams in June 2003 scored as follows:

Exam	Total # Tested	Passed	Scored 65 or Higher
English	32	27	24
Math A	27	16	15
Math III	19	10	10
Science	25	22	20
Chemistry	11	11	9
Earth Science	10	10	10
Global History	28	19	17
US Gov't & History	32	29	28

These impressive results reflect the suc-

cess of the programs in our schools. And even more importantly, they reflect the success of the students.

And the success doesn't end there. Of the 31 special ed. students who were graduated in 2004, 10 attend four-year colleges, 13 attend 2- year colleges, and 18 are employed.

Barry and Alethea's presentation highlighted the time, energy, expertise, thoughtfulness, and creativity that the faculty, staff and administration of our schools offer our children. Their dedication affords their students the opportunity to dig down, below the surface of various disabilities to discover the intelligence that might have otherwise gone unnoticed.

Special Ed. Advocacy: Mistakes Parents Make*

by Robert K. Crabtree, lawyer concentrating in Special Ed. & disability law

Here are several common errors which can undermine parents' ability to obtain appropriate services:

- Viewing the special education process as the moral equivalent of war, fighting that war with a "scorched earth" approach, and letting personal animosity toward the administrators and /or teachers distort one's judgment about what is best for the child and what is realistic to accept;
- The opposite mistake: trusting administrators and teachers too uncritically; assuming that if they are "nice" they are also competent and interested in serving the child's best interest; not questioning slow, or nonexistent progress as long as the child, parent and teacher have a cordial relationship.
- Taking an "all or nothing" approach: waiting too long before getting good independent advice, then insisting on instant delivery of needed services rather than steady progress toward the right program.
- Failing to understand that the special education process sometimes requires that the parent educate the child's special education team about the child's disabilities and needs (the school system may not be willfully refusing to meet the child's needs; they may simply not understand them);
- Not trying a program or added services, even on a temporary basis, when they are offered by the school system - holding out for an alternative program only to have a hearing officer decide the untried program might have worked;
- Attempting to "micro-manage" the details of a child's life in school; even if parents don't feel things are going well, their efforts to control the child's day usually backfire when the hearing officer concludes that the parents were over-protective and didn't let the school professionals do their job;
- Focusing on minor, non-prejudicial missteps by the school (e.g., the parent who already knows her rights and says, "Aha! Gotcha! School district forgot to give me the rights brochure!")
- Not consenting to school evaluations;
- Choosing the wrong independent evaluators: e.g., those who will not follow through by observing programs, attending team meetings, those who do not have the training or experience to evaluate a child like yours;
- Not providing copies of independent evaluations to the school, or not providing them in a timely way;
- Not responding in a timely way to proposed IEPs;
- Not documenting issues with the school; not sending letters to confirm agreements with the school or to record important conversations with school personnel;
- Seeing the school system as a monolith ("All those teachers are incompetent [or wonderful!]); failing to look carefully at alternatives within the system for this year and at next year's teacher possibilities.

* Source: www.familyeducation.com

LEGISLATION

The following excerpt is from "State plans revised tests" by Randi Weiner, *The Journal News*, Oct. 3, 2004

New Exams for Grades 3 - 8

New math and English language arts tests for third through eighth graders could be on some children's desks by the spring.

Federal education law requires all children from third through eighth grades be tested yearly on math and English competency.

The state plans to offer two levels of test for grades three through eight. Fourth, sixth and eighth would have English essays and more math problems. Odd grades would have fewer math questions and no English essays. David Abrams, the state's assistant commissioner for standards, assessment and reporting, said the odd-grade tests would take less time to administer and would give students and teachers a break from test stress.

The tests themselves should be aligned with what already exists in grades four and eight, said Ossining Superintendent Robert Roelle. In addition the information can be valuable in terms of monitoring

students' year-to-year progress.

The long interval between the time the students are tested and the time the schools get the results, however, limits their use by teachers trying to reach students in their classroom, Rolle said.

And the testing regimen is expensive. Districts grade the tests locally using

groups of teachers, which necessitates hiring substitutes for those class-





rooms.

Rolle said, "It's going to be time away from instruction, and that concerns me. I'm just generally concerned overall about how much formal testing we have to do to tell how the kids are doing ... We need to bring ourselves back to teaching and learning. Think of the things these tests don't measure: cultural arts, overall growth, the production of good citizens. I don't think these tests tell us anything about those overall goals."



The state Education Department has signed a contract with CTB/McGraw-Hill

to create the tests. The English test will be based on the current curriculum. The math test will be based on curriculum the state is developing."

Timeline for New Tests

-  Regional forums, fall 2004.
-  Field test, spring 2005.
-  First operational tests in English language arts scheduled for administration in January and February 2006.
-  Ongoing updates will be provided at: www.emsc.nysed.gov/osa/.

Curriculum Implications

-  English language arts tests will be based on existing core curriculum.
-  A new core curriculum for mathematics will be developed by winter 2004-05 based on the recommendations of the Math Standards Committee. Proposed changes include moving from seven key ideas to five topics (number sense and operations, algebra, geometry, measure and statistics and probability) and five math skills (problem-solving, reasoning and proof, communication, connections and representation). Fewer topics taught but more in-depth.

"Think of the things these tests don't measure..."

TESTING REQUIRED BY THE NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND ACT*

Annual statewide assessments of student progress are the centerpiece of the expanded accountability principle of NCLB. Data from these assessments, combined with other important indicators, are used to determine if schools and school districts achieve adequate yearly progress (AYP) in order to reach the NCLB goal of having every student proficient by the year 2014.

The annual testing requirements are keys to improving the academic performance of **all** students. Testing is the mechanism for checking whether schools have been successful in teaching students the knowledge and skills defined by the state content standards. For that reason, these assessments must be aligned with each state's high academic content standards and, with only limited exceptions for students with signifi-

cant cognitive disabilities, **all** students must be tested against the **same** standards. Schools that test less than 95% of the total student body, or less than 95% of each subgroup, will not achieve the AYP required by NCLB.

In addition to reporting the assessment results for the overall school, results must be broken down into subgroups of students that historically underachieve. However, the performance of subgroups is only reported if the size meets or exceeds the minimum set by the state. The subgroup requirements are: economically disadvantaged students, students with disabilities (served under IDEA), students with limited English proficiency, and students from major racial/ethnic groups.

By the 2005-06 school year all schools will be required to test stu-

dents in the areas of reading/ language arts & math each year in grades 3 - 8, and once during grades 10 - 12.

By the 2007-08 school year all schools will be required to test students in science once during grades 3-5, once during grades 6-9, and once during grades 10-12.

Schools that do not achieve AYP for two consecutive years, either in overall academic achievement or in the achievement of **any** subgroup, are considered "in need of improvement."

*Source: *Making the 'No Child Left Behind Act' Work for Children Who Struggle to Learn: A Parent's Guide*, publication of the National Center for Learning Disabilities and Schwab Learning. For more information go to, www.LD.org/NCLB

Medical And Therapy News

What Every Child Needs for Good Mental Health
Information from the National Mental Health Association

It is easy for parents to identify their child's physical needs: nutritious food, warm clothes when it's cold, bedtime at a reasonable hour. However, a child's mental and emotional needs may not be as obvious. Good mental health allows children to think clearly, develop socially and learn new skills. Additionally, good friends and encouraging words from adults are all important for helping children develop self-confidence, high self-esteem, and a healthy emotional outlook on life.

Give Children Unconditional Love

Love, security and acceptance should be at the heart of family life. Children need to know that your love does not depend on their accomplishments.

Mistakes and/or defeats should be expected and accepted. Confidence grows in a home that is full of unconditional love and affection.

Nurture Children's Confidence & Self-esteem

Encourage Them

Encouraging children's first steps or their ability to learn a new game helps them develop a desire to explore and learn about their surroundings. Allow children to explore and play in a safe area where they cannot get hurt. Assure them by smiling and talking to them often. Be an active participant in their activities. Your attention helps build their self-esteem.

Set Realistic Goals

Young children need realistic goals that match their ambitions with their abilities. With your help, older children can choose activities that test their abilities and increase their self-confidence.

Be Honest

Do not hide your failures from your children. It is important for them to know that we all make mistakes. It can be very reassuring to know that adults are not perfect.

Avoid Sarcastic Remarks

If a child loses a game or fails a test, find out

how he/she feels about the situation. Children may get discouraged and need a pep talk. Later, when they are ready, talk and offer assurance.

Encourage children to not only strive to do their best, but also to enjoy the process.

Make Time For Play!

Encourage children to play

To children, play is just fun. However, playtime is as important to their development as food and good care. Playtime helps children be creative, develop problem-solving skills and learn self-control. Good, hardy play, which includes running and yelling, is not only fun, but helps children to be physically and mentally healthy.

Children Need Playmates

Sometimes it is important for children to have time with their peers. By playing with others, children discover their strengths and weaknesses, develop a sense of belonging, and learn how to get along with others.

Parents Can Be Great Playmates

Join the fun! Playing Monopoly or coloring with a child gives you a great opportunity to share ideas and spend time together in a relaxed setting.

Provide Appropriate Guidance and Instructive Discipline

Children need the opportunity to explore and develop new skills and independence. At the same time, children need to learn that certain behaviors are unacceptable and that they are responsible for the consequences of their actions.

As members of a family, children need to learn the rules of the family unit. Offer guidance and discipline that is fair and consistent. They will take these social skills and rules of conduct to school and eventually to the workplace.

Suggestions on Guidance & Discipline

1. Be firm, but kind and realistic with your expectations.
2. Set a good example.

3. Avoid nagging, threats & bribery.
4. Talk about your feelings.
5. *Apologize* if you were wrong!

Remember, the goal is not to control the child, but for him/her to learn self-control.

Warning Signs of a Child's Mental or Emotional Disorder

The following signs may indicate the need for professional assistance or evaluation:

- decline in school performance
- poor grades despite strong efforts
- regular worry or anxiety
- repeated refusal to go to school or take part in normal children's activities
- hyperactivity or fidgeting
- persistent nightmares
- persistent disobedience or aggression
- frequent temper tantrums
- depression, sadness or irritability

Where to Seek Help

Information and referrals for children's services may be obtained from:

- ☎ mental health organizations, hotlines and libraries
- ☎ other professionals such as the pediatrician or school counselor
- ☎ other families in the community
- ☎ family network organizations
- ☎ community-based psychiatric care
- ☎ crisis outreach teams
- ☎ education or special education services
- ☎ family resource centers & support groups
- ☎ health services
- ☎ protection & advocacy groups and organizations
- ☎ self-help and support groups

For more information

National Mental Health Association
2001 N. Beauregard 12th Fl.
Alexandria, VA 22311
Toll-Free: 800-969-6642
TTY: 800-433-5959
www.nmha.org

PARENT SUPPORT GROUP

"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, emotional, social, behavioral or educational difficulties, meeting with other parents who face similar issues and are struggling with similar feelings can be a tremendous support.

Six-session support groups, led by an experienced clinical social worker, are held weekly on Saturday mornings in Croton. Each session includes practical information as well as an opportunity for open exchange.

For information or registration,
contact Barbara Probst
914-271-1266
barbprobst@aol.com

article of interest

The following item was written by a 2003 graduate of SHS as part of the senior magazine assignment. SEPTA was granted permission to use this piece with the request that the writer's name be withheld.

My Years at High School

Four years of high school goes by faster than you can believe. Everyone has a different high school experience; socially, extra curricular, and academically. Throughout high school teachers told me, "High school is what *you* make of it." After living through three years of school, I am 100% in agreement with what my teachers said. It is what you do as a student; how you study, how you do homework; how you socialize, how you become involved in your school community, and how you use the help provided to you that really shapes your high school experience.

Knowing yourself as a learner is important to how you perform in school and in life. If you know one subject is more difficult for you than another, you can expect to work harder in that subject. If you know that you learn better by doing than by listening, you adjust the way you study. If you know you need help, you have to arrange to get help.

There are many options available in high school for help. Some people take advantage of these options and others do not. There are even more services for students who are classified with a learning disability. I happen to take advantage of the

services available since I am a person who struggles with dyslexia.

I have been classified as dyslexic since first grade. This does not mean that I am unintelligent. It means that for me reading is difficult and quite often challenging; so, I found ways to deal with my reading disability. I am fortunate I have been able to take advantage of the help that has been made available to me. I have learned many strategies that enable me to complete the required work for my courses.

In my high school there is a very good resource program. I have been able to get help and make modifications that allow me to perform to the best of my ability.

When I started high school I did not use the modifications available for me. The main reason I did not take advantage of these modifications was because I felt uncomfortable leaving the class. I felt like I was being singled out. I really wanted to be normal and just fit in like everyone else. Not using the modifications made tests more of a struggle. I would struggle through reading the test questions before I would even start struggling with the actual material on the test. It took me a while and a couple of failing marks to realize that I needed help. It also took me some time to see that it was OK to get help. I realized that if I was to be successful I needed the help.

When I made the decision to take

advantage of having tests read, it made the testing situation much more manageable. It eliminated my struggle in reading the test question and alleviated a tremendous amount of anxiety before taking a test.

My main struggle now, like everyone else's, is getting through the material. I have to deal with the fact that school work, specifically reading, is more time consuming for me than for the average student. I have to plan ahead and allot more time for homework when reading is involved. While I struggle with the reading, it forces me to find compensatory strategies to learn.

One skill that I fine tuned was my ability to listen. Since reading was so difficult, my auditory skills became a strength both in and out of the classroom. I use books on tape to complete assigned reading. Auditory strength is unusual in today's society but it will continue to help me on my way through life.

My four years of high school have gone too fast. I have made it through school without failing a class or a major test despite the fact I have a learning disability. It was hard at times but I was able to see that my disability is a part of me. It will not go away but it cannot stop me from pursuing the life I want to live.

FYI: The writer is currently attending college in New Hampshire.

People think if something goes 'wrong' it's their fault. If only they had done something differently. But sometimes things go wrong to teach you what's right.

-Alice Walker

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
VICE PRESIDENT Lisa Immerblum
SECRETARY Laura Hanlon
TREASURER Katherine Realbuto

“Together we can make a difference.”

Somers Central School District

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 277-3777 Alethea Schepperly
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 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.

NYS PTA Special Education Chairperson

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

Eye Therapy

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

Social Groups

New York Presbyterian Hospital Outpatient department 997-5940
 White Plains, Groups
 for boys and girls
 Dr. Bob Milich Croton-on-Hudson, 271-5326
 Groups for boys
 Dr. John Slater Irvington 591-6868
 Once Upon a River
 Groups for boys (uses Karate)

Social Worker

Laura Hanlon, CSW, MsEd Somers 588-3870

Tutors

Pam Provetto, Orton-Gillingham Thornwood 769-9036

Videos

Dr. Richard Lavoie Tapes available at Somers Public Library
 The FAT City Workshop Videos: *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.aspergerinformation.org For parents & professionals about Asperger Syndrome with special emphasis about bullying

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

Book Dedication Program

The Somers PTA Council is pleased to announce, **For the Love of Reading: A Book Dedication Program**, which provides a wonderful and unique way to commemorate special events, to honor children, teachers and friends, or to memorialize a loved one.

Donations to the program are used to purchase new books for the school library of your choice - Primrose, Intermediate, Middle or High school. A bookplate is placed inside each book purchased indicating the occasion

and a letter, printed on school stationery and signed by the school librarian, is sent to the person or family being honored.

Participation in this program puts books on library shelves that Somers children will learn from and enjoy for many years to come.

Be on the lookout for "For the Love Reading" brochure which will be sent via the U.S. mail to your home shortly. Dedication Forms will also be available in the main offices and libraries of each building by the second week

of November.

Funding for the brochures has been provided by the Somers Education Foundation and designed by Graphic Technology Partners.

For additional information, contact: LauraJensen@aol.com or GSanzillo@aol.com. The Somers PTA Council greatly appreciates your support!